

Caste, Society and Politics of North Bengal, 1869-1977

**Thesis Submitted to the University of North Bengal,
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Acknowledgement

In the present work I have tried to analyze the nature of caste society of North Bengal and its distinctiveness from other parts of Bengal nay India. It also seeks to examine the changing process of caste solidarity and caste politics of the region concerned. I have also tried to find out the root of the problem of the region from historical point of view.

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Siliguri

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Glossary

Babu- A Bengali title equivalent to Mr.

Bahe- It is a distorted form of the word 'Baba he' by which the Rajbansis generally used to address a person.

Bangal-Kheda Andolone- An anti-Bengali agitation in Assam by which the Bengalis residing in Assam were forcefully expelled from the state (1959-62).

Bhadralok- Bengali gentleman.

Bhanga-Kshatriya- a Kshatriya who have failed to observe scriptural rituals.

Bhatiya- the term is used by the local Rajbansis to the outsider to their land, Bhati means lower land therefore those people had been coming from Bhati land were called as Bhatiya.

Bigha- Land measurement.

Bratya- Kshatriya- Degenerated or fallen Kshatriya.

Chukanidar- Tenure holder below Jotedar (owner of land).

Coolie- Indian or Chinese hired labourer.

Dar- Chukanidar- An under tenant of Chukanidar.

Dardar –Chukanidar- Tenure holder below a Dar- Chukanidar.

Izaradar- Lease –holder of land.

Jagosangeet- A kind of song which appeals people to awaken.

Jote/Jotedar- Cultivable land/ holder of a proprietary agricultural land or Jot directly from the state or the zamindar.

Adhiyar- Half crop sharer.

Jotedari-Adhiyari- The system, where Jotedars make agreement with Adhiyars.

Kachhari- The Office of the Zamindar or land owners.

Kaibartya- Caste amongst the Hindus who originally were peasants.

Kalapani- The dark- coloured waters of an ocean.

Mandali- An assemblage.

Mandali- Samiti- A congregation of members of a particular association.

Maqtab- Muslim traditional primary school.

Milankshetra- A meeting place.

Paiks- Infantrymen, guides armed with staff and also with other weapons.

Palagan- Narrative opera.

Panda- A Brahmin (mostly of Orissa) priest acting as a guide to pilgrims at holy places.

Pandit- A learned Hindu versed in Sanskrit and Hindu scriptures and arts and science.

Pandit Shrestha- most learned and well versed in scriptures.

Pathshala- Indigenous Hindu primary school.

Shaktadharma- A kind of religion by which one worships Sakti.

Sebadharma- The sacred task of serving others.

Tols- Indigenous Sanskrit schools, characteristic of the ancient Hindu system of education.

Yajna- Vedic sacrifice, a religious sacrifice.

Contents

	Pages
Introduction	1-17
Chapter- 1: Social and Caste Geography of the Region	18-64
Chapter-2: Social Awakening of Contemporary Bengal and North Bengal	65-110
Chapter-3: The Condition of the Rajbansi Community	111-143
Chapter-4: Rise, Growth & Decay of the Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti Movement	144-205
Chapter-5: Social and Caste Structure of the Hill Region of North Bengal during Colonial Rule	206-242
Chapter-6: Other Minority Groups' Movement	243-292
Chapter-7: ^{Post-Colonial scenario:} caste ^{-society} in the light of ^{the} constitution of India	293-312
Conclusion	313-318
Selected Bibliography	319-344
Appendices	

INTRODUCTION

The present study is an attempt to look into the significant characteristics of the caste, society and politics of North Bengal and the factors and consequences of changes that had been taken place between the years 1869-1977. The five districts of the northern part of present day West Bengal viz. Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Malda and Dinajpur are together officially and unofficially known as North Bengal(the district of Dinajpur was divided as North and south Dinajpur in 1992). It deserves mention that though the main area of focus will be the above stated districts of present day West Bengal, yet it has to be considered that in the pre-independent period the geography of North Bengal was not the same. Before 1874, the northern part of Bengal was constituted by the districts of Purnea, Goalpara, Rajshahi, Malda, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Cooch Behar(Cooch Behar was then a Princely State). Except Cooch Behar the eight districts were under Rajshahi division. In 1874 the Goalpara district was made part of Assam which was then made the Chief Commissioner's Province¹. The district was under the District and Sessions Judge of Dinajpur until 1905 October when it was placed under the Judge of Purnea and again in April 1912 it was placed under Dinajpur(Rajshahi Division)². after partition in 1947 the whole of Rajshahi, Rangpur, the eastern part of Dinajpur with 17 police stations, five police stations of Malda, five police stations of Jalpaiguri, a few parts of Cooch Behar and one police station, Phansideoa of Darjeeling went to east Pakistan(now Bangladesh) and Purnea became part of the State of Bihar³.

Before entering into the subject of concentration we must understand the geography and the historical background of the area concern, otherwise it will not be possible to understand the caste society, its distinctiveness etc. because the caste and social structure of this region has no match with that of the rest of Bengal. Moreover it is known to all of us that the society of a particular region gets very much influenced by its geography as well as history and it is historically true that geography and history together with other factors determine culture, customs, behavior, language, and above all help in making the socio-political structure of a particular region and North Bengal is no exception to that.

North Bengal is situated at the bottom of the Himalayas. The geographical location of North Bengal has determined its history since the dawn of its civilization. Due to its existence in the sub-mountain zone it has commercial as well as cultural contact with Tibet, China, Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan in the north, Assam and Bangladesh in the east, Bangladesh and southern part of west Bengal and Bihar in the south; Bihar, Uttaranchal and Uttarakhand in the west. On the other hand it maintains a relation with the rest of India through the river Ganges. As a whole it occupies a strategic position and lies between the eastern India and the Aryavarta or the rest of India. Thus the region has been serving as a gateway for the trade and commerce as well as cultural relation and exchange of ideas from the very beginning between Indian subcontinent in the west and Assam, Burma, china and other parts of south-east Asia in the east. Therefore the region is situated in one of the greatest migration routs of people since time immemorial. As a result all most all the races like Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Alpine-Iranian had assimilated in this region. Among all these groups the people of Tibeto-

Burman i.e. Indo-Mongoloid group are most numerous and predominant⁴. Not only that the people of Indo-Mongoloid and Aryan groups had been intermingled there. The Indo-Mongoloid group of people is known as Kirata. The Kirata and Aryan civilization had developed a mixed culture in this region. Another important point is that according to historians the history of North Bengal bears the glory of two different zones of imperial Kingdoms i.e. Pragyothispur-Kamrup-Kamtapur in the northern part of North Bengal and the Pundra-Gour Kingdom in the southern part of North Bengal⁵. In addition to that there is a small hilly portion which had also a different tradition of outside the subcontinent.

North Bengal may be considered as a miniature of India considering its diversity regarding geography, demographic composition, caste, race, religion, language, ethnicity etc. The northern part of North Bengal is situated at the foothill of the Himalaya; naturally this part is covered by dense and deep green forest. But the southern part is absolutely different with vast plain and cultivable lands. According to historians and scholars, at the very beginning there inhabited the people of Nordic group and then the people of Mongoloid origin began to settle there. The Aryan described the people of north eastern India as 'Kirata'. Moreover there had taken place an admixture of Aryans and Mongoloid group of people though Mongolian influence is much dominant among them⁶. Therefore the region is basically a non-caste zone. The most numerical groups amongst them are Rajbansi, Koch, Mech, Paliya and Deshi. Of these groups, except the Mech, all had gone through a process of Hinduization long before the period of our study. There are two main forces/streams of origin amongst the tribes of North Bengal i.e. Mongoloid and Proto-Austral. The Mongoloid people came from

the neighbouring countries of northern and north-eastern part of North Bengal. Amongst these groups Rajbansi, Koch, Mech, Dhimal, Rabha, Garo, Lepcha, Bhutia are in majority. On the other hand the Proto-Australoid group of people had migrated from the central part of India and Bihar. Munda, Santal, Oraon, Malpahari, Mahali, Kheria etc. groups do represent the Proto-Austral origin in the region. During medieval period new religion-based community came and also played a role in changing the socio-cultural life of the region. But in the pre-British period no major change took place in the areas of North Bengal because most of the areas of present day North Bengal were covered by dense forest and almost deserted. With regard to the religion, people of almost all the religious groups' viz. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islamism, Jainism, Christianity and also the believers in animism live in this region. Diversity is also present in respect of language e.g. Bengali, Nepali, Hindi, Kamrupi, Tibetan, Lepcha, Sadari, Suryapuri and a number of regional dialects can also be found here.

As it has mentioned earlier that all the districts of undivided North Bengal were under Rajshahi Division, but there were differences of administrative system in different portion of North Bengal districts. For instance the whole of Darjeeling and the western Duars of Jalpaiguri district were non-Regulated area, that means no law or rule prevalent in the rest of British Bengal (Regulated area) was applicable in this non-Regulated portion. Only the Governor will run the administration with the help of District Magistrate or the Administrator in Charge of this area. In addition to that Cooch Behar was a Princely State (tributary). Such type of different administrative complexities must have affected the people and society and also the politics of the region which has been discussed as a sub-chapter under chapter- 4. It

has also mentioned earlier that most of the districts of present day North Bengal are the creation of British Colonial Government. The people in the non-Regulated portion almost all are migrants and the society is therefore migrants' society. With the expansion of British administration into the region the process of migration increased, though there were early settlers, their number was not very significant and the decadal census operations showed that the number of migrants phenomenally increased in this part with the passage of time. The migrants flocked into the region from various neighbouring districts as well as provinces with their own traditions, culture, customs, habits etc. which in a long run resulted in the development of a mixed culture through the process of intermingling between themselves.

Though a good number of works have been done by scholars on the social mobility movement and caste politics and the academic value of those works are immense, yet an overall study of the various aspects of caste, society and politics of the different districts of North Bengal during colonial and particularly in post colonial period is remained unexplored in academic area studies. Most of the scholarly works have dealt with not more than one or two districts of the region and till independence. It is interesting to note that more than sixty-four years have been passed away and meanwhile considerable changes have taken place with regard to the socio-cultural and political life of the region. Moreover, no major research work is discernible regarding the caste history covering the period after independence, though district wise works are coming in these days. However, this work intends to make a comprehensive study over the region dealing with various aspects of changes that had taken place time to time in the colonial and post colonial period.

Regarding the period or time-frame of the study, it has already mentioned that the districts of present day North Bengal are the creation of British Colonial Govt. It also deserves mention in this respect that long after the establishment of British colonial hegemony in central and eastern Bengal, (more than a hundred year), the British Government brought this area under the mainstream administrative periphery of Bengal, though Dinajpur came under East India Company's control in 1765 and the Malda district was made in 1813. These two districts were historically and socio-culturally very much associated with the Barind Bengal. After a number of changes the Darjeeling district was made in 1864 and the Jalpaiguri district was made in 1869. It is interesting to note that being the youngest district it was made the sub-divisional headquarter of Rajshahi division immediately after the formation of the district. It can undoubtedly be said that since then the geographical configuration of present day North Bengal has been completed, though a number of changes had taken place regarding the jurisdiction of the area from time to time. So a new region had been developed which actually consolidated the three historical regions under a common administrative umbrella. That is why the period 1869 has taken as the beginning of our study. The whole study has been divided into two specific phases i.e. Colonial and post-Colonial period. The reason behind such division is that the Colonial Govt. in order to run its administration properly promoted the cause of caste, race, and religious diversities amongst the subject people. The census of 1881 mentioned the caste, race and religion etc. of each community and group. The result was the emergence of a number of caste consolidation as well as caste mobility movement throughout the sub-continent which gradually assumed political character taking the opportunity

provided by the Colonial Govt. in the name of 'protective discrimination'. These movements have been adequately delineated by a number of eminent scholars. The works of Prof. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Prof Swaraj Basu and Prof. Biman Dasgupta are worth mentioning so far as the caste movement of Bengal particularly North Bengal is concerned. In addition to these a good number of Scholars of this region are engaged in writing various aspects of the history, society, polity etc. of this region. But after independence the constitution of free India does not allow caste based differentiation amongst its citizens. So a new turn in the caste movement and caste politics took place in this particular phase. What is interesting is that despite such constitutional provision the colonial legacy is still continuing and caste is playing as 'proxy' from behind the door in the name of reservation. In addition to this the case of North Bengal is further different because in the post partition period huge number of refugees from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, most of whom were of scheduled caste category began to settle in different districts of North Bengal permanently. The early inhabitants (predominantly the Rajbansis) were also of scheduled caste category. With the passage of time the latter began to consider the refugees as encroachers to their facilities from Govt. services to agricultural fields as they suffered economic backwardness in competition with the refugees and gradually became marginalized. So out of such resentment a number of movements came into existence which gradually took the shape of ethnic identity movement. If we compare the problem of refugee infiltration and the relative economic crisis with southern part of West Bengal we will find that the refugee scheduled caste and the earlier inhabitants who were also scheduled caste were of same origin i.e. Aryan origin. But in North Bengal the refugees are of Aryan origin and the early inhabitants are of Mongoloid origin. So the

caste consolidation movement of colonial period converted into the ethnic identity movement in the post independent period in North Bengal. Such movement received a further change after 1977 i.e. after the formation of the Leftist Govt. in West Bengal. The Govt. ideologically does not believe in any discrimination regarding caste, race, ethnicity and religion etc. instead it propagates the cause of the removal of all kind of discrimination on the basis of class. Therefore another turn in the caste history had been started in the region with the Leftist Regime. That is why the whole study will end in 1977.

Regarding the chapters, in the first chapter, as it has already mentioned that there are three distinct historical as well as ethno- linguistic and socio-cultural regions found in North Bengal, therefore in this chapter three specific regions and their caste picture are categorically discussed both during colonial and post colonial period. These three zones may be classified as- a) The northern portion of North Bengal which is constituted by the districts of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar (then Princely State), and the Terrain portion of Darjeeling. It has already mentioned that the Rangpur and eastern part of Dinajpur were transferred to East Pakistan, now Bangladesh in 1947. They played a crucial role in the formation of the social and caste geography of this area. The district of Cooch Behar was a Princely State before independence and its merger to Indian Union on 28.08.1949. Similarly Goalpara which was transferred to Assam in 1874 constituted an important position because the above mentioned area along with Goalpara has been a land of particular caste groups' viz. Rajbansi, Koch, Mech etc. The area between the rivers Tista-Karotoya and Brahmaputra was part of the Kingdoms of Pragyothishpur-Kamrup-Kamtapur from time to time. In

addition to this political connection, the people of the area have socio-culturally and ethno-linguistically an association with common characteristics. In this respect this part is different from other two sections of North Bengal as well as rest of Bengal. b) The hilly zone comprised with the hilly portion of the district of Darjeeling with three sub-divisions viz. Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. This part has also specific characteristics. It has already mentioned that the area had connection with the Himalayan and sub-mountain countries. This area was almost covered by dense forest and with regard to the inhabitants the Lepchas, Bhutias, Tibetans etc. communities were predominant in Sikkim and its adjacent hills of Darjeeling. Therefore the history and culture of the hilly North Bengal is basically a part of the Lepcha culture of Sikkim which is associated with the Buddhistic culture. With the coming of the Nepalis from eastern part of Nepal in various phases of British Colonial rule there developed also a mixed socio-cultural belt in this area. Another interesting feature is that there is sharp difference between the socio-cultural life of Nepalis of Nepal and the Nepalis residing in Darjeeling-Sikkim-Bhutan areas. c) The third one is the southern portion with the districts of Malda and Dinajpur. This portion had an association with the Barind region of central Bengal (undivided) in one hand and Purnea and Bhagalpur Divisions on the other. In these districts the early inhabitants were mostly Deshi, Poliya, Rajbansi etc. During colonial period a large number of tribes began to settle there. Although in the pre Colonial period the migration of different tribes from Bihar and Central part of India was there, the rate of migration increased phenomenally in the Colonial period. Therefore the people of this region have a close connection with regard to the social, cultural and historical traditions with these two regions. This characteristics has made this southern portion a

separate zone distinct from the northern and hilly zones of North Bengal. Thus we can see that geographically, historically, ethno-linguistically and culturally there are three different zones within the periphery of North Bengal. But after independence a large number of infiltrations from East Pakistan in all the districts of North Bengal took place. Most of them were of Indo-Aryan origin. On the other hand migration of Nepalese from Nepal in the terrain and doors further contributed for the emergence of a mixed and heterogeneous socio-cultural life in the area concerned.

The second chapter deals with the social awakening of North Bengal and contemporary Bengal where we have found that western education and nineteenth century renaissance left their impact over the northern part of Bengal with minimum extent as the majority of the people of this part was illiterate and the society was comparatively backward. Not only that, this area responded to such developments in a much later phase as because the colonial administration was established in this region comparatively later. But interestingly the social awakening movement of southern Bengal made considerable influence over the single largest community of the area i.e. the Rajbansis and they also started their social mobility movement.

In the third chapter the condition of the Rajbansi community has been discussed. Without understanding their condition it will not be possible to understand the background of their community consolidation movement. It has mentioned earlier that the society of the Rajbansis is endogamous one where there was no caste hierarchy in their social structure, though the leaders of the Kshatriya Samity Movement claimed of their Aryan origin. The leaders also argued that they were at once the ruler of the whole of

northern part of North Bengal. Gradually they became socio-economically backward. Situation began to change with the migration of the high caste Bengali Hindus from eastern and central Bengal. They became dominant in the socio-cultural and economic life of the region though their number was lower. The Rajbansis began to feel themselves as outcaste and a sense of alienation developed among them which accentuated with the census issue. In the post partitioned period (1947) a new phenomenon arose with the United Front Government's land acquisition policy, which said that no individual Jotedar or Land-lord would hold more than 25 Acres or 75 Bighas of land. Therefore, land exceeding 75 Bighas was confiscated by the Government and distributed those vested lands to the landless cultivators. But the major portion of the vested lands was distributed among the refugees. As results, the local Jotedars discontented against such act of the Government and within a few years an ethnic based movement was launched by them named Uttarkhanda Dal movement which demanded separate state for the Rajbansis (Hindu and Muslims). Such antagonism further aggravated with the coming of the large number of scheduled caste Namasudras, particularly in post 1971 period. The latter became dominant in the socio-economic life of the region in the following periods which generated a new crisis among the Rajbansis who claimed themselves as son of the soil. This resulted in the ethnic consolidated movement questioning the proper application of the reservation benefits to the backwards. It has to be kept in mind that the outburst of such confrontation occurred noticeably since the eighties of the twentieth century though the seeds of conflict germinated during the period of study.

In the fourth chapter an attempt has been made to depict the dichotomy regarding the movement of the Rajbansis for their uplift. In this regard we

find that the leaders of the community claimed of their Kshatriya origin and demanded the recognition by the Government in the census records. On the other hand they demanded safeguards from the government citing their poor and economically backward condition. For that they demanded their name to be enlisted under scheduled caste category. This question actually has placed the community in an unending debate residing in North Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Nepal. In North Bengal they are enjoying scheduled caste status since colonial period, in Assam they are of scheduled caste category but fighting for getting scheduled tribe status, in Bihar and Nepal they are enjoying Other Backward Caste status. In Bangladesh they are treated as general category.

In the fifth chapter I have tried to analyze the caste picture of the hill region that the three sub-divisions viz. Darjeeling or Sadar, Kurseong and Kalimpong of Darjeeling district. The original inhabitants of the hill areas were the Lepchas, Bhotias and Tibetans and their number was very low at the time of British annexation. The Nepalese from eastern Nepal migrated in the hill region during colonial period as labourers in the plantation industries (tea, cinchona), workers in various developments, shouldered in British Army etc. Plain people also migrated. In course of time the Nepalese emerged as the single largest community in the hill of Darjeeling. Though the structure of Nepali Society is as same as the Hindu society of Bengal nay India and the society of the hill is heterogeneous, yet a peculiar linguistic consolidation is found in this area and diversities regarding caste are almost disappeared. It is true that colonial rule contributed for the emergence of a lucid society among the Nepalese. Simultaneously separate administrative set up made the hill area different from plains of the region. in the post 1950

period huge number of Nepalese from Nepal, Meghalaya, Assam etc. migrated in the Terai and Duars of the Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri respectively which is still a continuous phenomenon.

In the sixth chapter an attempt has been made to study about the movements which were launched by various minor groups and communities of the region concern. In this context we will find that there were two distinct phases with regard to the characteristics of the movements in the colonial and post independent period. Most of the movement during colonial period were aimed at socio-religious and cultural reforms by a number of groups and communities and ended with the realization/understanding that no movements will be successful unless or until educational and economic developments are made for the respective communities and for that most of the leaders entered into electoral politics. So, upward mobility movements are found during this period. In the post independent period the movements started with specific demands for economic developments and for that purpose the leaders gave stress on demands for extending reservation benefits. So in this period the movements demanded scheduled caste and scheduled tribe status from the government for the respective groups and communities and most of the movements became strong since the nineties of the twentieth century.

The seventh chapter concentrates on the changed perspective of the caste, society and politics of North Bengal caused by the introduction of Constitution after independence in 1947. The Constitution of free India does not endorse caste based politics which was prevalent during colonial period; instead it has provided special socio-economic safeguards to the backward

and depressed classes in the name of social justice. Thus a radical change in the socio-political scenario has come out. After the partition in 1947 a large number of refugees most of them were scheduled caste Namasudras infiltrated into the region and settled permanently. Gradually with regards to the sharing of reservation benefits tensions arose among the Rajbansis against the refugees and it is surprising to notice that the reservation facilities instead of redressing the long drawn grievances rather generating a new crisis amongst the backward people themselves particularly in this region.

In course of the study it has revealed that Cooch Behar was a Princely State and with regards to the administrative and political aspects it maintained a distinction from the British Bengal, though historically, socio-culturally, ethno-linguistically it had close contact with the surrounding districts of undivided Bengal i.e. Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, terrain of Darjeeling etc. Therefore in order to understand the caste society and politics of Cooch Behar a sub-chapter entitled 'caste, society and politics of Cooch Behar till 1950' has been added to this work (Chapter-4) which was not given in the proposal/ synopsis of this study. The ethno-linguistic and socio-cultural condition has already been discussed in chapter-1. So, administrative and political development of the State was absolutely different from the rest of Bengal. Therefore it deserves special mention. The study also reveals that in Cooch Behar a division of the people viz. Cooch Behari and non-Cooch Behari took place which was approved by the Royal Authority of the State. It has also mentioned that after its merger with Indian Union on 28th august 1949, it became a district of West Bengal on 1st January 1950 and came under common administrative structure. But an inner current of separate ness

was there among the people of Cooch Behar and in course of time along with complex socio-economic development of the region as a whole an ethnic identity movement emerged among them and the people of the surrounding districts of North Bengal, which is however discussed in chapter-7.

Methodology: with regard to the methodology, it has to be mentioned that the study is basically documentary and historical. Therefore I had to depend on primary and secondary source materials. For primary source I have collected materials in the State Archives (Kolkata), National Library (Kolkata) and for secondary source the Central Library of North Bengal university under which the work has done. In addition to these the Cooch Behar State Library which has invaluable primary source materials regarding the socio-economic and political history of the state, has provided important source materials. As the study is regional one therefore the materials available in the region has great importance and values. Particularly the journals, little magazines, newspapers, periodicals, weeklies, leaflets etc. published from various districts of North Bengal since colonial and post colonial period. It is worth mentioning that a number of works at districts level have been coming out both in the academic and non-academic arena. The little magazines play a very crucial role in developing the study of various aspects socio-cultural and political life of the people at regional level and in this respect it will not be irrelevant to state that in the post independent period the publications of little magazines in the districts of North Bengal has placed it in a unique position. These magazines reflect almost all the nooks and corners of the history, society and politics etc. of the region and the research value of those works is significant.

In addition to that I have collected the records of comparative statistics of the participation of the two major scheduled caste communities of the region viz. the Rajbansis and the Namasudras in the academic area from various academic institutions such as Ananda Chandra College Jalpaiguri, Acharya Brajendra Nath Shil College, Cooch Behar etc. Another source of collecting both primary and secondary study materials is the personal library of the supervisor under whose guidance the work has done which is unquestionably a profound source regarding the history of the region. Therefore I had depended much on it and it provided some superfluously primary source materials. But at the same time I have to admit that I could not collect some more information due to non availability of the preservative measures of sources in a few non-academic institutions at block level offices.

Special emphasis has also been given to oral studies as one of the recognized methods of regional history writings. In this relation I did conduct personal interviews with eminent and concerned personalities, and I also collected the excerpts of interviews taken by scholars for their respective studies from persons who were either active in or close witness to various socio-political activities of the region during the period under study.

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CHAPTER -1

SOCIAL AND CASTE GEOGRAPHY OF THE REGION

Considering the historical background of North Bengal the area of enquiry in this chapter has been divided into three specific geographical zones, which actually made three distinct historical regions of different ethnic and caste-based socio-cultural entities. These three zones are classified as – a) the northern portion of North Bengal which is constituted by the districts Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar (then Princely State), and the terrain portion of Darjeeling. It has already mentioned in the introductory chapter that the Rangpur and eastern part of Dinajpur were transferred to East Pakistan, now Bangladesh in 1947. They played a crucial role in the formation of the social and caste geography of this area. The district of Cooch Behar was a Princely State before its merger to Indian union on 28th August 1949. Similarly Goalpara which was transferred to Assam in 1874 constituted an important position because the above mentioned area has been a land of some particular caste /groups' viz. Rajbansi, Koch, Mech, Dhimal etc. The area between the rivers Tista-Karotoya and Brahmaputra was part of the kingdoms of Pragyotishpur-Kamrup-Kamtapur from time to time. In addition to this political connection, the people of the area have ethnolinguistically and socio-culturally an association with common characteristics. In this respect this part is different from other two sections of North Bengal as well as rest of Bengal. b) The hilly zone, comprised with the hilly portion of the district of Darjeeling with three sub-divisions viz. Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong. This part also has specific characteristics. It has already mentioned that the area had connection with the Himalayan and sub-mountain countries. This area was almost covered by

dense forest and with regard to inhabitants, the Lepchas, Bhutias, Tibetans etc. communities were predominant in Sikkim and its adjacent hill of Darjeeling¹. Therefore the history and culture of this portion is basically a part of the Lepcha culture of Sikkim which is associated with the Buddhistic culture. With the coming of the Nepalese from eastern Nepal in various phases of British colonial rule there developed a mixed socio-cultural belt in this area. c) The third one is the southern portion with the districts of Malda and Dinajpur. This portion had an association with the Barind region of central Bengal (undivided) in one hand and Purnea and Bhagalpur divisions on the other and also with the Salar-Bagri region (Murshidabad). In these districts the early inhabitants were mostly Deshi, Poliya, Rajbansi etc. During colonial period a large number of tribes began to settle there. Although in the pre-colonial period the migration of different tribes from Chhotanagpur, Bihar and central part of India was there, the rate of migration increased phenomenally in the colonial period². At the time of Bargi invasion a good number of Santals migrated into Malda as it was adjacent to the districts of Shibganj and Purnea of Bhagalpur Division..Therefore, the people of this region have a close connection with regard to the ethno-linguistic, social- cultural and historical traditions with the Barind Bengal and the Bihar, Purnea, Bhagalpur etc. This characteristics has made this southern portion a separate zone distinct from the other two zones of North Bengal. Thus we can see that geographically, ethno-linguistically, historically and culturally there are three distinguished portions within the periphery of North Bengal.

It becomes clear from the introductory chapter that the area as well as the period of study is vast one. Therefore considering the vast period the whole study will be divided into two periods i.e. from 1869 to 1947 and from 1947 –1977. It has to be kept in mind that unlike the other parts of Bengal the society of North Bengal as a whole can be said as non-caste based society though caste Hindus were there, their number was insignificant. Moreover the domination of those caste Hindus over the social life of the local people of the region was started during the colonial period as they emerged as middle class taking opportunities of English education, the Government services and other occupations. Another important point is that after independence due to the large infiltration of the refugees the caste structure of the region underwent a change. But what is interesting is that amongst the refugees who settled in different districts of North Bengal most of them belonged to Namasudras and other low caste groups, therefore the basic characteristics of the region i.e. non-caste majority area remained the same. Let us study first the social and caste picture of the northern most portion of North Bengal during two different phases.

I

(a) (I) Northern Section from 1869 – 1947:

The northern section is consisted with the district of Jalpaiguri, the Cooch Behar State and the Terai portion of Darjeeling. Here we will categorically study about the caste and society of the region. The district of Jalpaiguri was created with the amalgamation of the western Duars annexed by the British govt. through the Indo-Bhutan war of 1865 from Bhutan and police circles (thanas) of Fakirganj, Boda, Sanyasikata (later named as Siliguri) and Patgram (Tetulia sub-division) from Rangpur district in 1869³. In this way

the district of Jalpaiguri was formed which gave a geographical shape of the northern part of present day North Bengal. From this background it is clear that a geographical and social amalgamation was made with that of administration from the very beginning of the formation of the district. On the north the district is bounded by the portion of Eastern Duars which is incorporated with Assam and Bhutan on the south by the state of Cooch Behar and the district of Rangpur, on the west by the district of Dinajpur, Purnea and by Darjeeling on the east.

The areas of Rangpur which included into the district of Jalpaiguri was regulated portion and was under the permanent settlement areas of land revenue under the colonial administrative category and the newly annexed western Duars was non-regulation area . So the district consisted of two well-defined parts viz. the permanently settled area which used to form part of Rangpur, and the Western Duars which were annexed from Bhutan. These two parts are different from each other in physical features, history, administrative arrangement, etc. The people of the regulated area had an affinity with the people of Rangpur, Goalpara, Cooch Behar state and the adjacent areas. The people of this area belonged to the Koch, Rajbansis, Poliya etc. community and they formed the majority caste group people of this region. A specific racial belt is found in this area that is of Indo-Mongoloid race.

The non-regulation area is described by the sociologists as 'settlers' town'. In this area actually migration took place in a significant way after the expansion of British colonial administration and continued till the period of our study. The social composition of the region therefore underwent a

change due to the migration from various neighboring districts as well as provinces from time to time. 'In the half a century between 1872 and 1921 the population increased by a fantastic 244.2 percent... No. other part of Bengal had in a period of comparable span after the advent of the census recorded such increase in population.'⁴ It is known from official documents that the district had vast tracts of forest land and cultivable waste in many areas especially in the Alipurduars subdivision. This uninhibited forest and cultivable waste lands attracted large member of land-hungry settlers from Rongpur, Dinajpur, Pabna, Malda, Rajshahi etc. districts. The Colonial Govt. and the Zamindars of Baikunthapur too welcomed the migrants to cultivate lands. The process of migration and bringing of virgin land under cultivation went on unabated till 1921⁵. It has to be mentioned that the migrant peasant cultivators of this period belonged mostly to Rajbansi community.

Another factor that encouraged migration was, from about 1880 onwards the Tea plantation industry established by the colonial ruler and European planters. The extension of Tea-plantation continued at a rapid pace unto the 1920s. With the expansion of Tea-plantation industry and railway, roads etc. the Colonial Govt. and planters brought labourers from the districts of Santal Pargana, Chotonagpur, Ranchi etc. of Bihar, Balasore, Mayurbhang etc. districts of Orissa⁶. Those migrants belonged to various tribal groups' viz. Oraon, Munda, Santal, Hoe, Mahali, Malpahari, Kheria etc. It is difficult to identify to which part of Bengal the tribes of Orissa had been settled, though Prof. Haraprasad Chattopadyay has mentioned about their migration into Bengal, because the tribes of North Bengal basically had come from Chhotonagpur, Santal Pargana and central India. In addition to the Tea-

plantation, other ancillary economic activities further encouraged migrations of other caste groups' people till 1930s.

Another important factor during the colonial period migration was the establishment of various offices in the district. Jalpaiguri became the divisional headquarter of Rajshahi division in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This factor necessitated migration of upper-caste Hindus from lower Bengal as office bearers, clerks, and professionals as doctors, lawyers etc. It has found that in the non-regulated area most of the migrants who came as service holders in the Colonial administration as well as in other profession most of them belonged to upper caste Bengali Hindus⁷. Marwaris a trading community from Rajasthan came for the purpose of trade & commerce, servants, *coolies* from Bihar, united province Orissa etc. started settling there in the district⁸. D.H.E. Sunder in his survey and settlement report of Western Dooars in 1895 attributed the large rise of population 114,277 (between 1881-1891) in western Duars to migration of Rajbansis, Koch, Mech, Paliya etc. from neighbour districts of Darjeeling, Dinajpur Rangpur and Cooch Behar on the one hand and various tribes from Bihar, Orissa, Chotonagpur and other provinces on the other⁹. The Nepalis and Dhangars numbering about 6000 migrated into Jalpaiguri during 1877-78 and were employed as labourers in the plantation areas¹⁰.

In the 'Regulation portion or the permanently settled area there was virtually no increase of population in the 50 year period from 1872 to 1921. This portion was already relatively densely populated compared to the non-regulated portion. In fact there was a steady drift of population from that part into the Duars where land was fertile and the rent rates low' ¹¹.

It has already mentioned that the society was composed of numerous and diverse social groups. The population belonged to different ethnic linguistic and cultural groups to various castes and religious communities. It has already mentioned that the land is of several autochthonous groups among them the most significant are Rajbansi, Meche, Dhimal, Rabha, Garo and Toto etc.

The Rajbansis of Jalpaiguri as well as North Bengal went through a parallel process of Hinduization and Islamisation long before the advent of the Britishers¹². The Hinduized Rajbansis constituted the single largest Hinduized social group in the population of the North Bengal districts of Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Koch Bihar State. Socially they are a homogeneous group. 'The Rajbansis constituted the most predominant section of the local Hindu Population in the northern districts of North Bengal. Numerically they were the third largest Hindu caste group in Bengal as a whole. The origin of the Rajbansis is shrouded in mystery and the basic debate is whether they are associated with the Koches or not. Most of the earlier writings associated or connected the Rajbansis with the Koch, Mech, Rabha, Garo etc. tribe saying them belonged to the same race i.e. Bodo or Bado. Whatever may be the debate two things are clear from the above discussion that firstly, they were the early settlers of the region and secondly, they were a socially homogenous community as they do not have any sub-caste hierarchy among them'¹³. Their simple socio-religious system of life is different from the Brahmanical culture and that gave the Rajbansis a distinct character. During colonial period the Rajbansis, after a long-drawn movement got the Kshatriya status and thus redefined their position in the

caste hierarchy of Bengal. The rest of the local groups and communities' viz. Mech, Rabha etc. too started social mobility movement which will be discussed in chapters 6.

The second largest component in the population of the region was composed of Muslims. Taking the district as a whole Muslims constituted a minority, just one fourth of the total population. This was in marked contrast to the religious community wise composition of population in most of the districts in North Bengal including neighbouring Rangpur and Dinajpur in all of which Muslims formed a large majority. In Jalaipuri district the Muslims were in majority only in Boda, Pachagar and Tetulia thana areas adjacent to the districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur and had large concentration in two more thana (police stations) areas- Debiganj and Patgram which were transferred to East Pakistan (modern Bangladesh) after independence and partition in 1947¹⁴.

The Muslims of North Bengal however, did not constitute a homogeneous community or group. They had two major segments – (a) the local Muslims the bulk of whom was composed of converted Rajbansis, Koches and Meches and (b) the Muslims who had migrated mainly from the east Bengal districts'¹⁵. It can be said beyond doubt that local Muslims were preponderant among the Muslim population in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts and particularly in the rural areas. It is mention worthy that the local Muslims are in all respect identical with the local Rajbansi Hindus, Meches, Koches etc. except in religious beliefs.

The early history of the local Muslims is in obscure. It is said by J F. Grunning in the District Gazetteer, Jalpaiguri(1911) that sheiks and Nasyas forming more than 99 percent of the Muslim population were native to the district¹⁶. About the Nasya Sheiks, it is believed that these people embraced themselves into Islamism, Perhaps attracted by the humane appeal & preaching made by the Pirs, Darbeshes etc. According to Harendra Narayan Choudhury the title “Nasya” is significant. It is generally believed to be the corrupted form of “Nasta” means fallen or degenerated’¹⁷.

It is evident from history that Muslim rulers and their lieutenant governors along with military army troops invaded the kingdom of Kamrup or Kamptapur and Cooch Behar in many a time. In course of their invasion they must have taken water, foods etc. from the inhabitants in their way. Not only that they had conducted loot & robbery village after village. These areas, after the departure of the troops were declared by the upper caste Hindus as ‘Nasta’ or corrupted, because they came in touch with the ‘Mlecchas’ or untouchable Muslims. These people being ignored by the caste Hindu society gradually inclined to Islamism. Thus the native autochthonous group people embraced themselves into Islamic fold. Thus in course of time, these people gradually came in touch with the Sufis (who were aristocrat migrants), and inspired by these Sufis, they threw off their lower caste, untouchable identity and got encouraged to take the title ‘Sheik’ as they are the disciples of the pir or sheik. Among the Muslims of northern region of North Bengal the largest section of them is Nasya Sheiks¹⁸. It is worth mentioning that though theoretically Muslim society does not believe in caste system, yet it has argued by scholars that even after conversion they could not throw away their previous socio-cultural practices and believing.

Therefore amongst the Muslims of the region also a tendency was there towards upward mobility¹⁹. The following poem which became an adage during that time proves the fact.

‘Aage chilam Tulla Ulla
Pare holam Uddin
Tahar pare Choudhury Saheb
Kapal firlo seidin’²⁰

(free English translation : At first I was ‘tulla’, ‘ulla’ which were the surnames of the muslims, then I got the surname as choudhury sahib and with this my social prestige has become upgraded.)

So the bulk of the local Muslims were converted or Islamised autochthons like Rajbansis, Koches, Paliya and Meches. However, a fair number of the Muslims in Jalpaiguri came originally from Dinajpur, Rangpur and Purnea districts and from the Cooch Behar state. The Baikunthapur Zamindars encouraged migration of Muslims from Dinajpur and nearby districts to facilitate extension of cultivation. Colonel Hedayat Ali of Patna, who took an important part in the Anglo-Bhutan war, also helped migration and settlement of some Bihari Muslims in the scantily populated Duars²¹. Some accounts also suggest that many of the Muslims of the district were most probably a mixed group with converts and immigrant Muslim soldiers and colonizers, who came in the wake of the Pathan and Mughal conquests, by living side by side and intermarrying with each other. It has also viewed by scholars that Islamization could notable progress because Hinduism was not deeply rooted among the autochthons of this part of Bengal. In the Duars region of Jalpaiguri a few Bihari Muslims are found²² who perhaps embraced Islamism during the period between 13th to 16th centuries.

With regard to the religious beliefs and practices it needs to be observed that the Islamized Rajbansis, Koches or Meches were not very strict in adhering to orthodox Islamic faith and tradition²³. Many of their observances had a folk form characterized by worship of pirs and mursheds and contained elements of nature worship and of non-orthodox Hinduism.

Other minor autochthons groups- In the Duars a few other local groups were found. These were the Meches, Totos, Rabhas and Garos who were considered to be the western branch of the Kachari or Bodo tribe (except the totos who are said as the branch of Tibeto-Burman group)²⁴. As these groups of people were numerically very small and did not have any significant role in the broader socio-cultural and political life of the district as well as the region, therefore the study will not concentrate on them.

A few Brahmins of Bengal, Maithilis of North Bihar, Pandas from Orissa and Kamrup as well as a few other higher caste Bengali Hindus were found in the Regulation portion of the Jalpaiguri district as early in the 15th -16th century. It was only after the formation of the district in 1869 that they began to move into the district including its Duars part as Govt. servants and professionals such as lawyers and doctors. The Sahas, a Bengali trading caste group of people came for conducting trade²⁵. The Marwaris Biharis etc. also came during the establishment of the British rule in this part. It has to be mentioned that the Marwaris had come into this part of Bengal long before the advent of the British. Rangpur was an important centre of trade, the regulation portion of Jalpaiguri was also important trading centre²⁶.

The tribal people are found mostly in Duars, as it has already mentioned that they had come as labourers in the plantation areas. Numerically the largest group consisted of the Oraons. their number 'increased from just 210 in 1881 to 2,844 in 1901 and further to 1, 15,350 in 1921. The second largest migrant tribal group was the Mundas, their number also was increased from 1,855 in 1891 to 34,601 in 1921'. Then the Santals, their number was also increased as they began to settle there permanently. These people are of Austric lineage. Of these groups the Oraon had their dialect of Dravidian family language, the Santals and Mundas used the speeches affiliated to the mundari family. In course of time a new dialect known as Sadari which is a mixed form of mundari, Kurukh, Hindi and Bengali – evolved for communication among themselves and with the others²⁷. It has to be mentioned here that this Sadari actually united the tribes of different groups and regions in this part of Bengal which is far away from their parental lands.

The Terai region included four police stations viz. Siliguri, Phansidea, Naxalbari and Kharibari i.e. the plain area of Darjeeling district. Now two more police stations namely Matigara and Bagdogra have been created and altogether six police stations have made the terai of Darjeeling. During the colonial period the northern portion of Purnea and the terai portion of Nepal were identical with regard to its people and socio-cultural affinities²⁸. Even today there can be found a large number of Rajbansis, Meches, Dhimals etc in the above mentioned areas which is beyond the jurisdiction of West Bengal. The Terai was a part of Sikkimese Kingdom. In the last decade of the eighteenth century Nepal became powerful and invaded the Terai region, East India Company came to help the Sikkimese kingdom from the

aggression of Nepal. As a result Anglo-Nepal war took place and ended with the historical treaty of Titalia in 1817. By the treaty Nepal gave to Sikkim the Terai portion and the river Mechi was fixed as the border between India and Nepal. During this time East India Company captured 640 sq miles of Terai land and returned it to Sikkim. In return the Company got a village named Darjeeling as gift from the Raja of Sikkim²⁹. At the time of Anglo-Bhutan war in 1864 the whole of the Duars came under the East India Company's jurisdiction. During this time the Company's Government established a new sub-division named Terai sub-division and its Headquarter was Hanskhoa, a village near Phansideoa Police station. In 1880 Siliguri was made it's headquarter after it was separated from Jalpaiguri. In the year 1891 the Terai was incorporated with Kurseong Sub-Division³⁰.

Like other parts of North Bengal the Terai region also was a non caste region. The upper Terai portion was inhabited by the Meches, and Dhimals and the inhabitants of lower Terai were the Koches. Next to the Koches the Rajbansis began to settle here. It has to be mentioned here that the high caste Bengalis came to settle here before the establishment of the British rule. It is believed by a few scholars that a large group of people came from Awadh at the time of the Battle of Buxer in 1764 and after the Sepoy Mutiny (1857) many Sepoys fled to Terai, they married the local Rajbansi women and with the passage of time they became assimilated with the local society and thus became inhabitants of the area permanently. The rulers of Baikunthapur Raikot family encouraged the migration of the Sanyasi and Giri in the Phansideoa police station area. They fought against the British force as the soldiers of Baikunthapur³¹. They too got married with the local Rajbansi brides and became the permanent inhabitants of the area. After the

introduction and establishment of tea gardens and tea industries the Oraon, Munda, Nepali, Santal, etc. began to come as labourers and settled there permanently. Thereafter the Marwaris and Biharis had come to this area. In the last phase we found the migration of the refugees from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh to this land³² which is still a continuing phenomenon.

So in the early time Terai was sparsely populated by the Koches, Meches, Rajbansis, Dhimals etc. 'These people are of mongoloid origin and they entered Bengal from the east by way of Brahmaputra Valley. Others consider it more likely that they are descended from a Dravidian stock which probably occupied the valley of the Ganges that driven forward by this incursion into the swamps and forests of the Terai, they were brought into touch with the Mongoloid races of the lower Himalayas, and the type became affected by intermixture with them'³³. According to the census of 1872, 50 per cent among the total population of the Terai were the Rajbansis. But after independence only 25 per cent of the total populations are the Rajbansis³⁴. The most noticeable change took place in Siliguri with regard to the demographic change. In 1947 the total population of Siliguri was about 8,000 only. Amongst the population the Bengalis (both high & high) were very few, the rest were the Bihari, Punjabi, a few Nepali, Bhutia, Lepcha and the local Rajbansis³⁵.

The society of the Terai region meant the society of the Rajbansis. Because at the time when it came under British rule in 1850 there were 544 Jotes (In North Bengal Zamindari system was more or less absent, instead Jotedari system was prevalent) the owners of most of the Jotes were the Rajbansis³⁶. The rest were the Meches, Muslims and a few high caste Bengalis. Most of

the Jotedars came from Dinajpur and they were accompanied by their own subjects who were their own community. It has mentioned in the succeeding chapters that the Rajbansis were the owners of vast areas of lands. We found the existence of big Jotedars in Rangpur, Jalpaiguri districts and CoochBehar State during British rule. The big Jotedars had great influence over the society of the region. It has to be mentioned that there had been a socio-cultural similarity between the Rajbansis of Terai of Darjeeling and Terai of Nepal and Purnea as it has already mentioned that there is a large number of Rajbansis in the Terai of Nepal and Purnea.

The most important point is that there was a sharp distinction between the Rajbansis of Mechi-Mahananda area and the Rajbansis of the land between the rivers Karotoya and Sankosh. With regard to the social relation, unlike the Rajbansis of Rangpur, CoochBehar and Jalpaiguri, there was no integrated social life between the Rajbansis of Terai and the above mentioned areas. Not only that there was no integrated social life between the indigenous tribal people of Terai i.e. Meches, Koches and Dhimals. Except as landowners the Bengalis came here in the British period in connection with the tea and timber business and they preferred to live in Siliguri and its adjacent areas. Those who came during British rule most of them belonged to high caste Hindus, though a good number Saha, Teli, Tili, Kumar, Kamar etc. low-caste Bengalis also migrated into this area.

As the Rajbansis were majority therefore the culture of this region was basically Rajbansi culture till the second half of the nineteenth century. But the cultural life of the people of this region was inferior compared to the life of the Rajbansis of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Rangpur etc. Because there was

no political stability in the Terai as there was no Kingdom or dynasty like in the above mentioned areas. The area between Karotoya-Sankosh Rivers had long been a rich cultural centre centering on the kingdom of Cooch Behar. On the other hand the Terai was under Sikkim and Nepal, so there was no political stability³⁷. Another important point is that the British Government was more interested to develop the hills instead of Terai. They were only interested to collect revenue from Terai³⁸; therefore no rich cultural heritage could develop in this region.

Like the Muslims of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Rangpur the Muslims of the Terai was different only with regard to their religion, except religion in all aspects they were identical with the local Rajbansi Hindus.

So, in the Terai the mixture of races is equally great. Here the aboriginal Koches, Rajbansis and Meches, Dhimal are most numerous so far as the number of a particular caste is concerned.

Another district under the northern zone of North Bengal is Cooch Behar which was a princely state till its merger with India in 1949. On the north of the state of Cooch Behar there is western Duars which became part of Jalpaiguri district in 1875 and on the eastern boundary there is Eastern Duars of Goalpara, Assam. Rangpur is situated on the south and on the west there are Jalpaiguri and Rangpur³⁹.

Though it seems from the name of Koch Behar (as the district gazetteer of Cooch Behar named it) that the land is inhabited by the Koch people, there were a large number of Rajbansis. Next to them the Meches, Rabhas, Garos

etc. also constituted the society of CoochBehar. The society of CoochBehar was also a non caste based society. The Koches and Rajbansis gradually became Hinduized and Islamised by contact with their neighbors as in the State also the high caste Bengali Hindus came to serve in the administration of the State. As earlier stated the Koches are of Mongoloid origin that entered Bengal from the east by way of the Brahmaputra valley, though other views are there with this regard which will be discussed in the succeeding chapters. Their society was homogenous. The society was basically agricultural society. So far as migration is concerned, migration started increasing from 1941 onwards which continued till the period of our study. In 1891 migrants from Rangpur and Jalpaiguri in number 17516 and 10,673 respectively entered into the state. People from Assam 4,117 and 5,157 from Bihar Division came into the state since 1881 to 1901⁴⁰. There was migration of people from Uttar Pradesh (then united province) into the State since 1881 onwards. Most of the migrants from neighboring districts belonged to the Rajbansis and from other provinces were mostly of non-Aryan and semi-Hinduised autochthons. In Cooch Behar there were Morangiyas, as they came from the Morang district of Nepal they were named like that⁴¹. In addition to the above mentioned castes and communities there were a good number of Kamrupia Brahmanas of Mithila. Benaras etc. who came into State at the time when the process of Hinduization had started in this part⁴².

In CoochBehar also the Muslims were mostly converted from indigenous people, though a few Asraf Muslims (high class) outsiders are also found who came here long before the advent of the British rule. In Cooch Behar, there is a small group of Muslims called Cooch Behari Muslim Bhatia. They

live basically in the areas of Tufanganj, Dinhat and Cooch Behar sadar sub-division. These people came from Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogara, Tangail etc. districts of eastern Bengal, they had come in a later phase between 1920⁴³. As they came from low-land (Bhati) of Bengal, therefore they are called by the local people in their common dialect as 'Bhatia' or the people of low-land. It is evident from historical reference that these Muslims are of Namasudra origin. Other small group called Manta Bajikar is also found in the Cooch Behar, though their number is very small. It has to be remembered that though there was no caste system among the Muslims of North Bengal, social stratification is there in them⁴⁴.

(ii) Northern Portion of North Bengal, 1947-1977: The district of Jalpaiguri suffered the infliction of partition. The census operations of 1961 enumerated 2, 18,341 people as refugees born in East Pakistan (modern Bangladesh) out of 454177 persons who were enumerated as outsiders⁴⁵. Therefore according to the census report of 1961 the refugees constituted 16 percent of the total population of the district.

With regard to Darjeeling, the Terai faced the migration of refugees from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh and in the hills a rapid migration took place from Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet etc. After the Indo-Nepal treaty in 1950 a large number of Nepalis began to settle in the hill areas of Darjeeling districts and since the late seventies of the twentieth century a good number of Nepalis began to settle in the terrain and Duars areas which is still a continuing phenomenon. In addition to that a good number of Marwaris, Biharis etc. compelled to flee from East Pakistan and settled at Siliguri after 1947. In

Cooch Behar also migration of the refugees from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh took place in a considerable extent.

Not only that after partition, five police stations of Jalpaiguri viz. Boda, Pachagar, Patgram, Tetulia and Debiganj were transferred to East Pakistan (modern Bangladesh). A portion of Phansideoa police station of Darjeeling district also went to East Pakistan. Therefore demographic composition faced a change for instance, the number of Rajbansi caste people decreased and in addition to this the numbers of infiltrated refugees mostly among them were Namasudras and other scheduled caste group people increased in the northern districts of West Bengal. Another important incident which affected the demographic pattern of the region was the 'Bengal Kheda' movement of Assam during 1959-62 which continued till the period of our study. Moreover a large number of Bengalis (about 10,000) compelled to leave Assam by the severe 'Bengal Kheda' movement led by the All Assam Students Union and the Peoples' War Council in 1952, 1961, and 1972 and also in 1979⁴⁶. What is important is that almost all those refugees from Assam took their shelter in the districts of North Bengal. In addition to that near about 90,000 Bengalis most of them were low caste Bengali Hindus crossed the border of Bangladesh during the Bangladesh war of independence in 1970-71. Most of these infiltrators took refuge in the open lands as well as in the Government refugee camps of North Bengal. On 18th November 1971 President V.V.Giri came to visit the refugee camps at Balarampur Hat, Bandar Nagar etc. in Jalpaiguri⁴⁷.

After independence the people from different areas, races, castes, have come and settled in the Terai. Along with the large number of refugee Bengalis a

good number of non Bengalis particularly the Marwaris, Punjabis, Biharis, Nepalese, UPites etc. came and settled there. Therefore a pluralistic culture had been developed in this area which is quite rare in Bengal.

After partition the new Assam Rail link project since 1947 developed in the Alipurduar Town which helped the Town to develop as a large railway centre. In addition to that several roads building projects were connecting Assam with the Duars opened a new way for further inter-mixing between the people of both Jalpaiguri and Assam. The following table will show the number of migrants in Jalpaiguri since 1941. Although these migrants entered the district both from inside and outside the country, the number of refugees from East Pakistan (modern Bangladesh) was largest among them. We will get the statistics of migration from Bangladesh in the following table.

1.1

Year	Darjeeling	Jalpaiguri	Cooch Behar	West Dinajpur	Malda
1961	38,162	2,18,341	2,52,753	1,72,237	64,474
1981	52,414	2,79,186	2,96,680	2,56,625	1,03,481

Source: Census of India 1961, Vol.XIV, West Bengal & Sikkim, pt. II-C(iii), Migration Tables (D-iv to D vi), p.176-196; Census of India 1981, West Bengal Series 23, pt. V, A & B, Migration Tables, p.70-102.

Before independence Cooch Behar was a Princely State, in 1950 the State became one of the districts of present day West Bengal after the merger movement of the state and inclusion of the State with Indian union. Being

the princely state the rate of migration in this area was all along slow during colonial period. Only the bureaucrats, priests and other upper-caste people from central Bengal came and settled there and their number was insignificant compared to the number of aboriginal Rajbansis, Koches etc. The population started increasing from 1941 which continued till the period of our study. The society of Cooch Behar was mostly composed of as mentioned earlier, Rajbansis, Koches, Meches who were numerous in number, though upper caste migration took place, it did not affect the demographic structure of the State. It is only after 1947 that a large number of refugees (most of them were of low caste) infiltrated into the district which escalated from time to time. If we see the trend of migration we will find that after the Pakistan resolution taken by the All India Muslim League in 1940 a large number of migrants entered the district from 1940 onwards.

