

CHAPTER -4

RISE, GROWTH & DECAY OF THE RAJBANSI KSHATRIYA SAMITI MOVEMENT

I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV

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

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

V

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VI

Response of Assam to the Kshatriya Samiti Movement:-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chief Minister: Himmat Singh

Education Minister: Satish Chandra Roy Singh Sarkar

Finance Minister: Anseruddin

Revenue Minister: Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmed⁸⁵.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

O Mor CoochBehari Bhai re

Sabar Ghare Jale Suraj Bati

Tomar Ghare Kane Andhar Rati? ¹⁰²

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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51. Ananda Gopal Ghosh, Op.cit. P.3, 5-7.
52. "Janamat" (a Bengali daily newspaper published from Jalpaiguri) 22nd Jaistha 1362 B.S.; "Trisrota" (a Bengali weekly newspaper from Jalpaiguri) 6th January 1957.
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55. Biman Kumar Dasgupta- 'The Dynamics of Social Mobility Movements among the Rajbansis of North Bengal and Assam' (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis) Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta university 1976, appendix portions.
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57. Ananda Gopal Ghosh- 'Aspasta Itihas O Jati Parichay Sankater Shikorer Khonje: Prasanga Uttarbanga', (in Bengali) in "Kiratbhumi" 1408 B.S. P.11.
 58. Ashok Roy Pradhan- 'Itihaser Prekshapate Uttarbanga O Rajbansi', Calcutta 2006, p.39.
 59. Dipak Roy- 'Manishi Panchanan O Assam', Siliguri, Darjeeling 2009,p.11-12.
 60. Smritigrantha: Boitamari Kshatriya Samiti, Boitamari Anchalik Kshatriya Samiti, 1392 B.S. Bangaigaon, Assam, cited in Dipak Roy , ibid, p.12.
 61. Autobiography of Shashibhushan Foujdar "Ashar Sapon", cited in Dipak Roy op.cit. p.14.
 62. Dipak Roy, op.cit. p.16.
 63. ibid, p.16.
 64. Personal interview with Panchanan Barma taken by Shibendra Narayan Roy, the editor of 'Prantabasi' in Assam, quoted in Dipak Roy, op.cit. p.24.
 65. Memoirs of Shashibhushan Foujdar, in Dipak Roy, op.cit. p.22.
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 67. Nalini Ranjan Roy-'Koch Rajbansi and Kamtapuri: The Truth Unveiled', Guwahati, Assam, 2007, p.154.
 68. Memoirs of Shashibhushan Foujdar, op.cit. p.24.
 69. Durgadas Majumdar- West Bengal District Gazetteers- Koch Bihar, 1977, p.37.

70. Kamalesh Chandra Das- 'The Modernization of a Princely State Cooch Behar under Maharaja Nripendra Narayan(1863-1911)', unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, North Bengal University, 1989, p.202; in addition to this the succeeding annual administration reports of the state prove the gradual increase of educational institutions both for boys and girls.
71. The decadal census reports show the existence of all the religions found in other parts of Bengal, which is an indication of religious toleration of the Maharajas of the State.
72. A. G. Ghosh- 'The Saga of the Hitasadhani Sabha, 1946-1950: A Case Study of the Ethnic Identity and Power Struggle in the Erstwhile Princely State of Cooch Behar', in "Karotoya" North Bengal University Journal of History, vol.1, 2007, p.69.
73. If we study the annual administration reports of the State we will find that in various occasion there are categorically differentiation among the subjects of the State e.g. Cooch Behari, non local etc.
74. Harendra Narayan Choudhury- 'The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlement', Cooch Behar State Press 1903, p.504-508; Ananda Gopal Ghosh-'The Uttarkhanda Kamtapur Movement: A Historical Perspective', Occasional paper presented in North East India History Association (NEIHA), 10th session, Shilong, 1989.
75. The Annual Report on the General Administration of the Cooch Behar State for the year 1942-43, Cooch Behar State Press, 1943, p.5.
76. Ibid, p.5-6.
77. Nilangshu Shekhar Das-'Cooch Behar Deshiya Rajye State Council er Sadasya Nirbachan O Samakalin Rajnaitik Prekshapat',(in

