

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 Pragytishpur-Kamrup-Kamtapur from time to time. In addition to this political connection, the people of the area have ethno-linguistically 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, Purulia 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 uninhabited 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 to1921. 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 districts¹⁵. 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 degenerated¹⁷.

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 1901and 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, Phansideoa, 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, Dinhata and Cooch Behar sadar subdivision. These people came from Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra, 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 hill 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 ‘Bangal 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 ‘Bangal 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 awards.

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

Limbu1 4706 Language of Burma 46

Mangari 10445 Language of Other Parts of India 1800

Murmi 32319

Nepali9 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 or 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 merchants, 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 20,000⁶¹.

(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 ethic 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 ethno-linguistically 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 aborigines 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 Shershahabis. 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 descend 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 (readersellers), Nikaris (fishermen) and Kunjras (vegetable sellers) 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, Qadiria, Quadiani, Rafezi, Ahle-Hadis, Deobandi, Nakshbandi, 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 Shershahdis, 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 Shershah 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 Shershah Badias are descendants of Shershah'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, Bhagulpur 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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