Interestingly, it is found that in almost all the districts of North Bengal the infiltration of refugees accelerated in between 1951 and 1981. The Indo-Pak War of 1965 gave another impetus to infiltrate from East Pakistan to a large number of refugees into almost all the corners of the region⁴⁸. Moreover the war of independence of Bangladesh in 1971 further augmented infiltration. These large numbers of refugees mostly belonged to Namashudra and other caste groups were peasant cultivators in their profession. It will not be irrelevant to mention that the Nasya Muslims of North Bengal had claimed of their Rajbansi origin since 1990s and became able to get OBC status in 1999⁴⁹. So it can be said that in spite of migration the basic characteristics i.e. non-caste majority area remained the same in this region after partition.

Whatever may be the reason either administrative reorganization or migration it can undoubtedly be said that the northern portion of North Bengal is basically a settlers 'zone' no other part of British territory in India did experience such a rapid and escalating migration except the districts of Sylhet and Kachar where the British Govt. encouraged such migration from 1832 onwards and people mostly from eastern Bengal gradually settled there permanently, as a result a new kind of social composition was developed in this part⁵⁰.

II

b) (i) The Hilly Zone: 1896-1947

The Hilly section is consisted of the Hilly areas of the district of Darjeeling. This region has taken as a separate zone considering its unique geographical location as well as historical background which has no match with the rest of Bengal. It has already mentioned that the hill area had the tradition of Lepcha culture of Buddhism and since the Colonial period with the coming of the Nepalis from the eastern part of Nepal a different culture with Hinduism came into existence. As earlier mentioned the district is basically the creation of the British Colonial Government.

It has mentioned earlier in relation to the discussion about Terrain region that in 1835 the East India Company first acquired the nucleus of Darjeeling district from the Raja of Sikkim. In 1860 through war again with Sikkim, annexation of the territory of Sikkim was made and an area was added to Darjeeling tract which brought the boundaries to the Nepal on the west and the river Tista to the east. The Terai was also added. The Kalimpong sub-

division was added to the district through the war with Bhutan in 1865. Thus the district got its present shape⁵¹.

In the early time the hilly region was sparsely populated by aboriginal Lepchas. The East India Company's effort to develop Darjeeling as hill resort gave an opportunity to the neighboring peoples to migrate and take part in the development. According to the census reports the original inhabitants, the Lepchas were rapidly outnumbered by settlers from Nepal and Sikkim which altered radically the racial composition of the population as well as increasing it enormously⁵². When the British intervened politically in the region there was already established the domination of the Bhutanese, Nepalese, in the north over the aboriginal Lepchas. The British interest was mainly to develop Tea-plantation industries, engineering transport and education, to establish military cantonment for keeping watch on Nepal & Bhutan, Sanatorium etc. therefore two large migrations were brought under the situation i.e. of Nepalese in the hills who were according to the Britishers more efficient and thrifty as cultivators than the aboriginal Lepchas⁵³ and in the Terai of Tribes from Chhotonagpur.

Darjeeling was and is situated as a gateway of business between India and Tibet, Nepal and China conducted by the British Colonial Govt. in India⁵⁴. Not only that the hill areas of Darjeeling was part of the Sikkimese Kingdom. Therefore a bulk of migrants from Tibet, China and Nepal entered and began to settle in the hills of the district during this period. When China invaded Tibet (1950) a large number of Tibetan infiltrated into the region. Many of them began to settle there permanently⁵⁵.

The social structure of the Nepalese is similar to that of the rest of Indian Hindus. There are number of sub-castes among the Nepalese came from Nepal. These are Newar, Rai, Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Sunuwar, Sherpa, Yakha and a number of others. They had their own customs, beliefs, language and tradition. A large number of these groups spoke to their own Tibeto-Burman language, but gradually Nepali became the dominant language in the hill therefore Nepali got the status of common lingua-franca among all the people in the hill irrespective of caste, group or religion.⁵⁶ The entire zone experienced a rapid rate of growth of population expanding from 10000 in 1850 to nearly 1, 73,342 in 1901⁵⁷.

According to the census of 1901 the Mohammedans formed less than 4 percent of the total population, most of them being residents of the Terai, and as it has already mentioned that many of the aboriginal Koches, Rajbansis etc. had embraced Islam there. The census reports of 1941 showed that the number of Muslims in the district of Darjeeling was 8,728, scheduled castes 50,750, plain Hindus 39,276 Nepalese who were the largest in number were 2,54,608 other hill men viz. Bhutia, Lepcha and others 20,083. Indian Christians, Europeans, Britishers etc were 3365 out of total population of 3,76,810 in the district⁵⁸. The census of 1931 classified the 3,19,635 persons then enumerated in the district of Darjeeling as having a mother – tongue as follows:

Bengali 37444 Khewari (Bihar) 11570

Hindi 22595 Mundari 5649

Urdu 2448 Santali 4771

Bhutia and 11761 Oraon 11742

Gurung	2029		
Limbu	4706	Language of Burma	46
Mangari	10445	Language of Other Parts of India	1800
Murmi	32319		
Nepali	2970	Language of other Parts of Asia	429
Newari	6956		
Other Bengali	55793	Language of Europe	2174
Languages			
Assam languages	823		

Source: Dash, A.J., Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, 1947, page 57.

The above data proves that the society of the region is exceedingly heterogeneous. The majority of the people in the hills are of mongoloid origin, belonging chiefly to various Nepalese castes, but also including a large number of Lepchas, Bhutias and Tibetans⁵⁹. Together with those Hill men there are found the denizens of the plains, who have been attracted to the hills by the prospect of wealth, among them are Marwari marchants, the Jews of the Himalayas, Bengali officers, clerks, Hindusthani mechanics, etc⁶⁰. As it has mentioned earlier the tribal people mostly the inhabitants of the Terai region which has discussed with the northern section of the region considering its similarity with the region in every aspects.

So it is clear from the demographic picture that the population in the hill region was heterogeneous and was fractured into many ethnic, linguistic and racial groups with disparate interests and concerns.

The Hilly tract of the district of Jalpaiguri came to be inhabited by among others a significant number of several Nepali castes groups people. In 1921 they numbered nearly 20,000 ⁶¹.

(ii) Hilly zone in Post Partition period 1947-1977:

Unlike other districts of present day West Bengal the hilly area of the district of Darjeeling did not suffer the refugee influx from East Pakistan, though indirectly it got influenced. The Indo-Nepal Treaty of 31 July 1950 actually made a further change in the social structure of Darjeeling. Because the Article VII of the treaty granted 'on reciprocal basis; to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter, residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce etc. and privileges of a similar nature'⁶². It can be mentioned in this respect that a large number of Nepalis were expelled as a result of anti-Nepali movement from Assam and Maghalaya since the 80s of the twentieth century and most of them settled in the terrain and duars portion of North Bengal. Therefore a large number of Nepalese in Post-Partition period entered and settled in the District, which resulted in the emergence of the Nepalese as a single largest ethnic group in the Hilly zone of West Bengal during Post-Independent period.

So except the Lepchas, Limbus, Bhotias and Tibetans the structure of the Nepali society is almost similar to the Indian Hindus. After the annexation of Tibet by china a large number of Tibetans began to enter and settled in India particularly the hill areas of Darjeeling since the middle of 1951, which gained momentum and assumed fairly large proportions in 1956 and 1959⁶³.

III

(c)(i) The Southern Portion from 1869-1947

The southern portion is consisted with the districts of Malda and Dinajpur. The Malda district was formed in 1813 by the amalgamation of four police stations of Purnea viz. Shibganj, Kaliachak, Bholahat and Gurguribas; two police stations of Dinajpur viz. Malda and Bamongola and two police stations of Rajshahi viz. Rahanpur and Chumpi. Dinajpur came under the East India Company's jurisdiction through the Grant of Dewany and it was made a district under Rajshahi Division in 1772⁶⁴. One thing has to be remembered in this regard that Malda and Dinajpur are the old districts compared to the other districts of North Bengal though in the early period of British rule the district of Malda was not formed. As it has already mentioned that after the amalgamation of a few areas of Bihar, Rajshahi and Dinajpur the district was formed in 1813. Before 1813 it was under Rajshahi Division.

In order to understand the demographic composition as well as caste and society of the district of Malda, we have to study the boundary and the administrative change that took place from time to time under the British colonial rule. If we see the boundary of the district we will find that on the north there are districts of Purnea and Dinajpur, on the east it is bounded by the Dinajpur and Rajshahi. The districts of Murshidabad and Rajshahi exist to the south and to the west there are Murshidabad, Santal Parganas and Purnea districts. The district of Malda was formerly a part of Bhagalpur Division and transferred to the Rajshahi Division in 1912⁶⁵. Not only that up to the early part of the nineteenth century different areas of the district were divided between the Collectorate of Purnea and Dinajpur⁶⁶. Therefore being

a part under the jurisdiction of Purnea and Bhagalpur on the one hand and the constant migration from this western part into the district on the other, the Bihari culture, habits, customs etc. intermingled with the existing society to a large extent which in a long run distinguished the district from other districts of North Bengal. There are two broad divisions in the district one is occupied by the migrant settlers which is socio-culturally and ethnolinguistically associated with Bihar, Purnea, Bhagalpur and Santal Parganas. The exact date of migration of the Santals as well as other tribal groups can not be stated specifically it can be said that the migration increased phenomenally during the last half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century. It is also mention worthy that there are a number of groups among the Santals also⁶⁷. The other portion is inhabited by the aboriginals and which had profound connection with the Barind region of grater Bengal from the very beginning. A large proportion of Hinduised and semi-Hinduised population comprised by the Rajbansis, Koches, Poliyas and Deshis etc., has contributed a major part to the total population of the district. From Govt. records and census reports it is known that labourers from Bihar and the adjoining districts migrated into Malda. In addition to that migrants from Murshidabad, Dinajpur and Purnea entered into Malda early in the 19th century. The survey and settlement report of Malda speaks of the migration of the Muslims and Santals of Murshidabad into Malda since about 1880⁶⁸. After the failure of 'Hul' movement of 1855-56 and the 'socio-economic change caused by the advancement of colonial rule' a large number of Santals from Santal Parganas left their ancestral home and began to settle in the areas adjacent to Bengal i.e. Malda. Social historians assume that this was mainly due to the fact that the district was a part & parcel of the Bhagalpur Division during 1876-1905. Therefore this geographical and

administrative convenience might help to such migration. On the other hand the area adjacent to the Rajshahi district and the central Bengal was very much associated with the culture of the said region. Moreover this part conceives the glory of the past kingdom of Gour which had determined the socio-cultural development of this area for long.

The Muslims migrated into the western side and the Santals into the Barind on the east of the district. In the course of a decade that followed nearly 20,000 Santal and 16,000 Muslims from Murshidabad had entered in Malda. During the period between 1911 and 1921 the Santals from Santal Parganas numbered in 38,011 entered into the district. The Santals cleared the Barind, a large part of which was covered by jungles and occupied land there at low rate of rent. 'A gradual flourishing Santal colony thus grew up in the Barind in east Malda. According to the Government reports, Gangs of labourers were 'constantly seen passing by the 'emmigration roads' through Bhagalpur and Purnea and by the Rajmahal road into Malda, Dinajpur and other eastern districts in search of employment'⁶⁹. The vast area of Kaliachak, Manikchak, Ratua, Bhutni, Habibpur Gajol Harishchandrapur etc. police stations is inhabited by this Santals.

In 1872 the Muslim population in the district commanded 46 percent which rose to 54 percent in 1931. This increase was due primarily to migration from Murshidabad. There has been a considerable increase of population in the diara tracts among the Muslims known as Shershabadis. The Hindus fall into three main divisions (1) the castes which have affinity with Bihar, mostly resident in diara tracts whose languages are Hindi and Sadari, (2) the castes with the affinities in Indo-Mongoloid race such as the Rajbansis,

Koches, Palis, Deshis found in the north east and north of the district and (3) lastly the other castes of lower Bengal strongest round Gour and the south.

Among the migrant Mohammedans the differences of nationalities can not be defined as the official records are scanty. But their affinities are for the most part with the castes of lower Bengal, though it is said that the Mohammedans of the Shershabadi Pargana of Sibganj police station known as Shershabadis, show traces of foreign descent who migrated at the time of the Mohammedan dynasties⁷⁰. With the exception of a few high class families of Saiyads, Moghuls and Pathans most of the Mohammedans are Sheiks. Among the cultivators, however, the Shershabadis form a distinct group. Of the functional groups may be mentioned the jolas (weavers), Dhaniyas carders), Nalus (readsellers), Nikaris (fishermen) and Kunjras (vegetablesellers) etc.

According to the census report of 1872 the number of Hindus was 3, 56,298 or 52.7 percent and the number of the Muslims was 3, 10,890 or 46 percent of the total population of 6, 76,426. within a few decade the Hindus were confined in the English Bazar and the adjacent areas and overall the Muslims became the majority community among the 15 (fifteen) police stations of the district⁷¹.

The Chains who numbered 30,082 in 1872 Census and 52,128 in 1911 census are a caste with affinities to Bihar found large in numbers in the diara thanas of the west of the district. They are agriculturists and labourers. This caste is more largely represented in Malda and Murshidabad than in any other districts of Bengal. Their home is properly in Bihar. Mr. Magrath C. S.

in treating of the castes of Bihar province states that the chains are chiefly boatmen and fishermen like the Binds⁷².

Another district of the same geographical as well as historical background is the district of Dinajpur. The district is a triangular tract, the northern part of which lies between the districts of Jalpaiguri and Rangpur on the east and Purnea on the west and on the south there are parts of Malda, Rajshahi and parts of Bogra district⁷³. Dinajpur is historically an old and rich district. Along with the above mentioned districts Dinajpur also was under Rajshahi Division during the British period. The majority community in the district are various Hinduised and semi-Hinduised aborigines such as Paliya, Rajbansi, Deshi, Koch etc. in addition to those a considerable number of low caste communities viz. Jugi, Kurmi, Gop, Nat, Pod, Bind, Hari etc. are also found. Among the semi-hinduised people the Palis and Rajbansis are largest groups or communities. The Tribal people mostly migrated into the district during the British period also constitutes a large portion of population. In the district one community called themselves as Asur is found and their number is very few. In 1976 they got Scheduled Tribe status from the Government⁷⁴. If we study the demographic settlement of the district we will find that the area between the rivers Kulik and Tangan is inhabited mostly by the people of Rajbansi, Pali and Deshi groups. The area to the south-east of river Tangan which extended upto the river Yamuna of Hilli crossing the rivers Punarvaba and Atrayee is the habitat of Bhuimali, Kora, Turi, Hari, Gop, Badia etc. low caste groups' people and the migrants who entered in the later phase such as kaivarttas and Namasudras and people belonging to Baiti, Dosad, Nat, Bhakta etc, inhabited mainly in the vast area from the south east bank of river Tangan to the north upto Sonapur⁷⁵.

The tribal people (Santal, Oraon, Munda etc) were brought from the part of Bihar and Chotanagpur to bring under cultivation the waste lands of the district which was covered by jungles that time. The statement of Mr. Gait, census Superintendent in 1901 proves the fact, he said 'about ten years ago it occurred to the manager of Govt. estate that the waste land might be reclaimed if Santals were imported and settle there. The experiment was made and proved such a success that the influx has continued even since'. Their lead had been followed by a few Mundas and Oraons from Ranchi⁷⁶. After the failure of the movement of 1855 a good number of the Santals came and settled in the Barind region of Bengal.

With regard to the religious distribution of population the great bulk of the population are Mohammedans and Hindus. A very few Brahma Samaj followers were there. The remainders consisting of Jains, Buddhists, Christians, a handful of aboriginal tribal still professing their primitive forms of faith i.e. animism, totemism etc.

Like the Muslims of the other districts of North Bengal in Dinajpur also most of them belong to Koch and Rajbansi origin who converted themselves into Islam⁷⁷. So far as religion among the Muslims is concerned the Muslims of Dinajpur were divided in a number of religious and ideological divisions viz. Sunni, Shiya, Motagela, Quadiria, Quadiani, Rafezi, Ahle-Hadis, Deobandi, Naksbandi, Hanafi, Sufi, La-mahzabi etc⁷⁸. It has to be mentioned that in the Malda district also the Muslims are divided into a number of ideological groups. In addition to the local converted Muslims a few number of Pathan, Sayad etc. migrated into the district. Except those higher class

Muslims the rest of local or converted Muslims were called as Sheiks. The sheik Muslims are again sub-divided into Khotta Sheik and Bangal or Barind Sheik. In Bengal most of the Sheiks are Bangal or Barind Sheiks who are nothing but Rajbansi Muslims. The languages of the Muslims of the district are Bengali, Urdu and Suryapuri. The tribal people use Sadari language which emerged as lingua-franca among the tribal of various groups. Like the northern section, in the southern section also the most predominant among the Muslims are Nasya Sheiks. A significant group of Muslims called Khotta (Sheiks) Muslims are found in Malda and Dinajpur. Originally they are of Dwarbhanga of Bihar. These people came to this region as because during the Mughal period the district was under the same jurisdiction of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa⁷⁹.

In this southern segment another significant group is Shershabadis, who are next to the Nasya Sheiks in number. It is known to all that the Pathan leader Sher Shah captured the Gour in between 1535-38. This time he was accompanied by soldiers from Bihar, as it is historically true that Shershabadi came into Bengal through Bihar. These people began to settle on the both sides of the river Bhagirathi. After conquering Bengal he made Bengal a Sarkar and for the easy collection of revenue he divided this Sarkar into a few Parganas. It is believed that one of such Parganas was named as shershabad. Therefore originally the inhabitants of this Pargana are the converted Muslims of Bihar and the Shershabadiyas had come from Murshidabad during Colonial period⁸⁰. It is believed by a few scholars that the Shershabadias are descendants of Shershabadi's Army. As the subject people of Bihar accompanied Sher Shah either by fear or lure of getting wealth, these people, therefore gradually became inhabitant of this region.

Not only that being degraded by upper caste Hindus as they had touched the Muslim soldiers perhaps these people converted themselves into Islamism⁸¹. Apart from these there are also found a number of small group Muslims viz. Mohmin, Kunjra, Rangrej, Hajjam, Ansari etc. A few numbers of Sayad Muslims are also found in this part. They are considered to be of higher, aristocrat section of society. They are a moving community and preach Islam from one place to other.

The noticeable characteristics of the caste society of this southern portion is that the area is closely connected with the Barind region of central Bengal in the one hand and with Bihar, Chhotanagpur, Santal Parganas, Bhagalpur and Purnea on the other. Because at once several parts of the area were under Rajshahi and Rangpur Division for administrative necessity. At the same time the other part was under the jurisdiction of Bihar, Purnea, Bhagalpur and Chhotanagpur. Therefore there had been a profound background and a thorough connection of this region with those different socio-cultural and ethno-linguistic zones. In this respect the southern section maintains a sharp distinction from the northern and Hilly section of North Bengal.

(ii) The Southern Section since 1947-1977:

As per the recommendations of the Boundary commission five police stations of Malda district namely Shibganj, Bholahat, Nachol, Gomestapur and Nababganj were partitioned off from Bengal/India to Bangladesh, then East Pakistan⁸². On the other hand like other districts of the region a large number of refugees started settling there. The first batch of refugees arrived in Malda after the anti-Hindu riots in Noakhali and Tippera in 1946, a year before the actual partition. Those who came during this phase mostly

belonged to the upper and middle class (also upper caste), like the landowning merchant and Professional classes. Up to 1949, about 15,971 people came to settle in Malda from Bangladesh then Pakistan. However the situation changed radically from 1949 onwards more than 49 thousand people arrived in the district in that year, all from Bangladesh (East Pakistan). The refugees who came from 1950 onwards were mainly displaced peasants and agricultural labourers. It is found from the census reports of 1961 that 31,027 person came in Malda between 1951 and 1961 from other states of the country, whereas 64,474 person had come from East Pakistan now Bangladesh between those years⁸³.

The eastern part of the district of Dinajpur with ten police stations was partitioned off from India and added to East Pakistan, now Bangladesh as per the recommendation of the Boundary commission (Radcliff Commission, with effect from 15th August 1947)⁸⁴. A serious problem came into existence because a police station named Tetulia which was a part of Jalpaiguri was transferred to East Pakistan (Bangladesh). Due to this transfer of Tetulia police station the northern part of present day West Bengal was disconnected from its Southern portion. This Tetulia was the sole connecting land between the northern part of Bengal (Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Cooch Behar) and the rest of South Bengal (Present day West Bengal). Because there was no direct road or railway communication between these two parts of West Bengal. In order to bridge the gap present Islampur sub-division was transferred from Purnea to West Bengal and the area was included finally with Dinajpur district⁸⁵.

It has to be mentioned that in Dinajpur there were three sub-divisions viz. Dinajpur sadar, Balurghat and Thakurgaon. Twelve police stations were there under Dinajpur sadar, eight police stations were under Balurghat and ten police stations were under Thakurgaon sub-division. After partition in 1947 the eastern portion of the district was transferred to East Pakistan, now Bangladesh and the western part with ten PS of thakurgaon sub-division, six PS of Dinajpur sub-division and only one PS (Phulbari) of Balurghat sub-division remained in West Bengal as west Dinajpur district⁸⁶.

It is obvious that the organic dissection as well as administrative reorganization made a great impact over the demographic composition of the district. The inclusion of Islampur sub-division with Dinajpur would have changed the demographic pattern of the district, as it is known from the booklet published by Bihar Government that the Islampur sub-division was inhabited by Muslims, Rajbansis and the tribal group of people. Not only that, population of the district had increased phenomenally after the partition of 1947. According to the census reports the influx of refugees was high during the 1951-81 periods than in 1941-51. As in other districts of North Bengal most of the refugees who came after 1950 and onwards belonged to scheduled caste group. Because of the dissection of the eastern part of the district the number of Rajbansis was decreased.

IV

The most noticeable feature of the society of this whole (North Bengal) region is the outcome of a mixed and peculiar socio-cultural and linguistic consolidation among the large number of tribes who migrated into the region during the period under British rule and as it has mentioned earlier that

ethnically they were of Austric lineage and divided into a number of groups viz, Santals, Oraons, Munda, Hoe etc. and occupationally were labourers and peasant cultivators. They came from various parts of Bihar, United Province, Orissa etc. and brought with them their own culture, customs, beliefs, languages etc. But interestingly enough the people of these migrant tribal groups with the passage of time had developed into this adopted land a sense of uniformity and solidarity among themselves though belonged to various groups and came from various parts of the country. Not only that they never developed in their parent lands such kind of solidarity among various diversified tribal groups. These people, for instance, had different languages of their own but gradually they developed a common language called Sadari as communicating lingua-franca among them. It is interesting to note that these people instead of taking Bengali developed a new form of lingua-franca through which a new type of culture had emerged in this part of Bengal. It may be mentioned that during colonial period no attempt was made for education among the tribes of plantation area and after independence the State Govt. did not give Bengali as medium of instruction amongst the pupils of these groups at the school level. As a result gradually there developed such type of linguistic consolidation which is absent among the tribes residing in the southern districts of North Bengal i.e. Malda and Dinajpur.

People of various origins and from region inside and outside the country came into the region from time to time, these migrants retained their own culture, customs, beliefs and traditions etc. at the same time with the passage of time developed a multi-lineal, diversified and heterogeneous society and a

pluralistic culture into their adopted lands. Therefore a mini-India by the true sense of the term was gradually cropped up into this region.

Therefore it may be derived from the above discussion that the original inhabitants or sons of the soil are almost absent in the northern part of this region, though it is difficult to define the term 'sons of soil'. All most all the inhabitants are migrants. They entered into the region since the dawn of the history of this land. Immediately after partition in 1947, influx of refugees flocked and took refuge into the region. 30 percent among them were Rajbansi (Hindus and Muslim) 20 percent were other scheduled caste group of people and the rest 50 percent were caste Hindu people⁸⁷. Before partition of 1947 the migrants were mostly of low caste group people though migration of high caste Hindus took place during this time also, there number was very insignificant compared to the scheduled caste communities and it has mentioned earlier that the influx of refugees continued from 1971 onwards most of them were of low caste origin. Therefore it may be said that the society of the region as a whole basically is non-caste based society. The proportion of upper-caste Hindus than other castes in North Bengal is and always has been very small, because in northern part of Bengal the Indo-Aryan civilization was far less advanced as the main channel or rout through which the Brahmins migrated into Bengal was the Bhagirathi-Hooghly channel⁸⁸.

The pattern of migration changed after Independence and Partition in 1947. Before the partition the migrants came for the purpose of serving as workers in different manual work-fields. As the opportunities of various works extended with the expansion of British rule to this region, therefore people

came in search of work. In a long run they became the permanent settlers of the region. After independence and partition in 1947 this situation changed phenomenally. Because of the organic separation done by the boundary commission, the eastern part of Dinajpur with ten police stations, five police stations of Malda, a few parts of Cooch Behar and five police stations of Jalpaiguri were to tear asunder from this region. As a result the influx of refugees entered the region not only to take refuge temporarily but to settle there permanently. Although the influx of refugees changed the demographic pattern in respect of racial and ethnic composition of society, the basic characteristics of the society of this region i.e. non-caste majority remained the same though socio-cultural as well as economic and political life were changing rapidly with the infiltration.

So far as infiltration of the refugees is concerned one point has to be kept in mind that Sir Cyril Radcliff divided Bengal on the basis of police stations applying the principles suggested by Lord Mount Batten, then Governor General & Viceroy in India. The commission did not consider the population structure of municipality areas of Bengal, Had the commission pay attention to the population structure of municipality areas and divided Bengal on the basis of municipalities instead of police stations the territorial boundary of present day West Bengal would have increased, because the division was made on the basis of religion only and most of the Hindus were settled in the municipal areas where as most of the Muslims were settled in the rural areas⁸⁹.

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CHAPTER – 2

SOCIAL AWAKENING OF CONTEMPORARY BENGAL AND NORTH BENGAL

I

Although the nineteenth century social reform movement did not shake the entire rural society of Bengal at a time, yet, the wave of such change left their effect upon the land far away from Calcutta, the centre of social awakening and social reform movement i.e. northern part of Bengal. Though there is controversy regarding the nature and characteristics of Bengal Renaissance it is true that western education must have changed the traditional beliefs of the educated Indians, who became the pioneer of social awakening of nineteenth century Bengal. Like the social and caste geography of the region, there was also a sharp distinction in the process of social awakening between North Bengal and the rest of contemporary Bengal.

The social awaking and social reform movement of the nineteenth century Bengal resulted in the demand for Kshatriya status by a number of low caste and non-caste group of people in Bengal as well as India. It has to be remembered in this respect that the demand for Kshatriya status was one of the most significant features of the nineteenth century caste movement in India. In the western and southern portion of Bengal there were movements which desired the status for Malla Kshatriya, Barga Kshatriya, Poundra Kshatriya, Ugra Kshatriya etc¹. In North Bengal the Rajbansis started movement for getting the Kshatriya status. In this respect North Bengal

made no difference from the rest of Bengal though there was difference in characteristics as well as consequences of the movement.

Here we will study about the background of the response of North Bengal to the social awakening of Bengal. The western liberal education and the development of newspapers periodicals, journals and establishment of educational institutions which are considered the vehicles of social awakening made their footholds in this part of Bengal in a much later phase. Similarly the wave of the nineteenth century Renaissance reached in this part in a later phase². Therefore we must study the reasons behind this delayed-response to the western education and the nineteenth century Renaissance of this region which lagged behind the spread of newspapers, periodicals, journals, liberal educational institutions, cultural associations, and organizations etc. which were the apparatuses of the social awakening in society of all kinds.

Although Bengal first came in contact with the British colonial administration and received the western liberal education first, this part of Bengal got attention by the colonial masters in a much later phase, more than after a hundred years of the establishment of the colonial hegemony in Bengal (1765). The northern portion of present day North Bengal was under Bhutanese kingdom for a long period. It is only after the war with Bhutan in 1864 that the hilly portion was taken under the colonial administration³. Similarly after war with Bhutan a large portion of western Duars was annexed from Bhutan by the British Govt. in 1865 and made the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri respectively⁴. It has to be kept in consideration that Dinajpur came under British administrative jurisdiction at the time of the

establishment of the East India Company's hegemony in the sub-continent i.e. through the Grant of Dewani in 1765⁵. Rangpur also came under British administration with the Grant of Dewani. It was the last frontier district of British Bengal before the annexation of duars. Malda was made a district in 1813 though it was a part of Company's administration long before it was made a district⁶. But we see that the eastern portion of Dinajpur was comparatively advanced which went to East Pakistan in 1947. The eastern part of Dinajpur was as backward as the northern part of north Bengal. On the other hand the social life of Malda was equally less advanced⁷. So it can be said that the northern portion of present day North Bengal came under the administrative periphery of British rule comparatively later than that of the southern portion of present day North Bengal. But the area as a whole was similarly backward in terms of western education and response to the nineteenth century Renaissance. Naturally the fruits of western education reached into this region far later in comparison with that of the rest of Bengal. Therefore spread of knowledge through educational institutions, newspapers, periodicals etc. could develop in this region in a very slow manner.

As we have studied in the previous chapter that the region is basically a non-caste and low-caste majority area. As mentioned earlier (chapter-I) the non-caste people were predominant in comparison to the so called caste Hindu people. The number of non-Hindu people too was significant. Therefore most of the issues relating to the social reform movements of the nineteenth century viz. the practice of sati polygamy, child marriage, taboo against widow remarriage & sea voyage, Age of Consent Bill etc. were almost

absent in this part of Bengal as they were related to the caste–Hindu society only.

It has already mentioned that socio-culturally this area was backward compared to Calcutta and some advanced parts of East Bengal (Modern Bangladesh). The literacy rate of this area was very poor even in the beginning of the twentieth century. Throughout this region there was only one institution for higher education that was in Cooch Behar (then Princely State) and the name of the institution was Cooch Behar Victoria College. From the contemporary administrative reports it is found that the number of recognized high schools in the region was only fourteen. Even in the first half of the twentieth century the picture remained as it was. For instance, according to census report of 1931 it is found that the literacy rate in Jalpaiguri district was 4.8%⁸. The very social and ethnic composition of the district was responsible for such low literacy level. So it becomes clear from the report that the number of people interested in spreading education as well as number of educated people was very negligible.

In undivided Bengal, probably this region had no important cultural and intellectual background. Because the cultural centers of the nineteenth century undivided North Bengal was Rangpur and Rajshahi (presently in Bangladesh). A large part of Goalpara (Assam), Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar was culturally attached to the Rangpur. Perhaps, for this Rangpur centric orientation of educations, publications, associations etc; the intelligentsia of northern North Bengal did not take much interest in establishing such institutions in this part⁹.

Similarly, Rajshahi, then an administrative Division of North Bengal, was the other centre of cultural association and activities of Malda and Dinajpur. Like Rangpur, Rajshahi too was culturally and intellectually developed. So many cultural and research institutions were established there to cultivate socio-cultural and intellectual activities. “VARENDRA ANUSANDHAN SAMITI (1900) was one of them. As it has mentioned earlier that Malda and Dinajpur culturally and ethnically was associated with the Barind region, therefore, no attempt was made to establish educational institutions to spread knowledge into this southern portion of present day North Bengal. Moreover the rate of education in this area was similarly low and number of educated people was also insignificant¹⁰.

The media of Calcutta and of enlightened areas reached to the districts of North Bengal and the people of this region had become aware of social awakening and social reform movement of Calcutta and surrounding areas. EDUCATION GAZETTE, SAMBAD PRAVAKAR, BHARAT MIHIR, HINDU RANGIKA—all the papers had their agents in North Bengal. For example – EDUCATION GAZETTE, edited by Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay had its agent in Jalpaiguri. These papers from outside North Bengal met the needs of the enlightened people of the region¹¹. But due to the lack of education amongst the masses the intellectual changes left no significant effect upon the society of the region.

The socio-cultural and political scenario had been changing since the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards. Rate of literacy and number of educated person were also increasing since then. In this connection railway communication played an important role. The introduction of North Bengal

State Railway in the year 1878 and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways in 1881 had a great role to play for the cause of higher education as well as publication of news papers, periodicals, journals etc. from North Bengal. Due to the introduction of railway communication in this region the distance with other parts of the country had been shortened and it made contact easier and smooth from one place to another which not only helped people, though mostly of upper & middle class, to send their boys for higher education. As a result the people of this region became culturally and educationally influenced¹². The Rajshahi College was established in 1878. It should be noted that there was no college in plain districts of present day North Bengal before 1942 barring the Princely State of Cooch Behar. Next to the Rajshahi College, Cooch Behar Victoria College came into existence in 1888, this was also followed by other institutions, the number of students interesting to take higher education increased¹³.

Thus we find that due to various reasons this part of Bengal received the fruits of western education in a much later phase. Therefore the process of social awakening delayed in this region. Though the process was slow, this region, however, responded to the socio-cultural developments started in Calcutta and surrounding areas throughout the nineteenth century. If we meticulously study the pattern of response of the region to the social awakening and social mobility movement of the nineteenth century Bengal we will see that there were two distinct types of response – a) response of North Bengal to the social reform movements of Bengal. The educated and enlightened section of caste Hindu people of North Bengal, though their number was small, responded to the cause of social reform movement, particularly to those issues which were associated to the caste Hindu society.

In addition to that, non-caste people along with the caste Hindus of the region responded to the spread of modern education and establishment of educational institutions, development of press and publications etc. and b) response of the Rajbansi community to the social mobility movement and Social awakening among the Rajbansis of North Bengal. It has already mentioned that the area is mostly inhabited by the non-caste people viz. Rajbansi, Koch, Mech, Tea- tribes, indigenous tribes etc. Among the non-caste people of the society of North Bengal the Rajbansis initiated social awakening movement which ultimately took the shape of caste solidarity movement with the passage of time.

II

a) Response of North Bengal to the social reform movement of nineteenth century Bengal:

Before entering into the course of response to the social reform movement of nineteenth century Bengal we must study the spread of education and the process of establishment of educational institutions, socio-cultural associations, printing-press, news papers, periodicals etc. which played as vehicles in bringing social reform movements into this region. So, here we further divide the discussion as-(i) the growth of education and the spread of press and publications in the region and (ii) the courses and conditions of social reform movements in North Bengal

(i) With regard to newspapers the main publications from North Bengal was in Bengali, apart from Bengali, English, Hindi, Nepali and Tibetan newspapers also came into being. These newspapers focused on the socio-cultural and political activities of concerned area and enriched the

knowledge of contemporary educated section of society. It has mentioned that socio-culturally this area was backward in comparison to Calcutta and advanced parts of erstwhile East Pakistan (modern Bangladesh); therefore the illiterate mass remained indifferent towards those developments.

From Malda the first monthly periodicals published under the editorship of Radhesh Chandra Seth, the name of the periodical was 'KUSUM'. The exact date of its publication is not known, though a few references suggest its publication in 1890. In addition to this the editor also published a few important news papers, among them 'GOURBARTA', 'GOUR DOOT' – two weekly news papers published from 1896. From Malda a bi-monthly journal 'GAMBHIRA' was published for a short duration (1914-1961). The editor and publisher of the journal was Krishna Charan Sarkar. Its purpose was to encourage different types of social reforms, to enhance social awareness among the people of different classes of society. In 1897 'MALDA SAMACHAR', edited by Kali Prasanna Chakravarty was published from Malda. Various social issues were reflected through these newspapers¹⁴. Apart from these a large number of news papers began to publish from Malda since the time of the Swadeshi movements onwards which were interested to propagate political and national ideas¹⁵.

The first newspaper from Jalpaiguri was published from 1900 namely 'TRISROTA' under the auspicious of Sri Bhujangadhar Roy Choudhury and Sri Sashi Kumar Neogi. The latter became the editor of the news paper. It was a monthly newspaper. But it stopped publication within a short duration due to the sudden death of the editor and again started its publication in 1923 as a Bengali weekly. This time its editor was Suresh Chandra Paul. He was an active member of district Congress Committee. Along with this,

'JANAMAT' (a Bengali weekly) and 'BARENDRA', English weekly started their publications under the editorship of Jyotish Chandra Sanyal, secretary of National Congress, Jalpaiguri branch, from 1924 and 1925 respectively. Another paper 'MUKTIBANI' was published under the guidance of Congress worker Khagendra Nath Das Gupta. In addition to those a number of other papers were also came into existence from the district during this time. Apart from these, a good number of periodicals were also published by some educational institutions of the district. The achievements of the periodicals were basically in the field of cultural and literary activities which helped in building public opinion around the district¹⁶.

The publications from Darjeeling were totally different from the other districts of North Bengal due to its socio-cultural and ethno-linguistic background. Another point is that unlike the plain districts of North Bengal the European Missionaries and British officials played an important role in developing education and public opinion in the hill areas of Darjeeling. Since 1892 a series of non-Bengali publications mostly in English came into being in the district. The official records from 1897-98 mentioned the following newspapers – 'THE DARJEELING TIMES' (English weekly), 'DARJEELING MISSION KA MASIK SAMACHAR PATRIKA' (Hindi monthly), 'DARJEELING-KALIMPONG-SIKKIM News' (monthly in English) etc. the first newspapers in Nepali language published from Darjeeling was 'GORKHA KHOBAR KAGAT' in 1901. Its editor was Ganga Prasad Pradhan, who was an active worker of Scottish Baptist Mission in Darjeeling. Along with the activities of the missionaries, this paper also published news and other information for the enlightenment of

the common people. The main concern of the journals published from 1912-1939 was investigation to different aspects of Nepali society, culture and language, propagation of republican ideas and condemnation of the social evils like child marriage and polygamy etc. in 1918, the first literary journal in Nepali language was published named 'CHANDRAKA'. Its editor was Parashmani Pradhan¹⁷.

As Cooch Behar was a princely state, it had some compulsion in this respect. But it has to be mentioned that the first Bengali news paper of North Bengal 'KOCH BIHAR MASIK PATRIKA' was published from Cooch Behar. The editor was Kumar Rangil Narayan of Cooch Behar Raj family. 'KULASASTRA DIPIKA' was published from CoochBehar in 1879. During the last decade of the nineteenth century a large number of newspapers was published from CoochBehar, 'SUKATHA' the mouthpiece of the Nababidhan Brahma Samaj of CoochBehar was one of them. The editor of the paper was Acharya Ram Chandra Singh. All these were published from the State Press of CoochBehar¹⁸.

From Dinajpur district, DINAJPUR BHATPARA UNNATISADHANI SABHA an association of the district published a paper named 'SUHRID'. This was the second Bengali newspaper of North Bengal, published from 1878. Its editor was Tarak Bandhu Sharma. Another newspaper named 'DINAJPORE PATRIKA' was published from Dinajpur at the very beginning of the publications from the district. Its editor was Brājendra Chandra Singh; he was a legal practitioner in Dinajpur court¹⁹. Like other districts from Dinajpur also a good number of papers and periodicals had

published and played an important role in developing social awakening of the people of the district.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, the wave of social reform movement arrived in this part and conscious people desired to organize some associations to make discussions about social and cultural reforms. In this context press and publication took an important role to generate public opinion. Until the late nineteenth century, we don't have any information about Association of North Bengal. At the initial stage the associations did not play any significant role in the socio- political and cultural development of the people of this region.

It is well known that the 'Indian Association' was established by S.N. Banerjee on July 26, 1876 (Other reference 1875). In the first year of its existence, the Indian Association affiliated a number of Associations in different parts of the country. These branch associations were set up in Bogra, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Pabna etc. as mentioned earlier that the districts of present day North Bengal were culturally, socially, ethnically were associated with Rangpur and Rajshahi, therefore the Indian association must had its influence over this region²⁰.

Like the Indian Association, 'Brahma Samaj' was another important socio-religious organization which had its branches and activities in different towns of North Bengal. Brahma Samaj was established at Baolia in Rajshahi (1859), in Cooch Behar (1873), in Dinajpur (1870), in Jalpaiguri (1870) and in Rangpur (1862). In this part of North Bengal Brahma Samaj activities became manifest in such places as Jalpaiguri, Saidpur and Siliguri owing to the presence of Chandi Charan Sen, well known for his work to develop

Brahma Samaj movement. It is well known to all that after the marriage of Keshab Chandra Sen's daughter Suniti Devi with the Maharaja of Cooch Behar the Brahma Samaj movement found a strong base in the State. Not only had that, from Cooch Behar the movement also left its effect in the surrounding areas²¹.

Like Brahma Samaj, 'Saktadharma' of Sri Ramakrishna and 'Sebadharma' of Vivekananda also made their impact in North Bengal. These two institutions gave much importance to the education specially, the women education and social services. But their influence and sphere of activities were limited to the educated middle classes of the urban areas only²².

Arya Samaj was established in Jalpaiguri in 1904. A number of Associations formed during nineteenth century in the region were transferred to erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh after partition in 1947. The Arya Natya Samaj was formed in Jalpaiguri in 1905. Other associations viz. Jalpaiguri Sahitya Samiti (1928), Jalpaiguri Muslim Sahitya Samiti' (1931), etc also came into existence during the first half of the twentieth century.²³

The branch of International Theosophical Society was founded in 1921 at Jalpaiguri to organize and build universal brotherhood of humanity and to serve the suffering people and the poor. The society received affiliation in 1923. The founder members were Makhanlal Roychoudhury (President), Upendra Nath Karmakar (Secretary), Suresh Chandra Chakraborty, Jogesh Chandra Ghosh, Ananda Chandra Rahut and others. The society celebrated its Platinum Jubilee Function in 1997 at Jalpaiguri Theosophical Society Lodge²⁴. Next to Jalpaiguri, another branch of the Theosophical Society was established at Kalimpong of Darjeeling. Although, most of the members of

this branch were Bengali, yet its Secretary was Motichand Pradhan, the first Nepali Sub-divisional Officer. But the contribution of Prof. Hirendra Nath Dutta for the prosperity of the society was unquestionable. He was the President of the eighth annual conference of the Theosophical Federation at Jalpaiguri in 1927²⁵.

In Malda, there are some associations too which exercised some socio-cultural activities. Radhesh Chandra Seth a renowned intellectual cum nationalist and Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar a renowned scholar and nationalist leader were the main force to establish several organizations in the district. These associations played an outstanding role for socio-cultural awareness in this area. The names of such important organizations were (1) Malda Zela Sahitya Sammelan (1317-B.S.), (2) Rampur Boalia Dharma Sabha (Malda Branch), the exact date of its foundation is not known. (3) Malda National Council for education (1907) (4) Malda Mohammedan Association (1890), (5) The Malda Association (1887) etc²⁶.

In Darjeeling district also a good number of associations were formed, though they were different in character. These associations along with socio-cultural awareness advocated the cause of Hill people. The associations were (1) Hillmen's Association (1917), (2) Nepali Sahitya Sammelan (1924), (3) Gorkha Dukkha Nibarak Sammelan (1932), (4) Nebula, the Association of Nepali – Bhutia and Lepcha (1935), (5) Gorkha Samiti, later on Gorkha Association (1926). It has to be mentioned that in the hill area the effect of the nineteenth century social awakening movement was different compared to that of the plain districts of North Bengal, there we found the emergence

of a strong Nepali culture through the development of newspapers, periodicals, association etc²⁷.

During the early twentieth century the Muslim society of North Bengal was still fragmented. The socio-cultural and political integration and intermingling between the migrant Muslims and the Muslims of autochthonous origin remained weak²⁸. It is worth mentioning that the migrant Muslims were socio-culturally and economically more advanced compared to the local Muslims and these migrant Muslims took the leading role in the socio-cultural development of the Muslim community in the region, though the establishment of their associations took place comparatively in a later phase²⁹.

It has to be noted here that the newspapers as well as the associations and organizations that developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were very much related to nationalism, socio-economic reforms, and spread of education etc. though some efforts were made to propagate Christianity and Brahma religion. Interestingly we do not find the voice of the people who lived in the rural areas of North Bengal, as the question of reforms were related to the removal of malpractices and superstitions prevalent in the caste Hindu society only. Therefore they had no significant role in North Bengal. The Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti which was the representative organization of the Rajbansis of North Bengal published its own mouthpiece named 'Kshatriya'. It was very much concern to upgrade the socio-economic condition of the Rajbansi community. It is also fact that a number of lower castes and non-caste groups launched their social mobility movements simultaneously with the Rajbansi Kshatriya movement but most of the movements were originated beyond the periphery of present

day North Bengal and they also had their mouthpieces which will be discussed in chapter 6 of the present study.

So far as education is concern in North Bengal the first Government school was established in Malda in 1858³⁰. It is also a fact that Malda and Dinajpur came under Company's jurisdiction comparatively earlier in North Bengal. Darjeeling was sparsely populated so educational institutions were established later there. Though later, the missionaries as well as the British Government took active initiatives to spread English education in Darjeeling, because the European officials opted to reside in the hills with their families and propagation of Christianity was the objectives of the Christian missionaries. In the princely State of Cooch Behar one vernacular school was established under the auspicious of Maharaja Shibendra Narayan and his wife Maharani Brindeswari Devi in 1857³¹. In 1861 the school was named as Jenkins school. The schools for girls came into existence a decade later, in 1870 at Malda and the name of the school was Barlow Girls School³². Next to Malda in Jalpaiguri another school for girls was established in 1871. In 1881 one girls' school was established in CoochBehar, it was a primary school. The numbers of schools affiliated to the Calcutta University in the present day North Bengal were only 14 in the year 1903; they were as follows- in Darjeeling 5, in Dinajpur 1, in Jalpaiguri 1, in Malda 3, in CoochBehar State 4³³. In addition to those there were a good number of Govt. aided and private schools but most of these were of primary level and lower middle schools. With regard to the higher education in 1900 there were only two Degree Colleges in North Bengal, one was the Rajsahi Government College and the other was the Cooch Behar Victoria College. There were 3 I.A. Level Colleges, 2 were at Darjeeling and 1 was at Rangpur. One point should be kept in mind that the nature of population and

socio-cultural features was absolutely different from that of plain districts of North Bengal and Cooch Behar was then a Princely State. Thus we see that there were no institutions for higher education in the plain areas of North Bengal till the first half of the twentieth century. But students of solvent section from the districts of Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur and Malda went for higher education to Cooch Behar and Rajsahi. In addition to the above mentioned institutions the students from these areas also went to take higher education to the Hindu college (Presidency College), Ripon College, Sanskrit College etc. and many of them came back to their birth places after the completion of their studies and joined to prestigious posts in the Govt. offices, many of them became professionals. Those students brought with them the seeds of nationalism and spirit of development and took initiatives for the spread of education in their respective places³⁴. But all these happened since the first and the second decades of the twentieth century.

With regard to the education of the Muhammedans we found that in the Cooch Behar State the Royal authority took initiatives to spread education amongst the subject people irrespective of differences in caste, religion etc. So far as British Bengal was concerned like in other parts of India, in North Bengal also the Muslims did not show any interest to take education at the initial phase of introduction of Govt. education.

Here the education of the tribal people is also worth mentioning. In the northern part of North Bengal i.e. the hilly and terrain portion of Darjeeling and the Duars of Jalpaiguri no Govt. effort was made in the plantation areas only the Christian missionaries opened a few schools but no significant response was found on the part of the tribal people³⁵. It has already mentioned in chapter I that the number of tribal people in Cooch Behar was negligible. In the southern part of North Bengal i.e. Malda and Dinajpur, in

spite of the Govt. effort the Santals and other tribal groups hitherto had not found it necessary to take education as the medium of instruction was Bengali, the language of the schools and they spoke in Santali and Hindi³⁶. Thus we see that due to a number of factors the educational development as well as the social awakening had delayed in this region.

(ii) Here we will study about the course of social reform movements of the region. The spread of western education resulted in questioning against a number of social anomalies, superstitions and malpractices prevalent in the society of Bengal. The most debatable among the issues was the movement for the abolition of Sati. This inhumane practice was almost absent in northern Bengal as there was no evidence of sati practiced in the Barnish Temple, though there is stray references of a few incidences of this in the districts of Malda and Murshidabad in the book 'Sati' written by Swapan Basu. Two specific incidences are evident in Cooch Behar, one occurred in the Royal family and the other was in a Brahman family of Khagrabari in 1840, except those the wife of Aniruddha who was a barber in profession at Pirganj of Dinajpur district preferred to be sati in the year 1224 B.S but ultimately she was saved by the Daroga of Pirganj police station. . The wife of renowned Golaknath Sharma of Malda district too preferred to be sati. This Golaknath was engaged in teaching Bengali among the missionaries of Malda. Therefore it can be said that this practice of sati was not a prevalent social system in this part of Bengal and also in Assam³⁷.

Polygamy was in vogue purely in the upper-caste Hindu society. Among the non-Hindu people of North Bengal, the Sariyati laws already gave permission to the Muslims to have four wives at a time. Although a few non-caste people did more than one marriages, yet it was depended absolutely on

the economic solvency. The Jotedars among the Rajbansis of Rangpur got married more than one or two, but inspiration to such act was economic approbation rather than ritual sanction, because the Jotedars themselves considered their wives as peasant workers and made them work in the field of cultivation. Therefore this could not be considered as polygamy as was prevalent in the upper caste Hindus of Bengal and it was not at all an alarming social issue. Because the Rajbansi Hindus, who were predominant in the region, did not have the kulin system, their society was endogamous society. Similarly the Kulin system was absent in the non-Hindu society also. Nevertheless, the enlightened section of the society of North Bengal participated in the movement against polygamy³⁸.

Another movement that flamed the fire of severe debate and contentions in the caste Hindu society during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the movement favouring widow remarriage. The widow remarriage act was passed in 1856 by the East India Company's Government as a result of the untiring efforts and vigorous clamourings by Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and his followers. The mafussil North Bengal was also shaken by the movement as it gradually took the shape of an all India movement. The educated people of Rangpur sent a memorandum to the East India Company's Govt. appreciating widow remarriage³⁹. Although the Act was passed in 1856, there was no evidence of widow remarriage till 1884. It is clear from the fact that perhaps the Act did not get mass support both in caste as well as non-caste Hindu society. In the first half of the twentieth century two references of widow remarriage are found in Balurghat, Dinajpur district and in Jalpaiguri district respectively. The eminent freedom fighter and leader of Indian National Congress of Balurghat Saroj Ranjan Chattopadhyay got married to a widow at his own initiative. Another distinguished political

leader of Jalpaiguri Satish Chandra Lahiri took initiatives of widow remarriage⁴⁰. But all these took place during the twentieth century.

The Age of Consent Bill movement started in Maharashtra and Bengal which had unfolded a serious debate and discontent all over India. Sociologists opined that the age of consent Bill movement was truly an all India social reform movement. Because the practice of Sati was a problem of Bengal caste Hindu society only, accordingly the widow remarriage was an issue of upper-caste Hindus (as it was in vogue in the society of the Rajbansis and other non-Hindu community), but the age of consent Bill was an all India issue which catered the whole of the Hindu society of India. The Bill proposed to enhance the marriage age of Hindu girls from ten to twelve. The intelligentsia of Bengal and Maharashtra divided into two groups i.e. protagonist and antagonist in responding to the question⁴¹. The wave of the movement was reached to this part of Bengal, though the effect was minimal. The educated people of Cooch Behar sent a Memorandum against the Bill to the British Govt. more information to this issue is not available.

There was no serious movement against child marriage throughout the period under study, though the practice was prevailed in the region to a maximum extent among the non-caste Hindu community people of this region.

Like other parts of Bengal, in North Bengal also there was a number of superstitions and social taboo against sea voyage. The name of the person who crossed the 'Kalapani' first of this region is not yet known in spite of adequate enquiry. In relation to the crossing of 'Kalapani', the migrant Bengali Hindus, and Muslims in Duars have a considerable record. The family members of Roy, Ghosh, Sanyal and among the Muslims the

members of Nabab Rahim Box since the first quarter of the twentieth century had taken their education in the United Kingdom, we do not find such a number of students went abroad for taking education in other districts of present day North Bengal.

It has to be noted that the grievous issues which were to redress through social reform movements related to the caste Hindu society only (and caused sufferings particularly to the women of the society). Therefore, the low caste, non-caste (viz. the tribes, Muslim community people etc.) who constituted a significant number in the demographic composition of North Bengal were indifferent towards those movements. Not only due to the lack of education and proper enlightenment, ethnically, culturally, linguistically these people were not at all associated with the notion of caste Hindu society of the region, naturally did not respond to the nineteenth century social reform movement. Thus we see that the spread of western education and the succeeding development of press, educational institutions, and socio-cultural associations accentuated the cause of social awakening in contemporary Bengal as well as in North Bengal.

b) Social awakening among the Rajbansis of North Bengal (1881-1911):

Before entering in to the course of the social awakening movement of North Bengal, we have to study first the background of the society. In undivided North Bengal the Rajbansi Kshatriyas constituted the single largest community. They were socially a homogeneous group in the region. The vast area of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Terai of Darjeeling and Goalpara district of Assam, Purnea of Bihar was inhabited by the Rajbansis. They even lived in the Terai region of Nepal. This habitat suffered a change after partition in 1947(see chapter1). There is much

controversy regarding the origin of the Rajbansis. Whatever may be the debate, it can undoubtedly be said that these people, at once, ruled over the northern region of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Rangpur and took a dominant role in the society and culture of the region.

