

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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