Situation began to change with the establishment of the Islamic rule over the land. Because from that time onwards the caste Hindus began to settle there in order to take part in their (Islamic rulers) administration. It is also evident that even before the advent of the Muslim rulers there inhabited a few rich Hindu Jotdars⁴² but their number was very few. This trend continued till the second half of the nineteenth century. After the formation of the districts of Darjeeling (1865) and Jalpaiguri (1869) the demographic pattern of this region began to change. Jalpaiguri was made the divisional headquarter of Rajshahi division. So, the subsequent establishment of various govt. offices, law courts, dispensaries etc. necessitated migration of educated upper caste Hindus from other parts of Bengal. These people settled there as govt. officials, office bearers, clerks, as other professionals viz. doctor, lawyer, business person, traders etc. As the early settlers (mostly Rajbansis) were basically cultivators and associated with land, did not show any interest to the modern process of development and the migrant people took the opportunities of English education and other facilities provided by the colonial masters. These people by virtue of their closeness to the administrative authority had become most dominant group in the local society, economy and politics. They began to control the society and economy of the region. They treated the Rajbansis as backward and inferior community. 'This alienation from the caste Hindus did indirectly promote caste solidarity among the Rajbansis'⁴³. Thus in this way the Rajbansis, once

a dominant community not only began to disintegrate but also had been disgraced by the migrant upper caste Hindus of eastern Bengal.

It is argued by a few scholars that after the mutiny of 1857, to face the question of social reforms the British Govt. started intensive study about the caste society of India. The result was the first census of 1872 which brought about an unprecedented response on the part of the Indians to place their respective castes, according to the traditional order in a recognized and prestigious stratum of the society⁴⁴.

After the publication of the first census report in 1872 the people belonged to various lower caste category of south and western India launched a vehement agitation against Brahmanical domination in the society and demanded the Colonial Government's intervention to change this social anomaly. The census of 1872 actually flamed the fire of anti-caste movement in south and western India as it (census) had disclosed the picture of social status of various lower-castes existed in Indian society. So, these people burst against the age long privileged caste-group and demanded their own respective caste protection and opportunities of all kinds. The anti-caste movement of south and western India had marked its influence upon the society of south Bengal in the first phase. The intermediary and lower castes people of south Bengal initiated a similar movement against the Brahmanical oppression, the anti-caste movement immediately took the shape of a caste – solidarity movement with the demand of higher social status, which desired recognition from the colonial Govt⁴⁵. It is interesting to note that most of the lower and intermediary caste groups of Bengal demanded recognition of their Kshatriya status. Therefore the demand for Kshatriya status became the most significant feature of the nineteenth

century caste movement. The anti-caste movement of South Bengal then influenced to start a similar movement in Northern Bengal. In this region as mentioned earlier the most predominant caste group was Rajbansis though other minor caste group people were also in existent. The Rajbansis had received inspiration from the movement of southern Bengal provoked by census report in 1891. Another reason for their resentment was that they were described as Koch in the report that they considered as inferior to them. 'The census operations had created a notion among the members of various lower and intermediary castes that if they could have their names listed in the census reports in the category of twice born, their social rank would automatically be raised and recognized by the indigenous society. So this kind of false notion of legitimacy that census created in local society led a sudden growth of caste association and caste movements. This affected the Rajbansis as well'⁴⁶. It was in this background the social awakening movement among the Rajbansis of North Bengal started. This movement, with the passage of time, became a caste consolidated movement in the process of attaining higher social status.

It was under this background the Rajbansis of North Bengal started claiming of their Kshatriya status which was opposed by the caste Hindus of eastern Bengal. Because according to them (caste Hindus) unlike the other parts of India there was no concept of Kshatriya in the social system of Bengal. The reason behind such conception was that there had never been any tradition of consolidated kingdom in Bengal. Interestingly the movements of the people of other low-caste groups in southern and eastern Bengal which also demanded the same Kshatriya status did not face such opposition that faced by the Rajbansis of North Bengal. Perhaps racial difference between the

Rajbansis and the other caste Hindus of Bengal was responsible for such opposition, because the Rajbansis are of Indo-Mongoloid origin where as the rest are of Aryan origin⁴⁷.

Apart from the census factor, other factors viz. socio-cultural domination and the hatred of the upper caste Hindus augmented the process of social awakening among the Rajbansis.

The social awakening movement of North Bengal resulted in the outcome of a consolidated and organized caste movement by the Rajbansis which demanded recognition of their higher social status from the British Govt. as well as indigenous society. The movement started with the claim made by the Rajbansi Hindus of the region that they were Kshatriyas of Aryan origin and separated from the Koch. Because the census of 1891 gave instruction to consider and mention the 'Rajbansis as same as Koch' as had done in the previous census of 1881⁴⁸. This created resentment among them because generation after generation they (Rajbansi Hindus) had been claiming for their status as Kshatriya descent of Aryan origin. When the census officials refused to enumerate them as Kshatriyas the leaders of the community in many places of Rangpur declined to fill up the census returns⁴⁹.

Thus a movement against the census authority had started by the leaders of the society, most of whom were zamindars, Jotedars and rich peasants. Sri Haramohan Roy Khajanchi, a local Zamindar of Shyampur (Rangpur) who belonged to Rajbansi community took initiative for the formation of an organization named 'BRATYA KSHATRIYA JATIR UNNATI BIDHAYANI SABHA' to elevate their status according to the Hindu Social hierarchy. Several leading Rajbansi Zamindars and Jotedars of Rangpur including Haramohan Khajanchi voiced their protest against this move of

census authorities. Thus Rangpur became the centre of agitation and Kshatriya movement⁵⁰.

On February 6, 1891 the Rajbansis of Rangpur openly demonstrated against the order of F.H. Skyne, then District Magistrate of Rangpur who had asked the local superintendent to enroll the Rajbansis under the head of Koch. Haramohan Khajanchi had been working to awaken the Rajbansis to attain higher social status. The Samiti urged the district Magistrate to dissociate them from the Kochs. Not only that, it had realized that to give spontaneity to the movement it was necessary to educate the Rajbansis. The education should make them conscious about their glorious past, history, society and tradition of which they will be proud to mention. As an eminent leader he held meetings in different localities and began collecting history, proverbs, traditions, cultural heritage and saying of the Rajbansis. He also met many Brahmin Pandits, *Naiyayiks* and *Sastrakars* of Rangpur, Kamrupa and other elite sections of Hindu society in Rangpur. As a result of his toilsome efforts he got recognition of his caste from the 'Pandit Samaj' (the learned society) of Rangpur and Kamrupa. He had also published two books – '*Vratya Mochan Paddhati*' and '*Kshatriyaponayan Byavastha*', which included the opinions of the Pandits of Mithila Kamrupa and Bengal stating that Rajbansis were Kshatriyas and had become 'Vratya' due to the non-observance of certain rites but can regain their Kshatriya status⁵¹.

The district Magistrate at his initiation sought the opinion of *Rangpur Dharma Sabha*, it was a mouth piece organization of Hindu religion and an association of Pandits. Pandit Yadaveswar Tarkaratna was authorized to give his opinion on behalf of the *Sabha*. He (Pandit Yadaveswar Tarkaratna) wrote to the district Magistrate a letter that Rajbansis and Koches were

different castes. He also drew references from the 'Sastras' and finally concluded that Rajbansis of North Bengal were Kshatriyas and should be recognized as 'Vratya Kshatriyas' not 'Bhanga Kshatriyas'. This statement was accepted by the District Magistrate. Therefore the movement deferred temporarily in 1891 and the Rajbansis were hopefully waiting for the recognition of their Kshatriya status in the census reports⁵².

It has to be mentioned in this context that the census reports attributed the Rajbansis as same as Koch on the basis of the observations made by the European ethnographers like Riseley, etc. Most of the European Scholars described them as a mixed race of Dravidian and Mongolian origin. According to Buchanan Hamilton the tribal Koches of Kamrupa are the forefathers of the Rajbansis. He further stated that the Hinduised Koches are called the Rajbansis and he mentioned them as lineage of Bodo group⁵³. Similar views had expressed by W.W. Hunter that the Rajbansis are a mixed caste originated from the same stock as the Koches, Meches, Kacharis etc.i.e. of Mongolian origin and the lineage of Bodo group⁵⁴. On the other hand Risley had mentioned that the Koch, Rajbansi, Poliya and the Deshi all are of same Dravidian stock. He further mentioned that Mongolian blood must have fusion into them⁵⁵. It has to be remembered that much later the renowned anthropologist Charu Chandra Sanyal in his famous work has mentioned them as of Mongolian origin⁵⁶. According to the view of the scholars of this region they are Pundra Kshatriyas⁵⁷. So a controversy regarding their origin had begun during this time which continues till the present days. It has viewed by most of the European scholars that since the early part of the sixteenth century the term Rajbansi are found in various

texts as well as other references. So it was concluded by them that since the sixteenth century onwards the Rajbansis began to be Hinduised. Therefore at the time of census debate a trend had started to enquire into their origin. Rajbansi scholars like Upendra Nath Barman, Haripada Adhikari expressed their resentment against the contention of the colonial ethnographers. They also disagree with the contention that the Rajbansis had adopted Hinduism during the regime of Biswa Singha in the early sixteenth century. According to these scholars the Rajbansis were already Hindus prior to it and were recognized as *vratya* or *Bhanga* (fallen) Kshatriya. They had tried to prove their argument through the ancient texts as well as mythological references that they are of Aryan origin and it was due to the fear of Parashuram who launched a fierce attack on the Kshatriyas they fled away from their lands of habitation and began to settle in the forests of this region. Due to the non observance of the ritual practices they had fallen from their actual status⁵⁸.

Although we will study here about the factors as well as the courses and features of the social awakening movement of the Rajbansis, it will not be irrelevant to mention another point in the continuation of this aspect that is the issue whether they are identical with the Koches or not, the Rajbansis are changing their stand regarding their caste identity from time to time both during colonial and post colonial period. It is viewed by a section of educated Rajbansis that the people of this community generally bear the features of all four human streams or culture i.e. Austra-Asiatic, Dravidian, Mongoloid and Aryan where Mongoloid features are predominant. When the Aryanised people made their headway into the eastern part of India they were resisted by the people of Paundra, Vanga and Kamrupa all in a strong

axis and delayed main Aryan thrust for centuries. Finally these aboriginal people accepted Aryan culture⁵⁹.

The movement however, created a great enthusiasm among the people who began to declare themselves openly as Kshatriyas and adopt Kshatriya customs and titles. But although it was getting popular and social awakening was visible, its nature was still sporadic and localized. By this time Haramohan Roy (khajanchi), the pioneer leader of the Kshatriya movement had died and the leadership was taken over by a more competent, dynamic and forceful person Panchanan Sarkar an advocate of Rangpur, originally an inhabitant of Cooch Behar state⁶⁰.

The Kshatriya movement again gained momentum during the census in 1901. The Rajbansis had expected after the 1891 movement that the govt. would accept their demand and enlist them as Kshatriyas and as a caste separate from the Koch. But it revealed to them that in the current census also orders had been issued to field workers to enroll the Rajbansis as mere 'Rajbansi' and not Kshatriya. This led to a general displeasure among the community. The Rajbansi leaders met at Rangpur and sent a protest note to P.C. Mitra, then district Magistrate on 1st February 1901, urging him to recognize their Kshatriya origin. The district Magistrate firmly rejected the notes as because he was instructed by the superintendent of census operation that they (Rajbansis) will be classed as 'Rajbansis' and not 'Bratya Kshatriyas'. He in his order on February refused to response the case. Therefore it became clear to the Rajbansis that the recommendations of F. A. Skyne in 1891 were not accepted. The Rajbansis then appealed to the census superintendent who also turned down their prayers as 'it is too late to issue

any order on the point'. On 19th April 1901 a memorandum was submitted to Sir John Woodburn, then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal but with no result⁶¹. As before 1901 census, the Rajbansis were again placed with the Koch community.

The disappointed Rajbansis launched a vigorous movement with new enthusiasm. They now concentrated mainly on social issues. The movement had spread throughout undivided North Bengal and reached even to the village level. Panchanan Barman with his able leadership encouraged his community fellows to stand on their own feet with dignity and valour. 'He brought out historical past and traditions of the Rajbansi kshatriyas. He said that the anti-Kshatriya king Nanda, popularly known as Parasuram lodged a fierce attack on the Pundra king who was a Kshatriya. Being defeated, the Pundra king with his agnates fled to the swampy forests of northern Bengal and western Assam to escape from the wrath of Parasuram. The descendants of his agnates for many years had concealed their sacred thread which the Rajbansis claimed they had and also their Kshatriya ancestry, they now claim to be 'Bhanga kshatriyas'⁶².

The Rajbansis under the leadership of Panchanan Barma (Sarkar) cited 'Jagasangits' a kind of 'palagan' to rebuild the Kshatriya status for the Rajbansis. The 'palagan' was composed by Ratiram Das, the famous rebellious who with Sibachandra Roy a Zamindar of Itakumari of Rangpur district led an armed peasant rebellion with their Rajbansi followers against the tyrannical Izaradar Devi Singha, appointed by the East India Company.

Ratiram mentioned his caste as ‘*Bhanga Kshatriya*’ in his Palagan⁶³. He further stated that Rajbansis were not non- Aryans.

One thing has to be cleared in this respect that barring the Rajbansis other caste group people of the region, who were minority in comparison to the number of the formers, also initiated social mobility movements with either minimum or no effect, which will be discussed in the succeeding chapter (chapter-6) of the present study.

For the fulfillment of their demands the leaders of the Rajbansi community realized that without a proper organization this movement could not be carried further. It is believed that the growth of associations among various other caste groups particularly in south Bengal might have also influenced the thinking of these leaders who began to move in the same direction of forming a caste association for themselves, though their objectives differed to some extent from those caste associations. Therefore the result of such initiation was the formation of Kshatriya Samiti in 1910⁶⁴.

The organizational structure of the Samiti was as follows- i) an Executive Committee to formulate and implement Samiti’s policies, ii) Finance Committee to look after the financial matters, iii) a Publication Committee and Publicity Committee. The Samiti had members of three categories) *Sadharan*’ or ordinary members, ii) *Pracharaka* or ‘*Ganya*’(distinguished) members, i.e. those who paid Rs. 2 each as annual subscription were regarded as *Ganya Sabhya*’. They will get invitation to attend all the meeting of the Samiti and were able to vote in all its meetings. iii) ‘*Manya*’

or respectable members who paid hundred rupees or more at a time to the Samiti's fund, they were the life-time members and were entitled to get all the Reports, Pamphlets published from time to time. Not only that they also had the right to vote in its meetings as well. The *Sadharan Sabhya* also could cast their voting rights in its meetings⁶⁵.

In the meanwhile enthusiastic attempts were made to collect proverbs, traditions, history, songs, sayings and popular folktales which established their Kshatriya identity. Pandit Hara Kishor Adhikari, well versed in Sanskrit and Hindu Scripturs published a booklet, 'RAJBANSI KULA PRADIP' in which he established that the Rajbansis were Kshatriyas. There were also works of other Rajbansi Kshatrihya scholars of the period like Pandit Jagamohan Sinha, who wrote 'RAJBANSI KULA KAUMUDI. 'KHATRO SANGEET' was written by Gobind Chandra Roy and 'RAJBANSI KULA DIPAKA by Maniram Kabyabhushan. The creation of the myth resulted with an appeal for the reform of socio- religious and cultural practices of the community⁶⁶.

In 1910 at the time of the census operations the Rajbansis once again started their campaign demanding Kshtriya status in the coming census reports. With this idea they convened a large meeting at Rangpur on 1st may 1910 (other reference 2nd may). The meeting was held in Rangpur Natya Mandir which resulted in the foundation of the Kshatriya Samiti, which was attended by the representatives of the community from Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Rangpur, Dinajpur, and other districts of Bengal amounting to almost 400 representatives. The aims and objectives of the Kshatriya Samiti were formulated by Sri Madhusudan Roy, a pleader of Jalpaiguri Bar as its

President and Panchanan Barma (Sarkar) as the Secretary. In the conference it was stated that the Rajbansis were Kshatriyas and were known as *Bhanga* or *Bratya* kshatriyas. It formed a separate Hindu caste different from of the Koch. A delegation of the community then met sir Lancelot Hare, the Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal and Assam at Dacca and the census Commissioner E. A. Gait at Calcutta and conveyed to them their desire and grievances. A memorandum signed by more than 2000 (two thousand) Rajbansis from Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar was also given to the Lieutenvant Governor of East Bengal and Assam in January 1911. In addition to this they (memorialists) submitted the rulings of various Pandits in support of their claim for Kshatriya status. In different districts the Rajbansis appealed to the district Magistrates to recognize them as Kshatriya and to permit them to use the more respectable surnames such as Barman, Roy, Deb Barman etc. instead of Sarkar, Das etc. C. Tindal, The district Magistrate of Rangpur strongly recommended to the census superintendent of Assam and East Bengal in letter dated 16th December 1910 that, Rajbansis should be recognized as Kshatriyas and the word 'Rajbansi' should be also put within the bracket to distinguish the community from the other castes. He also mentioned that there were no reasons to object if the Rajbansis use surnames like Barman, Deb Barman etc. the Deputy Commissioner of the Goalpara district in Assam ordered the field Superintendents on 27 January 1911, to enroll the Rajbansis as Kshatriyas. Similar instructions were issued in other districts including Purnea in Bihar, except in Cooch Behar, where the Royal Officials strongly opposed it. Ultimately the interference of the Cooch Behar state superintendent E.W. Dentith solved the problem. The efforts of the Kshatriya Samiti ultimately brought success as they got

recognition of their claimed Kshatriya status in the final Report of 1911 census, where they were listed as a separate Hindu caste, Rajbansi with 'Kshatriya' in brackets. Ultimately L.S.S.O'Malley, census Superintendent published the census report in 1913 and commented in page no 445 that "the former request was granted without hesitation, as there is no doubt that as the present day, irrespective of any question of origin, the Rajbansi and Koch are separate castes"⁶⁷.

In order to understand the uphill task taken by the leaders of the Rajbansis for achieving higher social status, we must study the response of the upper caste Hindus to their movements. As mentioned earlier that the Rajbansis were organizing themselves with the objective of attaining Kshatriya status in the social hierarchy. Upper caste section of Bengal did not welcome their movement because during the pre-colonial and colonial period the upper caste Hindus dominated the socio-religious life. Therefore the attempts made by the Rajbansis to get recognition of higher social status 'opened the question of readjustment in power relation'. Naturally they voiced their protest against such movement. Not only that the caste Hindus claimed that there had been no concept of Kshatriya in the caste system prevalent in Bengal. It can undoubtedly be said that the 1901 census move rejected their (Rajbansis) demand particularly on the basis of the objection put forward by the upper caste Hindus. Many Brahmins as priests in religion and social ceremonies and officials refused to record the caste of these people as Kshatriya⁶⁸.

But Pandits of Mithila, Kamrupa and some local Brahmins continued to support the cause of the Rajbansis and even participated in the movements.

The Pragyothispur or Kamrupi Brahmins had cultural relations with the Mithila Brahmins for a long period even before the coming of the Muslims or the British. A group of Mithila Brahmins was invited by the rulers of Khyen dynasty. There were cultural exchange with the Rajbansis and they adopted some of the customs of the Kamrupi Brahmins⁶⁹.

III

Although the census operations of 1891 caused the emergence of a movement aiming at the social uplift among the Rajbansis of North Bengal, the movement was not confined to the attainment of recognition of their Kshatriya status only, but also to the all round development of the community. It was realized by the leaders of the movement that the community was 'educationally backward, economically poor and socially degraded'. Therefore the leaders from the very beginning espoused the cause of spreading modern education among the Rajbansis. Moreover the leaders were painfully aware of the existing backwardness of the community. They realized that unless or until the community was educationally advanced they would not be able to contend for securing Government facilities. Although the leaders considered that there was a noble value in the society that education should bring knowledge, therefore the Rajbansi Kshatriyas must not be guided by the objectives of getting jobs only; education must develop to generate the moral values of mankind⁷⁰. The leaders of the movement repeatedly mentioned about the noble values of education, at the same time expressed the inevitability of taking education to get job opportunities under the situation when the Rajbansis are in a deplorable condition for their backwardness in comparison to the other castes of Bengal. The renowned leaders of the Kshatriya Samiti Panchanan Barma at the time when began his

career as legal practitioner in 1901, he found that the Rajbansis Kshatriya society was extremely backward in the field of education. The society was not at all eager to take education which was the sole way of social uplift of all society.

It has mentioned in chapter- 3 that one of the reasons for the lack of education among the Rajbansis was the absence of student's hostel or boarding to accommodate the students of the community who were interested to go outside for education. Panchanan Barma made an appeal to Government for the better accommodation of the Rajbansi students, saying that due to the absence of hostels the students could not go for taking higher education the lack of which is the root cause of their utmost miseries. The Government however promised to spend Rs.10000/- to establish a students hostel if the Samiti take the responsibility to provide Rs.5000/- for the purpose. Panchanan Barma with much trouble ultimately became able to manage the said amount of Rupees. Thus the first hostel for the Rajbansi students was established in Rangpur district in 1320 B.S.(1913) with the capacity to accommodate 32 students. Brahma Narayan Ashikari was given the charge as superintendent after appointing him as the teacher in the district school. The establishment of the hostel and the initiatives of the Kshatriya Samiti must have resulted in the increase of Rajbansi students in higher education⁷¹.

In the eighteenth conference of the Kshatriya Samiti at Bhandardaha, Patgram, Jalpaiguri in 1334B.S.(1927) the Annual Secretary of the meeting Sri Jagat Chandra Singha requested Sri Jagadindra Deb Raikat of Jalpaiguri for his deliberation and share his views regarding the education of the

community. Jagadindra Deb Raikot at his deliberation repeatedly urged for the development of inner spirit through education. He too emphasized the lack of education as one of the reasons for their backwardness. He also argued that the community must be educated to remove the overwhelming control of the 'Bhatias' in all aspects⁷².

In 1913, under the initiatives of the members of the Rajbansi community, two English Schools were established, one was at Naotara, Tapa village and the other was at Sundarpur Chortabari village, both were under Dimla police station in Rangpur district. From the proceedings of the Kshatriya Samiti we get a list of students appeared and qualified in various examinations between 1915 and 1917. The following table shows the number of students appeared and qualified in the three consecutive sessions.

Appeared

	Matriculation	I.A. & I. Sc.	B.A. & B. Sc.
1324 B.S.(1917)	15	9	3
1323 B.S.(1916)	15	9	4
1322B.S.(1915)	16	9	0

Qualified

	Matriculation	I. A. & I. Sc.	B.A. & B. Sc.
1324B.S.(1917)	7	4	3
1323B.S.(1926)	12	3	1
1322 B.S. (1915)	14	3	0

Source: Brittabibarani of Eighth years of the Kshatriya Samiti, 1324 B.S.p. 32.

Along with education, the social reform movement of the Rajbansis did touch various social evils also prevalent in the society. Particularly the

movement launched an attack to the dowry system. The leaders of the movement encouraged to develop physical strength both for male and female members of the society, for which they suggested a regular training that should be arranged by the society itself. In addition to the measures mentioned above a number of steps were taken considering the development of the community. Thus we see that the nineteenth century social reform movement of Bengal left its imprint upon the society of North Bengal to a great extent though there were differences in characteristics of the movement, yet it maintained the same line i.e. the reformation and social mobility by the most numerous caste group people of this region. Another important point has to be mentioned that during a decade from 1911-1921 the Samiti paid considerable attention to the educational, emancipation of women and socio-cultural development of the community. Not only that the people of the community also began to respond to the efforts of the leaders. But after 1921 the Samiti began to participate in the electoral politics and gradually all those social reform programs became secondary to the leaders, naturally the illiterate and poorest of the poor people of the community remained illiterate and backward. The objectives of such initiatives however will be discussed in the succeeding chapter (chapter 4).

IV

Thus we see that the census provided an opportunity to the Rajbansis of this region to develop a community consciousness among them for attaining a respectable position in social hierarchy. The Rajbansis started the movement around census to establish a respectable position in the society which was further strengthened through the process of 'sankritisation' and

‘westernisation’ which will be discussed in the later chapter (chapter 4) elaborately.

If we study the social awakening movement among the Rajbansis of North Bengal we will find that the movement had several distinct characteristics which changed from time to time. The movement was initiated with the demand of recognition to their higher social status from the Colonial Government. By this time their sole demand was to get entry into the census list as a separate caste group dissociated from the Koch. Because the earlier census reports recorded their name under the head Koch, whom the former considered as degraded caste group. The movement rose to its climax in 1910 when it formed a distinct caste based organization i.e. Kshatriya Samiti. Ultimately they got official recognition in 1911 census when they were enlisted separately from the Koch and entitled the Kshatriya status as per their claim.

After achieving the official recognition of their desired Kshatriya status in 1911, the leaders of the movement had shifted their attention and activities towards the direction of social uplift of the Rajbansi community. Initiations were taken to spread education, establishment of educational institutions, acceptance and practice of various social practices prevalent among the upper caste Hindus, such as adoption of sacred thread etc. A number of offshoot organizations of the Kshatriya Samiti were formed in different places of North Bengal⁷³. Thus under the banner of a distinct caste based organization the leaders of the Kshatriya Samiti advocated the cause of social up gradation movement for the community. This trend is described by the renowned sociologist M.N. Srinibas as ‘modernization’ and

‘westernization’. Actually the social structure of Bengal was not well acquainted with that of the other parts of India. In other parts of India there were Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Sudras where as in Bengal there were Brahmans, Baidyas and Sudras, no Kshatriyas. Therefore, the mentioned theory is partially applicable to the society of Bengal. So, considering the shifts in characteristics of the movement the study of the social awakening movement of the Rajbansis has been divided into two specific periods – (i) from the inception of the movement in 1891 till 1911 which has already discussed in the present chapter and (ii) from 1911 to 1947, because from 1911 the movement gradually shifted its dimension towards other aspects. Moreover the Colonial Govt. opened the door to various lower caste groups to get facilities by Participating in the election as separate caste groups from the level of Union Boards to the Legislative Council. Therefore the social awakening movement gradually took a political turn as it realized that without their representation they will not be able to get facilities from the Government which was needed for their development. Therefore the social up gradation movement was converted into caste-based political movement by the Rajbansi community. This trend continued till the independence in 1947, which will be discussed in chapter 4. After the independence and partition in 1947 the movement lost its spirit because the centre of the movement, Rangpur was transferred to erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Not only that, caste based politics was abolished by the constitution of independent India. The movement took a new turn during the 60s of the twentieth century, which is observed by modern scholars as ‘ethnic identity movement’, this aspect will be discussed in chapter 7, and this trend again got a shift to another as because after 1977 a new horizon in

the spheres of socio-political movement emerged with the formation of leftist Government in west Bengal.

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CHAPTER - 3

THE CONDITION OF THE RAJBANSI COMMUNITY

I

In order to understand the caste society and politics of the region we must study the condition of the Rajbansi community as they were the numerous community compared to other caste groups in the region concerned. Moreover, they claim that they were the early settlers or aboriginals and experienced a number of changes with the introduction of British rule in this part and also after independence. It is interesting to note that being part of the whole society of Bengal, their condition was sharply different in comparison with other castes and communities, so far as socio-cultural and economic life is concerned.

In undivided North Bengal the Rajbansi Kshatriyas constituted the single largest community. The vast area of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Cooch Behar state, Jalpaiguri, Terai Portion of Darjeeling and Goalpara district of Assam, Purnea of Bihar was inhabited by them. They even lived in the Terai region of Nepal. According to 1921 census, more than 88 per cent of their population lived in the districts of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and the state of Cooch Behar. After the formation of the Kshatriya Samiti, the socio-religious organization of the Rajbansis claimed to be the representative body of more than 22 lacks of people of the community¹. It has already mentioned that they constituted the largest community of the region. At the same time it must be kept in mind that after the partition of 1947, the number of Rajbansis in the divided North Bengal had been reduced as a considerable

portion of their habitats went to the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as per recommendation of the Boundary Commission headed by Sir Cyril Radcliff though a good number of the Rajbansis migrated from east Pakistan to this part of Bengal in the post-independent period.

It is interesting to note that there was no social stratification among the Rajbansis of the region. They have endogamous society. There was no concept of sub-caste or caste hierarchy among them. Therefore it can be said that it was a non-caste based region. Another point is that even after the migration of various other caste group people with the establishment of British rule and the ancillary enterprises even after the partition and infiltration and settlement of a large number of refugees in the region, intermarriage between the Rajbansis and other migrant caste groups was noticeably absent. Unlike the society of other parts of Bengal where inter marriage of various different caste groups and the emergence of mixed castes was the natural bi-product of migration, this region had maintained distinction in this respect.

The pattern of settlement where the Rajbansis used to live with their kinsmen and people of their own community began to change after the establishment of Muslim rule in this region. The upper caste Hindus began to migrate and settle into the region to take part in their administration². This trend continued during the British administration in this part of Bengal. Among the migrants who came in search of various works and settled in the region were mostly the upper caste Hindus and were non-cultivators. The British administrative and judicial system opened up new employment opportunities to which they were attracted. They (upper caste Hindus) were

eager to obtain formal education. Their eagerness for higher education was motivated by the advancement in service and profession. These people came to be called as 'Bhadralok' or 'babu'³. The creation of Jalpaiguri district as the divisional headquarter of the Rajshahi Division in the last quarter of the nineteenth century helped the migration of urban population due to employment opportunities opened up by the new administrative centre. Professions and services which were ancillary to such administration also attracted a large number of people from outside⁴.

After the establishment of tea plantation economy in Darjeeling and western Duars of Jalpaiguri, the British Govt. encouraged migration of several tribal groups of people as labourers in the Tea gardens of western Duars instead of recruiting the existing inhabitants i.e. the Rajbansis, Koches, Mechas etc. same was the case that the Govt. did in the hilly region of Darjeeling. There in the hilly zone the Govt. encouraged the migration of Nepalese instead of recruiting the aboriginal Lepehas, as, according to the Britishers, the 'Lepehas were reserved and lessy' on the contrary the Nepalese were more vibrant and thrifty as labourers⁵. But one point has to be kept in consideration that this view is partially true, and the reasons behind such steps taken by the Govt. were difference in hills and in the Duars. So far as the Rajbansis were concerned they were more interested in land cultivation and agricultural production with the traditional mode of cultivating lands. It has observed by a few scholars that working in the field was also a laborious work, perhaps they found in the land a kind of security, moreover it was a prestigious work in the society of the Rajbansis.⁶ Whatever may be the reason they did not take part in the tea gardens, construction works, railway works and other activities initiated by the British Govt. during this time.

Another factor was that due to their educational backwardness they could not contend with the migrants who were more advanced and efficient in taking services in the Govt. offices. The migrant high caste Bengali Hindus took the opportunities of western education provided by the Colonial Govt. and gradually became dominant in the society. Not only that they disgraced the Rajbansis as inferior to them⁷. As a result a sense of alienation arose among the Rajbansis in the region with the passage of time.

II

Therefore, cultivation was the only economic activities of the Rajbansis in this region during pre-British and British rule. The *Jotedary-Adhiary* system was prevalent there. As there was vast waste of uncultivated lands, therefore, to bring them under cultivation those were given to rich men at very low rents. These land holders gave such lands to poor cultivators to bring the waste lands under cultivation⁸. Initially the cultivators paid no or minimum revenue, but with the passage of time cultivation started properly and the cultivators paid generally in kind half of the produce to the original titleholder. These cultivators became the share-croppers and the rich men by virtue of their economic supremacy became the land holders⁹. Ethnically the migrant cultivators had same social origin during the pre and early British period.

At the inception of the British rule in this region most of the zamindars belonged to the Rajbansi community. But the number of non- Rajbansi Jotedars and land holders were increasing from late nineteenth century onwards. 'In Jalpaiguri, while the number of jotes held by the Rajbansis decreased those held by the non- Rajbansis i.e. Marwaris, upper caste

Bengalis etc. increased sharply'¹⁰Prof. T.k. Roy Choudhury has proved in his article 'Duars-e Bhumi- Rajaswa Byabasthar Bibartan the transfer of land by providing adequate statistics that due to various reasons transfer of land from the hands of Rajbansis to the non-Rajbansis took place in Jalpaiguri district. It has mentioned that due to the overburdening of taxes, the transfer of land increased in this region'¹¹. Various land revenue reports revealed the fact that the Jotedars were compelled to transfer their lands to others due to the excessive revenues imposed by the Govt. It is found in the Grunning's Report that only in Falakata Tahshil 205 jotes were sold off and the buyers of those were Marwaries and other non-Bengali businessmen'¹².

In this context one thing must be kept in mind that though land-transfer had taken place in the pre-independent period mostly in the thirties of the 20th century, it never became the major issue of discontentment among the Rajbansis till the late seventies of the twentieth century.

One interesting thing is that in the region, the landowners and their under tenants had same social status as they belonged to same social origin, same community as majority of the cultivators belonged to the Rajbansi community. 'A low-level equilibrium existed in this society during pre annexation and early British period which maintained its economic and social stability'¹³. So there was no social stratification based on occupation, education and caste existed in this region. 'On the whole the area did not show any socio-economic dynamism which would give rise to social stratification, economic inequality and political consciousness'¹⁴. In this respect the region was in sharp contrast to other parts of rural Bengal in British India.

Thus we see that there was a massive change in the ownership of land during the British rule in the region. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century for enhancing the income from rent, the Govt. had adopted various measures to increase agricultural lands or to bring the fallow, waste land under cultivation. So the barren fallow and jungle lands were distributed to the cultivators of out side. The British Govt. had announced various measures viz. low rate of rent, no rent until proper cultivation had been started etc. In Cooch Behar, it is found from the land settlement report of Mr. Becket, the settlement officer of the Cooch Behar State that there was a radical change in the land-man ratios as well as the ownership of land in the State. He wrote in 1872, 'From calculation made, I found that out of about 150000 *Bighas* of revenue paying lands included in 185 *taluks*, about 81000 *Bighas* are held by foreigners, of the remaining 69000 *Bighas*, less than a third is held by cultivating *Jotedars* and the remainder by resident *Jotedars*, who do not actually cultivate lands but live on profits derived from *Chukanidars* (middlemen)'¹⁵. The people from out side mostly of those were in administration of Cooch Behar State and were perceptively more resourceful than the local inhabitants, grabbed a large number of *Jotes*. By 1872 in the state 54 percent of the revenue paying land had passed into the hands of the outsiders¹⁶.

After the First World War and the subsequent economic depression all over the world, *Rajbansi Jotedar* of North Bengal began to sell off their lands. Thus we see that a change in the ethnic composition of land- holding took place during the early twentieth century. The result was that 'the *Rajbansis*

who once dominated the local society were gradually subordinated by the newly settled dominant upper caste people mostly Hindus'¹⁷.

III

It has already mentioned that the society of the Rajbanshi community was endogamous and there was no social stratification on the basis of caste and with the migration of the upper caste Hindus of lower Bengal into the region social relations began to change. 'The socio-economic structure of the rural society of Bengal had been shaped into a definite pattern. The village society of caste and social position was fixed by the status attached to each caste'¹⁸. Although western liberal education had been spread and social reforms were introduced, yet the contemporary society in late nineteenth century was dominated by caste. Caste status determined the social position. From this view point the highest social status was given to the upper caste Hindus. 'The upper caste Hindus at the time when began to settle in northern Bengal obviously brought this tradition with them. That is the oriental influence made them tradition bound adhered to the social stratifications based on caste, community and religious identity. At the same time the liberal education of the western society encouraged them to search occupational opportunities. Interestingly enough they represented the liberal tradition of the western society on the one hand and maintained the conservative discipline of oriental heritage on the other'¹⁹. These people by virtue of their close connection with the administration became dominant in the rural society of North Bengal. They considered the local Rajbansis as lower caste and 'antyaja' and maintained distance with them. Moreover, the upper caste people did not drink water touched by the Rajbansis²⁰.

As it has already mentioned that North Bengal was once inhabited mostly by Rajbansis, Koches, Meches, Ravas, Totos and other local ethnic groups saw a steady migration of upper caste Hindu Bengalis as well as others since the mid nineteenth century, therefore, with the gradual settlement of upper caste Hindus in what were traditionally the Rajbansi dominated areas, the migrant upper caste Hindus in course of time became the most dominant group(though their number was small compared to the local people) in local society, economy and politics. They manned the local administration and because of their closeness to the administrative power and due to their intelligence, they emerged as the dominant land-holding class. As the Rajbansis socially and culturally followed the tradition of their own failed to get a respectable position in the status estimation of these migrant upper caste people²¹.

There were sharp dissimilarities between the cultural practices of these two groups i.e. the Rajbansis and the migrant upper caste Hindus. The simplicity of the Rajbansis in their dress and foods was humored by the upper caste Hindus. The upper caste migrant people behaved in a rather haughty way with the local Rajbansis and treated them as 'backward', uncultured. They used to refer to the Rajbansis as "Bahe"²², implying their cultural inferiority. The word Bahe was a distortion of the word 'Baba he', by which the Rajbansis generally used to address a person. The Rajbansis used to refer to the migrants as Bhatia as an expression of their irritation to this term used to them by the upper caste migrants²³. The meaning of the word Bhatia is outsider to their land. Thus, the attitude of cultural superiority of the migrant

upper caste Hindus and their general tendency to look down the Rajbansis created a psychological barrier that prevented a closer relationship between them and the latter.

Another important point is that, the higher caste Hindus tried their level best to maintain the ritual hierarchy and their exclusive caste identity in matters of socio-cultural interaction. There are number of references to the humiliation of the Rajbansis by the upper caste migrant Hindus. The Rajbansis had no right to enter the places of worship on the occasion of any public celebration of pujas or to enter the kitchen in the upper caste households. Even as it has mentioned earlier that water was not accepted from their hands by the upper caste Hindus. Charu Chandra Sanyal, the renowned scholar, writing on the history of Jalpaiguri district, mentioned that caste was very much maintained in this district and the people of higher and lower castes used to sit in different rows on the occasion of any public lunch or dinner. The Rajbansis were not allowed to touch the well of the upper castes²⁴. Same was the picture in other districts also.

In the biography of Panchanan Barma, Upendra Nath Barman mentions another incident which is the worse example of caste hatred of the upper caste Hindus to the Rajbansis of the region. The incident was one day, by mistake, the lawyer Panchanan Barma went to the courtroom wearing the cap of some Maitra, who was one of his high caste colleagues in the bar. On his return, he realized his mistake, but when he gave the cap back to Maitra, the latter angrily threw it away and said, "I hate to use a cap or toga used by a Rajbansi"²⁵, the autobiography of Upendra Nath Barman also reveals the same incidences of caste-hatred by the upper caste Hindus during his college

days. It is clear from the above discussion that the community did not occupy a respectable social position in the eyes of the migrant upper caste Hindus which hurt the Rajbansis to a great extent and they began to express their dissatisfaction through the movement of redefining their social status in the existing social hierarchy. It is out of such background that the Rajbansis of North Bengal started agitation centering on the census of 1881, which mentioned in its return the Rajbansis under the head of Koch disregarding their claim of Kshatriyahood. The movement has discussed in chapter 2 & 4 of this study.

Another interesting fact is that the demand of the Rajbansis for Kshatriya status in the census returns under the banner of Kshatriya Samiti movement since the first decade of the twentieth century was not accepted by the high caste Hindus. It is said that from the very beginning the high caste Hindus could not reconcile with the claim of the Rajbansis for Kshatriya status. Because, conventionally, as argued by the high caste Hindus, the Bengali society was composed by Brahmanas, Baidyas, Kayasthas and Sudras and there was no Kshatriya in the traditional caste hierarchy in Bengal. Moreover there was no tradition of any strong Bengali kingdom which ruled the region consecutively in the past²⁶. Therefore their demand was vehemently opposed by the upper caste Hindus. Thus we see that the Rajbansis were despised by the migrant upper caste people, and in a long run this attitude of the upper caste Hindus had widened the psychological rift and alienation between the Rajbansis, the aboriginal inhabitants and the migrant settlers.

It has pointed out by a number of scholars that the British Govt. in order to understand as well as to meet the socio-religious questions of the sub-continent had began study about the people and society of the country through various officials from time to time. As a result a number of works describing the existing caste society came into existence²⁷. These works had a profound influence upon the educated Indians in making their concept of existing society of their own country. As these studies had been conceptualized on the basis of existing notion of caste hierarchy, therefore those works indirectly provided legitimacy to the prevalent social stratification prescribed by the early texts. For instance, the observation of Sir Francis Buchanan Hamilton, working on North Eastern Indian society, that the Rajbansis and Koches are 'low and impure', such comments must had influenced the educated Indians who considered the colonial Govt. as their supreme authority, in every aspects. Therefore, the disgrace and ignorance to the Rajbnansis were increased under such influence made by the officials appointed by the Colonial Government²⁸.

IV

Educationally the Rajbansis were backward compared to other lower and backward communities of Bengal. We find a number of reasons for their backwardness in educational fields which should be the concern of our study otherwise the total condition of the community can not be understood. The leaders of the Kshatriya Samiti initiated movement with the aims of upgrading their social status /condition found a number of factors which were responsible for their backwardness in education. Firstly, the Rajbansis in general did not show any interest to take education from the very

beginning. It was due to the indifferent attitude of the community towards education that the number of educated Rajbansis was very few till the first few decades of the twentieth century²⁹. It is also a fact that the Rajbansis were interested to bestow education to their sons only for the requirement of making an arrangement of their marriage, and the requirement in this regard was up to the primary level. Because it was clear to the parents that the source of their livelihood was land which was plenty and more than the need. It should be born in mind that cultivation was conducted through the traditional method and the amount of produce can hardly be called as abundance and the economic condition of the cultivators of the community in general was poor.

Secondly, the centre of modern education was Calcutta and surrounding areas. North Bengal, being situated far away from the centre of educational activities, did not get much attention to their country-fellows, who took the initiatives of spreading modern education. Therefore the opportunities for education was limited as most of the people of this community lived in the villages.

Thirdly, the poor section of the community could not afford to send their boys to go outside for education. Moreover the children had to help their parents for their livelihood after a certain age³⁰. The poor Rajbansi cultivators worked in the fields of Jotedars with huge debts to repay and the question of education for their children was irrelevant to them. Another factor was that they found that the half-educated or with minimum education their children could neither work in the fields of cultivation nor could live a

respectable life in the learned society³¹. Therefore these people remained indifferent towards education.

On the other hand the Jotedars and rich peasants who could afford their children to send for education, did not feel any necessity to provide facilities for education. Because according to them, a minimum knowledge of keeping accounts for the purpose of maintaining Zamindari or Jotedari' was sufficient for their boys, and that had been provided by their 'Sarkars' or accountants whom they used to recruit to their estates or *taluks*. Not only that, they did not want their boys taking service in the Govt. offices as they themselves recruited a number of employees in their Zamindari or Jotedari areas³². Therefore it was a prestige issue to them. As they were satisfied being attached to land therefore the zeal for Govt. services was absent among them.

Fourthly, although a few Jotedars and substantial peasants showed a keen interest to send their children for higher education, there was no adequate arrangement of accommodation in the hostels or boarding-houses for the Rajbansi students³³. There were only a few schools which had their accommodation facilities but the students of the Rajbansis as well as other lower communities could not stay there with dignity and honour because of the hatred and ill-treatment of the high caste community students. It is known from the autobiography of Upendra Nath Barman, one of the eminent leaders of Kshatriya Samiti, that he also faced caste-hatred from upper caste Hindus in his student days at Cooch Behar Victoria College during 1916-20. In the College hostel there were two dining halls and students took food in either of these halls according to their own choice. But one day the hostel

superintendent Phanibhusan Chatterjee in a notice declared that the smaller dining hall is reserved for Brahmans and the bigger dining hall is for Vaidyas and Kayasthas and the 'Parata' hall (another hall which was used for cooking *chapati* for the tiffin of the hostel students) is for others for taking their meals. Among the 'other' there were a few Rajbansi students and the students of 'sonar bene' community (goldsmith). The Rajbansi students and other lower caste students under the leadership of Upendranath Barman raised their voice of protest against such notice by demanding another dining hall for themselves. Ultimately the matter was brought to the notice of the College principal, he made it clear to the superintendent that 'Victoria College hostel is not for those who observe caste distinction'³⁴. However this was his bitter personal experience of caste discrimination in his life. It is out of that background that the Kshatriya Samiti under the leadership of Panchanan Barma took initiative to establish students' hostels for the Rajbansi Kshatriya students. It was realized by the Members of the Samiti that without hostel the students can not obtain higher education. They also realized that unless or until the Rajbansis had taken adequate education their condition can not be improved³⁵. It has to be remembered that all these initiatives were taken after the formation of the Kshatriya Samiti in the early twentieth century. Thus we see that one of the means of social empowerment remained beyond the reach of the Rajbansis of this region till the first few decades of the twentieth century.

Another interesting point is that, unlike the Zaminders of other region who contributed much for the cause of educational development in their respective areas both in terms of economic and physical initiatives, in this

part of northern Bengal region the Jotedars and rich peasants did not take any initiative for the establishment of schools or other educational institutions for providing facilities of education to the children in their respective villages³⁶. It was considered that this kind of activities should be the concern of Govt. on the other hand the Govt. was of the view that schools should be established in the urban areas or in the areas where the educated middle class have been settled. Therefore no active steps were taken for the establishment of educational institution to promote higher education among the Rajbansis of the region. It was only when election was held with limited voter list in 1937 as per the provisions of local self gov. act of 1935, that the local Rajbansi Jotedars felt the need of higher education. From that time onwards, collective endeavours were taken to set up M.E. Schools in the villages. In Jalpaiguri, the M.E. Schools were elevated to the level of H.E. Schools not before 1945³⁷.

The picture of education among the Rajbansis in the Princely State of Cooch Behar was also the same as was other districts of North Bengal. It has found from the writings of Upendra Nath Barman that G.T.B. Dalton, the Deputy Commissioner of Cooch Behar in 1882 and 1883, made his comments regarding education of the state as “When we (The British) took charge of affairs in 1864 there were only two schools aided or unaided are returned until 1866-67”.

We get more information from the Annual Report of 1888-89 prepared by Major Evans, then superintendent of the native state of Cooch Behar. The Report reveals that ‘Cooch Behar had one College, one High School, three Middle English Schools and only thirteen Middle Bengali Schools.’ The

elementary education of the children generally took place in the village pathshalas. Thus we see that the State of Cooch Behar was quite pessimistic towards education. It is true that Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur was a pioneer of introducing western and modern education in Cooch Behar. Many Primary and secondary schools both for boys and girls were established. Maharaja also established a College in the name of Queen Victoria in 1888 for remembering the Golden Jubilee celebration of her coronation. It was the first Degree College of the then North East India. The Primary objective of Maharaja was to spread higher education among his subjects. But it appears from the administrative reports of the state that the major portion of the opportunities of higher education was availed by the outsiders. The Administrative Report of 1931 shows that forty- seven candidates appeared in the examination of whom only eleven were Rajbansi students of Cooch Behar³⁸. Thus the majority of the people were remained within the fold of illiteracy and ignorance.

The condition of Jalpaiguri can be understood from the writings of Sri Amiya kumar Pakrashi. He wrote in the Jalpaiguri district centenary souvenir regarding the picture of primary education in the district that “the first census in the district was held in 1872. There were only nineteen primary schools having 283 students (boys) and 22 teachers”³⁹. Though he had mentioned the comments of the Govt. regarding the census Reports that it did not represent the actual picture, yet more or less the situation was as such with regard to the education of the district. It is evident from 1911 census that only 51 out of 1000 Rajbansis of North Bengal (undivided) were literate, the male – female ratio was even worse. Like the people of other caste society of Bengal, the Rajbansis too were indifferent regarding women

education. It is found from Upendra Nath Barman's autobiography that so far as education among the Rajbansi women was concerned, Walter Hamilton in his 'The East India Gazetteer' Vol. II, part II page 471, wrote that "In Rangpur it is considered highly improper to bestow any education on women and no men will marry a girl who is known to be capable of reading. Girls of rank were usually married at eight years of age". He again wrote in the same Gazetteer regarding the general condition of education in page 478, "Few indeed born in this district are qualified even for the occupation of a common clerk or writer"⁴⁰. It was only in the third decade of the twentieth century that Bimala Roy, the daughter of renowned Kshatriya Samiti leader Madhusudan Roy took the initiative to run a girls school named 'Matrimandir,' in Jalpaiguri in 1925⁴¹. When Mahatma Gandhi came to Jalpaiguri, visited the school and gave blessings to her as she was the pioneer of such school for the Rajbansi girls in the region⁴². On the whole the status of education among the Rajbansis was low compared to other low-caste communities of contemporary Bengal who were under the same socio-economic condition.

The following table shows the percentage of Scheduled Castes to total population and the Rajbansis to total Scheduled Caste population by Census Years.

Table: 3.1

District	Census Year	Total SC population including the Rajbansis	Percentage of SC population to total population	Percentage of Rajbansis to total SC population
Darjeeling	1951	26,080	5.85	60.94
	1961	82,381	13.19	38.20
	1971	98,277	12.57	32.05
Jalpaiguri	1951	235,203	25.71	73.43
	1961	418,655	30.80	75.48
	1971	595,424	34.02	55.28
Cooch Behar	1951	269,464	40.15	93.54
	1961	478,313	46.90	87.26
	1971	665,020	47.02	72.37
West Dinajpur	1951	123,118	17.08	54.81
	1961	286,453	21.64	32.59
	1971	429,578	23.09	31.42
Malda	1951	136,379	14.54	14.88
	1961	163,433	13.37	23.52
	1971	265,697	16.47	19.07
North Bengal	1951	790,244	21.42	66.87
	1961	1,429,235	25.75	62.83
	1971	2,053,996	27.67	50.03

Source: 'The Rajbansis of North Bengal: A Comparative Demographic Profile' by Rajat Subhra Mukhopadhyay, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, North Bengal University, 1990, p.15.

V

From the above discussion it can be said that during the pre- independent period the caste- hatred and social disgrace made by the upper caste migrant Hindus towards the Rajbansis were the major issue of dissatisfaction of the community. Social alienation made them prepared to uplift their social status. During this time there was no agitation against economic deprivation of the community. Actually the attitude of the upper caste Hindus to the Rajbansis in social affair hurt them to such an extent that they started agitation centering on census issue (in 1891) for the amelioration of their social position in the caste hierarchy of Bengal. It has already mentioned that the migrant upper caste Hindus placed them in the lower stratum of the society. It proves from the agenda and resolutions taken by the Kshatriya Samiti, that from the very beginning their grievances were centering on their social degradation and caste hatred. A feeling arose among them that being the successors of a number of powerful, strong kings /rulers and the lineage of renowned kingdoms of the past they had been degraded by upper caste migrants, therefore their sole thrust was to redefine their higher position in the society through the recognition by the Govt. in the census return to give legitimacy to their claim. Thus it can be said that the replacement of the socio-cultural domination made the Rajbansis subordinated to the migrant high caste Hindus that created a frustration among them. The expression of the frustration was found in the conversion of many Rajbansis to other faiths though the Kshatriya Samiti, repeatedly in its resolutions urged for the socio-cultural development of the community and gave emphasis on the spread of education among the members of the community which will make them able to compete for Govt. services, considering their poor condition, the sole concern was gradually shifted to the all round development of the

community. The writing of a poet of Dinajpur reflects the desire of the Kshatriya Samiti movement. He wrote:

‘Mora chahina artha, chahinam maan,
Chahina bidya, chahina jnan,
Mora chai shudhu jatir pratistha,
Mora chai shudhu jatir pran’⁴³.

(Free English translation: we want neither money nor prestige, we do not want education or knowledge, we only want the recognition of our caste, we only want our caste to exist alive).

VI

The Jotedars of this region could not reconcile with the land acquisition policy of the United Front Government. According to the Rajbansi leaders of this region, the policy brought unprecedented misery for the Rajbansi Jotedars and land owners⁴⁴. Manibhushan Majumdar, a Rajbansi social thinker, wrote in his autobiography that the big Jotedars and land owners did not distribute their lands to their offspring and kept those lands to their own holdings⁴⁵. Therefore, more than 75 Bighas of lands were captured and declared as vest lands by the Government.

It is worth mentioning that though the abolition of Zamindari Act was passed in 1953, yet in North Bengal the acquisition of land by the Government started comparatively later⁴⁶. It has argued by the Rajbansi Jotedars that, at that time, most of the Rajbansi Jotedars were illiterate and they filled the return form taking assistance of the Lawyers, Muhuris, Government Officials who were not at all acquainted with the condition of

their (the Jotedars) lands. Therefore, the illiterate Jotedars could not understand about which lands were going to become vested or khas lands and which will remain with them. At the time of recovery of land by the Government the Jotedars became surprised when they saw that the 'good' land i.e. high yielding lands went to the government and the 'bad' or low productive lands remained with them. As consequence a large number of Rajbansi land lord and Jotedars became more or less landless soon after the recovery of lands by the State Government⁴⁷. It is true that in the colonial period particularly during the economic depression period a good number of Rajbansi Jotedars compelled to sell off their lands due to the subsequent economic crisis to the Marwari money-lenders and other high caste Bengali Hindu businessmen etc⁴⁸. As results the Jotedars were forced step by step down from Jotedars to Chukanidars, then to Darchukanidars., some times as far as Dardar Chukanidar with an ever increasing rent to pay⁴⁹. But after independence and partition in 1947 the situation became different. Like other parts of West Bengal, here also, the Government was busy to give priority to the cause of rehabilitation of the refugees which became a burning issue to the then Government of both State and Centre⁵⁰. Therefore, most of the vested lands were distributed to those landless refugees. As it has mentioned earlier that the Rajbansi Jotedars did not give education to their offspring, nor they did engage themselves in any other occupations, therefore, they had to face unprecedented miseries.

It was out of such background the Rajbansi Jotedars started an ethnic based movement named *uttarkhanda Dal* movement in 1969, which demanded separate state on the basis of their separate ethnicity⁵¹. It demanded inclusion

of the members of the *uttarkhanda Dal* in North Bengal Development Council which was formed by the State Government to control the issues of North Bengal⁵². The *uttarkhanda Dal*, however, contested in the assembly election which is discussed in chapter-7. So, after independence the caste consolidation movement of this region converted into the ethnic identity movement since the late sixties and became strong in the eighties of the twentieth century.

VII

Situation began to change after independence particularly in the post-Bangladesh war of independence in 1971. The influx of refugees, most of whom were cultivators entered and settled in the rural areas of North Bengal. Pressure on land increased rapidly which was unprecedented in the pre-independent period⁵³. With the coming of the refugees the mode of agricultural production also changed radically, because the refugee cultivators had brought with them their own methods of cultivation⁵⁴. They applied modern technology in the fields of cultivation of this region. As a result of their efforts a number of new agricultural crops producing belt had emerged Viz. Dhupguri-Jalpaiguri, Falakata-Jalpaiguri; Haldibari, Batabari, Adhkari, Phansidewa and some other areas which began to supply the demand of the surrounding areas. One point must keep in mind that according to sociologists, migrants are always very much vibrant which help them of becoming triumphant in all challenging circumstances and in every aspect over the local inhabitants. Moreover, they availed the loan facilities provided by the Govt. of India to the cultivators. During pre-independent period the agricultural production of the region was more or less 'semi-

stagnant and unchanged'. So with the application of modern technology in the agricultural fields, production increased to a considerable extent and the refugee peasants, cultivators within a very short span of time became richer compared to the Rajbansi cultivators. Thus there was a rapid change in the nature of cultivation. An unprecedented boom in the agricultural production took place with the introduction of modern technology viz. high yielding fertilization, irrigation with the help of modern technology etc. This change created a sense of deprivation among the Rajbansis, because being the early inhabitants and attached mostly to the agricultural economy they remained indebted and poor. This disparity forced them to change their condition. Because most of the benefits provided by the Govt. of India as well as by the State Govt. to the cultivators were grabbed by these refugees and the Rajbansis found that they are in the same economic destitute, their condition remained stagnant as it was earlier.

Thus agitation against economic deprivation started from this time onwards it has to be born in mind that during pre-independent period most of the migrants were in Govt. services took various other professions also. They did not show any interest in agricultural occupation during this period. Though land-transfer took place, there was no scarcity of land and the migrant land holders did not introduce any major change in the field of agricultural economy. If we study the important factors behind the transfer of land during the British period we will see that due to the establishment of tea plantation economy a vast amount of land was transferred and interesting thing is that in this process the beneficiaries were the Jotedars. Indebtness was another important factor for the transfer of land, and in this respect the non Bengali Jotedars gave those lands for cultivation to the local Adhiyars,

Chukanidars or such intermediaries⁵⁵. Therefore no radical change in agricultural economy took place during this time. Even after independence a huge number of refugees began to settle in the urban areas and took several other professions except cultivation. So, pressure on land had not felt vigorously as there was plenty of land. It was only after the post-Bangladesh war of independence (1971) that a large number of refugees most of them belonged to Namasudra caste that land became viable and pressure on land began to be felt. These cultivators in their professional life were cultivators and actually created a huge pressure on land and problem in agricultural field started from this time onwards in the region⁵⁶.

So, from the above discussion we can argue that the theories which claim that the economic change took place in the region due to the transfer of land in pre-independent period can not be accepted on the ground that in spite of the transfer of land there was not any resentment arose among the Rajbansis, because there was not any significant change in the agricultural production or land-based economy. To be more specific land was not viable. Thus it can be derived from the above statements that in the pre-independent period basically socio-cultural dissatisfaction made the Rajbansis to launch the movement though gradually in course of time it had changed its outlook and desires and assumed political character. In the post independent period particularly after the Bangladesh war (1971) economic grievances along with socio-cultural dissatisfaction took a consolidated form of movement which had been expressed in various occasions by a number of organizations that sprang up during this period, though their expressions were different, their inner voice was more or less same i.e. economic deprivation⁵⁷.

Apart from the agricultural field, in the field of Govt. services also the scheduled caste refugees took the advantages and facilities to a maximum extent. If we study the percentage of the employees in the Govt. services we will find that the number of scheduled caste refugees was greater than the number of scheduled caste Rajbansis during this time. Therefore, the educated Rajbansi youths had started agitation being felt deprived in the field of Govt. services.

Another important point is that the educated Rajbansi youths has raised a question that their forefathers once claimed for the recognition of their higher social origin (Kshatriya) and redefined their status during the first and second decade of the twentieth century, and again within a few years they had made appeal for getting scheduled caste status. So this contradiction had been raised by them. It is true that a few members of the community raised their protest against such move earlier, but Panchanan Barma, the renowned leader of Kshatriya Samiti movement successfully became able to convince them stating the need of holding such dual status. Long after the independence; this dichotomy had been felt and argued by the educated youths of the community which can not be overlooked in this connection.

It has observed by a few leaders of the community that the facilities granted by the Constitution as well as by the Govt. of India were not followed in toto in west Bengal nay North Bengal. This statement is proved by the fact that till 1972 no scheduled caste members were nominated in the Rajya Sabha in west Bengal. It was in 1972 that Prasenjit Barman was nominated as a scheduled caste member in the Rajya Sabha⁵⁸.

There was a sharp distinction between the nature of settlement between the refugees who came in post-independent period i.e. since 1947 to 1971 and those who came after the Bangladesh war of independence. The refugees who came immediately after partition, most of them preferred to settle in the urban areas. So during this time resentment regarding land was more or less absent. But after 1971 most of the refugees settled in the rural areas as it has already mentioned that they were cultivators and brought radical change in the quality and quantity of agricultural production. As consequence the urban scheduled caste refugees became the contenders of the scheduled caste Rajbansis in the field of various Govt. services and other Govt. facilities and the rural scheduled caste refugees became the competitors in both the field of land and agriculture as well as in the Govt. services.

The refugees gradually became dominant in the field of economy which made them dominant in the field of political and cultural sphere of the region also. Thus in every aspect from socio-cultural to educational, from educational to economic, the domination of the refugees established, which germinated the seeds of movement among the community who claim themselves as the original inhabitants of the region⁵⁹. Therefore we find a number of organizations sprang up during the period in different places throughout the region which expressed the same grievances. Due to the lack of rapid and direct communication system they could not consolidate their grievances at a common platform. But the inner voice of all such organizations more or less echoed the same context of socio-cultural and economic deprivation one such organization was UTJAS (Uttar Banger Tapashili Jati O Adibasi Sangathan). So a total dissatisfaction of the people of the community, from educated to illiterate, from urban to rural areas gave

birth to a total mobilization among the community. In course of our study we have found that the Rajbansis as a distinct caste group underwent a radical change which determined the courses of history of the region which will be discussed in chapter-7.

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CHAPTER -4

RISE, GROWTH & DECAY OF THE RAJBANSI KSHATRIYA SAMITI MOVEMENT

I

The social awakening among the Rajbansis gave birth to the formation of the Kshatriya Samiti in 1910 which has already been discussed in the previous chapter (chapter-2). After the formation of the Samiti the demand of the Rajbansis for higher social status (Kshatriyahood) received a mass base popularity. It is out of such systematic efforts that the movement of the community for attaining Kshatriya status got success. But in course of the movement the leaders realized that the movement must concentrate on the uplift of the community. Panchanan Barma and his disciples insisted on the need of all round development of the society because according to them the community will never get acknowledgement of their social prestige merely by their enlistment as Kshatriyas in the census reports and adoption of sacred thread unless or until they initiate constructive programs for the development of the community. Therefore the Samiti took a number of steps to ameliorate the community of its objectives.

The formation of the Kshatriya Samiti gave a new direction to the Rajbansi Caste movement; it took several steps for the welfare of the Kshatriya community. The primary interest of the Samiti therefore appeared to have been the social regeneration of the Rajbansis through socio-cultural and religious reforms.

In order to create a sense of solidarity among the Kshatriya community, the Samiti in its Second Annual Meeting made a suggestion for wearing the sacred thread by the Rajbansis. But no definite resolution was passed to this regard.

After achieving Kshatriya recognition officially in the census of 1911, the Samiti initiated systematic efforts for all round socio-economic development of the Rajbansi Kshatriyas which is described by M. N. Srinivas as changing nature of mobility, 'the actual shift in emphasis being from acquiring the symbols of high status to the real sources of high status i.e. political power, economic power and education'¹. Therefore the Samiti not only demanded official recognition of Kshatriya status of the community from the Government and the orthodox Hindu society as well but also conducted movement to awaken the general mass of the community. For this purpose the Samiti suggested to organize their social structure and reform social customs and practices in the light of modern development of the Hindu society. A good number of Maithili and Kamrupi Brahmins along with other leaders were appointed, who carried the movement down to village level².

In the third Annual conference of the Samiti, the secretary Panchanan Barma emphasized on the need of wearing *upabita* or sacred thread. He said that they had fallen from the order of their actual (Kshatriya) caste due to the non-observance of Vedic and Hindu rituals³. The Kshatriyas being next to the Brahmans in the caste hierarchy must be entitled to the ceremony of *upanayan sanskara*. One thing has to be mentioned that Panchanan Barma was the main ideologue of the Kshatriya Samiti movement and he remained

the secretary of the Samiti from the day of its foundation till his death in 1935. Therefore the Samiti claimed to regain their Kshatriya status by performing the necessary 'prayaschitya' or expiation so that they can read the Vedas along with wearing sacred thread.

In this way the Samiti under the leadership of Panchanan Barma and others soon got popular support. However, the Samiti sought the opinion of the Hindu Pandits and their rulings or *vyabasthapatras*⁴. Pandits like Mahamahopadhyay Siddhinath Vidyabagish and others of Cooch Behar, Mahamahopadhyay Disewar Bhattacharya and others of Kamrupa, Pandit Shreshtha Kamaksha Nath Sharma and others of Calcutta, Panditraj Yadaveswar Tarkaratna and others of Rangpur, Mahamahopadhyay Bhubanmohan Sharma of Nabadwip, Pandit Chandrabushan Sharma and others of Kashidham (Benaras), Pandit Chitradhar Misra of Mithila and others expressed their consent that the Rajbansis were Kshatriyas and can adopt sacred thread. The rulings of the Pandits were distributed among the members of the Samiti in the Third Annual conference. Following this, the day of adopting sacred thread and performing expiation was fixed on 27th Magh 1319 B.S. (1912) at Debiganj, then in Jalpaiguri district on the bank of the river *Karatoya*, which was considered by the Rajbansis as a holy river. Thousands of Rajbansis from different places gathered there. Many eminent Sanskrit Pandits from Nabadwip, Kamrupa and Mithila were invited to solemnize and authorize them to 'reaccept' the sacred thread. Thousands of Rajbansis took sacred thread and as prescribed by the Pandits they had to shave their heads and bear. The ceremony continued for three consecutive days⁵. This was followed by similar *milankshetras* in different districts of

North Bengal where many more Rajbansis were given the sacred thread which would signify their Kshatriya status. Along with this they began to adopt Kshatriya surnames like Barman, Deb Barman etc⁶.

Another important step towards Kshatriyaization was establishment of 'tols' to spread religious education among the Rajbansis. The period of 'asauch' or mourning ceremony after the demise of either parent was shortened from 30 day to 12 days. In addition to this, regular rituals of worship viz. Gayatri, sandhyapath, Achman, Gita path etc. were also introduced.⁷ The details of those rituals were published and distributed by the Samiti to the members of the community so that they can perform those rituals in their daily life. Panchanan Barma introduced the worship of Goddess *Chandi* because she was the symbol of *Sakti* or power, which was known as the basic quality of the Kshatriyas⁸.

So far as social reforms were concerned, the Kshatriya Samiti followed the line of upper caste social customs and practices. Following the upper caste model early marriage for the daughters of the Rajbansis were arranged, 'appeals were made to introduce Purdah in the Rajbansi Society'. Traditionally the women in Rajbansi society enjoyed much more freedom and equality in comparison with the upper caste Hindu society. Not only that as there were incidents of abduction of women by hooligans, therefore the Samiti through its journal 'Kshatriya' appealed repeatedly to protect their women from being abducted. 'A proposal was made by Panchanan Barma in the thirteenth annual conference of the Kshatriya Samiti for the formation of volunteer group called 'Nari Raksha Sevok Dal' with proper training in

every village *mandali* to save women from hooligans/abductors which was accepted by the society⁹. In 1330 B.S. (1923) due to the frequent incidents of female abduction physical training and training of using daggers also became popular among the Rajbansi women particularly those who were returned back from the abductors. Moreover, to encourage the women and men of the community, Panchanan Barma wrote a provocative poem entitled 'Dangdhari Mao' (mother with weapon in her hands)¹⁰. All these created great enthusiasm among the Rajbansis.

In order to ameliorate the society from within 'Kshatriya spirit' was infused among the Rajbansi youths by citing the examples of their martial heroes of the past. The leaders of the Kshatriya Samiti movement tried to generate among the Rajbansis a spirit of vigour citing the examples of their heroes of the past. They felt to be proud of being the successors of those who once ruled over the region. For instance it has mentioned in the *Mahabharata* that the great king of the region Bhaga Datta joined the war of Kurukshetra against the Pandavas favouring Kouravas, he was a Kshatriya. Then in the seventh century A.D. the famous ruler Bhaskar Barman confronted with the formidable king of Northern India Harshavardhana. During the medieval period the rulers of this region not only defeated the great warrior and victorious Baqtier Khilji and his troops who conquered Bengal immediately before entering into Kamrupa but also threw them away to the river Karatoya. The '*Paiks*' who were constituted by the Koch and Rajbansi of North Bengal vehemently resisted the invasion of the Mughals from entering into the region. Another Rajbansi king Kanteswar established a free independent kingdom at Gosanimari, though he was defeated by the king of

Gour Husain Shah, and the revenge was duly taken by his lieutenant. During East India Company's rule, the Rajbansis took up arms against the oppressive Izaradar Devi Singha under the Governor Generalship of Lord Warren Hastings¹¹. Thus an attempt was made to generate among the youths a martial spirit through the recollection of mythological and historical references. As a result 'about 400 Rajbansi had joined the army during the First world war'¹². This trend of joining the war by the Rajbansis, however, also signified their loyalty to the British Raj. Because it was desired by the leaders of the community that British Government should last long in India¹³. In this respect we get the similar spirit among the leaders of the justice Party of Madras, Tamilnadu. The leaders of the lower caste community in the South and western India also demanded in a similar manner the long run existence of the British rule.

In this respect Panchanan Barma requested earnestly to the Bengal Government to raise a separate regiment for the Rajbansis¹⁴. This initiative had two-fold importance, as the leaders proved their stand more materialistic and strategic to earn for the Rajbansis new job opportunities as well as loyalty to the British Government in the process of their mobilization. Not only that their claim of Kshatriyahood was challenged by the caste Hindus as there was no Kshatriya in the Bengal caste society. But in the World War I they could prove that they were the descendants of Kshatriya lineage.

The Kshatriya Samiti's efforts were not limited to the development of martial qualities of the Rajbansis but it also took initiatives for the spread of modern education among them. As it has mentioned earlier that the community was educationally backward, therefore the leaders of the Samiti

understood it well that without proper education the importance of social reforms would not be realized by the community¹⁵. As a result many primary schools were established in villages. The Samiti planned to provide scholarships to the needy students. From the report of the sixteenth annual conference of the Kshatriya Samiti it appears that it had by then spent more than Rs 10,000 by way of providing financial help to about 70 students¹⁶. Citing example of the Government policy which provided facilities to the Muslims the leader of the Kshatriya Samiti Panchanan Barma fervently appealed to the Govt. to provide the same facility in respect of public employment to the Rajbansis also¹⁷.

In the nineteenth conference in 1335 B. S. at Bhotmari, Rangpur, the annual secretary of the conference Sri Jogendra Nath Barman in his Presidential address said that the Rajbanshis should bring under the National Educational program to develop the whole society. Previously, in its eighth conference in 1324 B. S. (1917) one of the Samiti's resolutions emphasized the need to promote women education.

Although the students of the Rajbansi community joined the Samiti from its inception, the Rajbansi Kshatriya Students Conference was held at the time of the seventh annual meeting of the Kshatriya Samiti¹⁸ and Swami Atmananda Brahmachary was proposed to be the secretary of the conference.

In 1320 B.S. (1913) the Collector of Rangpur district Mr. J.N. Gupta pleaded for Rs. 25000 in order to establish a First Grade College from the fund of Kshatriya Samiti. Interestingly opposition came from the districts of Assam

and Cooch Behar State as they had Colleges for higher education in their respective places. Ultimately the proposal was dismissed by the opposition of the leaders of Cooch Behar State and Assam. On the contrary the renowned social worker and the Zamindar Rai Bahadur Anandamohan Roy Choudhury of Tapa donated Rs. 100,000 and it was due to his contribution the CarMichael College at Rangpur was established under the auspicious of J.N. Gupta¹⁹.

The leaders of the Kshatriya Samiti realized that the Rajbansis were deeply immersed in poverty and social backwardness in comparison to the other castes of Bengal. The foremost concern therefore was the uplift of the community. In this respect they preferred assistance from the Govt. by showing their loyalty to the Raj because it was obviously understood by them that without Govt. facilities they will not be able to uplift the society merely by the spread of education and other social reforms from the age long poverty and exploitation by the upper castes. They believed that the longevity of the British Govt. will eliminate permanently old disparities, discriminations and disabilities. In the fourth annual conference in 1913, the Samiti took a resolution expressing its loyalty to the Raj as 'we the Rajbansi kshatriyas are always the obedient subjects to His Highness' Govt. we express our heartiest reverence for receiving just socio-religious and educational favour as we are under a Govt. and we pay thanks to the representative of His Highness Govt. in Bengal Lord CarMichael....."²⁰ Moreover in the tenth conference in 1919 the Samiti took a resolution saying as "The Kshatriya Samiti feels to be proud of its performance in the war field. It extended its helps to the emperor at the cost of the lives of its members who proved their Kshatriya spirit in the war."

Thus the Samiti appealed to draw the attention of the Governor of Bengal in this regard.

Although 'the Rajbansis were occasionally involved in the nationalist mass protests, such as the non-cooperation movement, and later developed connections with the Hindu Mahasabha from its inception in Bengal in 1924, some of the important personalities among them, like Upendra Nath Barman or Jagadindra Deb Raikat, were also deeply influenced by the nationalist fervour at different juncture²¹. But in spite of all these, their Kshatriya movement on the whole remained loyal to the British and again in its seventeenth annual conference in 1926; the Samiti adopted a formal resolution expressing its loyalty and obedience 'to the Raj'. It can be said that the Samiti in almost all its conferences expressed their (Rajbansi kshatriyas) heartiest loyalty to the Raj.

Another important step towards the development of the Rajbansis was taken by the Samiti was that; it made its demand to the Govt. regarding the employment of the educated Rajbansis. The Samiti expressed its apprehension that if the educated Rajbansis do not get proper employment they will be disappointed and therefore be receded from education, rather their motivation and novelty will be demoralized. Generally all most all the educated youths of Bengal preferred to take the profession of legal practitioner, most of them became advocate, as because the respectable jobs were reserved for the 'white masters'. Moreover it was the most lucrative profession at that time. North Bengal made no difference in this respect. It has found that most of the leaders of the Kshatriya Samiti were legal

practitioner in their professional life. The leaders, however, on behalf of the Samiti appealed to the Govt. to provide job facilities for the educated Rajbansis, because according to them the general people of the community will be encouraged by the future fate of their educated fellows²². Thus gradually the community will be educated and able to upgrade their condition in all aspects.

In addition to that the Samiti was equally aware of the peasants' cause. Panchanan Barma and the other leaders of the Samiti realized that to make the movement a mass movement, it was necessary to take into consideration the problems of the peasants²³. The Jotedars and prosperous peasant members of the Samiti raised a community fund called 'Barma Company' for providing loans to the Rajbansi agriculturists at times of emergency so that they could be protected from the clutches of the money-lenders. A 'Kshatriya Bank was established in 1327 B.S. (1920) at Rangpur²⁴. It was placed in the worthy hands of Kshetra Mohan Sinha. It continued for a very short tenure and closed down after the partition of India in 1947. It has to be mentioned here that though the Samiti was aware of the poor condition of the cultivators or the mass of the community, it did not incorporate any constructive and long-drawn agenda for the economic benefit of the community though the Samiti in its annual conferences repeatedly urged for the economic prosperity of the community. The dichotomies lies in the fact that most of the Samiti leaders were from Jotdar and big landlord families naturally they could not take any revolutionary step with regard to the development of the economic condition of the poor Rajbansi peasants. It has to be kept in mind that till the thirties of the twentieth century not only the Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti no organization either in provincial or national

level even the Indian National Congress did not take any comprehensive resolution for the peasants' cause though all the leaders were aware of the deplorable condition of the peasants.

Along with these, attempts were made by the leaders of the Samiti to develop linkages with all India Kshatriya movements²⁵. In this field also Panchanan Barma came into forefront as he was successful in making contacts with them through Krishna Mohan Sinha, a descent of Rajput Kshatriya whose family resided in Cooch Behar for generations. In 1922 Panchanan Barma was elected the vice-president of the Bengal branch of the Bhartiya Kshatriya Mahasabha, known as the Bengal Prantik Sabha. Janaki Pal Singh, a Panjabi Kshatriya came in close contact with Panchanan Barma, who had taken active steps recognizing the Rajbansi kshatriya samiti as the sub-branch or *prantik* committee of Bhartiya Kshatriya Mahasabha of eastern India. As a result of this relation Panchanan Barma and other leaders of the Samiti attended the annual conference of the All India Kshatriya Mahasabha at Puri in 1920; similarly, Janaki Pal Singh attended with other leaders the conference of the Kshatriya Samiti at Gaibandha, Chakdulia and Votemari as the representatives of the all India Mahasabha. In 1331 B.S²⁶ (1924) Barma went to Alwar along with Kamini Kumar Singha and Upendranath Barman to attend the conference of Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha. In 1927 the conference of the Mahasabha held in Indore was also attended by Panchanan Barma, Harikishor Barma and others²⁷.

The Samiti initiated the publication of a monthly journal 'Kshatriya' in 1328 B.S. (1921) which was the mouthpiece of the Samiti.

In the Fourth Annual Conference of the Samiti in 1913 under the leadership of Panchanan Barma a decision was taken to set up *Mandali Samiti* in every village. From 1916 onwards under the initiatives of the volunteers, such *Samitis* came into existence as a full fledged network of village organization, though in a slow process. Later it was spread from district to sub-divisional level. By 1926 there were about 300 such *Mandali Samitis* in North Bengal. Under this system, every Rajbansi village had *Mandali* at the top and *Patti* or neighbourhood organization each under a *Pattanayaka* at the bottom. Ten to twelve *Pattis* formed a *Gadiani*, the head of each *Gadiani* was called *Gadian*, and five to seven *Gadian* constituted a *Mandali*. Above the *Mandalis*, at the sub-divisional level there were *Mahamandali Samitis*, all of them were under the central committee of the Kshatriya Samiti of Rangpur²⁸. These *Mandali Samitis* acted as bridge between the Rajbansi cultivating masses and the rich substantial peasants and *Jotdars*. The volunteers of the Samiti acted as social reformers, campaigned against several social evils in the society like dowry system etc.

II

We see that though the Kshtriya Samiti was formed with the objective of socio- religious reforms and social awakening of the Rajbanshi community, with the passage of time responding to the consequent administrative developments it changed its outlook and decided to take part in electoral politics. The Samiti put its candidates in the council elections between 1920 and 1929 and the Assembly election of 1937 & 1946.

In the Montagu-Chelmsford Reform Act of 1919 the diarchy was established in the provinces and the size of the Provincial Legislative Council was further enlarged. It divided each constituency as Mohamomedan and Non-mohamonedan. In Rangpur, the Non-Mohammedan constituency consisted of two members and every voter had to cast two votes. There were four candidates for the Rangpur non-Mohammedan constituency. In 1920 the candidates for the election were Panchanan Barma, Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Jogesh Chandra Sarkar and Ashutosh Lahiri. In the election, Rai saheb and Jogesh Chandra Sarkar were elected as Kshatriya Samiti members by defeating Ashutosh Lahiri and Sarat Candra Chatterjee²⁹. One important point has to be considered that the Rajbansi Khatriyas could not get the fruits of reservation till 1935. The next election of 1923 was particularly significant because the Swarajya party and C.R. Das had decided to take part in the election with the view of wrecking the diarchy from within and had succeeded in capturing majority of the elected general Hindu and Muslim seats³⁰. The Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti projected Panchanan Barma and Nagendra Narayan Roy as candidates. The other candidates were Jogesh Chandra Sarkar, who had won the previous election with the support of the Kshatriya Samiti. Kshaetra Nath Sinha, an independent candidate and Sri Bijoy Chandra Dasgupta of the Swarajya Party. The Swarajya party won almost all seats except in Rangpur where the Kshatriya Samiti defeated the Swarajists in two seats and the victorious candidates were Panchanan Barma and Nagendra Narayan Roy³¹. The result of the election revealed the stronghold of the Kshatriya Samiti in Rangpur.

In 1926 election the Rangpur non-mahammedan constituency was divided into East and West Rangpur non-Mohammedan constituency. The candidate of Kshatriya Samiti for east Rangpur constituency was Panchanan Barman and Nagendra Narayan Roy was for the west. The other candidates were Sri Jitendra Nath Chackraborty (Advocate) and Nalini Mohan Roy Choudhury (the local Zamindar) from Congress party. This time the result went against the Kshatriya Samiti where Panchanan Barma was defeated by the Congress candidate Jitendra Nath Chackraborty. As a result the Kshatriya Samiti claimed that the Congress party had taken illegal measures to win the election and filed a case against Jitendra Nath Chackraborty in the court. The case was summoned in 1927 in Jalpaiguri but the illegal measures as claimed by Panchanan Barma and Kshatriya Samiti could not be proved³². However Nagendra Narayan Roy wined the election from the west Rangpur constituency which brought good news to the Samiti.

In 1929 election again the Kshatriya Samiti projected Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma as its candidate from west Rangpur non-Mohammedan constituency. His opponent was Dr. Atul Chandra Saha of the Congress party,³³ this time again Panchanan Barma became victorious.

An important point has to be kept in mind that the Kshatriya Samiti movement from the very inception was flourished Keeping Rangpur as its centre. As it has already mentioned that, Rangpur became the 'capital' of socio-cultural renaissance of the nineteenth century undivided Northern Bengal. A number of Jotedars and Zamindars dominated the whole society. Like the Zamindars of other castes they too encouraged the cause of socio-cultural development and the spread of Education. They wanted the uplift of

the Rajbansi society. Harmohan Roy (Khajanchi) of Shyampur, Kaminikumar Singha Roy of Dimla, Prasanna Nath Choudhury of Sadyapuskarini, Harikishor Barma, Kshetra Nath Sinha of Shimulbari etc. is citable among them. Therefore this Rangpur became the centre of protest movement of the Rajbansis. Not only that the base of the social awakening among the Rajansis was made by the *Rangpur Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Bidhayani Sabha*. Harmohan Roy Khajanchi, Hari Kishor Barma and Nagendra Narayan Roy were the three stalwart leaders of this awakening movement. Nagendra Nath Roy was elected as councilor in the Bengal legislative council during the period 1924-36. In 1946 he contested as a candidate of Kshatriya Samiti and became minister in the ministry of Suhrabardi in Bengal. But he did not contest in the Assembly election of 1937³⁴. A number of Young volunteers came into from Rangpur to work for the samiti. So undoubtedly Rangpur became the heart of the Kshatriya Samiti movement.

‘The Minorities sub-Committee Report’ of the First Round Table Conference showed that the representative of the Depressed classes’ had demanded that they should be separated from the Hindu population and be regarded as a distinct community for electoral purposes. However the matter was referred to the Indian Franchise committee, headed by Lord Lothian³⁵.

In the memorandum submitted to the Indian Franchise committee (1932) on behalf of the Bangiya Jana Sangha, which was an organization of the representatives of Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti and several other backward but ‘non- touchable’ caste groups formed in 1922, Panchanan Barma in order to secure the rights for the Rajbansi community stated that “the Rajbansis and

other backward classes should be represented by reserved seats..... through joint Electorate”. The Kshatriya movement supported the provisions of the August Declaration of 1932 for reserved seats and separate electorate for the depressed classes and later on its modified versions i.e. reserved seats but joint electorate under the Poona pact of September 1932³⁶.

The Kshatriya Samiti in its various resolutions concentrated on the demands for nomination of adequate number of Rajbansi Kshatriyas to the district Board, union Boards, municipalities etc. i.e. local self- govt. institutions, suitable measures for spread of education and increased job opportunities for the educated Rajbansi Kshatriya youths as the community was educationally and economically backward. It is found that from 1920 onwards the Samiti repeatedly expressed its firm loyalty to the British Govt. A resolution was taken in the seventeenth Annual conference of the Samiti held in 1333 B.S. (1926) that “weKshatriyas are expressing our sincere and firm devotion and loyalty to the (British) Raj.” However it took a long time to get the desired facilities, because the Rajbansis were excluded from the list of ‘depressed classes’ prepared by Lord Lothian in 1932. The Franchise Committee noted and classified the backward classes as those community who are untouchables and do not have the right to enter the temples, instead of considering the previous definition. Because that could create problems if high-caste put their demand for representation being ‘educationally and economically backward’ which was previously taken as the criterion of preparing the list of beneficiary communities. Therefore the demand of the Rajbansis was rejected because ‘it was clearly incompatible with their insisted demand to be recognized as twice born or kshatriyas’. Several other castes like Teli, mahishya etc. had voluntarily withdrew their names from the backward classes³⁷.

In this relation one interesting point has to be mentioned that the question of inclusion of the Rajbansis in the list of scheduled caste raised a debate within the Rajbansi community itself. The opponents argued that 'this would be inconsistent with their Kshatriya status and would lower their social dignity'. However, Panchanan Barma on behalf of the Samiti persuaded them in favour of the inclusion saying that without protection and reservation in electoral politics, education, job and administration the community will not be able to improve their social position merely by capturing on caste pride'. The Kshatriya Samiti had then appealed to the reforms officer, Government of Bengal, arguing that because of their social and political backwardness they deserved to be included in the list of depressed classes. In the meantime the name 'depressed classes was replaced by that of 'scheduled castes' by a Govt. of India resolution in 1933. Therefore in the final list of scheduled castes for Bengal, published by Bengal Reforms office, the Rajbansis were included and till today they enjoy the benefit of the system³⁸. It has to be remembered in this respect that, Panchanan Barma and Upendranath Barman, the two leading personalities of the Rajbansi community received success in their academic as well as professional life not through reservation but by their merit.

Under the act of 1935 the first general election to the Provincial Legislative Assembly was held in 1937. In this election Puspajit Barma, Kshetra Nath Singha from Rangpur, Upendra Nath Barman from Jalpaiguri-Siliguri and Premhari Barma, Shyama Prasad Barma from Dinajpur won the election as Kshatriya Samiti candidates. 'For the first time such a large number of Rajbansi leaders could win the election and this was a direct

benefit derived from the reservation of seats³⁹. In this election, out of 31 scheduled caste members 25 were independent representatives and 6 were congress nominees. As it has mentioned earlier that being influenced by the works of All India Depressed classes' Association formed in 1917, the leaders of the Bengal depressed classes formed the Bengal Jana Sangha in 1922 and in 1926 the Bengal Depressed Classes' Association was formed⁴⁰. The Rajbansi Kshatriya leaders took part in both the organizations⁴¹.

After the election, the Krishak Praja Party under the leadership of Abul Kashem Fazlul Hoq formed the ministry in collaboration with the Muslim league. It must be kept in mind that before the formation of this KPP-League ministry, Fazlul Hoq sought coalition with the Congress Party. The eminent congress leader of Bengal Sharat Chandra Bose accepted the proposal but the central Congress Committee did not support the proposal made by the leader of the Krishak Praja Party. However, this KPP-League ministry could not run long and was toppled in 1940. A new legislative party, known as the Progressive Coalition Party formed the ministry in 1941. The progressive coalition party was constituted by the Krishak Praja Party, the Nationalist Party under the leadership of Shyama-Prasad Mukhopadhyay and Independent Scheduled caste Party under the leadership of Jogendra Nath Mandal. The Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti joined with the Independent Scheduled Caste Party⁴². This second Fazlul Hoq ministry however, continued till 1943.

However, the political situation began to change in post 1937 period. The leaders of the Samiti began to disintegrate in the general election of 1946. Although disintegration arose previously at the time of Bengal Legislative

Council election in 1927 when the eminent advocate and leader Sri Kshetranath Singha and eminent organizer of the Samiti Nagendra Narayan Roy who was also advocate both applied desiring nomination from the Samiti to the west Rangpur non-Mahammedan centre. The Samiti did not give nomination to Sri Kshetranath Singha, the latter, in reaction, gave support to the Congress candidate Sri Nalini Kanta Roychoudhury. Nevertheless, in the election Nagendra Narayan Roy became the winner⁴³. But the confrontation and contention for getting nomination from the Samiti in 1946 made it weak.

In the Assembly election of 1946 in Bengal, the Rajbansi candidates won from Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur, but they did not contest as the candidates of the Kshtriya Samiti. For example Mohini Mohan Barman, a Rajbansi leader won from Jalpaiguri-Siliguri constituency with the support of the Congress, though Upendra Nath Barman himself contested from the same constituency as an independent candidate backed by the Kshatriya Samiti, he was defeated. Only Nagendra Narayan Roy won the election from Rangpur as Kshatriya Samiti member in 1946. So the 1946 election revealed the fragmentary trend of the Kshatriya Samiti. Thus the Kshatriya Samiti, once the unalterable organization of undivided North Bengal contested and won over elections against nationalist parties' viz. Indian National Congress, Swarajist Party; Communist Party etc. began to disintegrate after the election in 1937. It is contemplated by scholars that the demise of the doyen leader Panchanan Barma must had an impact for this fragmentation of the Samiti. Upendranath Barman too got Congress support and became a member of the Constituent Assembly of India⁴⁴. After the partition and independence in

1947 the Samiti lost its vigour and spirit both in the fields of social and political activities.

III

Before entering into the discussion regarding the activities of Kshtriya Samiti after 1947 we will cast our eyes over the extent of the movement that spread in the area under study. If we categorically study the spread of the movement we will see that barring Rangpur, the socio-cultural hub of the Rajbansi Kashtriyas of North Bengal, Jalpaiguri played a significant role in this respect. Because in Cooch Behar, to launch a socio-political movement was not an easy task as it was a princely state. Therefore we see that the stalwart personalities born in CoochBehar state found their centre of activities outside the state, i.e. Rangpur, Jalpaiguri etc.

Although the Kshatriya samiti movement inserted great enthusiasm among the Rajbansis all over North Bengal, the Cooch Behar Royal family remained detouched from it. Not only that the royal family maintained its non-cooperative attitude towards the movement. Opposition was made by the officials to the thread wearing ceremonies (milankshetras) held at various places in Cooch Behar. It was particularly reported in the fourth annual conference of the Kshatriya samiti that ‘in the previous year at many places in Cooch Behar, especially in Mathabhanga sub-division, there was opposition to the holding of milankshetras’. Priya Nath Ghosh, the Dewan of CoochBehar state sent an order that “in Cooch Behar the funds raised in each of the Milankshetra should be retained within Cooch Behar, no milankshetra should be arranged within the estates of Cooch Behar, the leaders of the kshatriya Samiti will be charged for offensive acts and their immovable properties confiscated if the order is violated.” Considering the

complaints made repeatedly by the members of the Samiti, it took the following resolution-“In view of the amelioration of the condition of the Rajbansys Kshatriya community of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Bogra, Goalpara and Coochbehar socially, morally, religious and educationally this assembly of the Rajbansya Kshatriyas of the Districts, most respectfully prays to His Highness, the Maharaja Bhup Bahadur of Cooch Behar in Council, to extend sympathetic help towards the movement inaugurated by the Kshatriya samiti and respectfully prays that His Highness Government be graciously pleased to issue general instruction to all its officers to take a friendly altitude towards the Samiti’s Act”⁴⁵. It is believed that Cooch Behar authority opposed Kshatriya mobility movement because Panchanan Barma and the Samiti had claimed that the ancestors of the Cooch Behar Raja were born of Koch and Mech admixture. Except the fact the Rajbansis of North Bengal did not associate themselves with the Koch and the former considered the Koches as belong to degraded caste group. Opposition rose to the extent that Panchanan Barma was banished from the State of Cooch Behar by a notice of 24 hours, though the ban was imposed for five years only, he could not enter the state during his life time⁴⁶.

According to few scholars, the Royal family of Cooch Behar State did not support the Kshatriya Samiti movement because they got fear of its character, because the reformatory measures taken by Panchanan Barma were not in favour of Royal administration. There was doubt whether the enlightened subjects would maintain the loyalty as they did⁴⁷. Not only that they looked in the movement the nature of anti-British & nationalist movement.

Whatever may be the reason either the contention with the Royal family of Cooch Behar or the opposition raised by the Bureaucrats of the State the Kshatriya Samiti could not establish its wings in the state. It is only in 1941 in a much latter phase that a separate association – ‘The Cooch Behar Kshatriya Society’ was established in Cooch Behar under the auspicious of Maharaja Jagadwipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur. The Maharaja himself was the President of the society. Not only that the Maharaja donated four *Bighas* of land and a palace at the outskirts of the town. It is interesting to note that a separate association was set up instead of opening a new branch of the Kshatriya Samiti in the State of Cooch Behar. It has assumed by scholars and researchers that generally in the princely state like Cooch Behar the Maharaja or native king was the head of all organizations and associations. Therefore on administrative ground it was not possible to open or establish wings of the Kshatriya Samiti in the State. Another factor for this indifferent response of the Rajbansis of Cooch Behar, as considered by scholars, that the disgraceful attitude of the educationally advanced and well to do Rajbansis of Rangpur towards the Rajbansis of Cooch Behar who were comparatively backward than the formers. They called the people of Cooch Behar as ‘native’⁴⁸. Therefore a psychological rift was developed between the Rajbansis of Rangpur and Cooch Behar.

This trend continued even after the independence and the merger of Cooch Behar into the Indian union. Unlike the other princely states (Tripura, Jaipur etc.) the members of the Cooch Behar Royal family did not participate into the electoral politics in post independent period. In other words they were not invited to take part in the electoral politics. Instead, the leaders of the

Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti members and Rajbansi Kshatriyas were welcomed by the provincial parties of Bengal. On the contrary, therefore, next to Rangpur Jalpaiguri became the more convenient centre of the Kshatriya Samiti Movement in the pre and post Independent period⁴⁹. Panchanan Barma gave the responsibility to spread the movement in Jalpaiguri to Upendranath Barman in 1925. Since then he worked hard for the Samiti till 1946. After defeating the election in 1946, he joined the Indian National Congress and became the member of the Constituent Assembly. Madhusadan Roy, the first president of the Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti also extended his political activities in Jalpaiguri. He had great influence upon the Samiti and it was under his untiring effort that the branch of the central Kshatriya Samiti was established in Jalpaiguri in 1927. He became the member of Union Board and also the Commissioner of Jalpaiguri Municipality. On the other hand Upendra Nath Barman was elected as the vice-chairman of the Jalpaiguri Municipality in 1931 within six years of his arrival in the district from Cooch Behar. After the partition in 1947 the Headquarter of the Rajbansi Kshatriya Samity was transferred to erstwhile East Paksitan, now Bangladesh. As a matter of fact the centre of the Samiti was shifted to Dinhata at first in 1954 and then to Jalpaiguri in 1957. Therefore Jalpaiguri became the centre of socio-political activities of post partitioned Kshatriya Samiti and Upendra Nath Barman became the central personality in this newly adopted centre till 1946.

Next to the districts of Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar State, the Rajbansis were numerous in Dinajpur. In spite of the fact, the branch of the Kshatriya Samiti was founded in the district comparatively in a later phase in 1920 at Kaugaon. In Dinajpur the renowned Kshatriya Samiti leaders

were Premhari Barman, Shyamaprasad Barman, Gobinda Chandra Roy, Harendra Nath Roy, Nabadwip Barman and others. In the Assembly election of 1937 Shyamaprasad Barman and Premhari Barman were elected in the Bengal Legislative Assembly with the nomination of Kshatriya Samiti. In the election of 1946 Harendra Nath Roy was elected. He was nominated by the Kshatriya Samiti. But this time Shyamaprasad Barman contested in the election with the nomination of Bengal Provincial Congress Party, and Premhari Barman joined the Ministry of Khaja Nazimuddin after the failure of the Progressive Coalition Ministry⁵⁰.

The Kshatriya Samiti's influence was not so vigorous in Malda. Only Gajol, Habibpur and Bamangola police stations were inhabited largely by the Rajbansis. Like the other districts of North Bengal only the Jotedars and substantial peasants supported the movement of the Samiti. In the 1937 election Tarinicharan Pramanik contested as a reserve candidate and wined the election, he was associated with the Samiti.

IV

After the Independence and Partition in 1947, initiation was taken to reorganize the Kshatriya Samiti in divided North Bengal. In this regard Upendra Nath Barman took a significant role. The partition of 1947, which deprived the community of its geographical conglomeration, resulted in a considerable amount of demographic dislocation and the final death blow to its socio-political movement. He got the assistance of a number of Rajbansi Kshatriya leaders like Umesh Chandra Mandal, Tarani Kanta Sarkar, Mukunda Mohan Singha Sarkar, Kalindra Nath Barman and others⁵¹.

The first conference of the central committee in post-independent phase was held at Dinhata in 1954. The conference was presided by Upendra Nath Barman, the renowned leader of the Samiti; it was with the toilsome efforts of a few hardworking leaders of the Samiti that it began to spread its wings in the region⁵². Among them Jatin Singha Sarkar of Tufanganj, Jajneswar Roy of Jalpaiguri, Mahendra Dakua, Sarada Prasad Pramanik , Gajendra Basunia of Mathabhanga, Surendra Nath Roy of Saptibari, Birendranath Roy Sarkar, Kalindra Nath Barman of Siliguri etc. were remarkable. In addition to the above leaders, a number of youths took a positive role in extending the activities of the Samiti. They were Dr. Bijoy Bhushan Roy, Manibhushan Roy, Harimohan Barman, Prasenjit Barman, Paresch Barman, and Mrigendra Nath Roy⁵³. The full-fledged conference of the Samiti in the post-partition period was held at Jateswar, Jalpaiguri in 1955. Again in this conference Upendra Nath Barman was the president.

V

The movement also had its limitations. They claimed their Aryan origin and strove for higher social status of Kshatriya. To fulfill their demand they followed the customs and rituals of higher caste Hindus. It is found that not only the Rajbansis the other mobile castes of Bengal like the Mahishyas, the Sadgops, the Namasudras; the Pods etc. followed the same path. Therefore no such movement made any attack to replace the existing system of social differentiation⁵⁴. But there is a fine line between the social mobility movement of the Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti of North Bengal and the movements of other lower caste groups of Bengal. That is the other movements maintained an anti-caste stand and protested vehemently against the upper caste domination, whereas the Kshatriya Samiti movement did not

raise its voice against the upper-caste domination, not even a critique was put forward by the Samiti. In contrast to the movement like Satya Sadhak Samaj in Maharashtra which radically opposed and rejected the Brahmanical authority, the Kshatriya Samiti movement sought recognition from the Brahman Pandits and Sastric sanction.

Although this newly emerging Kshatriya Samiti started its activities with full enthusiasm, it began to lose its vigour as well as spirit in course of time. The socio-political programs taken by the Samiti in the Pre-Independent period had lost its ground during Post-Independent period. Not only had that, leaving aside the political issues, it again transformed into a social organization. The resolution of the subsequent conferences proved the fact⁵⁵. The Samiti confined itself to the social reform program whereas in the pre-independent period it responded to the all India movement and contested in the electoral politics against National level political parties' viz. Indian National Congress, Swarajy Dal, Communist Party of India etc. After the partition in 1947, people of other castes infiltrated in a large number and settled as refugees which had given a fresh impetus to the caste solidarity movement in post-independent period though the nature was different. The movement however described by scholars as 'identity movement'.

The Samiti developed a close contact with the Hindu Mahasabha and had sent its representatives to its provincial conferences. It is interesting to note that at least in one or two years a few Muslims took part in the Samiti's conferences. The Samiti also referred to the need of unity among Hindus and

Muslims of local origin against the 'Bhatias' i.e. the immigrant Bengalis of lower Bengal (Bhati)⁵⁶.

It is believed by a section of the educated Rajbansis that due to the involvement of the Samiti in the electoral politics, the question of social regeneration and reawakening of the community remained incomplete. So it was an incomplete social movement. It is also believed by them that, had the Samiti limited its activities to the social issues only, the social scenario of the Rajbansis would have been different. Perhaps the opportunities in the field of education, health, economic prosperity would have increased⁵⁷. But at the same time it should be remembered that without participating in the electoral politics the reservation facilities would have been beyond the reach of the community. The negotiation regarding reservation facilities have been possible because of the representation of the Samiti in the legislative council. Because we find a number of other caste groups were too fighting for getting the reservation facilities at that time viz. Jadav (Gop), Chain etc. but could not get the same as they did not have their representatives in the legislature. But the irony lies in the fact that the participation of the Kshatriya Samiti in the electoral politics paved the way for its disintegration.

In spite of the shortcomings and limitations the work and achievement of the movement is no less significant. At that time most of the Rajbansis were embracing other faiths. The Kshatriya Samiti movement not only saved the community to exist into the Hindu faith but also 'showed them a path towards progress. Like Raja Rammohan Roy and his Brahma Samaj saved the western educated youths from either being excommunicated or embraced Christianity. Therefore the Samity played an important role in a transitional

period of the history of the Rajbansi society. The movement provided a spirit to a lassitude and frustrated community, encouraging their socio-political and economic development.

Another point has risen by a few scholars of the community that the Rajbansis were disgraced by upper caste Hindus because they could not prove their ancestral glory of Khatriyhood. Due to the lack of education, they lost their glimps and spirit. It was under the leadership of Panchanan Barma that, the reference of 'Kalika Puran', 'Bhramari Tantra', 'Bayu Purana', and Brahmavaivarta Purana etc. were cited and claim of their Kshatriya status of Aryan origin was thus proved by the leaders citing the ancient texts. That they are the descendants of such a lineage which had provided a number of powerful rulers who not only ruled over the whole of the northern region in the past but also defeated a number of powerful kings of Aryavarta viz. Magadha, Kanauj etc⁵⁸. Thus the leaders of the Samiti satisfactorily proved the legitimacy of their demand of Kshatriya status.

VI

Response of Assam to the Kshatriya Samiti Movement:-

From the very beginning the voice of Panchanan Barma regarding the Kshatriyahood of the Rajbansis was echoed by the author of 'Rajbansi Kulapradip' Harakishore Adhikari (Dhulagaon, Bangaigaon in 1315 B.S.). Moreover, this line of thinking had made an influence over the educated Rajbansis of Assam. For instance, the Zaminder of Laxmipur, Parbotjoar-Nagendra Narayan Choudhury wrote in 1945 'Prachin Kamrupor Kshatriya Jati', the eminent social thinker of Barak Valley Sri Khelendra Nath Rajbansi wrote in Bengali 'Koch-Rajbansi Dehan Itihas' (1963) and

‘Kachhar Koch Rajbangser Itihas’ (1968). ‘Koch Rajbansi Kshatriya Jatir Itibritta’ was written by Shashibhushan Faujdar. In addition to these, a number of other writings began to come out which prove the extent of influence of the Kshatriya Samiti movement of Rangpur in Assam⁵⁹.

The first Kshatriya Samiti of Assam was founded at Goalpara (*namoni* or lower Assam) in 1336 B.S. which was known as Baitamari Kshatriya Samiti at Bangaigaon, Assam. Sri Jagamohan Sarkar of Baitamai, Rameswar Choudhury of Bechimari, Shashibhushan Choudhuri of Kakoijana, Bijoy Sarkar of Talguri, Upendra Nath Choudhury of Amguri and others took the leading role in this respect. The movement of Panchanan Barma got support from the successor of Bijani Royal Family- Sri Lalit Narayan Deb, Zamindar of Parbotjoar, Laxmipur Estate- Sri Jyotindra Narayan Choudhury, the Bodo leader- Rupnath Brahma, Zamindar of Rupasi etc⁶⁰.

The first annual conference of Goalpara District Kshatriya Samiti was held in 1340 B.S. / 1933 at Bangaigaon. The conference was presided by the Raja of Sidali, Abhay Narayan Deb. Like the Kshatriya Samiti of Rangpur, here also the main objective of the Samiti was to spread education among the Rajbansis of Assam and social reform among them. In the same year the Kshatriya Students’ Conference was held at Bangaigaon near rail station⁶¹.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century there formed in Kachhar- ‘Kachhar Rajbansi Barokoch Samiti’, ‘Kachhar Jila Asomiya Rajbansi Mahasabha’, ‘Kachhar Barokoch Rajbansi Asomiya’ etc. Since the thirties, the Rajbansis of Barak Valley discarded their surnames as ‘Koch’, ‘Barokoch’ and instead, adopted surnames as ‘Rajbansi’. In the forties of the twentieth century, the ‘Kamrup Rajbansi Kshatriya Sammelan’ was founded and Sri Krishna Kumar Medhi was elected its president. Since this time, the Kshatriya Associations of Brahmaputa Valley made an influence over the

Rajbansis of Barak Valley⁶². As result a number of associations were founded and equal conferences were arranged by them.

On 31st August 1947, a special conference of Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti was held at Uttarshalmara, Bangaigaon under the President ship of Balendra Roy. In this conference the need of all Goalpara Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti was felt and thus 'Sadou Assam Koch-Rajbansi Kshatriya Sammilani' was founded (registration 1959-'60)⁶³.

It has found from the resolutions of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Rajbansi Kshatria Samiti held at Goalpara that leaders of the Samiti pleaded for enlisting the Rajbansis of Goalpara, as scheduled caste in the 1941 census. In this context it can be remembered that such demand was made by Panchanan Barma long before this conference but the leaders of Assam could not reconcile with his arguments⁶⁴.

After independence the leaders of the Rajbansi Kshatriya Samitis in Assam discarded the principle of Kshatriya identity of the Rajbansis and controversies regarding the claim of Kshatriyahood arose. A section of Rajbabansis in Assam believed that they were never Kshatriyas as they were not at all the Aryans, they were Koches. The same voice was echoed amongst the Rajbansis of Nalbari, Barpeta, Darang, Dhubri (Shalkocha). On the other hand another section of Rajbansis considered themselves as Kshatriyas and that is why the Rajbansis of Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bangaigaon, Goalpara, newly formed Buxa district etc. accepted the sacred thread and arranged for the formation of a number of Kshatriya Associations and Conferences⁶⁵.

As result the Rajbansis of Assam began to fragment as *Upabita*, *Anopabita*, *Rajbansi* and *Kshatriya*. The Karya Bibarani of Rangpur Kshatriya Samiti differentiated the society of the Koch and Rajbansi, though since the thirties of the twentieth century the Rajbansis in Assam divided the society as Koch, Rajbansi and Kshatriya⁶⁶. Their contention is that the Rajbansi Kshatriyas of Assam were basically Koch and therefore, they gradually began to separate from the ideas and principles of Rajbansi Kshatriya Society of Rangpur as well as West Bengal.

“Apart from this, the Koch and Rajbansis of Assam have formed a part of ‘All Assam backward Classes’ central committee’ formed in 1953 at Dibrugarh and the members are Mech, Koch, Rajbasi, Ahom, Kaibarta, Miri and others. There it is seen that by merging themselves with the other backward classes, the Koch Rajbansis of Assam not only receded from the Kshatriya movement which is so much upheld by the Rajbansis of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri of North Bengal but also began to demand tribal status from the Assam government. There the recognition as Kshatriyas has become subsidiary and secondary in Assam”⁶⁷. A section of Rajbansis express their pride by calling themselves as Koch.

In 1968 the ‘Sadou Assam Koch Rajbansi Kshatriya Sammilani’ had demanded tribal status for the Rajbansis of Assam. In its tenth annual conference in 1969 at Choutara, Kokrajhar district under the president ship of Lalit Narayan Deb. This conference gave utter priority to the demand of getting Scheduled Tribe status for the Rajbansis from the Government of Assam⁶⁸ which is still a continuous movement.

It has been argued by the local scholars that had the Rajbansis of Assam accepted the ideas of Panchanan Barma and Scheduled Caste status from the Colonial Government, they would have represented their better socio-economic condition at present days. It is true that the condition of Rajbansis in Assam is more poor and backward compared to their counterparts residing in West Bengal. Thus we see that the movement generated an ethnic consciousness among the Rajbansis of Assam.

Caste, Society and Politics in the Princely State of Cooch Behar (1869-1950)

So far as the study of the caste society and politics of North Bengal is concerned it needs to be mentioned that though Cooch Behar State became a district of West Bengal after 1950 it was a princely State before that. So the study of Cooch Behar in this respect is required special attention. In the previous chapter (chapter 1), under the northern portion of North Bengal, the caste society of Cooch Behar has already been discussed. So in the previous chapter we have noticed that the caste society i.e. the social structure of Cooch Behar is almost identical with the social structure of Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and to some extent with the Terai of Darjeeling. But with regard to the politics of the State it maintained a sharp distinction with the rest of Bengal. Therefore we will study here about the political condition and activities of the State till 1950. But it has to be kept in mind that even after 1950, Cooch Behar maintained its self-guided politics which was different from other parts of North Bengal till the eighties of the twentieth century when the leaders of the 'indigenous' people took initiatives to bring the people of their community to a common platform to the question of their

common identity. We will mention about the people and the society of the State as per the need of our discussion.

At the beginning of the period of our study Cooch Behar was a Princely State protected by the British Indian Government in lieu of annual tax from the State. Because long before in 1772 the Cooch Behar Kingdom was attacked by the Bhutanese force and the Koch force was humiliated with defeat. Therefore the state asked the British East India Company and sought for help. The East India Company and its Governor Warren Hastings agreed to extent military help to save the State on payment of annual tax to the Company. Thus the Bhutanese force was defeated by the combined force of the East India Company and Cooch Behar State under the leadership of Mr. Purling⁶⁹. Thus the Cooch Behar State was made a feudatory State by the Company and till August 28, 1949 it (Cooch Behar) maintained the same status under various Kings of Koch Dynasty. Amongst all the Kings the period of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan (1863-1911) is significant as a period of modernization of the State because the Maharaja took a number of initiatives to spread education amongst his subjects. He made significant contributions to the socio-economic and cultural development of the State and her subject people. Many primary and secondary schools both for boys and girls were established⁷⁰. It has already mentioned in chapter 3 that the Maharaja also established a College in the name of Queen Victoria in 1888. It was the first degree college of the then North East India. Not only that the Koch Dynasty played significant role in the growth and development of religion, language and culture of the State. They were liberal in their

religious attitude, which has been reflected by the peaceful co-existence of Saivism, Vaisnavism, and cult of Sakti⁷¹.

In order to understand the caste, society and politics of the Cooch Behar State we need to study about its demographic pattern. It has mentioned earlier that (chapter 1) the eastern side of the river Karotoya i.e. part of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar and the eastern portion of Rangpur of present day Bangladesh were under the Kingdom of Pragytishpur and Kamrup-Kamtapur. Therefore the socio-cultural and linguistic features of the people and society of this part were identical. Like in the Jalpaiguri and Rangpur districts of British Bengal in the princely State of Cooch Behar also majority people belonged to the Rajbansi Kshatriya community. Nevertheless, the situation was quite different in the State. The people of the Princely State of Cooch Behar were divided into two broad categories – Cooch Beharis and non-Cooch Beharis. Cooch Beharis meant the local Rajbansi Hindus, the local Rajbansi Muslims known as Nasya Sheikh, the Kamrupia Brahmanas i.e. Maithili Brahmanas who had settled in Cooch Behar since the time of the beginning of the Hinduization and some other low-caste Hindus such as sahas, jogis and some tribes⁷². Amongst the non-Cooch Beharis there were mainly outsiders who came into the State for the purpose of serving the State and hold different administrative posts mainly belonged to the high caste Hindus of central and eastern Bengal. A good number of the outsiders were the owner of lands and became Jotedars. Barring the Bengalis there were Marwaris who came to conduct business, Beharis who came to serve the people of the State with the advent of the British. The outsiders were called by the indigenous people as non-Cooch Beharis and particularly the Bengalis of central and eastern Bengal were called by the local Rajbansis of

the State as Bhatias i.e. the people who have come from Bhatir Desh (in terms of the course of river). The outsiders on the other hand called the local people as 'Deshi' or in some cases 'Bahe'. So, it can be said that 'a ground was prepared for socio-political conflict in the princely State of Cooch Behar'. It has to be mentioned that this Cooch Behari, non-Cooch Behari division was made and approved by the authority itself though the authority did not discriminate the subject of the State on this basis. The division was reflected in the administrative report of the State, where there was clearly mentioned the numerical strength of the students in various State funded and aided institutions as Cooch Beharis, other locals and non locals' etc⁷³. The local people here were mostly agriculturists. Amongst them there were a few jotedars, but largely small land holdes and Adhiars⁷⁴.

In order to understand the political activities of the Cooch Behar State we will study here about the system of Government and administrative structure of the State which was quite different from the British Indian territories as it was a princely state. In the State, the King (the Maharaja) was the source of all authority and power. An Executive Council (after 1942 election) was there consisted of His Highness the Maharaja Bhup Bahadur as its President; the Chief Minister of the State was its Vice-President and three other Ministers as its members. All Ministers were responsible to His Highness the president. Each Minister was in charge of a number of departments in respect of which he exercised clearly defined administrative power⁷⁵.

After the State Council election (1942), in addition to the above mentioned council, a Legislative Council was there in the State. Though the Cooch

Behar State Legislative Council was formed in 1909 during the reign of Maharaja Nripendranath Bhup Bahadur (1863-1911) but all the members there of the Legislative Council were then either official or nominated. An election system was introduced in the Council in 1941 by the Cooch Behar State Legislative Council Act (No.III) During the reign of Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur(1936-1949) and provision was made there in for direct election of eight members—two members (one Hindu and one Muhammedan) by the Jotedars of the State, one by the members of the legal profession of the State, and five members from each of the five Sub-Divisions of the State, namely Sadar, Mathabhanga, Mekhliganj, Dinhat and Tufanganj ⁷⁶. Important leaders of the local people like Satish Chandra Roy Singha Sarkar, Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmed, Ansar Uddin Ahmed, Jogendra Nath Roy, Gajendra Narayan Roy Basunia, Kumar Tikendra Narayan, Mossaraf Hossain Pradhan amongst others became members of the State Legislative Council⁷⁷.

So far as politics are concerned, political movements were prohibited in the State, therefore no political parties were allowed accordingly to propagate their ideas though there were a number of social organizations and associations emerged due to the liberal attitude of the Kings particularly during the time of Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur. Many a time the Kings themselves took initiatives to set up such organization or association and in that case the King became the President of the organizations or associations as per the tradition of the State. It has already mentioned in chapter 4 that the Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti movement under the leadership of Raisaheb Panchanan Barma had to face stiff resistance from the authority of the State. It has argued by a few scholars that the movement could not find any place

in the Cooch Behar State due to the opposition of the high caste Hindu outsiders who were holding the high administrative posts and were close to His Highness the Maharaja and his Council. According to them (outsiders, particularly the high caste Hindus), there was no concept of Kshatriyas in the Hindu social hierarchy both during pre-Colonial and Colonial period. The Hindu society was composed of the Brahmanas, the Vaidyas, the Kayasthas and the Sudras. But there was no Kshatriyas. Therefore they did not reconcile with the claim of the Rajbansis of their Kshatriyahood⁷⁸. There is however another view which mentions that the Maharaja did not allow Panchanan Barma and his movement out of fear, which according to His Highness' consideration could disturb the peace of the State and also could hurt the British Indian Government. It was long after passing 30 years of the formation of the Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti (1910) that a separate organization named Rajbansi Kshatriya Society was established in Cooch Behar in 1941 with Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur as its President. It has to be remembered in this context that no branch of the Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti was allowed to open up in the State⁷⁹. In spite of the fact, the Rajbansi Kshatriya movement of northern part of the British Bengal left enormous influence upon the Rajbansi Hindus of Cooch Behar State. Not only that they became able to get the Scheduled Caste status with the Rajbansis of British Bengal after 1932. Moreover during the forties of the twentieth century an ethno-linguistic consolidation movement was started under the banner of Hitasadhani Sabha that came into existence in 1946 in CoochBehar State. The Hitasadhani movement left significant impact over the people of adjacent areas of British Bengal, the details about the movement will be discussed later in the same chapter.

Situation began to change during the last years of the thirties of the twentieth century, particularly after the passing of the Government of India Act in 1935. In British India the first general election was held in 1937 according to the provision of the Government of India Act of 1935. The Indian National Congress formed the ministry of Governments in almost all the provinces except in Bengal and United Province. In Bengal the Krisak Praja Party in coalition with Muslim League formed the ministry⁸⁰. All these changes made a great influence over the Princely Indian States also and Cooch Behar was no exception in this respect. Therefore in Cooch Behar State the first State Council election was held in 1942. It may be assumed that perhaps on suggestion of the British Indian Government the Royal authority introduced such election programs in order to satisfy the subjects of the State. Much information about the election however is not available. It has to be mentioned that different political parties of British India had their contact with the States' people though they could not set up their branches as politics was prohibited in the State. Therefore the subject people in the State must have influenced by the secret political parties and perhaps the Royal authority wanted to check the subject people from the possibility of being divided. So His Highness the Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur took initiatives to announce for the election. Thus the first State Council election came into existence⁸¹. It is interesting to note that in the election there was neither any Election Commission nor any Ballot Box, nor any symbol of the contestants. There was only an Election Officer; Bazley Rahman S.D.O. was appointed as the Election Officer. The candidates had to collect signatures from each voter in their favour. The candidates individually had contested from the five sub-Divisions, but we do not find any representative from Mekhliganj in this election. Perhaps the candidates

from Mekhliganj contested together with the candidates of Mathabhanga sub-Division for the said election⁸².

The second State Council election was held in 1946. One Election Commission was formed at the time of this election; S.D.O. Dwijendra Mohan Sen was appointed as the Chief Election Officer. Other equipments and provisions e.g. Ballot Box, Vote Box, Symbols of the contestants etc. were also there at this election. We get the name of Sushil Chackrabarty, a lawyer from Tufanganj contested against Jogen Mandal who was a retired teacher of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Memorial High School. It is known from personal interviews taken from the onlookers of the election that both the candidates took unfair means to become elected but both the candidates got defeated⁸³. Sri Rajeswar Singh Sarkar was elected from Tufanganj and he went to the State Council. Satish Chandra Roy Singh Sarkar, a lawyer contested the election from Dinhat sub-Division against Mokbul Hossain Ahmed who was also a lawyer. Umesh Chandra Mandal from Mekhliganj contested against Sushil Kumar Chakrabarty and Mosaraf Hossain Pradhan, in the triangular contest Mosaraf Hossain Pradhan got elected, the former got the sympathy and support from the Maharaja and the British Resident. Satish Chandra Roy Singh Sarkar was appointed as Education Minister in the Council for the State. From Mathabhanga one candidate named Gajendra Narayan Basuniya went to the State Council. The most important point is that though there was no political party in the State, yet in the second State Council election Hitasadhani Sabha, an ethno-linguistic political group, took its participation. Another important thing is that all the subject people had their voting rights in the State irrespective of caste, religion, Cooch Beharis and non-Cooch Beharis etc. But other views mention that the non-Cooch

Beharis did not have any voting right except a few influential personalities who were very much closer to the Royal authority. The following persons got voting right in 1946 who were non-Cooch Beharis- Shashabinda Roy Moulik, he was a hunter and he used to go for hunting with His Highness the Maharaja; Prafulla Kumar Sarkar (Panchu Babu). He was the Secretary of the Tufanganj Town Committee; Tarapada Mukhuty, he was a Tax Collector. It is also known about him that by virtue of his profession he often acted as informer of the King⁸⁴. After the election the State Council was formed according to the following manner.

Chief Minister: Himmat Singh

Education Minister: Satish Chandra Roy Singh Sarkar

Finance Minister: Anseruddin

Revenue Minister: Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmed⁸⁵.

The influence of the Muslim leaders was noticeable in the Council as 60 per cent landowners at the time belonged to the Muslim community in the State. Another factor was that the Maharaja of the Cooch Behar State did not follow any discriminatory policy towards the minority subjects of the State. The holiday lists of the State corroborate the fact⁸⁶.

It has to be mentioned that the Hitasadhani Sabha became the most popular political group\party in the State and took a leading role in question of the merger of the State after independence because it represented the voice of the indigenous people i.e. of the Cooch Beharis. Here we will make a brief study regarding the background of the emergence of the Hitasadhani Sabha. It has already mentioned in the earlier chapter (chapter 4) that the question of Kshatriyahood claimed by the Rajbansis became an outstanding area of

confrontation between the Cooch Beharis and non-Cooch Beharis. After the census of 1891, different caste groups organized movements for the Kshatriya status throughout the country. In Bengal we found the birth of Ugra Kshatriya, Barga Kshatriya, Pundra Kshatriya, and Rajbansi Kshatriya etc. movements. During pre-colonial and early phase of colonial rule there was no concept of Kshatriyahood in the Hindu Social structure of Bengal. Therefore such movement of the Rajbansis for the recognition of their Kshatriya status from the Government resulted into the birth of a serious social tension in North Bengal and in the Cooch Behar State. Because the upper caste Hindus of lower Bengal who have settled in the Princely State of Cooch Behar and the British Bengal districts of Rajshahi Division, could not reconcile with the claims of the Rajbansis as the Kshatriyas, as because conventionally the Bengali society was composed by Brahmanas, Baidyas, Kayasthas and the Sudras⁸⁷. It has to be mentioned here that the Hindus of upper and lower Bengal residing in Cooch Behar usually did not drink water touched (Jal-Achal) by a Rajbansi. This caste-hatred and alienation rose to climax when the Rajbansi Kshatriyas had submitted a memorandum to the Government for the inclusion of the Rajbansis in the scheduled caste category status⁸⁸. As the Kshatriyahood and the scheduled caste status of the same community obviously seemed contradictory, therefore it also became an issue of social dispute between the Cooch Beharis and the non-Cooch Beharis of the State and the surrounding areas.

Another area of conflict was the language problem. It has to be kept in mind that though language problem was there it never became a serious issue till eighties of the last century. Though the language question became serious with the identity question in the post modern period yet with regard to the

language a division or a discontent was there from the very beginning. The language used by the Cooch Beharis including the Rajbansi Hindus, Rajbansi Muslims, Kamrupia Brahmanas and the other sub-castes was deshi or regional dialect derived from Kamrupi language which had been looked down by the non-Cooch Behari high caste Bengali Hindus. The High caste Hindus used to communicate with their chaste Bengali language. So there was a kind of inferiority complex on the part of the indigenous Cooch Behari people⁸⁹.

Again disparities in the economic and educational fields further accentuated the ethno-caste-linguistic antagonism in the State. Although the Maharajas of Cooch Behar particularly Maharaja Nripendra Narayan made significant contribution in introducing western and modern education in the State. But from the Administrative Reports of the State we come to know that the major portion of the opportunity of higher education was availed by the outsiders. For example, in 1940, forty-three students appeared in the Calcutta University Examination, out of whom forty-one students were Hindus and two Muslims and only seven were CoochBeharis⁹⁰. In 1942, 65 boys appeared in the University Examination. Of them 18 were Cooch Beharis (11 Hindus and 7 Muhammedans). In all 31 passed only 9 students were Cooch Beharis(6 Hindus and 3 Muhammedans)⁹¹. In addition to this the higher posts of all the educational institutions were occupied by the non-Cooch Beharis mostly by the High caste Hindus. Gradually, year after year a few students got their education and became qualified in their examinations though their number was very few. Therefore an expectation developed among these 'indigenous' educated youths of the State but failed to get their expected occupation which resulted a feeling of disparity and deprivation.

So far as the high caste Bengali Hindus was concerned they actually by virtue of their advancement became able to get Government services both in British Bengal and in the Cooch Behar State.

Like in the sphere of education, the administrative officials particularly the high officials were non-Cooch Beharis. The process of domination of the outsiders i.e. the *Bhatias* or the *Bhadralok* Benglis over the administration of the State began even before the advent of the Company's control over the administrative affairs of the State. Although we found a change in the administration during the period when Maharani Indira Devi was the President of Regency Council as the king Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur was a minor and since then the domination of the Bengalis over the administration began to reduce. Her Highness Maharani Indira Devi was in favour of appointing the high officials of the State from other parts of India⁹². The situation however changed after the coronation of King Jagaddipendra Narayan in 1936 and again Bengalization in administration took place.

The most significant area of discontent was the land question. The State Government adopted various measures to develop the agriculture of the State for enhancing the income of the State, so like other areas of north Bengal in Cooch Behar also the fallow and jungle lands were distributed to the cultivators of the outsiders in lieu of tax. This resulted in a massive change in the ownership of the land. This change was reflected in various Land Settlement Reports of the State⁹³. This change of land man ratio and ownership was a continuous process in Cooch Behar, even today this process of change is noticeable. Therefore as a result of such divergent types

of conflict, the Hitasadhani Sabha came into existence. It has argued by its leaders as well as by the Scholars that the formation of the Hitasadhani Sabha was a climax of the long-standing conflicts between the Cooch Beharis and non-CoochBeharis.

On the other hand, though political activities were banned and no political party was allowed in the State, yet political activists who were fighting for independence of India used to live in the State and many people of the State maintained relationship with them and supported their cause. In the meanwhile situation began to change rapidly in the British Indian territory also. On 20th February, 1947 the British Government announced their intention to transfer the power of British India to the Indian hands. On 3rd June 1947 The Indian National Congress and the Muslim League accepted the scheme for the partition of India⁹⁴. The Indian Independence Act was passed in the British Parliament on 18th July 1947. The question of the merger of the princely States came into forefront. The background of all these incidences must have played an important role in the emergence of Hitasadhani Sabha on 19th May 1946. Other views mentioned the foundation year of the Sabha in 1947⁹⁵. But we have noticed that Hitasadhani Sabha took participation in the State Council election of 1946 and 1949, therefore it must have founded before the election or at the time of election. Whatever may be the original year of its foundation, the most important fact is that the Hitasadhani Sabha immediately got mass popularity and support which proved the long drawn background and aspirations of the Cooch Behari people. The objectives of the organization clearly prove the underlying aspirations which proved that it was purely an ethnic based movement.

Before studying about the objectives and activities of the Hitasadhani Sabha we will mention about the leaders who were instrumental behind the formation of the Hitasadhani Sabha. Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmed was its President. The vice president was Dharani Shankar Bhattacharya, Satish Chandra Roy Singh Sarkar. The Secretary was Jaladhar Saha and Assistant Secretaries were Majir Uddin Ahmed, Kumar Purnendu Narayan, and Satish Chandra Roy⁹⁶.

It has to be mentioned here that according to the convention and practices of Cooch Behar State the king or queen or the scion of Royal family will be the head or president of all associations and organizations. This practice was followed at the time of the formation of the Desh Hitaiana Sabha in 1859 when Maharaja Narendra Narayan became its president. After the demise of the Maharaja it became the Praja Hitasadhani Sabha and Cornel C.J. Hutton became its president⁹⁷ but in case of Hitasadhani Sabha this practice was not followed. Nevertheless, it must have approved by the Royal Authority, or in other words the Hitasadhani Sabha was formed with the blessings of the king. Because without the support of the Royal authority it was not possible for the Hitasadhani Sabha to spread its wings at the grass root level within a short time i.e. from 1946 to 1949⁹⁸. After 1949 no election was held in the State and the State was merged with Indian union on 28th August 1949⁹⁹. On many occasions, the Maharaja had addressed the meetings of the Hitasadhani Sabha. Indrajitendra Narayan, a scion of the Royal Family had also delivered a speech in the meeting of the Hitasadhani Sabha at Mekhliganj¹⁰⁰.

So far as the aims and objectives of the movement of the Hitasadhani Sabha was concerned the leaders had identified as the root cause of their problems

to the deprivation of the indigenous people i.e. the Cooch Beharis in all aspects of life and with this regard they identified the outsiders particularly the high caste Hindus of central and eastern Bengal as their enemies who according to them (leaders) had encroached on their area of opportunities¹⁰¹. Therefore they aimed at attaining political power through which they could restore their privileges and establish their hegemony over the State. So sharing of political power was given priority from the very beginning of the foundation of the Hitasadhani Sabha by its leaders. Therefore they launched a severe movement against the caste Hindus and raised a slogan as 'Bhatia Hatao' (move out the Bhatias). The meeting of the Hitasadhani Sabha used to be started with an inaugural song written by Anwar Uddin the younger brother of renowned folk singer Abbas Uddin Ahmed, the content of the song was full of anti-outsider or anti-Bhatia spirit. Few lines of the song will clear the contention-

O Mor CoochBehari Bhai re

Sabar Ghare Jale Suraj Bati

Tomar Ghare Kane Andhar Rati? ¹⁰²

So an ethnic and caste based division took place in the State. Scholars of this field have mentioned that a kind of ethnic consciousness developed in this Princely State which was reflected in the election result of 1946 when Hitasadhani Sabha got noticeable majority. Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmed, the president and Sri Satish Chandra Roy Singha Sarkar the vice president of the Hitasadhani Sabha were elected and appointed as the Revenue and Education Ministers respectively¹⁰³.

In the post independent period, the political atmosphere of the State was changing rapidly. As per the Cabinet Mission Plan and the Indian Independence Act three options remained for the princely State of India, either to join with Indian or Pakistani Union or to maintain the status as independent State. The Hitasadhani Sabha, the sole mass based political organization of Cooch Behar State did not want the merger of Cooch Behar State with Indian Union, instead pro-Pakistani attitude was clear from its activities¹⁰⁴. After the birth of Pakistan the major section of the Muslim members of the Hitasadhani Sabha inclined to Pakistani identity. It has to be mentioned that the Hitasadhani Sabha from the very beginning wanted to keep status quo so far as the future fate of the Cooch Behar State was concerned, but gradually a section of its members instead of pleading for the separate existence of the State began to close to the League leaders. 'In a letter to Sardar Patel, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, wrote that the obnoxious developments in Cooch Behar State will not only affect the security of West Bengal but also of the Indian Union'¹⁰⁵. It has been said by many local scholars that the president of the Hitasadhani Sabha and the then Revenue Minister of the State Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmed encouraged the Muslim migrants of Rangpur and Mymensingh to settle in the Cooch Behar State¹⁰⁶.

In response to such activities a new kind of political development took place in the State. As there were many people in the Hitasadhani Sabha who did not subscribe to the views of the Muslim leaders and they demanded the merger of the State with India. Under the circumstances Umesh Chandra Mandal, a follower of Gandhian politics had founded 'Cooch Behar State Praja Mandal' with the help of the progressive minded people of the State¹⁰⁷.

The progressive people of the State were mostly the followers of the communist party as it has already mentioned that different political parties had been working secretly in Cooch Behar since the very beginning. The President of the Praja Mandal was Umesh Chandra Mandal and the Secretary was Ramesh Chandra Roy, a CPI worker. The Praja Mandal leaders and followers actively supported the cause of the merger of Cooch Behar with the Indian Union. 'In a memorandum dated July 20, 1948 addressed to Vallab Bhai Patel, the Vice Premier of India, the Praja Mandal alleged that the Maharaja and his pro-League Muslim Ministers as well as the Ministers who belong to the scheduled castes were hobnobbing with Pakistan¹⁰⁸. It has also been said that the Maharaja himself met Suhrawardy, the Prime Minister of Bengal and invited his opinion about the question of merger referring to the fact that his State was surrounded on three sides by the territories of Pakistan¹⁰⁹.

During this time some people of Cooch Behar State with the help of the Praja Mandal, formed a new association at Calcutta known as the 'Cooch Behar Peoples' Association'¹¹⁰. The spokesmen of the association Prof. Chunilal Mukherjee, Pulakesh Dey Sarkar, Tarapada Chakravarty, and Sailen Roy prepared a memorandum for submission to the Prime Minister of India signed by Umesh Chandra Mandal, Prof. Chunilal Mukherjee, Ramesh Chandra Roy, Satish Chandra Pal, Prem Nihar Nandi, Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Rajandra Chandra Chatterjee, Charu Mohan Bhoumik, Asmat Ali Byapari and others. The motive behind such act was to draw the attention of the intelligentsia as well as the people of Bengal and the Government of West Bengal and India. In addition to that the Cooch Behar Peoples' Association and Praja Mandal in order to create public opinion convened a

public meeting at Calcutta¹¹¹. It can be said from the above facts that there was a 'tumultuous condition' in the State regarding the fate and future status of the State.

In course of the above mentioned incidences we have noticed that the Hitasadhani Sabha wanted to exercise the power of the State and it changed its demands time to time. At the first stage the leaders of Hitasadhani Sabha demanded the merger of Cooch Behar with Assam instead of West Bengal and at this stage the Muslim faction of the Hitasadhani Sabha wanted the merger of the Cooch Behar with East Pakistan. On the other hand the Assamese Rajbansi leaders Sarat Chandra Sinha (later Chief Minister of Assam) and Purnendu Narayan Sinha wanted the merger of the State with Assam pointing out the affinity of age old culture between the two. They claimed that seventy per cent of the people of Goalpara and Kamrup i.e. western Assam belonged to the Rajbansi community¹¹². But this demand was strongly opposed by the eminent Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti leader Upendra Nath Barman who joined the provincial Congress party after 1946. The other Rajbansi leaders of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar also advocated the merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal.

A section of the Rajbansi people of both Hindu and Muslim community demanded the inclusion of the western Duars with the Cooch Behar State. They argued that before the conquest of Bhutan by British Indian Govt. the western Duars was a part of the Cooch Behar State. It was also mentioned by them that the State of Cooch Behar had long been the part of Pragyoitishpur, Kamrup or Kamtapur. Moreover the people of the western Duars ethnically and linguistically belonged to the same stock with the Cooch Beharis¹¹³. It is also a fact that the movement of the Hitasadhani Sabha left its influence over the people of western Duars and an ethno-linguistic consolidation process

had started also in the Duars portion of Jalpaiguri. But Hitasadhani Sabha was concerned only about the Cooch Beharis and the Cooch Behar State, not about the Duars, so, this kind of demand could not get any success.

In the meantime there emerged another association named 'Uttarkhanda Pradesh Sangha'. The association was formed by the representatives of different political parties of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Sikkim, and Darjeeling. The leaders of the association met at Darjeeling on 30th October 1949 and demanded the formation of a separate State comprising the above mentioned areas¹¹⁴. This demand was also opposed by the leaders of the Praja Mandal, provincial Congress party etc. who were in favour of the merger of Cooch Behar State with India¹¹⁵.

The Hitasadhani Sabha desired that the Cooch Behar State should remain as a centrally administered State as their second best choice. But this was opposed by the leaders of Congress, Leftist, Cooch Behar Peoples' Association and the leaders of Bengal on the consideration that the State is just adjacent to West Bengal and the people here speak in Bengali, their medium of instruction is Bengali and in every sphere of life they are close to Bengal¹¹⁶.

Both the Dominions of India and Pakistan were trying to get the Cooch Behar State merged within their respective territories. It has stated by scholars "Though Neheru and Patel had a kind of sympathy to the demand of the Cooch Behar people, which was reflected in the announcement of Neheru in a public meeting at Calcutta in 1949 where he announced that a plebiscite will be arranged to honour the opinion of the people of the State, yet the increasing turmoil in the State forced them to take different steps"¹¹⁷.

The Maharaja of the State also realized that it would not be possible to remain independent and he however decided to accede to the Dominion of India. Accordingly an Agreement was signed by the Governor General of India and the Maharaja of Cooch Behar on 28th August 1949 and on the basis of the Agreement the Cooch Behar State acceded to the Dominion of India and there was transfer of power from the Maharaja to the Chief Commissioner of the State V.I. Nanjappa on 12th September 1949¹¹⁸. It must be kept in mind that Sardar Vallab Bhai Patel, then Minister of Home Affairs and States, Government of India played a very important role to merge the State with Indian Union as in case of other princely Indian States. Thereafter, the Government of India Ministry of Law, issued a notification No. SO.28 dated 31st December 1949 and by virtue of this notification the Cooch Behar State since centrally administered merged as a district of West Bengal on 1st January 1950¹¹⁹. Satish Chandra Roy Singha Sarkar joined the Cabinet of Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, the Chief Minister of Bengal, as a Deputy Minister of Transport and Communication On the other hand Umesh Chandra Mandal, the leader of the Praja Mandal was also inducted by Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy in his Cabinet as a minister¹²⁰. After some time the Hitasadhani Sabha was disbanded and four Muslim leaders of Hitasadhani Sabha named Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmed, and others went to Pakistan from Cooch Behar and many leaders along with Gajen Basuniya were arrested¹²¹. Thus the Hitasadhani Sabha was almost disintegrated and thus its power struggle was ended.

It is clear from the above discussion that, the political history of Cooch Behar State was entirely different from that of British Bengal districts of North Bengal. Not only during the colonial period has it maintained its

different ness even in the post independent period too. During the eighties of the twentieth century a separate identity movement has started in Coch Behar which is however beyond the period of our study.

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CHAPTER- 5

SOCIAL AND CASTE STRUCTURE OF THE HILL REGION OF NORTH BENGAL DURING COLONIAL RULE

I

The hill region is constituted by the three sub-divisions of Darjeeling district viz. Darjeeling or Sadar sub-division, Kurseong and Kalimpong sub-divisions. The hilly portion is the northern most region of North Bengal. Geographically, historically, culturally and ethno-linguistically this region maintains a clear distinction compared to the fourth sub-division of the district of Darjeeling i.e. Siliguri sub-division or Terai region as well as the other parts of North Bengal. It is due to this fact we will study the social and caste picture of the region in a brief manner.

The creation of Darjeeling was completed in 1866. The cession of 'Darjeeling' area from the Raja of Sikkim on February 1835 at the 'repeated and prolonged persuasion of the British Government' gave rise to the foundation of Darjeeling town and the District, which was then associated with only a village¹. Further annexation was made in 1860 as a result of the 'fighting' with the Sikkim Raja which was followed by the annexation of territory in the hills and added to the Darjeeling tract, thus brought the boundaries to the Nepal frontier on the Terai was also added (the social and caste picture of the Terai region has already discussed in chapter – 1). Lastly under the treaty of November 1865, Kalimpong was ceded from Bhutan and it came to the hands of the British Indian authorities. The ceded territory was placed under the Deputy Commissioner of the western Duars. In October 1866 it was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Darjeeling district, thus in this way the shape of present day Darjeeling district was completed².

Geographically the hilly portion of North Bengal is entirely different from that of the other parts of it. It is mentioned earlier that (chapter – 1)

geographically and historically this region bears a distinct background and characteristics. Ethno-linguistically the hilly zone was connected with the sub-montane countries viz. Tibet, Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan etc.

It is said that when the British first acquired this hill territory in 1835, 'it was in fact estimated that the whole of the tract comprising 138 sq. miles contained only 100 souls'³. There were about 100 Lepchas in and around present Darjeeling town, about two thousand Lepchas in the Kurseong-Mirik area and about three to four thousand Lepchas and Bhotias in the Kalimpong area. Therefore it can be said that prior to the establishment of the British colonial rule, the area was entirely under forest and most of the area was uninhabited and the Lepchas and Bhotias were the early inhabitants of this part. Like the western Duars of North Bengal, in this hilly portion also migration in a significant way took place during the British rule. The migration increased so phenomenally that within a span of thirty four years namely between 1835 and 1869, tremendous growth of population took place in the region. One thing has to be mentioned in this regard that the major portion of the migrants were Nepalese. According to 1941 census, Nepal provided 45 percent of migrants to India. According to 1961 census the number of migrants per 100 persons over the period between 1931 and 1961 averaged around 35 persons in the hill areas of Darjeeling⁴. So it can be said that after the formation of the district, migration increased in a considerable extent resulted in the emergence of a new era in the history of this region.

II

In order to understand the caste society of the hill region, we must study the courses and causes of migration that took place during the British rule which is still in a continuing process. Without studying the causes of migration it will not be possible to make a clear concept of the caste picture and social composition of the region. Because unlike other parts of Bengal, the society of the hill areas was absolutely an immigrants' society which had similarity only with the Western Duars of Jalpaiguri district and Sylhet and Kachar districts of Assam so far as migration was concerned, but the composition of the society had been different.

Before entering into the study of the caste and society of the hilly region we will cast our eyes over the factors that promoted the cause of migration. Firstly, the introduction of tea plantation economy and its unprecedented boom during the eighties of the nineteenth century paved the way for immigration of people into the region from Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim etc neighbouring countries⁵.

Secondly, the development of hill resort and sanatorium in the hilly zone gave an opportunity to the immigrants from outside to take part in the process of development⁶.

Thirdly, Darjeeling was situated as a gateway of business between India and Tibet, Nepal and China etc. conducted by the British Govt. of India. Moreover, the hill of Darjeeling was part of the Sikkimese Kingdom. Therefore a bulk of migrants from Nepal, Sikkim, Tibet and China entered and began to settle in this part during the British rule. One thing must be

remembered in this context that Tibet had trade relations with Bengal prior to the establishment of British rule and the staying of a few Tibetans on temporary basis was a natural phenomenon⁷.

Fourthly, the development of transport and railway communication gave another impetus to migration. The Darjeeling Himalayan railways were constructed in the second half of the nineteenth century (1866-1881), the P.W.D. work of construction and maintenance of roads, the management of the forests and other such works grew considerably in course of time which demanded a huge strength of manual labour. The early settlers viz. Lepchas, Bhutias and Tibetans were less willing to do this hard physical work. Therefore the British Govt. encouraged migration to meet the requirements by providing a number of facilities to them⁸.

Fifthly, the Anglo-Nepal war (1814-16), confrontation with Sikkim and the Bhutan necessitated the establishment of military cantonment to keep watch on the boundaries of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. The establishment of military cantonment in the hills of the region provided opportunities to the immigrants to get job in the military services as well as other services of maintaining such establishment⁹. It is clear that almost all the developments took place in the hills depending entirely on the labour of migrants, as the area was sparsely populated and the earlier settlers did not show any interest to participate in such activities. Thus we see that various factors necessitated migration into the region.

Sixthly, it is said that each European settled in the hills required a number of porters. During seasonal migration of the British officials a huge number of porters were required. In order to get this service the migration was encouraged and the Govt. recruited them to such services¹⁰.

III

Here we will study about the various caste groups as well as the social structure of the hill region. It has already mentioned that the major portion of the migrant population was the Nepalese. Other important caste groups among the migrants were Bhutia, Tibetan, Chinese etc. and the earlier inhabitants of the region were the Lepchas. Thereafter the Limbus came and settled. Along with the above mentioned hill men, there were a significant number of plain people. Among the Plainsmen Hindus, mostly of them were Bengalis, a good number of Marwari's, Hindustanis, a few Muslims were the inhabitants in the hills. A few Europeans were also there during colonial period that constituted a part of the hill society¹¹.

Lepchas :

The Lepchas were the original inhabitants of the district. According to the Lepcha tradition their original homeland was a place called '*Mayal*' which was situated in an inaccessible valley of a mountain that is normally known by its Tibetanized name as Kanchenjunga¹². According to another tradition, which perhaps developed later under the influence of Lamaist Buddhism, the place of the origin was holy mountain Kailash (ti-se). It is found in the Gazetteer of A.J Dash that 'when the British first acquired Darjeeling it was then reported that they formed two-thirds of the population of Sikkim. They were not very numerous in the hills of Darjeeling, near about 100 Lepchas were there at the time of British annexation of the area'. They were basically cultivators.

O'malley mentioned that 'at the time of 1872 census there were only under 4000 Lepchas in the district, where as at the census of 1901 their numbers were found to be nearly 10,000. He further mentioned that they are not as prolific as the Nepalese; their numbers are indeed practically the same as in 1891. They got intermarried with other races, especially with the Limbus and Sikkim Bhotias, who stood higher in the social scale and in this way they (Lepchas) contributed to their self-effacement'¹³.

The Lepchas were divided into two branches – Rong and Khamba. The former claims to be original inhabitants of Sikkim, while the Khamba are believed to have migrated some 250 years ago from the kham province of China¹⁴.

Limbu :

The Limbus are believed to have migrated from the eastern part of Nepal. They belonged to the Kirati group¹⁵. According to Risley they are the descendants of early Tibetan settlers. It is believed by the Limbus that they came from Kashi or Benaras. Whatever may be the exact history of their origin it can undoubtedly be said that they were the ancient inhabitants of Darjeeling and a number of scholars have traced their origin as Mongoloid¹⁶. Though they consider themselves as a military race, they were not ranked among the regular fighting tribes of Nepal¹⁷. Prior to 1887 most Gorkha regiments enlisted the Limbus but after the formation of two Eastern Nepal Gurkha Regiments they together with Rais were enlisted exclusively in the Eastern Nepal Regiments of the Gorkha Brigade¹⁸. They did trade and agriculture too. The Limbus was divided into thirteen endogamous sub-tribes, each of which was again sub-divided into a number of exogamous

groups¹⁹. With regard to the religion, they were the followers of Buddhism. In this respect they maintained their distinctiveness from other faiths.

Tibetan:

It has already mentioned that Tibet had a profound influence over the region from time immemorial. Buddhist Lamas came into the region along with Sikkimese territories to spread the lessons of Buddhism among the hill men. They also encouraged education to these people to chant the Tibetan texts of Buddhism. Moreover, long before the establishment of the British rule in the region the Tibetans controlled the major portion of Indo-Tibetan trade. The important centre of trade was Kalimpong before 1864-65²⁰. Therefore the migration of Tibetans took place through the religious and trade relations. Before the advent of the British there remained a good number of Tibetans at the time of the development of habitation in this part and there was much influence of the Tibetans over the Lepchas of Darjeeling and Sikkim²¹. . Thus at the time when the British intervened politically into the region there was already established the domination of Tibetans including Bhutanese in the area over the aboriginal Lepchas²².

Bhutia :

The Bhutias of Darjeeling consisted of four classes 1) Sikkimese Bhutias are a mixed race descended from Tibetans who settled in Sikkim some centuries ago and inter married with Lepchas. 2) Sherpa Bhutias or Bhutias of Nepal who came from East or North-East of Nepal. There was a minor sub-division among them called Kagate. They were also called Kagate-Sherpa as they were engaged in paper making when they first came in Nepal from Tibet. 3) Drukpa Bhutia or Bhutias of Bhutan and 4) Bhutias of Tibet or Tibetans²³.

Nepalese: There are a number of sub-castes among the Nepalese viz. Khambu, Newar, Rai, Tamang, Gurung, Manger, Sherpa, Sunuwar, Yakha and others. Here we will discuss about few important caste groups of the hill region.

Khambus :

The most numerous group among the Nepali castes inhabited in the hills are the Khambus. Their original home was in Eastern Nepal²⁴. It is observed by a few scholars that the term was originally geographical and was applied to a race of aboriginals which according to Newar tradition came into Nepal from the east that is from Tibet²⁵. Another name applied to them was Kiranti. It is also a geographical term applied to all the races i.e. Limbus, Yakhas as well as Khambus, living in Kirat, a tract in the east of Nepal which is bounded by the river Dudh Kosi on the West and by Arun or the Tambar River on the east²⁶. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has mentioned the people living in the mountains, particularly the Himalayas and in the North Eastern areas of India were of mongoloid origin²⁷, so it can be derived from this delineation that the Khambus are Mongoloid by their origin. They claim that they were one of the fighting groups i.e. Jimdars and bear the kiranti title of Rai, Subba etc. So far as their religion is concerned, Risley mentioned that the Khambus like other many Nepali castes enrolled in Hinduism and their ancestral religion was Buddhism²⁸. Landowning and cultivation were their traditional occupation, but a certain number of them adopted military service and entered Gorkha regiments under the title of Rai.

Murmis :

The Murmis claimed to be among the earliest settlers of Nepal. So far as their origin is concerned, Risley said that 'their exogamous divisions bear, Tibetan names seem to lend support to the opinion that they are descended from a Tibetan stock modified more or less by intermixture with Nepalese race'²⁹. According to Col. Dalton, the Murmis were a nomadic and pastoral branch of the Bhotias, who had an alliance with the Nepalese³⁰. They had exogamous society. A few of them were believers of animism. But most of them were Hindus by religion. It is believed that Buddhism was declined from their religious believing and practices. They were basically agricultural cultivators; many of them however served in the police and in the British Army and a very large proportion in the hills of the district of Darjeeling were employed as labourers in the tea gardens³¹. So it can be said that they were the believers of Buddhism and gradually adopted Hinduism.

Sherpa:

The Sherpas had their original home in North-Eastern Nepal. They were the descendants of Tibetan race³². In Tibetan language the term Sherpa means the inhabitants of the East. They also have a number of sub-groups. Their language is Tibetan. According to scholars they are of Mongolian origin³³. By religion they were the believers of Buddhism. According to the census of 1941 their number was 6,929 in Darjeeling; Risely mentioned them as a section of the Murmis in Darjeeling. Till 1951 the Sherpas enlisted their names as mountaineers in Darjeeling. Thereafter they continued their activities from Nepal.

Khas :

The Khas or khasas who had the surname of Chhetri was one of the three dominant warrior groups of Nepal (other to were the Mangars and the Gurungs), which had overthrown the Newar dynasty in 1769³⁴. They were regarded as an Indo-Aryan groups and it finds mention in many ancient Sanskrit texts along with other frontier tribes living in the North-Western periphery of Indian sub-continent. They were referred to as degraded Kshatriyas in Manusmriti³⁵. In 1941 there were 25941 Chhetris in the district. According to A.J. Dash, 'they were probably a large admixture of Aryan blood and their language which is acquired from the Brahman and Rajput refugees has now become the Nepali of current use'³⁶.

Tamangs :

Tamangs were a Mongolian or semi-Mongolian group of people, who claim to be among the earliest settlers of Nepal. It is believed by a few scholars that they were probably descended from a Tibetan stock modified by intermixture with Nepali race³⁷. They basically followed Buddhism as their religion, though a few of them became the followers of Hinduism in the later phase. They were found in a large number in tea gardens. They were also recruited in the Gorkha regiments. According to Risley, they were a thar or Sect. of Murmis in Darjeeling. The term is sometimes used to denote the whole caste³⁸.

Gurung :

The Gurungs were a nomadic pastoral race of Nepal. They helped in 1769 to overthrow the Newar dynasty and Gurungs of Nepal were recruited to

combatant rank in Ghokha battalions. They were divided into two endogamous sub-castes and a number of Sects³⁹. The caste was once Buddhist and became Hindus during the early British period. A few of them still profess animism which they professed before their conversion to Buddhism. The Gurungs are well distributed throughout the district and a large number of them had been recruited in the tea gardens in the hills.

Mangar :

Nothing can be said specifically regarding the origin of the Mangars. According to their own tradition “they came from Bokim a land behind Nepal some where in Tibet.”⁴⁰ It is generally believed that they are the descendants of Mongolian people. The Mangars are found throughout the district wherever there are Nepalese. They were one of the three dominant warrior castes as mentioned earlier in Nepal, who overthrew the Newar dynasty. As per their religion Risley said that ‘the religion of the Mangars may best be described as lax Hinduism tempered by survivals of an earlier animistic cult’. Agriculture, trade and sold-earing had been the chief occupation of the Mangars⁴¹.

Newar :

The Newars ruled in Nepal until 1769, when the dynasty was overthrown by Khasas, Mangars and Gurungs. It is said by a few scholars that they were the early settlers of Austric origin⁴². ‘The Newars are a highly intermixed group both religiously and racially. There are hindu and Buddhist newars and racially they are drawn from the Abhiras, the Kiratas, the Lichhavis, the vaishya Thakuri and the Karnatakas’, apart from the fact that there might have been some ethnic group which provided the foundation for the present

Newar type⁴³. It is difficult to say, however, who had been the forerunners of the present Newars. They were recruited in the Gorkha regiments. They were numerous in tea areas of the sadar and Kurseong sub-divisions and in the Kalimpong Khasmahal areas⁴⁴.

Nepali Brahmans:

The Nepali Brahmans in the hill are of Indian origin. It is said that the Brahmanas along with some Rajputs from Kanauj, Chittore and some other Places of Northern and Western India came to the Western hills of Nepal during twelfth century when they were dislodged by the Muslim invasions⁴⁵. The Nepali Brahmans were fairly numerous in the hills of Darjeeling. According to the census of 1911 their number was 8,999 in the area. No Nepali Brahmans were recruited in the Gorkha regiments. They inhabited largely in the Khasmahals in Kalimpong sub-division.

Sanyasis : They had the surname as Giri. The fact is their number was very few compared to other Nepali castes migrated into the areas of Darjeeling. They were also recruited in the British army⁴⁶. Their number was 1,335 in 1941.

Kamis, Damis, Sarkis :

The Kamis were blacksmiths and recruited in the Gorkha regiments as armourers. They were quite numerous in the district. They are found in all areas in the hills but are particularly numerous in towns, on tea estates and in the Kalimpong khasmahals. They were regarded as 'untouchables'⁴⁷. They have Aryan features and considerable cultural affinity with the Brahmans and Chhetris.

The Damis belonged to the Tailor caste and were recruited to Gorkha battalions only as 'darzis'. The word 'Damai' is derived from the word Damaha which is the chief musical instrument of those people.

The Sarkis were leather workers and were recruited to Gorkha regiments only as such. "Exact origin of these occupational castes is obscure as is that of their counterparts among Newars⁴⁸". All the three above mentioned castes were regarded as 'untouchables'. Among these three caste groups the Kamis seem to be numerically the most dominant. Their total population in Darjeeling was 16,272 in 1931 while the Damis had only 8,162 and the Sarkis 2778 in the same year and place. All the three groups had been enrolled as scheduled caste category in 1956.

Ghartis :

They were considered the descendants of freed slaves⁴⁹. According to the 1941 census their number was 2,393 persons. Risley mentioned them as a section of Kamaras and a sub-group of Mangars etc⁵⁰. Among the various caste groups, the most numerous lower castes were the Kamis, Damis, Sarkis and Ghartis.

Sunuwars : They were a cultivating race who were originally hunters and recruited from Nepal to combatant rank in Gorkha regiments. They are also of mixed origin. According to Chemjong they migrated from Tibet in more than one groups and settled in Nepal via Kashmir, the Brahmaputra river region etc.⁵¹ Regarding their caste rigidity Risley mentioned that 'though in theory the sunuwars were a strictly endogamous group, intermarriage with Mangars and Gurungs is tacitly recognised'⁵².

Yakhas :

The Yakhas are regarded as Kirata, non-Aryan like the Limbus, Rais etc. They were an agricultural caste group calling themselves Diwan. They came from the same area of Nepal as the Rais and Limbus. They were also recruited in the Gorkha regiments. Like the Giri. They are not numerous in the district⁵³.

Bhujels :the Bhujels were originally slaves in Nepal. Their status had improved and during the First World War some of them had been recruited in the Gorkha regiments. Their social and religious activities indicate a mixed origin⁵⁴. In 1941 their number was 5,816 in the district. Risley mentioned them as a thar or sect of Mangars in Darjeeling.

Yogis :

It is found in the census of 1941 that the Yogis were 454 in number in the hills of Darjeeling. A J. Dash observed that the Yogis are not strictly a caste or tribe but only a group of those who have taken to a religious life.

It has to be kept in consideration that all the above mentioned caste groups had a number of sub-divisions. Moreover there emerged a number of new mixed castes as a result of the inter-caste marriage in the hill areas of the district.

Although Neplai castes are divided into a number of 'parts' which is treated by scholars as 'whole' which can hardly be ignored to understand the society, yet what is interesting is that after their migration in the hill the

Nepalese had thrown out their traditional caste rigidity or in other words, they had to adjust to the new social, economic and political environment of the region⁵⁵. Perhaps due to this reason they compelled to lose their adherences to the tradition. Therefore the nuances of interrelationship with the society gradually had shaped into a new structure. As it is well known that migrants in everywhere themselves create a new society with significant characteristics, in which inter-caste marriage and relations not only provide scopes for social mobility but also for the emergence of a number of new mixed castes though each of them try to maintain their own socio-cultural identity with adequate laxity. The caste structure of the Nepalese society is therefore as follows:-

High Caste: Brahman, Thakuri, Chhetri etc.

Middle Caste: Newar,Rai, Limbu, Yakha,Tamang, Manger,Gurung, Bhujel, Sunuwar,Sherpa, Yalmu etc.

Low caste: Kami, Sarki,Dami etc.

Others: Lepcha, Bhutia, Dukpa,Marwari, Bihari etc⁵⁶.

There was also a significant diversity among the plains people who came to the hills to grab the benefits of the developments of the area during British rule.

Bengalis came in the hilly zone with the establishment of British administration and the introduction of tea plantation economy in the district. They basically served the intellectual needs. As they picked up the opportunity of English education and knowledge in English language, they obtained the posts of officials, clerks, supervisors etc, in various offices and institutions⁵⁷. But gradually with the emergence of middle classes the

Nepalese too took their position in the Govt. services. Even after independence the Bengalis were numerous there in several Govt. and non-Govt. services, but gradually with the emergence of the Nepalese as part of middle class they found their places in Govt. services as they had the equal zeal for obtaining English education⁵⁸. It is found that the number of Bengalis in services in the hills gradually decreased, though there were other factors too behind this change which is not the concern of our study. Nevertheless, it can undoubtedly be said that the Bengalis migrated in the hills with the establishment of the British rule as part of their administration either before the migration of the Nepalese there or at the same time they immigrated in the region. The numbers of the Bengali speaking people in the district as shown in various censuses are not unambiguous. In 1891, Bengali was stated to be the mother-tongue of 47435 people, in 1911, 45,985 and in 1931-37444. The consecutive census reports revealed the gradual decline in the number of Bengali speaking people in the hills. Among the Bengalis there were a number of castes in the hills.

Apart from the Bengalis, the Marwaris and Upite Hindustani mechanics also migrated in the hill areas. The Marwaris conducted trade and commerce after the establishment of the British rule there. A considerable number of Hindustanis of United province, Bihar etc. also migrated to serve as mechanics and other services in various activities initiated by the British Govt⁵⁹.

In the hill area, Muslims were very few and mainly found in the towns with a relatively small number in semi-urban areas. According to the census of 1901 the Mohammedans formed less than 4 percent of the total population

of the district⁶⁰. Most of them had been the residence of the Terrai where many of the aboriginal Koches, Mechas Rajbansis etc. had embraced Islam. The census reports of 1941 showed that the number of Muslims in the district of Darjeeling was 8728.

Linguistic Distribution of Population⁶¹

Language	% to total Population
Nepalese (Khaskura)	21.00
Bengali	17.00
Jimdar	14.00
Murmi	10.00
Hindi	6.50
Limbu	5.00
Manger	4.00
Other Neplai language	5.00
Lepcha	4.00
Bhotia	4.00
English	1.50

Growth of Population in the hill areas of Darjeeling

1872	—
1881	92141
1891	150311
1901	173342
1191	189.763
1921	206961
1931	239377
1941	286355

1951	328785
1961	41,109
1971	479978

Source: Relevant censuses.

IV

So far as religious beliefs of the people in the hill region is concerned. Hinduism from India and Buddhism from Tibet and India had influenced the religious life of the inhabitants of the hills. Most of the people in the hills are believers of either Hinduism or Buddhism. It is mentioned in the writings of A. J. Dash in his district Gazetteer that generally the tribes (Lepcha, Bhotia, Tibetans etc.) were Buddhists and others (Nepali, Marwari, Hindustani, Bengali, Hindus etc.) were Hindus.

Among the tribes a few have been the believers of animism. It is evident that a good number of people who migrated into the district from Nepal were Buddhists as there was also migration from Tibet took place in Nepal long before the advent of British in this region. But Hinduism had become triumphant over them who migrated into the hills of Darjeeling and became permanent settlers and many of them embraced Hinduism. Overall the society of the Nepalese was and is Hindu by religion. It has to be noted that Hinduism gradually spread at the expense of Buddhism. Because the religion of the early settlers viz. Lepcha, Bhotia, Tibetan and even the lower caste group people of the Nepalese was Buddhism. Even among the Lepchas, Bhotias and Tibetans Hinduism had left its influence, though generally they are Buddhists by their religious beliefs and practices. It is evident that before

the advent of the British, the Buddhist monks and priests from Tibet had a regular contact with the people of the region and they conducted education to the inhabitants for preparing them able to chant Tibetan and Buddhist religious texts. But gradually with the migration of heterogeneous communities, races etc. particularly the Nepalese influence of the priests over common people perhaps reduced and thus Hinduism found its ground to develop and spread⁶². It has mentioned by O'Malley in his District Gazetteer that even after being embraced Hinduism, the Nepali Buddhists made their contributions to the Buddhist monasteries. Moreover, there was no deep cleavage between the two sects i.e. Hindus and Buddhists. Therefore popular religions in the hills were both Hinduism and Buddhism. The migrant Nepalese were Hindus and the aboriginal inhabitants' viz. Lepcha, Limbu, Tibetan, Bhotia etc. were Buddhists by their religious beliefs. In Kalimpong sub-division, Buddhist Monasteries were more numerous and it was here in the district that Buddhist culture had survived most strongly.

Buddhism however was gaining ground. The adherents of Buddhism had increased. The greatest numerical change in the Buddhist group of the hills of Darjeeling was caused by the influx of Bhutia migrants⁶³. It is mention worthy that the Limbus are Buddhists and in this respect they maintained their distinctiveness from other faiths.

The religion of the most plains men was Hindu. Although Hinduism and Buddhism were the main religions of the region, there were also a good number of Christians in the hill of Darjeeling. The Christianity was spread at first under the endeavour of missionaries. It is found from the 1941 census

that there was an Indian Christian Association which claims that there were at that time about 12000 Christians of local origin in the District, most of whom were of Nepali races. In this context one thing has to be taken into account that the converted Nepali, Lepcha etc. Christians from the very beginning availed the benefits and facilities provided by the British Govt. compared to the Nepali Buddhists or Hindus. In this respect the work of Mr. William Macfarlane is considered remarkable. He actually became succeeded in converting over 600 persons into Christianity before his death in 1887⁶⁴. It is already mentioned that a few people were found who retained their faith in animism.

V

If we study the courses of migration during British rule we will find that major portion of the migrants were Nepalese and in course of time there developed a strong overwhelming Nepali domination through the language over the society and culture of this adopted land. Here we will try to find out the reasons as to why such domination took place in the society and culture of the region. Though it was not caste domination, it was a cultural and linguistic domination over the hill people that established during this time. In this respect one point must be kept in mind that the British Govt. took an active role in bringing the Nepalese in the hills of Darjeeling⁶⁵. There were a number of factors directly or indirectly promoted the cause of the migration of the Nepalese and their gradual uplift in the region.

The Govt. preferred to recruit the loyal, obedient and laborious Nepalese in its military battalion. It was found in the subsequent period that the Gorkha

soldiers fought for the company and later on for the British Govt. in and outside the sub- continent. There was separate Gorkha Regiment in the British Govt.'s Army. There were about 11000 Gorkhas in the thirteenth battalion. There were Gorkhas in the Kashmir Imperial service infantry, Naga Hills Force, Surma Valley military police and Barma police etc⁶⁶. After retiring from the military services almost all the Gorkha ex- soldiers had been provided lands to settle in the hilly areas of Darjeeling, on the other hand, there was a minimum scope of job opportunities in the economic activities of Nepal. Agriculture was traditional and with the growing population pressure on land increased, therefore the people preferred to migrate to the hills of Darjeeling and joined the services offered by the British govt. to maintain their livelihood.

Another point is that at the beginning of the establishment of the British rule in Darjeeling, the owners of most of the lands were the Maharajas of Cooch Behar, Burdwan and other Zamindars of Bengal. The British Govt. took possession of the estates during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and gradually turned them into Khasmahal settlements. Not only that the Govt. enacted laws in favour of the retired Gorkha soldiers who served long in the British defense regiments one of such laws converted the district as non-regulated district i.e. the district will be governed directly by the Governor, therefore no laws, rules or regulations of the legislative council could be applicable in the district. More over there was imposed bar on land- selling during this time. The fact was that except the hill people no other (non- hill people) could buy lands in the district. They could acquire land only on lease basis. As most of the land in the district was under khasmahals, therefore the owner of the land was Govt. itself. The British Govt. gave those lands to the

retired Gorkha soldiers. The land laws which were introduced by the British Govt. in other parts of India were not applicable to the hill areas. It was almost impossible for the upper caste Hindu money lenders or others to buy the lands from Nepalese. The laws regarding the transfer of land from the Nepalese to other groups were made extremely stringent. Therefore, the Nepalese did not have fear of alienation to the rich upper caste money lenders of the plains. The Nepalese formed nearly 84 percent of the khasmahals' population in the hill. Thus in this way with the help of the British Govt. another colony was established by the Nepalese in the hills who became socio- culturally the most dominant caste group there⁶⁷.

The establishment of the plantation economy necessitated a large number of labourers to run it properly. The plainsmen, who also immigrated there, were more interested in trade and intellectual works rather than serving as labourers in the gardens. On the other hand the British and European planters saw that the Lepchas were reserved and slow and the Bhotias were unwilling to do manual works, they decided to bring the Nepalese to the hills to work as labourers who were thrifty and laborious than the aboriginal Lepchas. As the British started deforestation and plantation of tea simultaneously, the Nepalese also worked as landed labourers. The preponderance of the Nepalese in this population can be understood from the fact that 'Ninety percent of the labour employed on tea estates in the hills is Nepali and language used on them is Neplai'⁶⁸. In Kalimpong also there was no Nepali at the inception of the British rule, but the original settler's viz. the Lepchas, and Bhotias were not as good in manual labour as was required to effect an overall improvement of the area. Naturally the Nepalese served

the need and had began to settle in the region in a large number with the passage of time.

Another factor that helped the development of a consolidated Nepali culture was the introduction of English education and the advent of the printing press. We see that the development of Western education and growth of public opinion helped much to emerge a strong domination of the Nepalese in the socio-cultural life of the hills of North Bengal. In this field also the British Govt. and Christian Missionaries played an important role. The Christian missionaries were the pioneer to introduce modern education in the hill area. The Church of Scotland mission did much to the development of primary education in the district. The British Govt. and the Missionaries in course of introducing Western education among the Hillmen preferred to take Nepali as the language or medium of instruction as it was very close to the language Hindi. Moreover, they found that 'even the Lepcha, Bhotia and Tibetans also picked up the language very quickly'⁶⁹.

In addition to that during the last quarter of the nineteenth century a lot of papers and periodicals were published in the hill area regularly, which espoused the cause of social awareness and socio-cultural development of the hill people. For instance the newspaper & journal 'Khabar Kagat (1901) edited by Ganga Prasad Pradhan actively covered the social issues and activities of the common people along with publishing missionary activities. The main concern of the journals published between 1912-1939 was investigation to different aspects of Nepali society, culture and language etc. It also propagated the cause of education for women and advocated for a

radical change in social outlook. One association named *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* founded in 1924 had done much to spread the influence of Nepali literature and culture in the hills and with this object published books also. Another newspaper and journal was 'Chandrika'. It published from 1918 under the editorship of Parashmani Pradhan, who was a renowned social worker. It played a significant role for the growth and development of modern Nepali literature. Parashmani Pradhan was an active campaigner for the growth and development of Nepali language and literature. He was first concerned with controversies surrounding the issue of standardization and later made great effort to obtain official recognition of Nepali as a major literary language from the Govt. of west Bengal in 1961 as well as Government of India. In this connection it will not be irrelevant to state that the language Nepali got the status of official language in the hill subdivisions of Darjeeling by The West Bengal Official Language Act 1961. A number of associations were cropped up during this time which promoted the cause of caste solidarity among the Nepalis. Thus it can be said that with the development of modern education, press and publications etc. a strong domination of the Nepalese in the hill society of Darjeeling was developed⁷⁰.

The Nepalese themselves were eager to improve their condition; they did not confine themselves working in the tea gardens and other manual working fields. Like the Bengalis they were equally anxious for the Govt. Services by obtaining education. By virtue of their knowledge in English language the Nepalese soon began to contend for various Govt. services in the hills which had been enjoyed by the Bengalis till then. So from tea gardens to railways, road communications, from education to Govt. services in every aspect they

stood in forefront in the hills, resulted in the emergence of a strong and overwhelming domination of the Nepalese as a distinct caste group in the hill region.

In the decade between 1891 and 1901, the total number of immigrants to India from Nepal was 243037. 'It is mentioned in an article written by Manas Dasgupta and Abdus Samad that in between 1869 and 1901 the Nepali population increased by eight times and in between 1881 and 1941 the Nepalise increased by about three times'. The censuses of 1911, 1921 and 1931 reported Nepalese migrants into India as 280,217, 273,932 and 327,828 respectively⁷¹. The major portion of the migrants had settled in Darjeeling .W.W.Hunter in his 'A statistical Account of Bengal' vol. x, wrote that 'the Nepalese who form 34 percent of the population of the District (Darjeeling) are all immigrants'

The socio-economic condition of Nepal also gave a fillip to the emigration of the Nepalese mostly of lower castes into the hills of North Bengal. After the establishment of the Shah Dynasty in Nepal, the legal and social forces encouraged by the upper caste Hindu migrants against the local population. The lower caste groups' people were deprived of their ancestral land by the upper caste Hindus. With regard to the education and employment opportunities also as the high caste Brahmans were already learned and when sanskritized Nepali written in Devanagari script became the official language of the Kathmandu Govt. under the Shah Dynasty, the Brahmans picked up the Debanagari script and sanskritized Nepali quickly. The administrative, judicial and other official posts were occupied by them. Therefore the large illiterate people were forced by the poverty to search

land and occupation. At the same time the British Govt. offered to the migrants many advantages viz. The Govt. offered them jobs in the expanding tea gardens, land for cultivation in the areas ceded from Sikkim which was remained as waste land, opportunities in the British army etc. Thus we see that due to the poverty and lack of job opportunities a large number of Nepalese flocked in to the hill areas of North Bengal to earn for their livelihood⁷².

It is clear from the above discussion that with the migration of the Nepalese in the hills of Darjeeling district, a dominant Nepali culture arose there. Their numerical strength also helped them for the emergence of a strong Nepali language and culture which gradually became the communicating lingua-franca and dominant culture respectively in the hill society despite the fact that each and every caste groups in hills had their own dialects and cultures. It must be kept in mind in this context that this domination can not be called as caste domination by the Nepalese; it was only a cultural and linguistic superiority which helped the community to be placed in a dominant position in the society.

VI

Although Nepali language became dominant in the hills, there were a number of other languages. A large number of people used to speak the languages of the Tibeto Burman family of which no less than 19 different dialects were shown in the census returns of 1901⁷³. Tibetan was spoken by the Bhotias domiciled in the district, who according to their Nationality spoke the Tibetan or Bhotia of Tibet, Sikkim or Bhutan. The Lepchas had

their own native language and that is called by them Rong river, which is considered as one of the oldest languages in the world. Limbu was another dialect. Among the Nepalese of Darjeeling Khambu, Murmi and Manger were the commonest dialect though Newar, Gurung Sunhwar and Yakha were also spoken. Among the plains men the Bengali, Hindustani etc. were also in use. Khas i.e. Nepali, Hindi or as it was sometimes generally called Paharia also had been a fairly common dialect among a considerable number of people in the hills. This is a form of Hindi spoken by the Khas group of Nepal, who obtained it from the numerous Brahman and Rajput refugees that took refuge in the hills at the time when the ancient Hindu kingdoms were overthrown by the Muhammadan invaders⁷⁴. These people intermingled and intermarried with the original Mongoloid inhabitants and gradually became fused with them.

VII

Thus we find that the majority of the people in the hills are of Indo-Aryan and Mongolian origin belonging chiefly to various Nepalese castes also including a large number of Lepcha, Bhotia, Limbu, Tibetan etc⁷⁵. The society of the hill region was therefore presumably heterogeneous in its ethnic, religious and linguistic composition.

Except the Lepechas, Limbus, Bhotias and Tibetans the structure of the Nepali society was and is almost as same as the Hindu society of the plains of Bengal nay India. They had caste based hierarchy in which the Branhmans were regarded dominant and powerful as well as advanced section of the society. Consequently a number of changes in the social

relation took place. Caste structure and caste relations in the region have become much more egalitarian. Unlike the rigid caste system prevalent among the Hindus of plains the society of the Nepalese is comparatively lax. The Brahmans and other high caste Hindus among the Nepalese did not maintain rigidity so far as inter-marriage and ritual ceremonies were concerned. With regard to the profession or occupation also, they did not pursue for retaining their functional occupations though certain professions were confined to specified functional castes who continued to follow their trade, for instance the Sarkis who made the native shoes and sheaths of khukri, kumal Newar (Potter) Kamis and Bhama Newars who manufactured metal ware and performed the functions of a Blacksmith. There was, however an extraordinary laxity in ceremonial observances. They ate and drank food which had been prohibited to the orthodox Hindus. In this regard there was sharp contrast between the migrant Nepalese and the migrants of the plains who rigidly maintained the caste system and did not shake off their orthodox ways. This distinction was noticed by Hodgson who wrote “these high land soldiers, who dispatch their meal in half an hour and satisfy the ceremonial law by merely washing their hands and face and taking off their turbans before cooking laugh at the pharisaical rigour of the Sepoys, who must bathe from head to foot, and make puja (worship) before they can begin to dress their dinner, must eat nearly naked in the coldest weather, and can not be in marching trim again in less than three hours⁷⁶”.

The social stratification based on caste, group etc. among the people of hill areas, however, became secondary as priority was given much to the economic activities and development. Moreover it is one of the characteristics of every migrant society to some extent. Therefore social

mobility received a larger scope. Despite social mobility each community retained its individuality in a way at preserving its own social customs and traditions which was evident from the different institutions, particularly religious ones which also served as platforms for social gathering on festive occasion and where they tried to rehearse and keep up their ties.⁷⁷

It is found that like the migrant Hindus of plains, the migrant Nepalese in the hilly areas were Hindus by their religious belief and practices. Interestingly enough there was hardly any socio-cultural intermixture between the plainsmen and hill men. The migrant plainsmen culturally were more tied up with the plains. For instance, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century it was found that they were regular subscribers of news papers and magazine published from Calcutta like the Englishman, The statesman, the Hindu Patriot, Sanjeevani, Amrita Bazar Patrika, Bangabasi etc⁷⁸. They never felt any interest to be assimilated with the society and culture of the hill people and vice versa. Therefore there emerged in the hill a different kind of society based on distinctiveness of culture, language and ethnicity. It must be kept in mind that the migrant plainsmen were very few in numbers compared to the hill men in the hilly region of North Bengal.

Another important point is that since the beginning of the twentieth century a community consciousness were developed among the Gorkhas of the hill region. It has to be remembered that all the migrant Nepalese were not Gorkhas. It is evident from two memorandums (letters) sent to Mahatma Gandhi, one by D.B. Chhetri, the Congress leader of Kurseong sub-division in 1946 and the other by Maharaja of Nepal in 1947. Both mentioned in their letters that in Darjeeling, there were 73648 Gorkhas out of 277049 hill men

inhabiting in the hills of the district⁷⁹. In this context one thing must be noted that, press publications, several socio- cultural associations played a significant role in building a sense of group solidarity among the Gorkhas. Almost all the news papers, periodicals published from hills and associations of the time espoused the cause of the development of the hill society. For example we can mention the name of few newspapers, periodicals, Associations and their activities- One journal / newspaper *Gorkha Khabar Kagat* started its publication in 1901. It owed its origin from '*Gorkha Bharat Jiban* published by Motiram Bhatta as its editor in 1886 from Varansi (The paper however was regarded with suspicion by most of the Nepali speaking Hindus as it published parochial and proselytizing articles). Another literary journal '*Chandrika*' published from Darjeeling by Dr. Parashmani as its editor during this time. It also played a crucial role in developing a group consciousness among the Nepalese of the hill. Another Nepali weekly named '*Gorkhali*' was published in 1915; it was the first Nepali weekly in India. In addition to the press and publication a number of associations were formed during this period which also promoted the cause of group interest though such organizations were purely based on socio-cultural activities and a few of them in course of time turned to political associations and changed their outlook, it should be born in mind that, there emerged no political movement based on caste race, group etc. during my period of study. But it can be said that a community consciousness were developed during this time. Gorkha League (1925), Gorkha Dukha Nibarak Sammelan. etc. are the few examples of such associations⁸⁰.

Another important point is that as the Indian National congress had started movement to uplift the socio-economic condition of the lower caste category people, like Harijan movement during the third decade of the twentieth century, the wave of such movement touched the hill society also. As a result Parvatya Ashprishy Samity' was established in Darjeeling.

VIII

After independence and partition in 1947 unlike the other parts of Bengal the hill region did not experience the refugee influx from East Pakistan, modern Bangladesh. On the contrary it faced the huge influx of migrants from Nepal which is still a continuing phenomenon. Due to the lack of job-opportunities, scarcity of land and poverty in Nepal the Nepalese had migrated into the district of Darjeeling. It must be kept in mind that during pre-independent period the Nepalese migrated from Nepal were settled mostly in the hills of Darjeeling, but after independence the influx of migrants not only settled in the hill areas of Darjeeling but also in the Terai and surrounding Duars areas of Jalpaiguri district including neighbouring districts of West Bengal. After the Indo-Nepal treaty of 1950, peaceful understanding had been established. As a result huge number of Nepalese from Nepal infiltrated and settled in the region. Actually the Treaty granted in reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the privileges in matters of residence, ownership of property 'participation in trade commerce etc. Therefore the migration again gained a new impetus changing the demographic pattern of the region in the post partition period, which in a long run helped in the emergence of the Nepalese as a single largest caste group in the hilly portion of North Bengal⁸¹.

Another incident, which played an important role in changing the demographic pattern after Independence was the Chinese invasion to Tibet in 1950. A large number of Tibetans left their parent land and took shelter in the hills of Darjeeling; many of them started settling there permanently⁸². Thus in this way since the sixties of the twentieth century the society of the hill region of northern Bengal makes a further difference from other parts of it.

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CHAPTER- 6

OTHER MINORITY GROUOPS' MOVEMENTS

In the present chapter we will study about the movements which were launched by various minor groups and communities of the region. In this context we will find that there were two distinct phases of these movements i.e. during the pre- independent period and the post independent period. If we meticulously study the characteristic features of such movements we will find a number of differences between the movements of pre and post independent phases. For instance, most of the movements launched in the pre- independent period had got their inspiration from south (Calcutta) and eastern Bengal. The movements were basically originated in outside north Bengal and later spread to North Bengal, though a few movements had been originated in North Bengal too. But in the post independent period almost all the movements had been originated in North Bengal.

Another important distinctive feature is that the movements during pre-independent period were aiming at the socio- religious and cultural reformation of several respective groups or communities though gradually the movements ended with the realization that no movements will be succeeded unless or until educational and economic developments are made for the respective communities. But the movements those took place in the post- independent period had started with the specific demands of economic developments and for that purpose the leaders of the movements gave stress on demands for reservation facilities provided by the Govt. of India to the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe. So in the pre- independent period we

find upward mobility movements were numerous which demanded a place in the Hindu social hierarchy by a number of lower caste groups and communities interestingly, in the post independent period most of the movements can be characterized as downward mobility movements which demanded their scheduled caste and scheduled tribe status from the Govt. of India.

Most of the movements which made their demands for getting reservation benefits became strong and vigorous after the publication of Mandal Commission Reports in 1990. For instance, the movements of the Chins, Dhanuks, Suryapuris and others demanded prompt recognition of their long-drawn movements for getting scheduled caste status from the Govt. of India. The Suryapuri movement was a linguistic movement, which demanded the recognition of Suryapuri language as medium of instruction at the educational level from the Govt. of Bengal and India. A number of movements received their desired status after the period under study which is beyond the purview of this study. Now we will make a categorical study of various minor groups' movements of the region.

Yogis

It has mentioned earlier that as a result of the social awakening movement a number of social mobility movements took place among the lower caste groups of Bengal and India during the second half of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. At the end of the nineteenth century a tendency of unification and self-assertion were noticed among the Yogis of Bengal. They founded a common platform named Assam-Banga Yogi Sammilani and spread the movement in Assam and Bengal. Though a very

few Yogis had been inhabited in North Bengal., the movement brought them to the common platform¹.

The number of yogis in Bengal was about four lacks (1931). Like other backward communities of Bengal the yogis of Bengal were also backward in the sphere of socio-economic and educational activities. The upper caste Hindus looked down upon them. During the first decade of the twentieth century they started a consolidation movement throughout Bengal and Assam²

The movement took place when Krishna Nath Dalal of Andul Mouri village of Howra district fed meal to Brahmanas, Nabashakhs and other castes cooked by Brahmanas. *Kaivartyas* also took the meal. As consequence an internal resentment arose among the *Kaivartyas* as one section of them opined that without expiation the *kaivartyas* who took meal would be excommunicated and they claimed the whole expenses of expiation from Mr. Dalal. This behaviour of *Kaivartyas* gave hurt to Mr. Dalal. Mr. Dalal committed to meet the expenditure but he expressed his desire to investigate the origin of the yogis before he could meet the expenses of the said expiation.

Therefore, investigation was started to reveal the origin and social status of the Yogis and after a prolonged enquiry, it came out that the Yogis were of high caste and there was no need of expiation in case when a person had taken meal in the house of a Yogi. Monimohan Nath another kind hearted person of the community also felt an urge to uplift the social condition of the Yoigis. He discussed about the pristine glory of the Yogis and their gradual

decline. He published a book named 'Yogi Sanskar Byabastha Ba Agam Sanghita' its publisher was Krishna Nath Dalal himself. The Yogis believed that they were a part of Brahman community. When Ballal Sen introduced caste system they lost their thread and became shudra. Moreover, they claimed that the Brahnans gradually became divided in four groups as 'Jnyani' (wise), Karmi (activist), Yogi and Bhakta (a devotee). So some reformers of Yogi Community felt the necessity of accepting upabita (sacred thread) again and they initiated a movement to redefine their status in the Hindu society³.

The first propagator of the thread wearing movement was Vishnu Chandra Nath Bhattachaya. The wave of the movement struck in different districts of west Bengal. Due to the active initiative of Vishnu Chandra Nath the movement also started in North Bengal. Like the other parts of Bengal, the Yogis of North Bengal too were considered as belonged to a neglected caste. To prove their superiority they convened a meeting at Dinajpur in 1300 B.S. (1893), about twelve to thirteen hundred people from Yogi and other communities assembled at the conference and the religious guru of the Yogis Paramahans Debpratipala Swami Maharaj through various proofs in Shastra proved in the conference that the Yogis were Brahmanas. As a result the enthusiasm to adopt upabita (Sacred thread) became immense among the Yogis of North Bengal⁴.

In 1901 'Yogihitaisini sabha' was established. It was decided that a memorial was to be sent to the census commissioner where it was to be stated that the name of the caste would be Yogi, the male members of the

community would use the title Nath or Debnath' and the women would use Debi. They appealed to census authority to comply with the statement. In response to their application the census authority suggested to the field officers to enlist their caste as Yogi in the report and enlist the title of the women of the community as Debi. Among the leaders who took significant role in initiating social reform movement for the Yogi community Krishna Chandra, Mohinimohan, Vishnu Chandra Bhattacharya, and others were citable. To make a connection between the Yogis of different districts of Assam and Bengal a monthly periodical 'Yogishakha was published from 1311 B.S (1904). In the year 1908 *Yogi Sammilani* was set up which conducted its regular sessions throughout Bengal and Assam. The first session of the *Sammilani* took place at Talpukurpar, Kummilla in 1910. To unite the Yogis of Assam and Bengal the Samiti was named as 'Assam Banga Yogi Sammilani'. In the second annual session of the *Sammilani* a decision was taken to publish a mouth piece of the *Sammilani* and the name of the mouthpiece was 'Yogi Sammilani Patrika'. The twelfth annual session was arranged at Naogaon in Assam in 1921. The thirteenth session was held at Chutiapara, Kamrup in 1922 and in 1935 at Bogura the 25th session was held. In 1940 the thirtieth annual session was held at Shakharipara in Rangpur. The forty-fifth annual session was arranged at Dinhat of Cooch Behar district in 1955. Many other sessions were organized afterwards in different parts of Bengal and Assam⁵.

The movement took a new turn after the publication of the list of depressed and backward classes' as consequence of the Mc Donald Award in 1932. The Yogis were enlisted as scheduled caste. After spreading the news

agitation among the Yogi community was started. The editor of *Yogishakha* Sri Pramatha Nath protested vehemently against this wrong decision of the Govt. through his writings in the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* on 29.12.1932 and in the *Liberty* on 30.12.1932. A number of meetings were arranged to take resolutions against such move of the Govt. The resolutions of such meeting were sent to the Reform Officer of Bengal. Ultimately as a result of the tireless endeavour of advocate Shashi Kumar Bhowmik, the Yogis were excluded from the list of the scheduled caste. On the other hand in Surma Valley, they were recognized as Exterior Hindus while in Assam they were enlisted in the list of Caste Hindus. Therefore it was considered by the leaders of the community that if this was allowed to be continued there may be aroused a disparity among the Yogis of Bengal and Assam. So they tried hard to exclude the name of the yogis of Surma Valley from the list of the Exterior Hindus and after long run effort the Yogis of Surma Valley were excluded from the list of Exterior Hindus⁶.

The activities of the *Yogi Sammilani* touched North Bengal through a few sessions which had been arranged in different parts of it. For instance, the Bogura session in 1935 might be considered as a congregation of various representatives of North Bengal⁷. The editor of the reception committee was Nilkanta Pandit of Rajshahi. Moreover a number of members from North Bengal represented the community in its various conferences and annual sessions throughout Bengal and Assam. If we meticulously study the proceedings of various sessions of *Assam Banga Yogi Sammilani*; we will get a clear idea about their aims and objectives.

In the various sessions of the *Assam Banga Yogi Sammilani* the members discussed about the various socio-economic aspects of Yogi Community. They pursued the ways and means for their development. A fund was raised to extend financial help to the poor and promising students of the community. The leaders realized that for the development of the community first and foremost task should be the eradication of poverty and illiteracy. Moreover they emphasized on united effort to fulfill this desire⁸.

One thing is to be mentioned in this context that after independence and partition in 1947, like the Rajbansi Kshatriya movement, the movement of the Yoigis also became weak as their headquarter and centre of activities viz. Kumilla, Chittagong etc. were, partitioned from India and added to East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Most of the conferences held after independence emphasized on the social and spiritual uplift of the community. They were concern of their socio- economic condition. They repeatedly mentioned that the number of the yogis in education, Govt. services had increased though the number is not satisfactory one in the context of the number of total population of the Yogis in Bengal and Assam. But interestingly they did not show their interest in participating electoral politics through representatives of their own community. So during the period of our study we do not find any active anticipation of the community in politics in the post in dependent period, though we found that after the 2nd World War they extended their support to the Indian National Congress to the cause of their freedom struggle movement.

It is interesting to note that when most of the backward class people were clamouring for getting facilities provided by the Colonial Govt. to the

educationally and socio- economically backward classes, under scheduled castes and scheduled tribe category, the Yogis claimed the recognition of their higher social status and protested against the Govt.'s move of enlist them under scheduled caste category, and ultimately became succeeded to exclude their name from the list of scheduled caste. After independence however, they got the status of other backward class community (OBC) by the Govt. of India and receiving facilities accordingly.

Gop

Though the nineteenth century is remembered particularly for socio-religious movements throughout the sub- continent, the wave of the movements reached to North Bengal in a later date. Nevertheless, many of the social reform movements by several caste groups took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Though most of the movements were originated in southern and eastern Bengal the movement left their imprint in this part of Bengal too. It is mentioned earlier that those movements were attempted to reform the caste and religion along with other superstitious practices of various groups and communities. One such movement was the movement of Yadav Kshatriyas. It is said that by caste they were Kshatriya and by religion they belonged to Gop religion. According to the leaders and propagators of the movement, due to the passage of time they lost their glory and fame. Thus they became inclined towards caste-hatred, violence, forgery, narrow self interests leaving apart their simplicity, purity etc⁹. During the last quarter of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century they keenly felt the need to redefine their age old tradition and fame, but for which they have to traverse a strong path.

Actually from the last decade of the nineteenth century the general trend of social elevation was noticed in Bengal as well as in India. The Gops were no exception in this regard. There were a number of sub- sects among the Gops. In Bengal, the Gops used to identify themselves as Pallava Gop. But afterwards they referred to use as Vallav Gop¹⁰. So influenced by the social mobility and social reform movements of other castes and communities during the late nineteenth century the Gops began to unite themselves, because they realized that it will not be possible to upgrade their socio-cultural and economic condition unless or until they would get united themselves. In this respect one thing is to be remembered that almost all the movements which aimed at socio-economic uplift of various communities were organized and continued with united efforts.

In 1901 Bada Dharmananda Mahabharati one renowned religious personality protested against the shudra status of the Gops and boldly announced that the Gops of Bengal were not shudras, they were of a branch of Aryan clan and belonged to Vaishya varna. They cited that 'in the Shrimat Bhagbat Mahapuran the Gops had been described as Vaishyas. In the the Vishnupuran it was stated that the Gops were the product of Vaishya mother and Kshatriya father. The Brahma Baiivarta purana state the fact that the vallav Gops took birth from the variants lord Krishna'. They claimed that the reference of the Gops in the Manu Sanghita Parashar Sanghita, Vishnu Puran, Shrimat Bhagbat bears the testimony of the fact that the Gops are an old caste of India. Mention may be made of the observation of Risley, he mentioned that "the Gops at first began to settle in the Mathura region (Brahmashri Pradesh), and then afterwards they spread in different parts of India. One of their branches is famous as Yaduvamsa'. Moreover, they got

recognition of a large group of Brahmana pandits that 'the Gops were of high caste'¹¹.

The movement of the Yadava Kshatriyas was started in Dacca, Punjab and Bombay in the year 1901. In 1908 a Samiti was set up at Rewari of Hariyana and during the following years its impact was felt in United Province, Bihar etc. some members of those organizations came to Calcutta and tried to start a movement with the association of Gops, Ahir and Yadavas. In 1329 B.S. (1922 A.D) almost five hundred persons gathered at Shyambazar in Calcutta and in this conference the 'Bangiya Gop Samiti' was established. This meeting was regarded as the first conference of 'Bangiya Gop Samiti' in Bengal¹². The objectives of the Samiti were to unite the Gops, to educate them, to make their all round development, to spread higher education among members of the community etc¹³. special emphasis was given to introduce primary education among them.

The mouth piece of the Samiti was 'Gopmitra' and the main objective of Gopmitra was to ameliorate the condition of the Gop society with its publications.

In the first conference some members from North Bengal took their participation. Among them Nibaran Chandra Ghosh, Kishorimohan Gosh from Pabna, Iswarlal Ghosh and Hemchandra Ghosh from Malda, Kedhar Nath Ghosh from Rangpur were important¹⁴. In this session discussion were made regarding the Shudra status of the Gops in Bengal. They mentioned that the Gops in western part of India had been enjoying a better position where as Gops in Bengal did not enjoy the similar status. The Gops of

Bengal concentrated on the question that why the Gops of Bengal could not attain the similar status as enjoyed by their counterparts in western India which was known from the 'Goptatwa Kaumudi', 'Ahir Itihas' etc. The intellectual leaders of the community then came to the conclusion that in Bengal during the days of Buddhism there was no other caste except Brahmanas and shudras. So in Bengal the Gops along with other Kshtriyas and Vaidyas were identified as Shudras. Thus under the context the leaders realized that to get recognition of their pristine glory and prestige it is necessary to spread modern education and at the same time, economic development of the community was the urgent need¹⁵.

The second conference of the *Bangiya Gop Samiti* was held at university institute hall in Calcutta University in 1330 .B.S. (1923). In the conference the number of members became considerably increased¹⁶.

The third conference was held at Malda under the Presidentship of Navadwip Chandra Ghosh Yadav from Mymensing in 1331 B.S. In this conference also stress was given on education as a basis of socio- political development for the community¹⁷.

The annual sessions of all India *Yadav Mahasabha* were held at different parts of India. It established its branch in Bengal and the *Bangiya yadav Mahasabha* had organized its meeting in different places of Bengal. In 1343 B.S. (1936) in Calcutta session Hemchandra Ghosh from Malda presided over the meeting and in the next session at Howrah in the same year the president was Ishwarlal Ghosh of Malda¹⁸. A large number of members of the community of North Bengal were actively associated with the movement

of the *Bangiya Yadav Mahasaba*, though it did not frequently organize its sessions of North Bengal Districts therefore the region was affected by the movement.

The Yadavas fought tirelessly for their reservation in education and Govt. services and also for their priority in promotion. Leaders like Rasbihari Ghosh, Lalbehari Ghosh, Kailash Chandra Ghosh, Prakash Chandra Ghosh, Budha Ghosh and others took active role in the process of up gradation of the Yadavas through various means viz. establishing schools, hostels, cow-rearing project etc. Such project was established jointly by Malda and west Dinajpur in northern Bengal. They also raised a fund to provide financial help to the students of the Yadavas or to the poor students of other communities in 1336 B.S¹⁹. Students were given stipend from a separate student stipend fund established by the leaders. The youths of the community set up from the very beginning of the formation of *Bangiya Gop Mahasabha* an Youth organization named *Gop Yatiya Yuva Sammilani* in 1330 B.S²⁰. In their conference a member of Youth from all over Bengal took their participation. Thus in this way the Gops are still trying to upgrade their socio- economic condition and now a day became successful in elevating their social status to a maximum extent.

Rajput Kshatriya

As it has already mentioned that the *Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti* was founded in 1910, it is said by a few scholars that the establishment of the *Kshatriya Samiti* roused a consciousness among many other minor caste groups or communities in North Bengal. '*Bangiya Prabasi Rajput Kshatriya Sabha*'

was the outcome of one such movement. The Rajputs of Bengal, according to their own statement, led a deplorable life in Bengal in comparison to the Rajputs in other provinces of India though numerically they were very few in Bengal.

At the time during the last quarter of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century a trend of community-consciousness and caste solidarity movement among various low caste, non-caste communities developed, which touched every nook and corner of the sub-continent as well as Bengal. The Rajputs of Bengal also began to realize that they should maintain their status and in this context they started uniting themselves under a common organization named '*Bangiya Prabasi Rajput Kshatriya Sabha*' which was established in 1325 B.S. (1918)²¹.

It was stated by them that in Bengal due to their association with the Bengalis they became accustomed with the life style of the Bengalis. So they decided that without matrimonial relation with the Rajputs only it would hardly possible for them to maintain their separate entity. In order to restore their Kshatriya status from effacement they began to unite themselves under the '*Bangiya prabasi Rajput kshatriya sabha*'.

The first conference of the Sabha was held at Barshalupara of Dinajpur district in 1325 B.S. In the first session Sri Debnath Roy was nominated as president of the first session. In the conference a resolution was taken to establish a permanent Samiti. The Sabha also resolved to formulate for the Samiti some rules and regulations. To fulfill the objectives of the *Bangiya*

Prabasi Rajput sabha an executive committee was set up and a number of members were given the responsibility to perform the works of the executive committee. One advisory committee was also formed as per the resolution of the conference. The secretary of the committee was Sri Shyama Prasad Ray of Dinajpur, president was Thakur Krishna Mohan Singha of Mekhliganj and the other members were Ramkumar Singha of Kishanganj and Panchanan Roy of Rajshahi²².

Interestingly, they supported and prayed for the victory of the allied powers in the First World War. To implement their aims and objectives they adopted some ways and means. The Rajput students were also encouraged through offering stipend. One of the objectives of the Sabha was to meet the educational expenses of the students who could not afford the cost of education. Apart from this the Sabha decided to appoint some preachers to propagate good senses and manners among the people of the community to initiate social reforms and eradicate unhealthy social customs and practices. Sri Krishnamohan Singha in his inaugural speech stated that the Rajput Khatriyas should follow the example of the Bengalis in the sphere of the education. Moreover he suggested to follow the qualities of Bengalis i.e. perseverance in education, self-dependency and their love for nation etc²³.

Thus we see that in North Bengal the Rajput Kshatriya movement took place and it spread its voice to every corner of Bengal and outside Bengal, Bihar, Purnia, Kishanganj, Dumka and some other places.

Rabha :

As it has mentioned in the earlier chapter (chapter –I) that the Rabhas are the inhabitants of Duars region extending from the river Teesta to sankosh. It is to be mentioned here that the Rabhas are found not only in northern Bengal, but also in different parts of Assam, Goalpara, Kamrup, Darang, Shibsagar and in western Garo hills of Meghalaya²⁴. A good number of the Rabhas live in the forests of the region and work as forest labourers under forest Department. Among those who live in the villages are mostly cultivators. The Rabhas belong to Mongoloid stock having similarity with other members for Bodo group such as Garo, Kachari, Mech, Koch, Hajong and others²⁵. They had their own dialect of Bodo family. In North Bengal they use Rajbansi as their language and in Assam they use Assamese. Another important thing is that in North Bengal their socio- religious life had been influenced considerably by the local Rajbansis. The Rabhas living at Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and surrounding areas have been greatly influenced by Rajbansi culture as they are surrounded by the Rajbansis. During the first half of the twentieth century there was noticed among the Rabhas of North Bengal a trend of elevating their socio- cultural status. So during the early forties of the twentieth century a strong movement of Hinduisation took place among the Rabhas.

Like other lower caste group people of Bengal, the Rabhas also did not occupy any prestigious position in the society or social hierarchy. They were not allowed to enter into the places of worship of the upper caste Hindus. They were looked down even by their neighbouring community i.e. Rajbansis.

It has been observed by a few scholars that the Rabhas were much influenced by the Kshatriyaization movement of the Rajbansis. During the early forty's of the twentieth century they also started a movement for upgrading their condition 'to get equal social status as that of the Hindu caste like the Rajbansis'²⁶. To obtain the higher social status they decided to give up rearing of pig and fowl willingly which had been their traditional occupation.

In the first phase of their movement Bhabendra Narayan Chowdhury, a saint and social reformer of the region took a leading role as he expressed that the Rabhas were of Hindus and they had the right to perform every Hindu rituals²⁷. The then Hakim of Tufanganj, Manabendra Thakur also extended his helps to the movement of the Rabhas. In 1934, Bhabendra Narayan Chowdhury took initiatives for the purification of the Rabhas²⁸. Thereafter, the Rabha leaders united themselves and adopted some decisions that henceforth the Rabhas be considered as shudra they would refrain themselves from drinking liquor etc.

It has to be mentioned in this context that the Rabhas faced severe problems even after elevating themselves to the rank of Hindus. Some primitive Rabha people of Barashalbari and Kamakshaguri refused to accept the newly converted Hindu Rabhas in their society. Moreover the Rajbansis also did not consider them as Hindus. The caste Hindus also refused to drink water touched by the Rabhas. Dhaneswar Bhattacharya who took the initiative for upgrading the status of the Rabhas had to face social boycott by his well-to-do Rajbansi clients (jajmans). 'the Rajbansis who were already claiming Kshatriya status did not like the Rabhas to become their equals and the

reason was that they would suffer economic loss because it is mentioned by a few scholars that the Rabhas reared fowls and pigs and the Rajbansis used to get share from them. As the Rabhas gave up it, the economic status of the Rajbansis received an adverse effect and they suffered economic hardship²⁹.

The movement however, gained momentum during the forties of the twentieth century. A teacher and priest of Bhatibari village of Alipurduar named Dhaneswar Bhattacharjee took initiative to convert the Rabhas to Hinduism. He met with the then Pandit Madan kumar Smritiratna of the Cooch Behar Royal family. He opined that the Rabhas might be considered as Hindus but to attain Hinduism they had to expiate. The Rabhas accepted Sri Dhaneswar Bhattacharya as their guru. Thus the movement of Hinduisation of the Rabhas started which was led by some Hindu and Rabha leaders and some popular leaders of the area³⁰. The Rabhas in general showed a keen interest for acceptance of Hinduism. The main objective of this socio- religious movement of the Rabhas was of course to get a place in the Hindu society and uplift the social position, status and hierarchy of their community people. They organized some large *yajna* and in that *yajna* all the Rabhas, local Hindu leaders Govt. officers and also representative of the Cooch Behar Royal family took place as witness. Then through the performance of some rites and rituals they entered into Hindu society, took Hinduism as their religion and became Hindus³¹.

The Rabhas of forest area were not enlightened with the socio-religious movement of the Duars and surrounding areas. The lack of communication was the main hindrance on their way to social mobilization. There was no

caste based political movement among the Rabhas of North Bengal during the period under study.

We find an eminent nationalist leader among the Rabhas, who took a leading role at Thana Gherao Movement of Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri during the 1942 Quit India Movement. He was Deben Das Rabha. According to local scholars, he was an educationist and socio-cultural reformer. He dedicated himself for the cause of freedom struggle and social reform despite the fact that, he had to fight against unbearable poverty throughout his life³².

Mech:

According to Charu Chandra Sanyal the Meches are one of the branches of Bodo or Baro like the Koch, Rabha and Garo etc. the Meches live in the Terai and forest areas of Darjeeling, Baikantapur and Duars region of Jalpaiguri and the areas crossing the river Teesta, Sankosh. Their habitation is also extended up to Goal Para in Assam. Most of the scholars mentioned their origin as Mongoloid³³.

It is interesting to note that the most controversial marriage of the nineteenth century Bengal i.e. the marriage of Maharaja of Cooch Behar Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur with Suniti Devi, the daughter of renowned Keshab Chandra Sen, the social reformer and leader of the Brahma Samaj movement had an impact over the socio cultural life of the subject people of the State and the people of surrounding areas. Suniti Devi introduced Brahma religion in the Royal family as well as in the state and founded a 'Brahma Mandir(Brahma Temple) in 1887. As consequence it was found that a good

number of Meches of Cooch Behar state and the surrounding areas adopted Brahma religion influenced by the activities of her highness Suniti Devi³⁴.

Apart from this a number of Meches in different parts of North Bengal adopted Christianity. Scholars in this field have opined that perhaps they embraced Christianity as a means to uplift their socio- economic condition. That means there were aspirations among the Meches of the region for the upliftment of their socio- economic and cultural life. It can be said that nineteenth century social reform movement of Bengal influenced the society of the Meches also to change their condition.

Bodo

Though the Bodos are the largest community in the plains of Assamese, there number in North Bengal is very few. They originally belonged to Tibeto- Mongoloid stock. The renowned sociologist and scholar Charu Chandra Sanyal mentioned that the Bodos in course of their migration to the east from central Asia particularly from Tibet and Mongolia they became divided into three branches. The Branch which migrated to north-eastern areas of Arunachal Pradesh and Brahmaputra valley and settled down in the whole of modern Assam and North Bengal (Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and surrounding areas) became further sub-divided in four groups viz. Mech, Koch, Rabha and Garo. In Goal Para and North Bengal they are called Mech. In the Brahmaputra valley of Assam they are known as Bodo and kachari³⁵. The Bodos adopted Brahmoism during the last quarter of the nineteenth cenchury.³⁶

The Bodos started their agitation in Assam after the partition in 1947. It is said that due to the rapid migration of refugees, they began to lose their traditional holdings on land, pressure on land was increased. Moreover they became compelled to surrender themselves to others in social, economic and cultural aspects.

During the 50s of the 20th century they started demanding the introduction of Bodo language in the primary level of education. They formed Plain Tribal Council of Assam. In 1967 the PTCA submitted a memorandum to the then president Zakir Hussain demanding the creation of an autonomous region for the plain tribal people of Assam. In 1973 a separate territory was demanded by them with the name Udayachal. They also demanded Roman script of their language³⁷.

It is interesting to note that all kinds of movements of the Bodos were concentrated in Assam and the Bodos of North Bengal were not influenced by such movement and we do not find such movement in this region. It has to be noted that their number is very few in North Bengal and most of them are found well established in various fields. It must be mentioned in this context that they had a tradition in doing services under the colonial govt³⁸. Therefore the Bodos of this region are not identified with such assertive movement of their counterparts in Assam.

Matua

In the earlier chapter (Chapter-2), it has mentioned that as consequence of the social awakening and the introduction of provisions of various new facilities to specific class and caste groups, communities by the Colonial

Government, a number of low-caste, non-caste groups, communities etc. launched social mobility movement which took the shape of caste consolidation movement during the last quarter of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. The most significant among these movements was the movement of the Namasudras of Bengal.

The Namasudras were the most numerous among the Hindus in Bengal. In this context it should be noted that the majority of the Namasudras lived in the eastern districts of Bakharganj, Faridpur, Dacca, Mymensing, Jessore and Khulna. According to the census of 1901, 75 per cent of the Namasudras lived in this area³⁹. In North Bengal the number of the Namasudras in pre-independent period was insignificant, but in the post-independent period their number increased considerably and the stand of the community became changed after independence particularly in this region. But there had been a link of this movement with the future course of history of this region. Therefore to understand the relation we will study the history and consequence of the Matua movement.

The social movement of the Namasudras was started in 1872-73 when the high caste Hindus did not attend the shradh (a respectful and willful offering rites to the deceased parents) of a renowned Namasudra village leader by the high caste Hindus of Faridpur- Bakharganj region. In reaction to this attitude of the high caste Hindus the Namasudras began a boycott movement which denied cooperating with the high caste people with regard to prepare their houses (high-castes Hindus), cultivate in their fields etc. Though they could not continue their movement of social boycott for long, it gave birth to a consolidated religious movement of the community named Matua

movement⁴⁰. The Matua sect owed its ideas and ideals to the contemporary Vaishnav religion. The movement assimilated those ideas and ideals with the originality of the particular community to understand as well as to face the power- relations which was prevalent in the society⁴¹. The leader of this religious sect was Guruchand Thakur. Like other Vaishav Gurus, he also preached to abolish the caste system and establishment of the ideas of equality. Unlike other religious preachers he encouraged the people of the community to establish themselves in the sphere of economic development. His slogan was 'Hate Kam Mukhe Nam' i.e. to continue mundane responsibility for their socio- economic prosperities and material wellbeing in the one hand and to preach the name of God for mental satisfaction and salvation on the other⁴².

The members of the Matua religious sect became more united when the high caste Hindus denied to maintain social relation with them. Therefore they emphasized on the need of social empowerment for themselves and for that purpose they began consolidate themselves. The religious movement of the Matua sect under the leadership of Guruchand Thakur and his son Harichand Thakur gave birth to the social mobility movement of the Namasudras in the late nineteenth century. In 1902 'Namashudra Hitaishini samiti' was set up. Finally with the formation of Bengal Namasudra Association' in 1912 and activities through its branches a complete caste consolidated organization came into existence. In course, of their movement for socio-economic development they demanded representation in the Electoral politics as well as in the provincial legislature. To get such facilities they demanded their scheduled caste status from the British Govt⁴³. ultimately they got the recognition of their desired scheduled caste status from the British Govt.

after 1932. From this point of view the activities of the Matua movement can not be overlooked. In North Bengal the Matua movement did not leave any significant impact as their number in this region in pre-independent period was insignificant.

In the post-independent period, in North Bengal, we do not find any movement by the Namasudras. But what is important is that the movement for socio-economic uplift of the Rajbansis who claim themselves as 'indigenous' in this region got a fillip considering the Namasudras as the contenders to the way of their development. It has already mentioned in chapta-3 that though we do not find any consolidated movement of the 'indigenous' community during this period, a number of organizations, associations came into existence during this time, which reflected more or less their grievances of deprivation in the field of reservation benefits provided by the Govt. of India to the scheduled caste people with regard to education, Govt. services etc. which are considered as instruments for socio-economic development. Thus we see that at once the Matua movement started agitation for the elevation of socio-economic condition of the Namasudra during the pre-independent period in eastern and southern Bengal, and after independence the same assertive movement for the amelioration of the socio- economic condition had propped up in the region by another community people against the refugee Namasudras which is still a continuing phenomenon. It can to be remembered that the Namsudras of eastern Bengal and the Rajbansis of northern Bengal under the leadership of Jogendra Nath Mandal formed the Independent Scheduled Caste Party and joined the Ministry of Khaja Nazimuddin in 1943⁴⁴. Moreover on question of Bengal's partition they had proposed a separate province named

‘Rajasthan’ comprising the whole of Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, and parts of Terai, Rangpur, Bihar, Purnea and the Goalpara of Assam⁴⁵. After partition however within a few decades their offspring became the contenders of each other resulted in confrontation between them.

Chain:

The Cains who numbered 30,082 in 1872 and 52128 in 1911 are a caste with Bihari affinities found large it numbers in the diara thanas (PS) of the west of the district Malda⁴⁶. They are actually found largely in Malda and Murshidabad districts. They enjoyed a very low status in the society. With the passage of time they became conscious of their social mobility and gradually became very eager to ameliorate their social status and dignity, therefore they started agitation and expressed their condition as being victimized by the denial of social justice and negligence for years.

Under the President ship of Sri Radhikanath Das they organized a pan Indian Chai-Vaishya conference in Jhaukona village of Panchanandapur of Malda in 1942. In the conference a unanimous resolution was adopted to voice their demands in favour of using the title Das and to identify them as Brahma-Vaishya. That is they also claimed to be the part of Hindu society of Aryan origin⁴⁷.

Chain Samaj Unnayan Samiti was established with a view to improve their socio- economic conditions. From 1972 they were striving relentlessly to include their names into the list of scheduled tribe. For the fulfillment of their grievances they even boycotted the election for three terms. They continued their movements and but could not get any constitutional recognition of their demand during the period under study. However after

the publication of Mandal Commission Report their movement again gained momentum and became able to get official recognition of scheduled caste status which will be discussed in the epitome section of this study.

Dhanuk

The Dhanuk community is said to be an old tribe and they are found mostly in various villages of Malda district. Like other tribal groups of people the Dhanuks were also economically, socially and educationally backward and poor. They were mostly labourers by their occupation. Except Bengal they are found in Gujrat, Maharashtra and Karnataka⁴⁸.

The Dhanuks of Mahanashtra, Karnataka etc., launched movement demanding their status as scheduled tribe and ultimately they were recognized as their desired status in 1950. The Dhanuks of west Bengal got influenced by the fate of the Dhanuks of out side Bengal i.e. Gujrat, Maharastra, Karnataka etc. and also started their movement in favour of Govt. recognition of their scheduled tribe status. But they have been recognized as O.B.C. (Other Backward caste). Naturally they were not satisfied with their OBC status and started severe agitation to get scheduled tribe status from the Govt. of India. We do not get any information regarding the fulfillment of their grievances during the period under study.

Ahmadiya Movement

Like the Hindus of Bengal, the Muslims also launched a number of socio-religious and political movements in different periods. But all those movements were not properly reflected in North Bengal and many of the movements are beyond the purview of the period of our discussion.

The Ahmadiya movement though started during the closing decades of nineteenth century, it left a great impact upon North Bengal. The movement was started by Mirza Gulam Ahmed of Quadian village of Gurudwarpur in Punjab in 1889-90. Like the Brahma Samaj movement of Bengal the Ahmadiya movement was based on a universal religion of all humanity. It opposed 'Jehad' or the sacred war against non-Muslims. The Ahmadiyas published several books and periodicals to spread their idealism. Actually the Muslims were lagging far behind compared to the non-Muslims because of their refusal of taking western education. Due to their indifferent attitude towards English learning their progress could not take place. Ahmadiya movement generated vigour and enthusiasm to this ruined community through its progressive ideas and ideals.

Though the movement had been originated in Punjab, next to Punjab it exerted its influence on Bengal. Gradually North Bengal came in contact with the movement and ultimately a branch of this organization of the Ahmadiyas was set up in Jalpaiguri district. The movement also spread over Rangpur. In 1927 a conference of the Ahmadiyas of North Bengal was held⁴⁹.

It is to be mentioned here that the Muslims in general do not recognize the Ahmadiyas as Muslims in the one hand and the Ahmadiyas called themselves as non-Muslims on the other. The British Govt. provided special facilities for the Ahmadiyas in the field of education, services etc. during British rule. One thing deserves mention in this regard that the Ahmadiyas has produced a number of brilliant personalities to the sub-continent throughout the period⁵⁰.

Anjumane Olamaye Bangla

It is known to all that after the 1857 revolt the Indian Muslims became divided into two branches, one group Belonged to Deobond and the other was the follower of Aligarh movement i.e. Deobond school of thought and Aligarh school of thought. The former branch emphasized on the anti-British movement and in the educational sphere they gave stress on the traditional religious teaching. The successors of this branch established an Ulema organization in Bengal in 1913 named 'Anjumane Olamaye Bangla.' The aim of this organization was to rouse nationalism among the orthodox Muslims so that they could free themselves from any blind faith regarding religion. The movement emphasized on the need of preaching the Islamic teachings, to eradicate communalism among different sects of Muslims, to educate the Muslims with modern scientific teachings etc. The movement continued till 1919 and only three of its conferences were held. The second conference was held in Calcutta in 1917, the third and last conference of the organization was convened at Chittagong in 1918⁵¹.

At its first conference in Bogura district invitation letters were sent to the Alems (who were considered as wise and had profound knowledge of Arabic language and Islam) of all the districts of Bengal. The content of the letter was as follows- "Nobody is unaware of the extremely miserable condition of Moslem Bengal. They have gone down in religion, education, wealth, morality, character in trade and commerce. On the one hand the darkness of illiteracy is leading the society to immorality and poverty and on the other; the current of occidental education is leading the educated young men, as it were, to activism and irreligiousness. Besides missionaries belonging to

other religion are working hard to strike at the root of Islam. Thus the Moslem community in Bengal is duly drifting to rack and ruin. In order to resist these evil currents God has created Ulamas and it is the duty to remove the evils and adopt themselves to time and place. No good result is at present expected through individual efforts. In order to remedy the evils and satisfy the wants, above referred to; the Ulamas must centralise their scattered energies and act collectively. It is for this reason that the conference has been called".⁵²

The leaders as well as the members of the organisation established a number of free *Maqtab*, *Pathshilla*, Library, Dharmashla, and Law Boards to spread education and mitigate litigations mutually in various districts of Bengal. In North Bengal it established its branches in Rangpur, Pabna, Bogura. The organizations worked for the eradication of superstitions among the Muslims. The leaders propagated against the activities of the Pirs and their disciples. Gradually the branches of the Anjumane Olamaye Bangla were established in Dacca, Chittagong, Naogaon Guwahati etc. the preachers of this organization also preached their idealism in different places of North Bengal, which is known from the mouth piece of the Anjumane olamaye Bengla named 'Al-Eslam'. The organization took active initiative to establish Islamic mission, Arabic University etc. The leaders wanted to wipe out non-Islamic rituals from Muslim society. Interestingly this organization along with many other reform programmes emphasized on the spread of education through the language of their own i.e. Arabic and even in Bengal they gave priority to the Arabic language as the medium of instruction. Actually they wanted to place Arabic as first language. Because, it was according to them, their national language, Bengali, which was the mother

tongue of the Bengali Muslims, was considered as second language. The English was placed as third language because it was the official or Govt.'s language and Urdu was given the status of fourth language by the leaders of the movement, because it was the communicating language of Muslims from Peswar to Assam and upper Burma, the organization, However was merged with 'Jamiyate Olamaye Hind' in 1919 which was establish in that year⁵³.

Anjuman- i- Islamia:

The Association was set up in 1860 and 1892 in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts respectively. The Anjuman-e-Islamia, Darjeeling was founded in 1860 by the Muslim residence of Darjeeling (who came from the plains) for the purpose of "improving the intellectual, moral, social and material conditions of the Muslims of the district".

In Jalpaiguri, it is believed that the association was formerly founded by the migrant Muslims though gradually it extended its activities to all Muslims of the district.

The objectives of the association were "the promotion of loyalty towards the British Govt. and the promotion and protection of the social, political, educational and other rights and interest of the Mahammedan community". Total member of this association were 165 (one hundred & sixty- five). The president of the organization was Nawab Musharruf Hossain, Khan Bahadur B.L. and it's secretary was Moulavi kazi Abdul khaleque. The association did much for looking after the social and educational interests of the Muslims of the district⁵⁴.

Ahl-e- Hadis

In the sixties of the twentieth century another socio- religious movement was originated at Malda. The movement later on spread its branches into North

Bengal and south Dinajpur. The movement was known as Ahl-e-Hadis movement. In Islam there are four Muslim laws – Maniki, Hanafi, Safai and Hambiti. The Koran is regarded as the oldest religious text. The followers of the Ahl-e-Hadis movement did not believe in such four laws (of text). They considered Koran as one and only text of the Muslims. The main objective of the movement was therefore to highlight this fact. The Shershabadia, a group of the Muslim community belonged to this Ahl-e-Hadis group. Though they do not believe in those four laws (majahaf) they are considered as La (not) majahafi, a section of the shershabadia group however, has faith on those four Muslim laws⁵⁵. The shershabadias are scattered throughout the North Bengal. The movement did not continue for long.

The Jamat-i-Islamic movement was another important movement of the Muslims. It was partly social and partly political movement. The main objective of the movement was pan-Islamism. The movement originated after independence and it had an all India base. Its impact was felt in North Bengal during the 1960s⁵⁶.

Another local movement took place in Jalpaiguri after independence. The movement had cropped up in between the indigenous Muslims and the Muslims migrated from Noakhali. The Noakhali Muslims who migrated from East Bengal during British rule and settled at Jalpaiguri were economically sound, culturally rich and educationally advance. They had a predominant role in the tea industries of Jalpaiguri. Though Europeans maintained their hegemony over those industries till 1947 and even after independence the European colonialists maintained their supremacy for a few years, still there was collaboration between the Bengalese and the

European planters. Both the Hindus and the Muslims played pivotal role in the growth of the plantation industries in Duars. These Bengalese were not indigenous people, they were outsiders. Among the outsider Muslims, the Noakhali Muslims had supremacy in Govt. services, trade and commerce, and also in other aspects of socio-cultural life. These people looked down upon the indigenous Muslims who were comparatively backward in all aspects of life. So there was a lack of integration among them⁵⁷. This alienation resulted in an atmosphere of tension between them. In the mid thirties of the twentieth century the local Muslims took active initiative to establish their organization known as 'District Mohammedan Association'. Under the association, the Muslims of Jalpaiguri and surrounding areas became united, the representatives of this association met the Lt. Governor of Bengal and they beg the favour of the Governor regarding their low social, political and cultural condition. In this respect it is observed by a few scholars that a community feeling and identity feeling have emerged. Moreover the Jalpaiguri Mohammedan association invited Mr. F.A Rahman, first Muslim Hon'ble vice Chancellor of Dhaka University to address a conference of the association. Gradually the movement had shifted its outlook and concentrated on the socio-economic development of the indigenous Muslims⁵⁸.

Another interesting incident in the history of the socio-religious movement of the Muslims of North Bengal was that two Muslim families of Haldibari sub-division of Cooch Behar district embraced Brahma religion and became Brahma. This was an unprecedented event in the history of Muslims and their religion. The surrounding areas were shaken / unarmed by the incident.

Further information about the families and the consequence of their being Brahma is not available to be mentioned⁵⁹.

Nebula

It is already mentioned that in the hill areas of Darjeeling a community consciousness was developing throughout the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century among the Nepalese and other aboriginal communities.

The arrival of Mahatma Gandhi of Darjeeling in 1921 inspired the hill people to develop their socio-cultural and economic condition. The activities of the Indian National Congress after the non-cooperation movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi to develop the condition of the downtrodden, lower castes and tribal groups of the sub-continent made a profound influence on the hill people. Parvatya Asprishya Sangha was set up around this time out of such endeavour. It was under this background NEBULA was organized in 1934⁶⁰.

The organization NEBULA was the mature and extended form of Hill Peoples' Social Union founded in 1920-21. It is said that in 1906-07 an association named 'Gorkha Samiti was established with an aim of socio-cultural development. But the samiti gradually failed to continue with its previous goals and the members came out from the Gorkha Samiti and laid the foundation of the Hill People's Social Organization and later on it extended its activities to enroll all the hill people under its banner. NEBULA was formed under such circumstances. The name of the organization itself signifies the name of three communities of Darjeeling hill. They were

Neplai, Bhutia and Lepcha. Due to the lack of any copy of the proceedings of this organization, it is difficult to say about its objectives definitely, but other references show that it was very much active to highlight the problems and propagated the political demands of these three hill communities viz. Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha of Darjeeling⁶¹.

Apart from this NEBULA published a journal as its mouthpiece named 'Nebula'. It published the demands of the communities for their development and socio-cultural improvement. It was published from Kalimpong. Its editor was K.D. Pradhan who was a renowned social worker. Though the journal propagated and was concern about the particular communities, it had a special interest with literary exercise. It published a few articles of literary values and at the same time played a significant role in mobilizing public opinion, promoted the consciousness of the Darjeeling hill people in general. 'No more details can be said about the organization due to the non-availability of the copy of any proceedings. But it can be said that the organization highlighted the problems and propagated the ethno-political demands of the three hill communities of Darjeeling as is already mentioned. It played a positive role in the field of socio-cultural development of Darjeeling hill area'⁶².

Tribal Movements

If we study the socio-cultural life of various tribal people who migrated and settled in North Bengal we will see that two distinct pattern of tribal settlement and socio-cultural activities. We must mention here that there are two major tribal populated areas in North Bengal viz Barind region of Malda

and Dinajpur districts and the Terai and Duars region of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts respectively.

One thing must be clear in this context that most of the tribal's in the Barind region are Santals. At the inception of their migration they were almost brought by the Zamindars though this time their number was very few and gradually their migration was increased during colonial period and began to settle in the Barind region of Malda, Dinajpur permanently. The tribals of the Terai and Duars region of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts, most of whom are Oraons, had also been brought by the European planters as labours from their homeland viz. Chotonagpur, Chhattishgarh etc. region.

The Santals of Malda and Dinajpur were agrarian peasants and the Oraons of terrain, Duars became the tea garden workers. Thus due to their profession for livelihood a different kind of socio-cultural life had emerged in these two regions. So in course of time their outlook became different. It has to be noted that there had been few reasons for the emergence of an opposite characteristics in the sphere of socio-cultural life of such people.

The Oraons of the Terai, Duars region have been living with various other tribal groups and non-Bengali people viz. Santal, Munda, Nepali, Bihari, Marwari etc. But the Santals of Barind region have been living with the Bengalis surrounding them, therefore in the Terai, Duars a mixed culture had developed whereas in Barind region the Santals became Bengalised in respect of language, culture, customs, beliefs etc⁶³. They must have influenced by the socio-cultural life of the Bengalis.

Another important factor was that in Terrai and Duars there was several languages among the Oraons, Mundas, Santals, Nepalese etc. Unlike the hill region where due to the numerical majority of the Nepalese, Nepali language became the communicating language among the people of various communities and groups, in the Terrai, Duars there was no such dominant language of any communities therefore in course of time, there developed in the region a common lingua franca named Sadari between various tribal groups living together in the said region. But when their children go to the schools the medium of instruction is Hindi, but Hindi is not their mother-tongue. Interestingly the Bengal Govt. from the very beginning (after independence) did not feel any necessity to give them education in Bengali as medium of instruction. We can compare the tribal people of Assam in the tea gardens so far as language is concerned, where the Assamese Govt. from the primary level to higher education introduced Assamese language as medium of instruction in schools for them. As consequence the tribal people of the region became Assamised in respect of language and culture, because language determines the socio-cultural activities of people of any region to a maximum extent⁶⁴. So it can be said that the tribal people of the Terrai, Duars region did not get the opportunity to learn Bengali language instead they received non Bengali language i.e. Hindi, Sadari and culture which gave birth to a mixed culture and thus added a new façade in the socio-cultural dynamism of the region.

The Santals of Barind region have been availing the opportunity of Panchayati system since the introduction of the reservation system for the tribal people. But the tribal of Terrai, Duars region started getting such benefits in a much later phase that is from the beginning of the twentieth

century. To be more specific, they got the benefit of the reservation after the implementation the Rajib Gandhi's scheme for the tribal communities to the Panchayat level administration⁶⁵.

The Santals of Malda, Dinajpur districts had been brought under the education system long before the tribal of the Terrai Duars region. Thus two different pictures with regard to the language, culture etc. emerged in these two tribal populated regions. That is why it is mentioned in chapter 1 that the demographic pattern, society, culture, language in all aspects, there are differences, dichotomies in different parts of North Bengal. That is why it is said by a few scholars that there are many little North Bengal within the periphery of the greater North Bengal.

So far as socio-religious and political movement of the tribal people of North Bengal is concerned we find in the Duars the Oraons launched Tana Bhagat movement and the Santals of Barind region started Satyam-Shivam movement, and Chhatrishia movement. The Chhatrishia movement was not originated in this region but it left its impact over the people of the region.

Tana Bhagat

Tana Bhagat movement in North Bengal, particularly in Duars area, was actually the reverberation of the movement originated in the Ranchi district of Chotonagpur in April 1914⁶⁶.

The Oraons were lagging far behind from point of view of intellect and intrepidity. Due to their illiteracy and socio-economic backwardness, they were plugged under superstition and some outdated rituals. A number of

Oraon social reformers had tried to purify their lives by launching agitation against intoxication, witchcraft, ghost worship etc. Different groups of social reformers were known as Bhagat. The first group reformers were Bhuipath Bhagat, the other groups were Kesh Bhagat group, Vishnu Bhagat group, Kavir Panth Bhagat group. Among them most important group was Tana Bhagat group. It was said that the movement would pull out (tana) ghosts and evil spirits which were according to them, responsible for their misery⁶⁷. It is to be kept in consideration that the Tana Bhagat movement of Chhotonagpur was not followed in toto in North Bengal, though the movement had an impact among the Oraons of Duars tea garden areas. Another important point is that though the movement was started as a socio-religious reform movement, it turned to a political movement aiming at the redress of their economic exploitation and poverty.

In Duars, the objective of the movement at its initial stage was to improve the social life particularly to the sphere of spiritual life. It was nothing but a continuation of the agitation of Chhotonagpur. Eventually it had spread its branches towards politics though official records viewed its political connection from the very beginning. At the primary level the movement was devoid of any military element. The Oraon tea garden workers first started agitation against exploitation of plantation labourers in Duars but gradually many non-Oraons and semi-tribal communities also joined in the movement. In 1916 the agitation reached to an alarming position. Duars Planters' Association in its annual meeting expressed that the stir was a cause of "great anxiety" to the European planters who considered the movement of the Oraons as a new and dangerous movement. It was reported that some Oraon men and women arranged meeting calling 'German Father' to save

them, they also sang song, which contained the reference of German victory in the First World War which was continued during the period. Thus the movement spread as an anti-British and Pro-German movement⁶⁸. They wanted to establish an ‘ independent Oraon Raj’ and considered the Germans as their saviour, not only that it was believed by them that Germany will overthrow the British and will establish her hegemony in the country and those who give support to Germany will be rewarded after war. Tana Bhagat movement made a considerable upheaval among the Oraons of the region, though a section of them was suspicious regarding the doctrine and methods of the movement and they were afraid of the threat which was made by the leaders of the movement that those will be excommunicated who would not provide them support and join the movement. However, the movement tried to secure their life from exploitations mainly of the landlords and traders, though some scholars have found in the movement anti-British fervour and the zeal to deny the British as their authority. The Govt. adopted severe method to suppress the movement. Naturally the movement did not bear any fruit and gradually faded away. The most important feature of the movement was that it was an autonomous movement, that is the leadership of non-tribal people or outsiders or any other organization was absent in this movement.

Santal

The Santals of Barind region in the eastern Malda had engaged themselves in a series of movements during 1924-32. The Barind tract was consisted of Bamongola, Gajol, Habibpur, old Malda, Gomastapur, Nachol and Nawabganj (during pre-independent period). The Santals of the region were divided into four religious sects viz Christian, Hindu, Kheroar Animists and

Hindu. Hindu Santals were numerous among them and they belonged to Satyam Shivam sect⁶⁹.

At that time some Swarajits were engaged in bringing the aboriginals and untouchables into the fold of Hinduism through 'Suddha' or purification. Kashishwar Chakravarty, a Swarajist and also a pleader from Dinajpur sowed the seeds of the movement among the Santals of Malda. It is said that he first concentrated on upgrading their condition by embracing them Hinduism. These Santals called themselves as Satyam Shivam sect. Kashiswar Chakaravarty was known as Sanyasi Baba and Jitu was his local agent. Another leader was Arjun-Santal. Jitu became the most renewed leader of this sect, whose proclamation was considered as gospel of truth by his followers⁷⁰. The social movement of the Satyam Shivam Community subsequently turned into a political movement with the passage of time.

In 1928 the Santals under the leadership of Jitu Santal who had a close connection with the Swarajit party, launched a severe movement against overburdening of tax imposed on the tribal agrarian peasants by the Govt. and its agents, landlords. As the movement spread, payment of rent to the landlord was prohibited. It is viewed by a few scholars that Jitu's perception was to replace their old religious faiths and customs by Hinduism⁷¹, after the elevation of their status they will be able to fight and victorious over their exploiters.

The movement reached its climax when in 1932 the newly converted Santals assembled in the Adina Mosque of Pandua and after occupying the mosque they had transformed it into a temple. Muslims were not allowed to enter into the mosque. Jitu and his followers declared themselves as independent.

Naturally the Muslims reached vehemently, they lodged complaint against all Santals to the police. The police superintendent along with other police personals, Muslims Zamindars and with District Magistrate cordoned off the Adina Mosque. Jitu was asked to leave the mosque but he did not comply with the order. The result was a fierce battle between the Santals and the armed police in which Jitu was shot dead and several other Santals were wounded severely⁷². With the death of Jitu the movement of the Santals became weak and gradually it lost its existence.

The Santal movement under their legendary leader Jitu Santal was an important phenomenon in the history of North Bengal nay Bengal. On the one hand the movement tried to emancipate the poor peasants from the yolk of feudalism which ultimately took a turn towards an anti-British movement; on the other hand, some historians are of the view that the movement was an example of upward social mobility by downtrodden community.

Chhatrishha movement

The Chhatrishha movement was started by the tribes of Dinajpur in 1922-23. The exact time of migration of various tribes viz. Santals, Munda, hoe etc. in Dinajpur district is still veiled in obscurity, but it can be said that the large scale migration of the tribal people took place during British period. It is already mentioned in the earlier chapter that they came to the region, cleared the jungles and brought under cultivation the jungle and waste lands. Thus with their settlement and inter mixing with the indigenous people a new social picture came into existence.

It has to be mentioned here that the non-cooperation movement left significant effect upon the tribal people of Dinajpur. The activities of the Indian National Congress opened a new vista to the tribal people for coming out of the exploitation of landlords. Thereafter the Harijan improvement programmes of Indian national Congress under the leadership of Netaji Sibhas Chandra Bose and his followers also made their imprint in the region⁷³. As a result a number of movements launched by the downtrodden, lower castes, non castes, tribal communities etc. came into existence throughout the sub-continent.

The Chhatrishra movement was one of such movement, which was launched by the tribal peasants against the torture and exploitation of the Zamindars, landlords of Dinajpur. As it was very much influenced by non-cooperation movement, the basic character of the movement was therefore non-violence. The movement involved thirty-six races and thirty six villages that is why it was known as Chhatrishra movement. The movement also raised thirty-six demands. The movement tried to create a revolutionary mentality among the common people through organizing peasant's movements. The movement was continued till 1939, when Bengal Tenancy Amendment Act was passed⁷⁴.

The tribal people and the Rajbansi peasants of Dinajpur district participated in the movement with full enthusiasm. The grievances of the tribal peasants were however redressed to some extent with the implementation of the tenancy Amendment Act.

There took place a few movements which though did not spread to much extent yet they played a significant role in developing awareness in the

region. In 1931 when the Indian National Congress boycotted the census operations a few tea industrialists along with British officials enlisted the tribal people in the list of non-Hindu animistic. At that time the local Congress leaders and eminent leaders tried to prove that the tribes were Hindus⁷⁵. At that time Hindu Mission which was formed in 1925 also campaigned in favour of enlisting the tribes as Hindus instead of Animists⁷⁶. They expressed their views through 'Trisrota' and 'Janamat' the two local news papers. The eminent social worker Charu Chandra Sanyal founded 'Asprishya Sevak Sangha' and under this organization they launched their movement⁷⁷.

Tamang Buddhists movement

Tamang Buddhist is a branch of Neplai Buddhist community. They are found in the hills of Darjeeling district⁷⁸. They enjoyed a very lower status in the society. Though Buddhism believes in an egalitarian society where every one should be treated equally, which will not indulge casts, but the Tamang Buddhist of Darjeeling district did not enjoy equal status with other Buddhists of the district. Even their status was lower than the hill tribes who also had a very lower status in the society. Another point is to be mentioned in this context that the Tamang Christians had been receiving various facilities with regard to the education, services etc. compared to the Tamang Buddhists in the hill of Darjeeling from the very beginning of the British rule⁷⁹.

In the 20th century like the movement of other communities the Tamang Buddhist also started movement for the improvement of their condition. They gradually became alert of their precarious social existence. They

comprehended that without social movement their position in society could not be established. They demanded from the Govt. for recognition of their scheduled Tribe status. After a long drawn movement they became able to get their desired Scheduled Tribe status from the Govt. of India. This movement of the Tamang Buddhists was a land mark in the history of social movements in North Bengal.

Surprisingly enough we do not find any movement launched by the Koches of Cooch Behar, Totos of Jalpaiguri and the Dhimals of Darjeeling Terai, the oldest groups of people of the region concerned. However, since the last quarter of the twentieth century, the Dhimals have started movement demanding Scheduled Tribe status from the Government which is still continuing.

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CHAPTER-7
POST-COLONIAL SCENARIO :
-SOCIETY THA
CASTE IN THE LIGHT OF CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

In the present chapter we will study about the changed perspective of the caste, society and politics of North Bengal caused by the introduction of Constitutional Govt. in post independent period. The Constitution of free India does not endorse the existence of caste system and caste based politics which was prevalent during Colonial period, instead, it has provided special socio-economic safeguards to the backward and depressed classes in the name of social justice¹. Therefore although caste system remained continuing in the social affairs, it could not find any place in the political activities throughout the country. Therefore there came a radical change in the socio political history of the region like the other parts of the country. On the other hand reservation or backward factor directly had no role to play in the social affair; instead, it became an inevitable and indispensable part in political field, administrative, and other occupational opportunities provided by the Govt. both State and Central. Though caste remained acting from behind because backward caste groups actually were brought under reservation category as they were recognized by the Colonial Govt. as backward or depressed class category long before independence in 1932.

I

With regard to the politics of reservation in North Bengal it has to be mentioned that most of the low caste and non-caste groups and communities of the area were brought under scheduled caste and scheduled tribes' category during colonial period². After independence through the recommendation of several commissions again a good number of backward castes along with tribes had brought under reservation category.

Interestingly, the early settlers and numerically the most predominant group of the region i.e. the Rajbansis could not enter into the electoral politics massively taking the reservation facilities from village Panchayat to union board and from district level to legislative assembly till the seventies of the twentieth century despite the fact that during colonial period their representative organization, Kshatriya Samiti contested in the electoral politics against the nationalist parties viz. Indian National Congress, Communist Party of India, Swarajya Dal etc³. But since the seventies the number of representatives of the Rajbansi community increased phenomenally although even today a section of educated Rajbansi express their grievances by arguing that, though Constitution have helped them to represent their community in the assembly or parliament, yet their participation is 'miniscule' in numbers even the fact that a large number of Rajbansis are spreading over the entire North Bengal⁴.

Another interesting fact that had taken place in the region is that the migrant tribes had been participating in the politics since the implementation of reservation politics in the tribal populated areas though it has to be mentioned that in the tea plantation areas Panchayati system had started in a later phase. It is interesting to note that most of these tribes had come from Chotonagpur and Santal Pargana during colonial period as labourers in the plantation areas and as cultivators and agricultural labourers in the cultivation areas. With the passage of time they became the permanent inhabitants in their adopted lands with the implementation of election system on the basis of reservation of seats for the scheduled tribes they became empowered and gradually established their holdings in the politics of the area⁵.

Another interesting factor is that unlike in colonial period when the contestant must had a minimum educational qualification as the criterion for participation in the election, in the post colonial period such provision had been lifted and with minimum or without educational qualification (only with thumb impression) leaders of the backward classes became able to contest in the election. Thus in this way political empowerment of such backward groups and communities have been taking place.

II

It has stated by the leaders of various movements in the region who had long been associated with their respective caste solidarity movement, that, the provisions of the constitution with regard to the special facilities to the scheduled castes and backward communities provided by the Constitution as well as by the Govt. of India had not been implemented accordingly in toto in this region. They particularly mention about the land related policy of the West Bengal Govt. both during the period of United Front Govt. and Leftist Govt. (the land ceiling policy of the Left Govt. and its consequences etc. are beyond the period of our study). According to them the land acquisition policy of the United Front Govt. was responsible for the unprecedented misery of the Rajbansi Jotedars and land owners of the region⁶. It has found in the autobiography of Manibhushan Majumdar, an eminent social reformer of the community, that the big Jotedars and land owners did not distribute their lands to their offspring and kept those lands under their own individual holdings⁷. Therefore, land excess to 75 Bighas was confiscated by the Govt.

It has been argued by a number of scholars too that the abolition of Zamindari in 1953 brought an unprecedented situation to the life and

activities of the Jotedars and Big land-holders of the region. Most of the Jotedars and land-lords were the Rajbansis. It is worth mentioning that though the abolition of Zamindari Act was passed in 1953, yet in North Bengal the acquisition of land by the Govt. started comparatively later⁸. It was stated that the lands more than 75 bighas will be declared as Khas or Vest lands. It has been argued by the Rajbansi Jotedars that at that time most of the Jotedars were illiterate and they filled the return form taking whole assistance of the lawyers, Govt. employers in the land development offices etc. who were not at all acquainted with the condition of their lands. Therefore the illiterate Jotedars could not understand that which lands were going to become Govt. vested or Khas lands and which will remain under their own holdings. At the time of recovery of land by the State Govt. the Jotedars surprisingly noticed that the 'good' lands i.e. high yielding lands went to the Govt. and the 'bad' or low productive lands remained with them. As consequence a large number of Rajbansi land-lord and Jotedars became more or less landless soon after the recovery of such lands by the State Govt⁹. Here one point may be raised that in the Colonial period particularly during the thirties of the twentieth century a good number of Rajbansi Jotedars compelled to sell off their lands due to the economic depression and subsequent economic crisis to the Marwari money-lenders and other high caste Bengali Hindu businessmen etc¹⁰. Thus they became landless and in this way their lands were transferred to the Marwari, high caste Bengali Hindus etc. It has found from the autobiography of Upendra Nath Barman that in Cooch Behar the bureaucrats in the revenue department became owners of lands taking the Izara in their names. As results Jotedars were "forced step by step down from Jotedar to Chukanidar, then to Darchukanidar, some times as far as Dardar Chukanidar with an ever

increasing rent pay"¹¹. Although the ownership of lands had changed, most of the cultivators belonged to the Rajbansi community, it has found in the district-wise Census Reports of 1951, (district handbooks) that in almost all the districts of North Bengal the cultivators belonged to the Rajbansi community. But after independence there was qualitative change in the ownership of land. Particularly after the recovery of lands there was the question of distribution of those lands to the landless cultivators. Like other parts of West Bengal the Govt. was busy to give priority to the cause of rehabilitation and problems of the refugees¹² which became a burning problem to the then Govt. of both State and the Center. Therefore most of the vested lands were distributed to those landless refugees¹³. It deserves mention here that at this time the Rajbansi Kshtriya Samiti in its meeting at a village named Chechakhaj in Alipurduar sub-Division in 1955 under the president ship of Upendra Nath Barman one of its resolutions stated that the Govt. should give priority at the time of distribution of those surplus of lands which the Govt. recovered after the abolition of Zamindari Act. to the Rajbansi landless cultivators as they are the original inhabitants of the region and depending fully on land. It also recommended for the inclusion of one representative from the Rajbansi community in the land distribution committee¹⁴.

So far as the problems of the Rajbansi Jotedar were concerned their situation had phenomenally deteriorated because unlike the Zamindars of eastern and central Bengal they did not engage themselves in other economic enterprises. They did not show any interest to give their offspring education, or involve in trade, commerce and industry etc. instead, land was their sole source of livelihood¹⁵. A good number of Jotdars from Rangpur became

landless after partition and settled in North Bengal districts. They also had to face unprecedented miseries. It has been argued by scholars in this field that the land acquisition policy of the United Front Govt. created a fear amongst the Jotedars and big land owners of the region because land was not only their source of livelihood but also a symbol of high social status. Another interesting point is that though a few Jotedars kept in hidden a few lands¹⁶, yet in a long run they could not retain such lands with them. The reason behind such act was that within a very short span of time the land-price increased and they again sold off their lands to the refugee migrants for more profit, because they could not cope with the rapid change that had taken place surrounding them due to their laziness and age long dependency on fate¹⁷. According to the sociologists migrants always are vibrant; this became true with the refugees of North Bengal.

Another noticeable fact mentioned by the Rajbansi leaders of the region is that most of the leaders of the land grabbing movement were the refugee 'Bhatias' of east Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Moreover during this time the poor Nepalis from eastern Nepal migrated and began to settle in the Khas lands of the plain Terai and Duars. Thus at the time of distribution of the vest lands to the landless cultivators the opportunity of occupying Khas lands was taken by the 'outsiders' compared to the landless Rajbansis¹⁸. So a sense of deprivation among the landless Rajbansis developed and discontentment however started among them¹⁹.

It was under this background the Jotedars of the region started an ethnic based movement named Uttarkhanda Dal movement in 1969 which demanded separate state on the basis of separate ethnic distinctiveness. The

significant leaders of the Uttarkhanda Dal were Kalindra Nath Barman, Wazuddin Ahmed, Panchanan Mallick, Suma Oraon, Satinath Roy, the priest of Jalpesh Temple where the movement was originated, Sri Jogendra Nath Mandal etc. after the formation of the Uttarkhanda Dal it demanded the inclusion of the members of the Uttarkhanda Dal in the North Bengal Development Council which was established by the State Govt. to tackle the issues of North Bengal²⁰. This demand was however opposed by the Congress leaders. As a result confrontation with Congress broke out and as consequence the Uttarkhanda Dal contested in the Assembly Election in 1972 and the party got a defeat. After the defeat the Uttarkhanda Dal began to disintegrate. It again participated in the Election of 1977 from the constituencies of Dhupguri, Mainaguri, Jalpaiguri, Raiganj, Madarihat, Phansideoa, Cooch Behar and Mekhliganj²¹. It seems from the constituencies that the influence of Uttarkhanda Dal was limited to the northern districts of North Bengal viz. Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and the plain areas of Darjeeling. It has been viewed by the scholars that Uttarkhanda Dal got defeated in the election due to the fact that there took a radical change in the ethno-caste composition of the population during this time. Along with the refugees from then East Pakistan, a large number of poor Nepalis from Nepal and the expelled Nepalis from Meghalaya, expelled Bengalis from Assam as result of Bangal-Kheda Andolon had come and settled in the districts of North Bengal. Therefore political ideology also had changed²².

Thus a dichotomy regarding the implementation and application of the provisions of the Constitution is noticeable, where we find that though the Constitution of India does not allow caste based political movements or

parties, yet an ethnic based political movement and party came into existence by a constitutionally approved scheduled caste group of the region.

Percentage of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population to total population in the State and districts of North Bengal:-

Serial no.	State/ district	Total population	Scheduled caste population	Scheduled tribe population	Percentage of SCs to total population	Percentage of STs to total population	Percentage of SCs & STs to total population
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	West Bengal	44,312,011	8,816,028	2,532,969	19.90	5.72	25.62
1.	Darjeeling	7,81,777	98,277	108,586	12.57	13.89	26.46
2.	Jalpaiguri	1,750,159	595,424	428,595	34.02	24.49	58.51
3.	Cooch Behar	1,414,183	665,020	10,611	47.03	0.75	47.78
4.	West Dinajpur	1,859,887	429,578	221,317	23.10	11.90	35.00
5.	Malda	1,612,657	265,697	130,715	16.48	8.11	24.59

Source: Census of India 1971, Series- 22, West Bengal, Part II-C (i), Social and Cultural Tables (Tables C-VII and C-VIII), by Bhaskar Ghosh, p. 66.

III

Another area of discontentment was the rapid change in economic life of the people of this region, as it has already mentioned the people of this region are basically peasants and agricultural labourers that mean they were/are dependent on land. It has already mentioned earlier that the local Rajbansis were under scheduled caste category. Moreover the refugees who came during the seventies of the twentieth century particularly after 1971 equally were peasants-cultivators and also under scheduled caste category. In the pre-independent period no significant change in the agricultural field was found in the region due to the availability of land. But it was after the coming of the huge number of landless cultivators and their settlements over the whole of the northern region a significant change had taken place with regard to the quality and quantity of the production. At the same time pressure on land increased phenomenally²³. The migrant peasants brought almost all the cultivable as well as barren, fallow land under cultivation. They applied modern agricultural technology viz. chemical fertilizers, pesticide, high yielding seeds, proper irrigation etc. not only that they took the opportunities of agricultural loan granted to the peasants by the State and Central Govt., as a result within a short span of time a radical change took place so far as agricultural produce was concerned. As results the production underwent a revolutionary change that had ever taken place in the region²⁴. Consequently the lands inhabited by Namasudra refugee peasants' viz. Kharibari, Batasi, Phansideoa, Dhupguri, Haldibari and so on soon began to cater/supply the demands of almost the whole of urban areas of North Bengal. On the other hand the Rajbansi peasants, though depending fully on land did not utilize the opportunities provided by the Govt. to the cultivators

for a long time after independence. Therefore among the two communities of scheduled caste category, both of who were land-dependent, a disparity regarding the economic condition came to be noticed within a very short period.

On the other hand the Namasudra refugees who settled in the urban areas took education and became able to avail the opportunities of Govt. services reserved for the scheduled caste category people. Thus they became triumphant over the local people in all competitive examinations and services and went a step forward than the 'indigenous' people²⁵. It deserves mention that the Rajbansis of North Bengal were backward with regard to education since Colonial period. Though the region came under colonial hegemony long after the rest of Bengal, it has mentioned earlier (Chapter-3) that they had an apathy towards taking education though after the Kshatriya Samiti movement gave specific emphasis on the spread of education among them that the rate of literacy began to increase. Whatever may be the reason the fact was that the Namasudra refugees were more advanced in taking the benefits provided by the Govt. than the local Rajbansis. In the non-agricultural sector the percentage of participation by the Namasudras all over West Bengal is 26.45% and the by the Rajbansis all over West Bengal 14.23%²⁶.

The region is backward so far as industrialization is concerned both during Colonial and post Colonial period. Moreover after independence more other communities had been brought under reservation category through the recommendation of various commissions viz. Kalelkar Commission (1955), Mandal Commission (1979) etc. As the scope of inclusion under reservation

category increased therefore a number of communities put forward their demand for the inclusion under reservation category²⁷. For instance the Chains of Malda district demanded for the inclusion of their name under scheduled caste category though their demand was recognized after the period of our study. Similarly the Nagar, Dhanuk etc. communities demanded scheduled caste status. In the hill of Darjeeling also the Tamang Buddhists started movement for getting scheduled tribe status. It is interesting to note that most of the communities in the hills who were already under scheduled caste category had started demanding scheduled tribe status from the Govt. But all these movements came into existence after the publication of Mandal Commission Report. What is more important in this respect is that though the number of people with reservation status increased, the scope of employment had not been increased to the required level. Another important fact is that due to the absence of any training course or infrastructure of such institutions in the region the local people could not succeed in competitions for various examinations and the 'outsiders' and the refugees became able to get such opportunities²⁸. Therefore an unprecedented conflict had been started among the scheduled caste groups' people themselves. This type of discontent is distinct from other parts of West Bengal because it has already mentioned in earlier that in other areas particularly in the southern Bengal where the refugees settled largely next to the North Bengal districts, the scheduled caste refugees and scheduled caste indigenous people belong to the same origin i.e. Indo-Aryan, but the scheduled caste refugees and indigenous scheduled caste people are ethnically of different stock. The latter belong to the Indo-Mongoloid origin. It has viewed by scholars that it is due to this ethnic difference the conflict took the shape of confrontation²⁹. The indigenous people formed a number

of organizations since 1966 viz. Uttarbanga Sanskritik Parishads' Movement, Hamar Sangh Movement, Bharatiya Tapashil Mission Movement etc. the leaders of the movements propagated that the refugees have been encroaching on their due share of opportunities in all aspects from agriculture to education to Govt. services in rural and urban areas of this region³⁰. All these associations and organizations reflected the same grievances and discontent of the indigenous people.

Next to Uttarkhanda Dal movement another significant movement was launched by the educated youths of the Rajbansi community named UTJAS or Uttarbanga Tapashili Jati O Adivasi Sangathan. Though the movement started in 1979, the seeds of the movement germinated during the period under study. It was actually an extended organization of the Rajbansi and other backward classes' students i.e. Uttarbanga Viswavidyalaya Tapashili Jati O Adivasi Chatra Sangathan. It was founded to deal with the 'problems of admission, stipend and misbehaviors from the upper caste students'³¹. The leaders borrowed the idea from Uttarkhanda Movement though its appeal was wider. It has to be mentioned that during this period the number of scheduled caste students was very few and they called themselves as Dalit students. The success of the students encouraged them to extent its activities on a broad platform and thus Uttarbanga Tapashili Jati O Adivasi Sangathan came into existence in 1978. They argued that since independence all the facilities provided by the State as well as Central Govt. to the scheduled caste people had been availed by the scheduled caste refugees as they were more efficient compare to the 'indigenous' people. They alleged that had the refugee not come to this region the benefits of reservation would have been availed by themselves. Therefore they began to agitate against the refugees,

at the same time they alleged the State Govt. for allowing such infiltration particularly after 1971 and providing them support and land³². In this connection they put forward their demands to the Govt. for the denial of citizenship of those refugees who came after 1971. They even started demanding special safeguards from the Govt. for the indigenous people particularly for the Rajbansis of North Bengal³³ and gradually this demand increased to the demand for separate state by them which is however beyond the purview of our study.

IV

One thing has to be noted here that this kind of ethno-political movement took place and spread in and around the northern districts of North Bengal. The reason behind such development was that in Malda the Rajbansis were not very numerous. In Dinajpur as it has mentioned earlier that due to the partition in 1947 eastern part of Dinajpur went to East Pakistan, naturally the habitation of the Rajbansis faced a change and the number of Rajbansis decreased in the western part of the district. Not only that the educationally advanced Rajbansis resided in the eastern portion, and the western portion was comparatively backward and politically less conscious. Moreover after the inclusion of Islampur sub-Division with the western part of the district one problem arose there centering on the language. Before the inclusion Islampur was under Bihar Division and the language of most of the people was Suryapuri, Hindi, Maithili and other non-Bengali languages. Since the 80s of the 20th century these people demanded the recognition of Suryapuri language. So, it was not at all caste or ethnic movement. On the other hand, as it has mentioned earlier that, in the hill areas of Darjeeling there developed a number of movements by a number of low caste groups and

communities which demanded scheduled tribe status from the Govt. since the eighties of the last century.

So far as the picture of the hill people is concerned, in the colonial period All India Gurkha League had established which demanded the recognition of the Gurkhas domiciled in India as minority community. The All India Gurkha League expressed its frustration on the ground that being loyal to the British Indian Govt. and despite rendering military service to the Colonial Govt. in and outside the Sub-Continent the Gurkhas were not considered as minority community and thus remained ignorant at the time of granting constitutional safeguards, where as the other minor groups had given the same³⁴. The League in its conferences repeatedly lamented for not granting to them the constitutional safeguards in the Govt. of India Act of 1935. It becomes clear from the deliberations of the leaders of All India Gurkha League in its several conferences that the League had a desire of getting reservation in the electoral seats so that the Gurkhas would be able to establish on firm base in economic life and at the same time their own socio-cultural tradition may restore, otherwise they expressed their fear of losing their own language, tradition etc. So unless and until their very existence in India was established on the basis of constitutional recognition they will not be able to reside in India with legitimate rights³⁵. On the other hand the British Indian Govt. in order to make the hill areas of Darjeeling a separate administrative unit declared the area as Backward Tract by the Montague-Chelmsford Act of 1919 and as Excluded Area under the Govt. of India Act of 1935³⁶. It means the Govt. had kept the hill areas different from other parts of plain Bengal. According to scholars this type of separate

administration had made the hill areas different from plain Bengal with regard to the socio-cultural life also³⁷.

Immediately after independence in 1949 the All India Gurkha League made its resolution in favour of forming a separate “Uttarkhanda Pradesh” consisting of Darjeeling, Duars, Cooch Behar State and Sikkim. In the proposed province the leaders of the League wished that due to the Indo-Mongolian similarity among most of the inhabitants of the mentioned areas they will live better than with the Bengalis in Bengal³⁸. So a new kind of solidarity movement on the basis of racial integrity took place among the members of All India Gurkha League, though there was diversity of opinion between the All India Gurkha League and other associations of the hill people. On the other hand the Uttarkhanda Dal leaders inclined to the All India Gurkha League after the refusal of the Congress leaders to include the representative of the Uttarkhand Dal in the said North Bengal Development Council³⁹. After 1977 election however the Uttarkhanda Dal movement had lost its importance and as it has already mentioned that a number of movements on the line developed in the region.

Thus from the above discussion it can be surprisingly noticed that the reservation facilities provided by the Govt. particularly to the scheduled caste people instead of redressing their long drawn grievances/problems it rather has created and still creating a new crisis amongst the backward people themselves of this region. It will not be irrelevant to state that the scheduled caste groups’ people are fighting against each other which had taken deep rooted shape of movements for separate State. We do not find any such crisis regarding the share of lands, power and employment

opportunities by the refugees and indigenous people in Rarh Bengal or central Bengal. It is interesting to note that historically there was no relation of eastern Bengal from where the refugees migrated after the said partition with Rarh or central part of Bengal. Moreover northern part of Bengal was geographically adjacent to the eastern Bengal and historically these two areas shared the same socio-cultural tradition in many cases. So, after being displaced they preferred to settle in northern districts of Bengal. So we find a paradigm shift in the caste movement of this region in the post independent period.

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CONCLUSION

So, from this study the first thing which has to be considered that heterogeneity is the noticeable characteristic of the society of this region. But the predominance was maintained by the Rajbansis. The region is basically inhabited by the non-caste, sub-caste low-caste and tribes' people. Another interesting point is that the northern part of North Bengal including the hilly tract is basically the settlers' zone, though indigenous inhabitants were there. The migrant people actually became dominant in all aspects of life. At the same time northern part of North Bengal bears the feature of divers linguistic, socio-cultural and ethnic entities. Here we found that in the plain areas the language of the indigenous people are Rajbansi, Rabha, Bodo, etc. and the language of the migrants are Bengali, Hindi, Sadari etc. in the hill the indigenous Lepcha, Bhutia and Tibetan had their own languages. After the increase of the migration of the Nepalis the Nepali language became dominant and it has become the communicative lingua-franca of the people of all the hill people. In the southern portion Bengali is the dominant language though the tribes mostly Santals use their own language in their day to day life, yet the medium of instruction is Bengali. Therefore, the linguistic diversities are comparatively lesser.

Social awakening and social reform movement of southern part of Bengal had an influence over the people of this region. In course of our study it has been noticed that the nineteenth century was the century of reform movement by a number of groups and communities for desiring Kshatriya status throughout the country and particularly the western part of India was the pioneer in this respect. So, from western India the wave of the movement

came to southern part of Bengal and from southern Bengal it had come in northern Bengal. It is interesting to note that most of the lower caste groups' people demanded Kshatriya status when they became aware of their numerical strength and condition after the publication of the census report in 1881. In North Bengal the Rajbansis (the single largest community of the region) initiated their social mobility movement. It has found that they have endogamous society and no caste based stratification is there in their social system. Moreover, unlike other parts of the country there was no tradition of Kshatriya kingdom in Bengal. But the leaders of the community had proved of their Kshatriya origin citing examples from the ancient scriptures. Therefore, opposition came from the caste Hindus of Bengal and the Rajbansis considered this opposition as hindrance towards the way of their re-installation into the Hindu fold and revivalism for social uplift. This problem, however, was considered by the leaders of the community of later generation, who launched several movements for separate state, as non-recognition of them as well as their historic past a part and parcel of the history of Bengal and society. Although the Rajbansis first started the movement, other minor groups of people also got influenced by the movement of social uplift in the same line. For instance, the Rabhas of North Bengal initiated their movement to recognize their place in the Hindu social structure.

The social awakening movement of the Rajbansis ended with a bewildered consequence where they found themselves in an unending controversy regarding their identity. The present status of the Rajbansis residing in various parts of India, Assam, Nepal and Bangladesh is different from each other. Moreover, with regard to the language and script also diversities are

found, for instance, in West Bengal and Bangladesh they use Bengali, in Nepal they use Devanagari script, in Assam they have adopted Assamese script. So, a group of scholar in this field argued that had the colonial government not separated Goalpara district from Bengal in 1874 and Rangpur remained part of West Bengal after partition (1947), such kind of identity crisis would not have emerged. It has also been argued by scholars that the economic crisis that is the gradual marginalization of the community was responsible for an in-depth enquiry into their condition since past till present.

It is interesting to note that in the society of the hill areas of Darjeeling a peculiar consequence of colonial administration is noticeable. Though the social structure of the Nepalis is as same as the Hindu social stricture of India, yet the caste system in Darjeeling has become lucid. Perhaps the structure of colonial administration had a role for reducing the caste rigidity as it was in Nepal amongst the Nepalis in Darjeeling. Instead, the colonial administration had made them much more westernized than other caste and communities of Bengal nay India. Moreover, the separate administrative system also played a crucial role for which no assimilation of the society of the hill with that of the plain took place and the people as well as the society in the hill area remained separate from the plain Bengal. With regard to the courses of activities and consequences, it can be said that the indigenous people of the plain and those of the hill area were different. For instance, the indigenous people had started fighting for reservation facilities whereas the indigenous Lepcha, Bhutia etc. had not voiced for fighting for such facilities during the period under study.

Apart from the Rajbansis of this region, a number of other minor groups and communities also got influenced by the socio-cultural reform movement of the time. Moreover, in addition to concentrate on the socio-cultural uplift of their respective groups and communities, some of their leaders participated in the broader activities, viz. Indian national movement. They contributed a lot for the spread of national spirit amongst their fellow countrymen. So far as the migrant tribes are concerned, who migrated during colonial period as labourers in the Terai, Duars and as peasant cultivators in the southern districts viz. Malda, Dinajpur, have made themselves part and parcel of the region and gradually took part in the electoral politics. Thus they have become empowered. Moreover, a Cosmo-culture has been developed with all India characteristics in this region. Another interesting point is that, amongst the tribes both in the hill and plain areas, the Christians became more beneficiaries than their counterparts of their traditional religion. Though it is true that the language and culture of the majority group of people dominate over the minority communities, yet since the late seventies a number of minor groups and communities, both indigenous and migrants, have become conscious of their own culture, language etc. and started movement for restoring and developing of their own languages, cultures et., for instance, the movement of the Suryapuri, Bodo, Rabha etc.

We saw that unlike other parts of Bengal, here in North Bengal, reservation policy of the government has created a complex social relation among the inhabitants, both indigenous and migrants. Grievances regarding the sharing of reservation benefits resulted in an unprecedented social tension in the region which is still a continuing phenomenon.

It is interesting to note that in spite of such socio-economic tension the under current of cultural fusion and assimilation is simultaneously working in the region, for instance, the Bhaiya of the Rajbansis and Bhatiyali of the refugee migrants from east Pakistan, now Bangladesh have become part and parcel of the life of the people in this region.

A unique feature of the politics of post-partition North Bengal particularly of the post-panchayat reforms of 1953 period was the introduction of the reservation of seats for the tribal communities in the panchayati system. Since the implementation of the said system the entire scenario has rapidly changed. It is interesting to notice that those people, who were not at all the inhabitants of the region before 1947, now they are in a dominant position in the politics of the region and the makers of the future politics and political groups. We see the similar instance of some overseas Indians of South East Asia, South Africa and some Caribbean Countries. The fore-fathers of today's statesman, political leaders of those former British colonies went as labourers and their offspring within a few decades became the makers of the future of those countries and a good percentage of the citizens belong to Indian by origin.

Surprisingly we found another kind of dichotomy, the migrant tribes, the Nepalis have now been dominating in the politics of the region where they are in majority, but the migrants from East Bengal, thereafter the 'refuges' from East Pakistan, thereafter 'infiltrators' from Bangladesh particularly the caste Hindus could not find any opportunity in the land to represent their caste and community. It is true that both the group of migrants viz. the tribes and the caste Hindu Bengalis had come into this region at the same time,

and the lands were made cultivable not only by the tribes but also by the migrant Bengalis. But history is so unkind to them that they could not find any place in the political atlas of India nay North Bengal.

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শাসন সংস্কার

আলোচ্য বর্ষ মধ্যে ইংরাজি অগেষ্ট মাসে বিলাতে ভারত সচিব মহাশয় মহামান্য ভারত-সম্রাটের মন্ত্রী-সভার অভিমত লইয়া ঘোষণা করেন—“ভারতে প্রকৃত্তমূলক রাজ্যশাসন-প্রণালীর সূচনা করা হইবে এবং স্বয়ং ভারত-সচিব মহোদয় ভারতে আসিয়া তৎসম্বন্ধে প্রমাণ পুঙ্গব অভিমত সংগ্রহ করিবেন।”

রাজ্য-শাসনের সহিত সমাজের সুখ-শান্তি বিজড়িত। রাজ্যের লোকের দেহবল, ক্রমবল, অর্থবল, বাণিজ্যবল, বিজ্ঞানবল এবং সমাজের অবস্থা প্রভৃতি নানা বিষয়ের সহিত সমাজ রক্ষণা পরিবর্তন করিতে হইবে। নতুবা মঙ্গল সাধিত পরিবর্তনও অসম্ভব টানিয়া আনিতে পারে। এই কারণবশতঃ সকল সম্প্রদায়ের লোকেই রাজ্যশাসন পরিবর্তন ঘোষণা তানিয়া তদানাগোচনার অস্বাধিক প্রবৃত্ত হইয়াছিলেন এবং নিজ নিজ সম্প্রদায়ের অবস্থানসম্বন্ধে—বাধা নিজের মঙ্গল বলিয়া প্রতীত হইয়াছিল, সেক্ষেপে অভিমত ভারতের রাজ-প্রতিনিধি—তথা বিলাত হইতে সমাগত ভারত-সচিব মহোদয়ের নিকট ব্যক্ত করিতেছিলেন। কত্রিয়-সমাজের অবস্থা বিবেচনা করিয়া কয়েকজন সামাজিক রাজ্যশাসন ও পরিবর্তন সম্বন্ধে অভিমত প্রকাশ করিতে মত স্থির করেন। তদনুসারে সমাজের সুখশান্তি ও সমাজগত উদ্ভিদে অত্যাধিক সাধনের প্রতি লক্ষ্য রাখিয়া মতস্থিত করা হয় এবং সম্পাদক কর্তৃক সেই মত রাজ-প্রতিনিধি তথা ভারত-সচিব মহোদয়ের গোচরার্থে বাঙ্গালা গভর্ণমেন্টের সমীপে প্রেরণ করা হয়। যে পক্ষে সেই মত প্রেরণ করা হইয়াছিল তাহা নিম্নে উক্ত হইল।

No. 6977.

To

The Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal.

Sir,

I as Secretary of the Kshatriya Samiti most respectfully beg to make the following submissions for favour of being placed for consideration of the Secretary of State for India to whom we beg to offer our heartiest welcome to India, and humbly beg to be graciously permitted to send a deputation to wait upon the Secretary of the State.

1. That the Kshatriya Samiti is an association representing about 22 Lakhs of souls belonging to Kshatriya community, inhabiting the districts of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and other neighbouring districts and the State of Cooch Behar.

2. That the people though now in a somewhat backward state in point of education and progress are the successors of a great people who founded great Empires and otherwise played great parts in the past history of India.

3. That the association is non-political and aims at the intellectual, social, moral and religious progress of the Community, and final emancipation of the souls by the finding of the great soul in all we see, is the goal.

4. That for the realisation of that goal gradual expansion of the individual soul is necessary which can only be attained by living in Samajas or Societies organised with a view to that goal and protected by the Sovereign power of the country which of yore used to belong to the country and the controlling head to be a countryman with identical thoughts and feelings.

5. That as a part of the great Hindu Community, this Kshatriya Community enjoyed the self-improving social organisations, but owing to misfortune that fell upon them a few centuries back and specially the present system of education, that organisation which used to secure obedience to superiors, love to all, love and respect to the parents and superiors, reverence to the good and beautiful, as also peace and prosperity to all, has been greatly damaged and there are apprehensions of tendencies appearing in not far distant future of discontent and even of disrespect to law and order of the country which is being viewed with alarm by the members of the Community.

6. That previously the Hindu Society and as a part of that, this Kshatriya Community were internally governed by small Samajas or Societies each with its controlling head and a Panohayat or a council composed by the Pramanikas or persons of proved virtues and good trust; while all these small societies formed parts confederated and combined by love and authority of a higher organisation which ordinarily was the state with the Raja or king at its head. These Samajas were in their respective spheres self-governing and representative, and worked by love with the view to the common local, blending the people as if in one body, making them respect the order and law and guiding to their higher destinies. Their leaders as also the king himself were completely under the control of the law and order. And the reverence for the good and beautiful, the love to all and respect and obedience to superiors as also to the law and order made them loving confederates with all other similar Samajas as also the rest of mankind.

Even in matters of interest partly temporal, a well-working and representative system of administration can be found in the Dalai system of the administration of the holy Kamakshya Temple and the connected

Estates. There, too, the principles of reverence, love, respect and obedience are at the base.

7. That owing to disregards more or less to the self-governing and self-improving institutions and as an effect of the present system of education, the finer elements are gradually disappearing, and in their places self-interests even of somewhat baser kind are gradually gaining ground bringing in its train even discontentment and disrespect for the law and order.

8. That to get things all right and to bring about the desired reverence, respect, love and obedience to law and order, of course consistently with the respect for self which keeps a man firm and virtuous, makes him do what is good in life, most well-intentioned judicious and substantial help at the hands of the protecting powers is necessary and it will be a very great thing if the protecting power the King-Emperor be pleased to grant us that most judicious help, so that all the people of India and for the matter of that, all the people of the British Empire can live in peace, prosperity and mutual love and respect.

9. That what is that most judicious help and how that can be administered are questions which can be fitly grappled by persons who are most conversant with the whole human nature and the whole affairs of the Empire. But in view of the situation, I on behalf of the Kshatriya Community, beg to make the following humble submissions :—

- (a) That the Government should retain the power to render requisite help to the different communities according to their needs and aspirations and to place them all such a good position that there may be mutual love, respect and help.
- (b) That the self-governing and self-improving Institutions are not in any way impaired but encouraged without any interference to their principles and works to work out their self-development.
- (c) That in the matters of Municipal, village Communities and Panchayats be established and recognised as units and made the basis of popular representation.
- (d) That if representations of the people in the councils of Government is wanted, the representation must be thorough and every community high or low, and every interest should be allowed so be represented by members of their own community and not by men who belong to other community as they may not have identical views and feelings on any subject.

- (e) That care should be taken to secure the due consideration by the Government of the interests of the small communities or interests sending one or few representatives. For these representative may be easily outvoted by others who not being identical in thoughts and feelings may not find their hearts in accord with that of the few representatives, and guided by their own view of things may go and by their volume of speech may lead others to go against the most cherished object of the community represented by the solitary members and thus establish a rule of one part of the people over the other.
- (f) That the system of education be so modified that every community may develop its own religious, social and moral ideas and that impetus be given to the industrial education and enterprise.

Dated, Rangpur,
The 5th November, 1917.

I have the honour to be
Sir,
Your most obedient servant
Panchanan Barma
Secretary, Kshatriya Samiti.

ইহার উত্তরে নিম্নলিখিত টেলিগ্রাফ পাওয়া যায়—

Panchanan Barma
Secretary, Kshatriya Samiti, Rangpur, 3-12-17.

Your letter of 6th November has been printed and placed before Viceroy, Secretary of State, regret impossible arrange for personal interview.

P. S. G.

বাঙ্গালা গভর্নমেন্টের প্রধান অমাত্য

মহোদয় সমীপে—

মহাশয়,

আমি কজির-সমিতির সম্পাদকস্বরূপে মহানগর ভারত-সচিব মহাশয়কে ভারতে আন্তরিক বাগতঅত্যাধনা জানাইতেছি এবং নিম্নলিখিত কয়েকটি নিবেদন তাঁহার গোচর করণার্থে বিপুল সম্মানপূর্বক আপনার নিকট পাঠাইতেছি ও তাঁহার নিকট প্রতিনিধি প্রেরণ কৃত অস্বস্তি প্রার্থনা করিতেছি।

১। এই কজির-সমিতি রংপুর, দিনাজপুর ও জলপাইগুড়ি পার্শ্ববর্তী জেলাসমূহের ও কুচবিহাররাজ্যের অধিবাসী কজির-সম্প্রদায়কৃত বাইশ লক্ষ লোকের মুখস্বরূপ।

২। এই কজিরেরা অধুনা শিক্ষা ও উৎকর্ষ-প্রদায়ক পঞ্চাষট্টি বটে; কিন্তু যে কজির

পশ্চিমবঙ্গ প্রদেশ কংগ্রেস কমিটি
তাং ১০ই ডিসেম্বর ১৯৫৬।
নং ডার্লি, সি। ১৪। ৪২৮৪।

ভীষুক সম্পাদক,

সকল জেলা কংগ্রেস কমিটি।

প্রিয় বন্ধু,

আগামী ৩১শে ডিসেম্বর ১৯৫৬ সালের কংগ্রেস সমস্তকরণের শেষ তারিখ। সমস্ত তালিকা প্রণয়ন ও আবেদনপত্র ইত্যাদি জমা দেওয়া সম্পর্কে আপনাদের অবগতির জন্য সমস্ত সূচী নিয়ে দেওয়া হল। আপনারা জানেন সাধারণ নির্বাচনে আসন্ন। অতএব আপনারা অতি অবশ্যই উক্ত সূচি অনুযায়ী সমস্ত করণের সমস্ত কাজ সমাধা করিবেন। অন্তর্গত পত্র এ সকল কাজ আর করা সম্ভব হইবে না। তাৎক্ষণিক আপনারা এবিষয়ে বিশেষভাবে লক্ষ্য করিবেন।

১৯৫৭ সালের ১শা জানুয়ারী তারিখের মধ্যে পত্রাক সাক্ষি হাট'রা পৃথকভাবে যে কোনও কংগ্রেস কমিটির নিকটে হস্তান্তর আবেদনপত্র লইয়াছেন, তাঁহারা সমস্ত আবেদন পত্র, (ব্যবহৃত অথবা অব্যবহৃত) ও তৎসহ সমস্ত দ্বি-টাকাকড়ি তৎসংশ্লিষ্ট কংগ্রেস কমিটির নিকটে জমা দিবেন।

১৯৫৭ সালের ৩রা জানুয়ারী তারিখের পত্র প্রত্যেক জেলা ও মহল কংগ্রেস কমিটির নিকটে যে সকল আবেদনপত্র ও টাকাকড়ি জমা পরিয়াছে, তাঁহারা সেই ঠিক সকল সংশ্লিষ্ট প্রাথমিক কংগ্রেস কমিটির নিকটে পাঠাইয়া দিবেন।

১৯৫৭ সালের ১৫ই জানুয়ারী তারিখের পত্র প্রত্যেক প্রাথমিক কংগ্রেস কমিটি গৃহীত সমস্তকরণের আবেদনপত্র ও দ্বি-টাকাকড়ি, সঞ্চয় তহবিলের অন্তর্গত সংগৃহীত 'খাদি', সূতা, ব্যবহৃত ও অব্যবহৃত আবেদন এ সংক্রান্ত প্রস্তুত করিয়া প্রাথমিক সমস্তের লিপি, নতুন ও পুরাতন সমস্তের পৃথকভাবে পাঠ প্রেরণ করিয়া সক্রিয় সমস্ত তালিকা গণ কংগ্রেস কমিটির নিকটে জমা দিবেন।

১৯৫৭ সালের ২০শে জানুয়ারী তারিখের পত্র প্রত্যেক জেলা কংগ্রেস কমিটিকে প্রাথমিক সমস্ত তালিকা এক প্রথ, নতুন ও পুরাতন সক্রিয় সমস্তের তালিকা দুই প্রথ সহ প্রদেশ বং নির্ধারিত ভারত কংগ্রেস কমিটির প্রাণ্য পত্র টাকাকড়ি, সঞ্চয় তহবিলের সমস্ত টাকাকড়ি ও সূতা প্রভৃতি প্রদেশ কংগ্রেস কমিটিতে জমা দিতে হইবে এবং

প্রাথমিক ও সক্রিয় সমস্তের আবেদনপত্রের যেটি হিসাবও তৎসহ দাখিল করিতে হইবে।

১৯৫৭ সালের ২১শে জানুয়ারী হস্তান্তরিত হস্তান্তরিত তারিখ পর্যন্ত সকল প্রাথমিক, মহল ও জেলা কংগ্রেস কমিটির অফিসে সমস্তকরণের নিজ নিজ নাম দেখিবার জন্য সমস্ত সমস্ত তালিকা, বাহা প্রদেশ কংগ্রেস কমিটির নিকটে দাখিল করা হইয়াছে, তাহা টালাইয়া রাখিতে হইবে এবং উক্ত তালিকার যদি কারো নাম তালিকাকৃত না হইয়া থাকে অথবা নামে কোনও ভুল থাকে তাহা হইলে উক্ত তারিখের মধ্যে সেই সমস্ত জেলা কংগ্রেস কমিটি কমিটির নিকটে আপত্তি দাখিল করিতে পারিবেন উক্ত তারিখের পরে আর কোনও আপত্তি গ্রাহ্য হইবে না। প্রত্যেক অভিযোগকারীকে তিন প্রথ করিয়া লিখিত ভাবে আপত্তি দাখিল করিতে হইবে। প্রত্যেক জেলা কমিটির নিকটে যে সকল আপত্তি আসিবে তাহার ১৫ই ডিসেম্বর ১৯৫৭ সালের মধ্যে নিষ্পত্তি করিয়া প্রত্যেক পার্টিকে এবং প্রদেশ কংগ্রেস কমিটিকে তাহা জানাইতে হইবে। হাত—

ভবদীপ—

শ্রীঃ বিক্রম সিংহ নাথার।

সাধারণ সম্পাদক।

ক্রিয় সন্মেলন

গত ২৮।১২।৫৬ তারিখে আলিপুর-ছয়ার কংগ্রেসের নিকটবর্তী চোচাখা গ্রামে একটি বিরাট ক্রিয় সন্মেলন হয়। সভার সভাপতিত্ব করেন ইউপেক্স নাম বর্ধন এম্. সি এবং প্রধান অতিথির আসন গ্রহণ করেন যানবীর উপস্বামী শ্রীমতী চন্দ্র সিংহরায়।

সভার নিয়মিত প্রস্তাবগুলি গৃহীত হয়।

১। সর্বস্বায়ত্ত্বীয় তপস্বীদি নেতা ডাঃ বি. আবেদকার এবং বাগার ভাস্কি ও যানবীর রাজাপাল ডাঃ হরেন্দ্র কুমার মুখার্জির হস্তান্তরে এই সভা সভার শোক প্রকাশ করিতেছে।

২। আলিপুরছয়ার মহকুমার তিনটি সাধারণ সিন্ডেটের মধ্যে একটিতেও তপস্বীগুরু আর্থিকে কংগ্রেস মনোনয়ন দেন নাই। অগত এই মহকুমার তপস্বীদি ভোটারের মধ্যে যেটাই উপেক্ষা নহে; এবং উত্তরবঙ্গের মধ্যে এই অঞ্চলটি সর্বোৎকর্ষ সর্ববিধে পশ্চাৎগত হওয়ায় এই সভা গঠিত করিতেছে যে আসন্ন সাধারণ নির্বাচনে কংগ্রেস মনোনয়ন সংশোধন করিয়া কমপক্ষে একটি আসনে প্রাতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা করিবার জন্য একজন

প্রকৃত ম্যাক বয়সী এবং কংগ্রেসমতী তপস্বীগকে মনোনয়ন দেওয়া হোক।

৩। সরকার জমিদারী প্রথা লোপ করিয়াছেন। উত্তর বাংলার আদি কৃষক রাজবংশী চাঁদী বাহাডে এই ভূমি বন্টন ব্যবস্থার প্রথম সুযোগ সুবিধা পাঠ তাহার জন্য এই সভা কৃষিমন্ত্রীকে অগ্রোধ জানাইতেছে।

৪। উত্তর বঙ্গে রাজবংশী জাতি একটি অস্বস্তি সম্প্রদায়; শিকার দৌকার অনগ্রসর। এই জাতির উন্নতি করিতে হইলে সর্বপ্রথমে একতাবদ্ধভাবে সংগঠনের মাধ্যমে সকল প্রকার ধ্বংস সুবিধা গ্রহণ করিতে হইবে। আমাদের কেন্দ্রীয় সমিতির অধীন পাথ্য সমিতি স্থাপন করিবার জন্য বন্ধু কামারী ইউনিয়নে একটি শাখা সমিতি স্থাপন করা হউক।

৫। বহুদিন ধাবৎ রাজবংশী জাতি একটি তপস্বীগুরু জাতি। যদিও স্বাক্ষরিত আ.ছ এবং অস্তিত্ব তপস্বী জাতির সর্বপ্রকার উন্নতিকল্পে ভারত সরকার যে সংরক্ষণ ব্যবস্থা করিয়াছেন তাহার পূর্ণ সুযোগ গ্রহণ করার জন্য কেন্দ্রীয় সমিতির অধানে একটি উপ-কমিটি গঠন করা হউক এবং তপস্বী জাতির সংরক্ষণ ব্যবস্থা আরো ১০ (দশ) বৎসরের জন্য বর্ধিত করা হউক।

৬। তপস্বীদি উপজাতিদের জন্য তপস্বীগুরু জাতিগুলির জন্য অর্থনৈতিক মাধ্যমিক শিক্ষার ব্যবস্থা করা হউক।

৭। বন্ধুকামারী ইউনিয়নে অবিলম্বে একটি স্বাক্ষরিত এবং ইউনিয়নের সর্বত্র বয়স্ক শিক্ষাকেন্দ্র স্থাপন করা হউক।

৮। জাতীয় সরকারের ২য় পঞ্চবার্ষিকী পরিকল্পনাকে সাক্ষ্যমণ্ডিত করিবার জন্য সর্বপ্রকার সংযোগিতা করা হউক।

৯। নতুন শিক্ষা ব্যবস্থা চালু হওয়ার ফলে সহরে স্কুলের কয়েকটি স্থল একাদশ শ্রেণীতে উন্নীত হইবে এবং গ্রামের অধিকাংশ হাই স্কুল অষ্টম শ্রেণীতে পরিণত হইবে। ইহার ফলে গ্রামের মাধ্যমিক শিক্ষা ব্যাহত হইবে। তাই এই সভা প্রস্তাব করিতেছে যে বর্তমান সমস্ত হাই স্কুলগুলিকে একাদশ শ্রেণীতে উন্নীত করার সমস্ত ব্যয় সরকার গ্রহণ করুক।

হরেন্দ্র নাথ রায়

সম্পাদক,

অভ্যর্থনা সমিতি।

এই মহাধর্ম উল্লিখিত সত্যানুসন্ধান করিতে ভুলিয়াছি সেই দিনই অধঃপতন আমাদের সমাজের দ্বার দেশে সমুপস্থিত হইয়াছিল। দুর্দিনের মধ্যেও মানুষকে বাঁচাইয়া আত্মচেতনা আনিতে হইবে, আমাদের ক্ষুদ্র অনুষ্ঠান যেন লুপ্ত না হয় সে দিকে দৃষ্টি রাখিতে হইবে। পৌরাণিক তথ্য ও গল্প সংগ্রহ করিয়া স্মৃতি জাগাইয়া প্রাণে চেতনা আনিতে হইবে। আমাদের ইতিবৃত্ত ও পুরাকীর্তি দেশে লোকের অজ্ঞাত অবস্থায় রহিয়াছে। তাহা দেশের সামনে ধরিয়া আমাদের বর্তমান হীন অবস্থায় তুলনা করিতে হইবে। সামাজিক ভাইগণ, যদি একবার অতীতের দিকে দেখ এবং ভাব তাহা হইলে স্তম্ভিত হইবে। মহাভারতে ক্ষত্রিয় বীর ভগদত্তের বিষয় আপনারা অবগত আছেন এবং কুমার ভাস্কর বর্মা যিনি ১৩০০ বৎসর পূর্বে প্রাচীন কামরূপের রাজা ছিলেন এবং কনৌজ রাজ হর্ষবর্দ্ধনের সমসাময়িক ছিলেন তাহার বিষয়ও আপনারা ইতিহাসে পাঠ করিয়াছেন। গৌড়ের ধ্বংস, গোসানীমারীর গড়, পৃথুরাজের গড়, ময়নামতীর কোট, ধরমপালের গড়, এইসব কি আমাদের পুরাকীর্তি নহে? কালের কুটিল গতিতে রাজনৈতিক পরিবর্তনের ফলে দেশে ধর্মহানি ও অরাজকতা ঘটে, তাহার কারণে সামাজিক উত্থান ও পতন অবশ্যাত্তাবী। রোম ও মিশরের সেই সমৃদ্ধি আর নাই, প্রাচীন ভারতের পুরাকীর্তি শিক্ষা ও সভ্যতা কোথায় চলিয়া গিয়াছে? দেশের উত্থান পতন অবস্থাভেদে পরিবর্তিত হইতে থাকে। আমাদের সমাজের অবস্থাও তদনুরূপ পরিবর্তিত হইয়াছে। আমাদের আপশোষের কিছু নাই, নিরাশ প্রাণে ব্যথার লাঘব করিয়া যাহাতে ক্রমোন্নতির পথে পুণঃ অগ্রসর হইতে পারি তজ্জন্য চেষ্টা পাইতে হইবে। এক্ষণ নূতন যুগ আসিয়াছে, নবভাবের প্রেরণা প্রাণে সাড়া দিতেছে, আসুন আমরা আত্মোন্নতির জন্য কর্ম ক্ষেত্রে অবর্তীণ হই।

বিনীত নিবেদক —
 শ্রীযোগেন্দ্রনারায়ণ রায় মণ্ডল
 সম্পাদক।
 গোয়ালপাড়া ক্ষত্রিয় সমিতি।

বিঃ দ্রঃ অভিভাষণের বানান ও ভাষা অবিকৃত রাখা হয়েছে।

বেকোয়ার্ড ক্লাস কমিশনের প্রেসিডেন্টের নিকট প্রেরিত আসাম
 প্রদেশ কোচ রাজবংশী ক্ষত্রিয় সমিতির স্মারকলিপি, ১৯৫৩।

To,

The President,
 Backward Classes Commission, New Delhi.

Dated, Gauhati, the _____ 1953.

Memorandum of the Koch or Rajbangshi or Rajbangshi
 Kshatriya people of the State of Assam with replies to the
 Questionnaire.

Sir,

On behalf of the Koch or Rajbangshi people of the State of
 Assam, we beg to submit this memorandum:-

With request you will be good enough to recommend to the
 President the claim of the Koch casts formerly a tribe at present
 known by three names- Koch, Rajbangshi & Rajbangshi-Kshatriya
 for inclusion in the list of the backward classes and for according
 special treatment for their upliftment in the lines of the treatment of
 Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribes.

The Questionnaire issued by the Commission Covers a vast
 range and varieties of matters and to answer them fully and properly
 is not possible for want of authentic publication containing the fig-
 ures and other details regarding caste and communities since 1912
 on-wards. We consulted the census reports but these do not con-
 tain the figures and information's needed to answer the Question-
 naire, we therefore beg to submit this brief description giving as far
 as possible relevant information's about the Koch community known
 by 2 other names Rajbangshi and Rajbangshi-Kshatriya with a his-
 torical back ground from the extracts from the writings of historical

authorities of Assam i.e. Sir Edward Gait I. C. S. and others, which may help the Commission in coming at a decision about the backwardness of this community in the state of Assam.

For reason best known to the State The All Assam Koch-Rajbangshi Sanmilani was not informed of the proposed visit of the Backward classes Commission and we have not been asked to send replies to the Questionnaire not to speak of giving evidence before the Commission. We got the information when the central committee of the Backward classes of Assam sat on 12-9-53 at Gauhati, The delay in submitting our Memorandum with replies to the Questionnaire is due to this.

ous parts of the country- Hor- Bod-, Kus-Bod, etc, and in later times when Buddhism spread in-to country, the southern part inhabited by Budhist Lamas was known as Basti (Lama) Bod which has transformed in-to Tibbot or Tibbet,"

"The inhabitants of various parts of the Bod country were known as Bodo-fisha or Bodo-cha or the children of the Bod country, and were later known simply as the Bodo or the Bods. Some of them however, retained the name of the particular portian of the country from which they migrated at a later date. These were the Koches, who perhaps migrated from the Kucher or the Kucha area and the Mechas who migrated from the Mecha area."

Another version about the origin of the Koches is found based "Jagini Tantra" and the English reading of it is given below as put down by Rajmohan Nath, B. E. in his treatises on Vir-Chilarai.

In ancient times there ruled Sahsrarjun, a Kshatriya King of the Lunar race. His twelve sons were completely routed in war by Parsurama, son of Jamadagni and they settled at Chikne, a village in the district of Goalpara after wandering through hills and jungles. They mixed gradually with the local tribes and gave up their own customs and began to pass their days peacefully having married Mech girls. Their descendents came to be known as Koches.

Of these twelve families, one Hari became very rich and rose to prominence. So, he became the Mandal or Chief of the locality. At that time worship of Sacti or Siva. He had no issues but in his old age two sons were born to him by his two wives Hira and Jira. Hira and Jira were both sisters and their father was a king of a small kingdom in the east part of Bhutan.

Hari Mandal believed that he was blessed with the sons through the blessings of Siva and so his descendents trace their origin from Siva and began to be called Sivabanshi.

The Koches are frequently referred to as Kuvacha in the Puranas and Tantras.

RELIGION:

As we find from the forgoing accounts the Koches were Budhists. These people had some tribal beliefs of worship too. Thus,

ষাদশ লোকসভা নির্বাচন—১৯৯৮

পশ্চিমবঙ্গের বিজয়ী প্রার্থী তালিকা

কেন্দ্র	প্রার্থীর নাম	দল
১। কোচবিহার (তফসিলি)	অমর রায়প্রধান	সারা ভারত ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লক
২। আলিপুরদুয়ার (তফসিলি উপজাতি)	জোয়াকিম বাব্বলা	বিপ্লবী সমাজতন্ত্রী পার্টি
৩। জনপাইগুড়ি	মিনতি সেন	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৪। দাঙ্গিলিং	আনন্দ পাঠক	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৫। রায়গঞ্জ	সুব্রত মুখার্জি	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৬। বালুরঘাট (তফসিলি)	রঞ্জন বর্মণ	বিপ্লবী সমাজতন্ত্রী পার্টি
৭। মালদহ	আবু বরকত আতাউল গনি খানচৌধুরী	ভারতীয় জাতীয় কংগ্রেস
৮। জঙ্গীপুর	আবুল হাসনত খান	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৯। মুর্শিদাবাদ	মইনুল হাসান	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
১০। বহরমপুর	প্রমথেশ মুখার্জি	বিপ্লবী সমাজতন্ত্রী দল
১১। কৃষ্ণনগর	অজয় মুখার্জি	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
১২। নবদ্বীপ (তফসিলি)	অসীম বালা	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
১৩। বারাসাত	ডাঃ রঞ্জিতকুমার পাঁজা	পশ্চিমবঙ্গ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস
১৪। বসিরহাট	অজয় চক্রবর্তী	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি
১৫। জয়নগর (তফসিলি)	সনৎকুমার মণ্ডল	বিপ্লবী সমাজতন্ত্রী দল
১৬। মথুরাপুর (তফসিলি)	রাধিকারঞ্জন প্রামাণিক	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
১৭। ডায়মণ্ডহারবার	শমীক লাহিড়ী	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
১৮। যাদবপুর	কৃষ্ণা বসু	পশ্চিমবঙ্গ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস
১৯। ব্যারাকপুর	তড়িৎবরণ তোপদার	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
২০। তমদম	তপন শিকদার	ভারতীয় জনতা পার্টি
২১। কলকাতা উত্তর-পশ্চিম	সুদীপ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়	পশ্চিমবঙ্গ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস
২২। কলকাতা উত্তর-পূর্ব	অজিতকুমার পাঁজা	পশ্চিমবঙ্গ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস
২৩। কলকাতা দক্ষিণ	মমতা ব্যানার্জি	পশ্চিমবঙ্গ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস
২৪। হাওড়া	ডাঃ বিক্রম সরকার	পশ্চিমবঙ্গ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস
২৫। উলুবেড়িয়া	হামান মোল্লা	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
২৬। শ্রীরামপুর	আকবর আলি খন্দকার	পশ্চিমবঙ্গ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস
২৭। হুগলি	রূপচাঁদ পাল	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
২৮। আরামবাগ	অনিল বসু	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
২৯। পাঁশকুড়া	নীতা মুখার্জি	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি
৩০। তমলুক	লক্ষ্মণ পেট	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৩১। কাঁচি	সুধীর গিরি	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৩২। মেদিনীপুর	ইন্দ্রজিৎ গুপ্ত	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি
৩৩। ঝাড়গ্রাম (তফসিলি উপজাতি)	রূপচাঁদ মুর্শু	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৩৪। পুরুলিয়া	বীর সিং মাহাতো	সারা ভারত ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লক
৩৫। বাঁকুড়া	বাসুদেব আচার্য	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৩৬। বিষ্ণুপুর (তফসিলি)	সন্ধ্যা বাউড়ি	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৩৭। দুর্গাপুর (তফসিলি)	সুনীল খান	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৩৮। আসানসোল	বিকাশ চৌধুরী	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৩৯। বর্ধমান	নিখিলানন্দ সর	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৪০। কাটোয়া	মেহবুব আহমেদী	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৪১। বোলপুর	সোমনাথ চ্যাটার্জি	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)
৪২। বীরভূম (তফসিলি)	রামচন্দ্র ডোম	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)

Lok Sabha Election 1996

Name of the winning candidates, party affiliations and winning margin.

No. & Name of the Parliamentary Constituency	Name of the winning candidate	Party affiliation	Winning margin
1. Cooch Behar (SC)	Amar Roy Pradhan	A.I.F.B.	89,034
2. Alipurduars (ST)	Joachim Baxla	R.S.P.	1,37,810
3. Jalpaiguri	Jitendra Nath Das	C.P.I.(M)	1,12,462
4. Darjeeling	Ratna Bahadur Rai	C.P.I.(M)	77,124
5. Raigunj	Subrata Mukherjee	C.P.I.(M)	10,956
6. Balurghat (SC)	Ranen Barman	R.S.P.	1,43,707
7. Malda	A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury	I.N.C.	89,822
8. Jangipur	Md. Idris Ali	I.N.C.	13,122
9. Murshidabad	Masudal Hossain Syad	C.P.I.(M)	37,185
10. Berhampore	Pramothes Mukherjee	R.S.P.	44,357
11. Krishnagar	Ajoy Mukherjee	C.P.I.(M)	38,910
12. Nabadwip (SC)	Ashim Bala	C.P.I.(M)	39,068
13. Barasat	Chitta Basu	A.I.F.B.	35,347
14. Basirhat	Ajay Chakraborty	C.P.I.	86,016
15. Joynagar (SC)	Sanat Kumar Mondal	R.S.P.	1,43,927
16. Mathurapur (SC)	Radhika Ranjan Pramanik	C.P.I.(M)	16,068
17. Diamond Harbour	Samik Lahiri	C.P.I.(M)	22,526
18. Jadavpur	Krishna Bose	I.N.C.	13,038
19. Barrackpore	Tarit Baran Topdar	C.P.I.(M)	50,894
20. Dum Dum	Nirmal Kanti Chatterjee	C.P.I.(M)	58,291
21. Calcutta North-West	Debi Prasad Pal	I.N.C.	64,951
22. Calcutta North-East	Ajit Kumar Panja	I.N.C.	64,985
23. Calcutta South	Mamata Banerjee	I.N.C.	1,03,261
24. Howrah	Priya Ranjan Das Munsri	I.N.C.	33,931
25. Uluberia	Hannan Mollah	C.P.I.(M)	27,842
26. Serampore	Pradip Bhattacharya	I.N.C.	5,463
27. Hooghly	Rupchand Pal	C.P.I.(M)	38,497
28. Arambagh	Anil Basu	C.P.I.(M)	2,26,333
29. Panskura	Geeta Mukherjee	C.P.I.	1,11,388
30. Tamluk	Jayanta Bhattacharyya	I.N.C.	7,910
31. Contai	Sudhir Giri	C.P.I.(M)	24,042
32. Midnapore	Indrajit Gupta	C.P.I.	2,10,649
33. Jhargram (ST)	Rupchand Murmu	C.P.I.(M)	3,47,264
34. Purulia	Bir Singh Mahato	A.I.F.B.	1,09,870
35. Bankura	Basudeb Acharia	C.P.I.(M)	2,28,987
36. Bishnupur (SC)	Sandhya Bauri	C.P.I.(M)	2,65,846
37. Durgapur (SC)	Sunil Khan	C.P.I.(M)	1,81,713
38. Asansol	Haradhan Roy	C.P.I.(M)	46,950
39. Burdwan	Balai Ray	C.P.I.(M)	2,62,714
40. Katwa	Mahaboob Zahedi	C.P.I.(M)	1,06,202
41. Bolpur	Somnath Chatterjee	C.P.I.(M)	2,53,646
42. Birbhum (SC)	Ramchandra Dome	C.P.I.(M)	1,11,020

APPENDIX - F

Table showing the elected members from different districts of North Bengal in the Bidhan Sabha Election in 1977.

Cooch Behar:

Constituency	Name of Candidates	Name of Party
Mekhliganj (SC)	Sadakanta Roy	FB
Sitalkuchi (SC)	Sudhir Pramanik	CPM
Mathabhanga (SC)	Dinesh Chandra Dakua	CPM
Cooch Behar north	Aparajita Goppi	FB
Cooch Behar west	Bimal Kanti Basu	FB
Sitai	Dipak Sengupta	FB
Dinhata	Kamal Guha	FB
Natabari	Sibendra Narayan Chowdhury	CPM
Tufanganj (SC)	Manindra Nath Barman	CPM

Japaiguri:

Constituency	Name of Candidates	Name of Party
Kumargram (ST)	John Arther Baxla	RSP
Kalchini (ST)	Manohar Tirkey	RSP
Alipurduars	Nani Bhattacharya	RSP
Falakata (SC)	Jogendranath Singha Roy	CPM
Madarihat (ST)	A.H. Besterwitch	RSP
Dhupguri (SC)	Banamali Roy	CPM
Nagrakata (ST)	Punai Oraon	CPM

Mainaguri (SC)	Tarakhandhu Roy	RSP
Mal (ST)	Mohan Lal Oraon	CPM
Kranti	Parimal Mitra	CPM
Jalpaiguri	Nirmal Kumar Bose	FB
Rajganj (SC)	Dhirendranath Roy	CPM

Darjeeling:

Constituency	Name of Candidates	Name of Party
Kalimpong	Subba Renuluna	GL
Darjeeling	Deoprasash Rai	GL
Kurseong	Dawa Narbula	Cong
Siliguri	Biren Bose	CPM
Phansidewa	Patras Minz	CPM

West Dinajpur:

Constituency	Name of candidates	Name of party
Chopra	Moha Baccha Munsu	CPM
Islampur	Abdul Karim Choudhury	IND
Goalpokhar	Ramjan Ali	IND
Karandighi	Hazi Sajjad Hussain	Cong
Raiganj (SC)	Khagendra Nath Sinha	CPM
Kaliaganj (SC)	Nabakumar Roy	Cong
Kusmandi (SC)	Dhirendra Nath Sarkar	Cong
Itahar	Dr. Zainal Abedin	Cong
Gangarampur	Ahindra Sarkar	CPM

Tapan (ST)	Nathaniel Murmu	RSP
Kumarganj	Jamini Kishore Majumdar	CPM
Balurghat	Biswanath Chowdhury	RSP

Malda:

Constituency	Name of Candidates	Party
Habibpur (ST)	Sarkar Murmu	CPM
Gajol (ST)	Sufal Murmu	CPM
Kharba	Golam Yazdani	IND
Harishchandrapur	Birendra Kumar Maitra	JAN
Ratua	Mahammad Ali	CPM
Araidanga	Habib Mustafa	CPM
Malda (SC)	Suvenu Kumar Chowdhury	CPM
Englishbazar	Sailen Sarkar	CPM
Manikchak	Subodh Chowdhury	CPM
Suzapur	Abdul Barkat Ataul Gain Khan Chowdhury	Cong
Kaliachak	Samsuddin Ahmed	Cong

Source: Election Recorder, Part II, Dilip Banerjee Book Front Publication Forum, Calcutta, 1990, p.277-284.

Members of the Parliament representing North Bengal districts after the Election in 1971:

Constituency	Members	Party
Cooch Behar (SC)	Binoy Krishna Das Choudhury	Cong.(R)
Jalpaiguri (ST)	Tuna Oraon	Cong (R)
Darjeeling	Ratanlal Brahman	CPM
Raiganj	Siddhartha Shankar Roy	Cong (r)
Balurghat (SC)	Rasendra Nath Barman	Cong (r)
Malda	Dinesh Chandra Joardar	CPM

Members of the Parliament representing North Bengal districts after the Election in 1977:

Constituency	Members	Party
Cooch Behar (SC)	Amarendra Nath Roy Pradhan	FB
Alipurduar (ST)	Pijus Tirkey	RSP
Jalpaiguri	Khagendra Nath Dasgupta	IND
Darjeeling	Krishna Bahadur Chhetri	Cong
Raiganj	Md. Hayat Ali	BLD
Balurghat (SC)	Palash Barman	RSP
Malda	Dinesh Chandra Joardar	CPM

Source: Election Recorder, Part II- Dilip Banaerjee, Book Front Publication Forum, Calcutta 1990, p.442-449.

দ্বাদশ লোকসভা নির্বাচন ১৯৯৮

পশ্চিমবঙ্গের চূড়ান্ত ফলাফল

প্রার্থীর নাম	দলের নাম	শ্রেণী ভোট ও শতকরা হার
১। কোচবিহার (তফঃ)		ভোটার সংখ্যা= ১০,৯৭,১৯৩
		প্রদত্ত ভোট= ৯,১৬,৬৪২ ● বৈধ ভোট= ৯,০৫,০৭৮ ● বাতিল ভোট= ১১,৫৬৪
১। অমর রায়প্রধান	সারা ভারত ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লক	৩,৯৬,১৪০ (৪৩.৭৬৯)
২। পাপিয়া বর্মণ	বহুজন সমাজ পার্টি	১৩,৪৮০ (১.৪৮৯)
৩। কর্ণেশ্বর বর্মণ	আমরা বাঙালি	৪,৩৯১ (০.৪৮৫)
৪। গোবিন্দ রায়	ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লক (সোসালিস্ট)	২,৭২,৯৭৪ (৩০.১৬০)
৫। প্রসেনজিৎ বর্মণ	পঃ বঃ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস	২,১৮,০৯৩ (২৪.০৯৭)
২। আলিপুরদুয়ার (তফঃ উপঃ)		ভোটার সংখ্যা= ১০,২৩,৫৬৭
		প্রদত্ত ভোট= ৮,২৭,৩৬২ ● বৈধ ভোট= ৮,০৬,২৪৭ ● বাতিল ভোট= ২১,১১৫
১। জ্যোতিকা বান্নলা	বিপ্লবী সমাজতন্ত্রী পার্টি	৪,১৫,০০৬ (৫১.৪৭৪)
২। ধীরেন্দ্র নারজিনারাই	ভারতীয় জনতা পার্টি	২,১৯,৪০৭ (২৭.২১৩)
৩। তুলুধাম প্রধান	ভারতীয় জাতীয় কংগ্রেস	১,৬২,১৬৮ (২০.১১৪)
৪। ফাবিয়ানাস তিরকে	সমাজবাদী গণ পরিষদ	৬,৬৯৯ (০.৮৩১)
৫। সমরেন্দ্র একা (পিটু)	নির্দল	২,৯৬৭ (০.৩৬৮)
৩। জলপাইগুড়ি		ভোটার সংখ্যা= ১০,৮৫,২৫৭
		প্রদত্ত ভোট= ৮,৮৬,১৭৫ ● বৈধ ভোট= ৮,৬৮,৬৭২ ● বাতিল ভোট= ১৭,৫০৩
১। অনিল রায়	বহুজন সমাজ পার্টি	৪,৩৮৭ (০.৫০৫)
২। মিনতি সেন	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)	৪,২৬,৬৭২ (৪৯.১১৮)
৩। শুভ্র পাত্র	ভারতীয় জাতীয় কংগ্রেস	১,৬৫,৮৪৫ (১৯.০৯২)
৪। কল্যাণ চক্রবর্তী	পঃ বঃ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস	২,৫১,৬৯৭ (২৮.৯৭৫)
৫। জয়গোপাল দাস	নির্দল	৬,১১৩ (০.৭০৪)
৬। ললিত বর্মণ	নির্দল	৩,১৭১ (০.৩৬৫)
৭। সনিকা মুণ্ডা	নির্দল	৫,৪৭৭ (০.৬৩০)
৮। শঙ্কর গাঙ্গুলি	নির্দল	৫,৩১০ (০.৬১১)

প্রার্থীর নাম

দলের নাম

প্রাপ্ত ভোট ও শতকরা হার

৪। দাজিলিং

ভোটার সংখ্যা= ১২,৩৮,৫৮৭

প্রদত্ত ভোট= ৬,৪১,২৮১ ● বৈধ ভোট= ৬,২৬,৯৬৯ ● বাতিল ভোট= ১৪,৩১২

১। আনন্দ পাঠক	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)	২,৮০,৫৮৯ (৪৪.৭৫৩)
২। প্রশান্ত নন্দী	ভারতীয় জাতীয় কংগ্রেস	১,৫৮,০৩৩ (২৫.২০৬)
৩। সুরজিৎ রাসিলী	বহুজন সমাজ পার্টি	৩,৭২৭ (০.৫৯৪)
৪। দাওয়া নরবুলা	পঃ বঃ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস	১,১৪,৬৮৮ (১৮.২৯৩)
৫। এল বি পারিয়ার	নির্দল	৩,০৪৮ (০.৪৮৬)
৬। পরেশ রায়	নির্দল	১২,৬০৯ (২.০১১)
৭। মতিয়ুর রহমান	নির্দল	২,৫৯৪ (০.৪১৪)
৮। আর বি রাই	নির্দল	৫১,৬৮১ (৮.২৪৩)

৫। রায়গঞ্জ

ভোটার সংখ্যা= ১১,২৬,৩১০

প্রদত্ত ভোট= ৮,৯৮,৩০১ ● বৈধ ভোট= ৮,৮২,৪৮৮ ● বাতিল ভোট= ১৫,৮১৩

১। প্রিয়রঞ্জন দাসমুন্সী	ভারতীয় জাতীয় কংগ্রেস	৩,৪৪,৬১৬ (৩৯.০৫১)
২। রাহুল সিনহা (বিষজিৎ)	ভারতীয় জনতা পার্টি	১,৬০,২৩৯ (১৮.১৫৮)
৩। সুরত মুখার্জি	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)	৩,৫০,৮৯৭ (৩৯.৭৬২)
৪। সুভাষ বালা	বহুজন সমাজ পার্টি	২,৮১২ (০.৩১৮)
৫। অজিতকুমার দাস	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ লেঃ) (এল)	৮,৪৮১ (০.৯৬১)
৬। ডাঃ মহম্মদ সালিমুদ্দিন	সমাজবাদী জনতা পার্টি (রাষ্ট্রীয়)	১,১৬৭ (০.১৩২)
৭। আশেখ্বর প্রসাদ সিনহা	নির্দল	৭৬৫ (০.৮৭)
৮। ডাঃ আবেদিন শায়েক্তা	নির্দল	৬,৫৮২ (০.৭৪৬)
৯। মহম্মদ ইলিয়াস চৌধুরী	নির্দল	৮৩৪ (০.০৯৪)
১০। উদয় দুবে	নির্দল	১,২১৮ (০.১৩৮)
১১। গোলাম ইয়াজদানি	নির্দল	৩,৮৮১ (০.৪৪০)
১২। দেবশিস মিত্র	নির্দল	৯৯৬ (০.১১৩)

৬। বালুরঘাট (তফঃ)

ভোটার সংখ্যা= ১০,৮৮,১০৫

প্রদত্ত ভোট= ৮,৯১,৩৮০ ● বৈধ ভোট= ৮,৭৬,৬৪৫ ● বাতিল ভোট= ১৪,৭৩৫

১। পূর্ণচন্দ্র সরকার	বহুজন সমাজ পার্টি	৩,৮৮৮ (০.৪৪৪)
২। মোহিনীমোহন রায়	ভারতীয় জাতীয় কংগ্রেস	১,৮২,৮৪৬ (২০.৮৫৭)
৩। রঞ্জন বর্মণ	বিপ্লবী সমাজতন্ত্রী পার্টি	৪,২৮,৭১০ (৪৮.৯০৩)

প্রার্থীর নাম	দলের নাম	প্রাপ্ত ভোট ও শতকরা হার
৬। বালুরঘাট (তফঃ)		
৪। ননীগোপাল রায়	পঃ বঃ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস	২,৫৬, ৫৩৫ (২৯.২৬৩)
৫। ধীরেন্দ্রনাথ সিনহা	নির্দল	২,৭৫৩ (০.৩১৪)
৬। নীরেন মণ্ডল	নির্দল	৬৬২ (০.০৭৬)
৭। মলিনচন্দ্র বর্মণ	নির্দল	১,২৫১ (০.১৪৩)
৭। মালদা ভোটার সংখ্যা= ১০,৩০,৩৪৩		
প্রদত্ত ভোট= ৮,৪৫,৩৬৭ ● বৈধ ভোট= ৮,৩২,৪৬৯ ● বাতিল ভোট= ১২,৮৯৮		
১। এ বি এ গণি খানচৌধুরী	ভারতীয় জাতীয় কংগ্রেস	৩,৫৩,১১৭ (৪২.৪১৮)
২। জীবন মৈত্র	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)	৩,০৪,০৩৫ (৩৬.৫২২)
৩। মহেন্দ্রনাথ হাঁসদা	বহুজন সমাজ পার্টি	৪,২২৪ (০.৫০৮)
৪। মুজফ্ফর খান	ভারতীয় জনতা পার্টি	১,৬৯,২৬০ (২০.৩৩২)
৫। আকবর হোসেন	নির্দল	৯১৪ (০.১১০)
৬। মাজিঙ্গুর রহমান	নির্দল	৯১৯ (০.১১০)
৮। জঙ্গীপুর ভোটার সংখ্যা= ১০,৭১,১৮৯		
প্রদত্ত ভোট= ৮,৪০,০৩২ ● বৈধ ভোট= ৮,২৭,৬২৫ ● বাতিল ভোট= ১২,৪০৭		
১। আবু হাসান খানচৌধুরী	ভারতীয় জাতীয় কংগ্রেস	৩,২৪,২৬০ (৩৯.১৭৯)
২। আবুল হাসান খান	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)	৩,৯৬,৭৬১ (৪৭.৯৪০)
৩। সেখ ফুরকান	পঃ বঃ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস	৯৯,০২৮ (১১.৯৬৫)
৪। মোসায়ফ হোসেন	মুসলিম লিগ কেরালা কমিটি	৬,০১৩ (০.৭২৭)
৫। রফিক সেখ	নির্দল	১,৫৬৩ (০.১৮৯)
৯। মুর্শিদাবাদ ভোটার সংখ্যা= ১১,৫৪,১০৭		
প্রদত্ত ভোট= ৯,৩৯,২৪০ ● বৈধ ভোট= ৯,২৭,৫৯৮ ● বাতিল ভোট= ১১,৬৪২		
১। আনারুল হোসেন খান	ভারতীয় জাতীয় কংগ্রেস	২,৭২,৯৩৫ (২৯.৪২৪)
২। মইনুল হাসান	ভারতের কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি (মাঃ)	৪,৬৩,৪০১ (৪৯.৯৫৭)
৩। সাইয়ুদ্দিন সরকার	মুসলিম লিগ কেরালা কমিটি	১৬,২৫৪ (১.৭৫২)
৪। সাগির হোসেন	পঃ বঃ তৃণমূল কংগ্রেস	১,৪৯,০৬১ (১৬.০৭০)
৫। আবদুস সালাম	নির্দল	১৯,০৫৪ (২.০৫৪)
৬। কাদের মণ্ডল	নির্দল	৫,৫৪২ (০.৫৯৭)
৭। নূপেন্দ্রনাথ মণ্ডল	নির্দল	১,৩৫১ (০.১৪৬)

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL
BACKWARD CLASSES WELFARE DEPARTMENT
Writers' Buildings

No. 2928-BCW/MR-436/99

Dated, Kolkata, the 10th July, 2001

NOTIFICATION*

Whereas by this department notification No. 1179-TW/EC, dated the 1st day of December, 1995 (hereinafter referred to as the said notification), 9 (nine) more backward classes for the purposes of the West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993 (West Ben. Act I of 1993) (hereinafter referred to as the said Act) were specified;

And whereas the West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes (hereinafter referred to as the said Commission) was set up under the said Act to examine requests for inclusion of any class of citizens as a backward class in the lists and hear complaints of over-inclusion or under-inclusion of any class in such lists and tender such advice to State Government as it deems appropriate;

And whereas the said Commission has now recommended that the names of two sub-classes 'Rana' and 'Thapa' shown in brackets against the existing entry of 'Mangar' at serial 3 of the said notification should be omitted so that the 'Mangar' class as a whole is treated as a backward class;

And whereas the State Government have accepted the said recommendation of the Commission;

Now, therefore, in pursuance of the provisions of clause (a), read with clause (c), of section 2, and sub-section (2) of section 9, of the said Act, the Governor is pleased hereby to make the following amendment in the said notification:

Amendment

In the list to the said notification, in serial number 3, after the word "Mangar" omit the brackets and words "(Thapa, Rana)".

By order of the Governor,
S. Barma
Principal Secy. to the Govt. of West Bengal.

* Published in Kolkata Gazette, Extraordinary No. WB(Part I)/2001/SAR-213, dated 10th July, 2001.

RECOGNIZED OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES OF WEST BENGAL

Recognized by Govt. of West Bengal			Recognized by Govt. of India	
Sl. No.	Name of the Caste <i>W.B.</i>	Particulars of connected orders	Sl. No.	Name of the Caste
1.	Kapali	Notification No. 346-TW/EC dt. 13.07.94 * read with Notification No. 92-TW/EC dt. 11.02.1997	1.	Kapali
2.	Baishya Kapali		2.	Baishya Kapali
3.	Kurmi		3.	Kurmi
4.	Sutradhar		4.	Sutradar
5.	Karmakar		5.	Karmakar
6.	Kumbhakar / <i>Kumbar</i>		6.	Kumbhakar
7.	Swarnakar		7.	Swarnakar
8.	Teli / <i>Kala</i>		8.	Teli
9.	Napit		9.	Napit
10.	Yogi-Nath		10.	Yogi-Nath
11.	Goala-Gope (Pallav Gope, ballav Gope, Yadav Gope, Gope, Ahir and Yadav.) *		Notification No. 705-TW/EC dt. 13.12.94	11.
12.	Moira-Modak (Halwai)	12.		Moira-Modak (Halwai)
13.	Barujibi / <i>Barua</i>	13.		Barujibi
14.	Satchasi	14.		Satchasi
15.	Malakar			(Notification No. 12011/9/94-BCC dt. 19.10.1994.)
16.	Jolah (Ansari-Momin)	15.		Malakar
17.	Kansari	16.		Jolah (Ansari-Momin)
18.	Tanti / <i>Tantubaya</i>	17.		Kansari
19.	Dhanuk	18.		Tanti, Tantubaya
20.	Shankakar	19.		Dhanuk
21.	Keori/Koiri	20.		Shankakar
22.	Raju			(Notification No. 12011/96/94/BCC dt. 09.03.1996)
23.	Nagar	21.		Keori/Koiri
24.	Karani	22.		Raju
25.	Sarak	23.	Nagar	
26.	Tamboli/Tamali	24.	Karani	
27.	Kosta/Kostha	25.	Sarak	
28.	Roniwar	26.	Kosta/Kostha	
29.	Christians converted from Scheduled Castes. *	Notification No. 183-TW/EC dt. 8.3.1996		(Notification No. 12011/44/96/BCC dt. 06.12.1996)
30.	Lakhera/Laahera		27.	^Chitrakar
31.	Fakir/Sain		28.	#Jogi
32.	Kahar		29.	^Fakir, Sain.
33.	Tamang X		30.	#Nembang
34.	Betkar (Bentkar)			
35.	Chitrakar			

Recognized by Govt. of West Bengal			Recognized by Govt. of India		
Sl. No.	Name of the Caste	Particulars connected with order	Sl. No.	Name of the Caste	
	W.B.		31.	*Sampung	
36.	Bhujel	Notification No.1179-TW/EC dt. 01.12.1995 read with Notification No. 2928-BCW dt. 10.07.2001	32.	*Turha	
37.	Newar <i>(NPPM)</i>		33.	*Bungcheng	
38.	Mangar		34.	*Bhujel	
39.	Nembang		35.	*Kahar	
40.	Sampung		36.	*Betkar	
41.	Bungchheng		37.	*Sukli (Excluding Solanki Rajputs who claim themselves to be Sukli.)†	
42.	Thami		38.	*Churihar [Not in the State list]	
43.	Jogi		39.	**Thami	
44.	Dhimal		40.	*Dhunia	
45.	Hawari		41.	*Dhimal	
46.	Bhar		42.	*Bhar	
47.	Khandait	Notification No. 93-TW/EC dt. 01.02.1997	43.	*Lakhera/Lahera	
48.	Gangot		44.	*Rangwa [Not in the State List]	
49.	Turha		45.	**Kasai-Quraishi*	
50.	Dhunia		46.	**Kalwar [Not in the State List]	
51.	Patidar		47.	**Hawari, Dhobi (Other than those included in the list of SCs.)*	
52.	Kasai		48.	**Tamboli/Tamali	
53.	Hela/Halia/Chasi-Kaibartta		49.	**Tamang	
54.	Bansi-Barman		50.	Khen (Non-Bania category)*	
55.	Nashya-Sekh		Notification No. 84-BCW/RC dt. 01.03.1999	51.	**Chamling
56.	Pahadia-Muslim			52.	*Hele/Helia/Chasi Kaibartta/Das Kaibartta
57.	Khen	53.		*SC Converts of Christianity and their progeny	
58.	Sukli	54.		*Rayeen	
59.	Sunuwar				
60.	Bharbhuj	Notification No. 2927-BCW/MR-436/99 dt. 10.07.2001			
61.	Dewan				
62.	Rai (including Chamling)	Notification No. 5001-BCW/EE dt.			
62.	Rayeen (Kunjra)				
63.	Sherhabadia				
64.	Deranga		Notification No. 861-BCW/EE dt.		
65.	Hajjam		Notification No. 3230-BCW dt. 20/264/BCW - 28/01/09		
66.	Chowdli	Notification No. 485/BCW dt. 20/2/09			
67.	Chasatti (Chasa)	Notification No. 771-BCW/MR-436/1999 dt. 5/3/2010			
68.	Baldar Muslim				
69.	Khotta Muslim				
70.	Sardar				

^Amended/Inserted vide Resolution No.12011/68/98-BCC dt 27th Oct. 1999 of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
 **Inserted Vide Resolution No.12011/36/99-BCC dt. 4th April, 2000 of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
 †Bracketed portion not in the State list
 *Bold portion not in the State list
 †Inserted vide Resolution No.12011/88/98-BCC dt.6th Dec. 1999 of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
 *Inserted vide Resolution No.12011/44/99-BCC dt. 21st September 2000.

67. Chasatti (Chasa) ——— Notification No. 771-BCW/MR-436/1999 dt. 5/3/2010
 68. Baldar Muslim ———
 69. Khotta Muslim ———
 70. Sardar ———

Government of West Bengal
Backward Classes Welfare Department
Writers' Buildings, Kolkata - 700 001,
 Website: www.anagrasarkalyan.gov.in / www.bcwdwb.gov.in

No. 6309 - BCW/MR-84/10

Date: 24 /09/2010

NOTIFICATION

WHEREAS "backward classes" have been defined in clause (a) of section 2 of the West Bengal Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993 (West Ben. Act I of 1993) (hereinafter referred to as the said Act), for the purposes of the said Act, to mean such backward classes of citizens other than the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes as may be specified by the State Government in the lists;

AND WHEREAS "lists" have been defined in clause (c) of section 2 of the said Act to mean lists prepared by the Government of West Bengal from time to time for purposes of making provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of backward classes of citizens which, in the opinion of that Government, are not adequately represented in the services under the Government of West Bengal, local and statutory authorities constituted under any State Act, Corporations in which not less than 51% of the paid up share capital is held by the State Government, Universities, Colleges affiliated to the Universities, primary, secondary and higher secondary schools and also other educational institutions which are owned or aided by the State Government and also establishments in public sector;

AND WHEREAS the Government of West Bengal has decided to categorise the backward classes included in the lists into two categories depending on their relative backwardness and make separate provisions for reservation in services and posts in favour of the two categories;

AND WHEREAS the Government of West Bengal has conducted a sample survey to ascertain the relative backwardness of the classes included in the lists of backward classes and the reports of the said survey has duly been received;

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the report of the survey, the Governor is pleased hereby to categorise the lists of the backward classes notified for the purpose of the said Act into two categories as 'Category-A' and 'Category-B', wherein the Category-A would mean the 'More Backward' and the Category-B would mean 'Backward' within the 'backward classes' and to bring the backward classes so far enlisted into the two categories in the following manner :-

A		B	
Sl.	MORE BACKWARD (Category-A)	Sl.	BACKWARD (Category-B)
1	Abdal	1	Baishya Kapali ✓
2	Baidya Muslim	2	Bansi-Barman
3	Basni / Bosni	3	Barujibi, Barui ✓
4	Beldar Muslim	4	Betkar (Bentkar) ✓
5	Bepari / Byapari Muslim	5	Bhar
6	Bhatia Muslim	6	Bharbhuja
7	Bhatiyara	7	Bhujel
8	Chowduli	8	Bungchheng
9	Chutor Mistri	9	Chasatti (Chasa)
10	Dafadar	10	Chitra'kar ✓
11	Dhukre	11	Christians converted from Scheduled Castes
12	Dhunia	12	Devanga
13	Fakir / Sain	13	Dewan
14	Gayen	14	Dhimal
15	Ghosi	15	Gangot
16	Hajjam	16	Goala-Gope (Pallav Gope, Ballav Gope, Yadav Gope, Gope, Ahir and Yadav.) ✓
17	Hawari	17	Hele / Halia / Chasi-Kaibartta ✓

A

B

18	Jamaadar	18	Kahar
19	Jolah (Ansari-Momin)	19	Kansari
20	Kalander	20	Kapali
21	Kan	21	Karani
22	Kasai	22	Karmakar ✓
23	Khotta Muslim	23	Kcoori / Koiri
24	Laskar	24	Khen ✓
25	Mahaldar	25	Kumbhakar, Kumar ✓
26	Majhi / Patni Muslim	26	Kurmi ✓
27	Mal Muslim	27	Malakar
28	Mallick	28	Mangar
29	Midde	29	Moira-Modak (Halwai) ✓
30	Molla	30	Nagar
31	Muchi / Chamar Muslim	31	Napit ✓
32	Muslim Barujibi / Barui	32	Nembang
33	Muslim Biswas	33	Newar
34	Muslim Haldar	34	Rai (including Chamling)
35	Muslim Mali	35	Raju
36	Muslim Mandal	36	Sampang
37	Muslim Piyada	37	Sarak
38	Muslim Sanpui/Sapui	38	Satchasi ✓
39	Nashya-Sekh ✓	39	Shankakar
40	Nehariya	40	Sunuwar
41	Nikari	41	Sutradhar ✓
42	Patidar	42	Swarnakar ✓
43	Penchi	43	Tamboli / Tamali
44	Rajmistri	44	Tanti, Tantubaya ✓
45	Rayeen / Kunjra	45	Teli, Kolu ✓
46	Sardar	46	Thami
47	Shershabadia	47	Turha
48	Siuli (Muslim)	48	Yogi-Nath ✓
49	Tutia	49	Darji / Ostagar / Idrishi
50	Dhanuk	50	Dhali (Muslim)
51	Jogi	51	Pahadia-Muslim
52	Khandait	52	Tal-Pakha Benia
53	Kosta / Kostha		
54	Lakhera/Laahera		
55	Roniwar		
56	Sukli		

The Governor is further pleased to decide that henceforth any class included in the lists of Other Backward Classes in the State of West Bengal shall be added either to the Category-A or to the Category B depending on its degree of backwardness.

By order of the Governor,

Sd/-

[SK. NURUL HAQUE]

Pr. Secy. to the Govt. of West Bengal