- Bengali), in “Mansai”(a literary and historical little magazine), Cooch Behar, 1992, page not mentioned.
78. Ananda Gopal Ghosh, op.cit. p.70-71.
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 80. Upendra Nath Barman- ‘Uttarbanglar Sekal O Amar Jibansmriti’, 1392 B.S. Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, p.86.
 81. The Annual Report on the General Administration of the Cooch Behar State for the Year 1942-43, Cooch Behar State Press 1943, p.i-ii.
 82. Nilangshu Shekhar Das, op.cit.
 83. Nilangsu Shekhar Das, op.cit.
 84. Nilangsu Shekhar Das, op.cit.
 85. The Annual Report on the General Administration Report of the Cooch Behar State, op.cit. p.4-5.
 86. Cooch Behar Gazette, 1927, 1947, relevant portions.
 87. Ananda Gopal Ghosh-‘Rajbansi Kshatriya Samajer Nabajagaran O Tar Tatparya’, in Bengali in “Kiratbhumi”, vol.21, no.1, 1413B.S./2006, p.12.
 88. Dharma Narayan Srakar- ‘Rai Saheb Panchanan’ (in Bengali), Rangpur, 1391 B.S., p.16; Swaraj Basu- ‘Dynamics of a Caste Movement: The Rajbansis of North Bengal’, New Delhi, 2003, p.63.
 89. Swaraj Basu- ‘Dynamics of a Caste Movement: The Rajbansis of North Bengal 1910-1947’, New Delhi 2003, p.62-63.
 90. The Annual Report on the General Administration of the Cooch Behar State for the Year 1940-41, Cooch Behar State Press 1941, p.65-66.

91. The Annual Report on the General Administration of the Cooch Behar State for the year 1942-43, Cooch Behar State Press, 1943, p.139.
92. It becomes clear from the notices issued by various officials holding high posts in the State from time to time in "Cooch Behar Gazette" since 1927 onwards till the end of the period of Regency Council.
93. Harendra Narayan Choudhury, op.cit. p.272, 362.
94. Leonard a. Gordon- 'Divided Bengal: Problems of Nationalism and Identity in the 1947 Partition in Mushirul Hassan (ed.) India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization, Delhi, Oxford University Press 1993.
95. Prasenjit Barman-'Hitasadhani Movement' in Sukhabilas Barma (ed.) 'Socio-Political Movements in North Bengal (A Sub-Himalayan Tract)', vol.1, New Delhi 2007, p.73.
96. Prasenjit Barman op.cit.p.72-73;Tapas Kumar Bandyopadhyay-'Koch O Totoder Samaj Sanskriti', (in Bengali), Kolkata, 2008, p.39.
97. 'Cooch Behar Hitasadhani Sabha Baktritramala', Secretary- Sri Sashibhushan Haldar, (Compiled volume of the lectures of the association), the pages mentioning the year of the volume are torn and damaged.
98. The Maharajas of the State were the supreme authority in the administrative structure of the State, as stated in the Administration Reports of the State, therefore it is a logical inference that the Hitasadhani Sabha must have received His Highness' support and patronization.

99. Census of India 1951, West Bengal, District Handbook, Cooch Behar, A. Mitra, p.i-ii.
100. Ananda Gopal Ghosh-‘The Story of the Integration of Cooch Behar State with Indian Union’, in Studies in History and Archaeology a Miscellany, ed. by Malay Shankar Bhattacharya, Calcutta 1989, p.35.
101. Ananda Gopal Ghosh-‘The Hitasadhani Sabha- Power Struggle by the Cooch Beharis’, in Sukhabilas Barma (ed.) ‘Socio-Political Movements in North Bengal (A Sub-Himalayan Tract)’, vol.1, New Delhi, 2007, p.85.
102. Sukhabilas Barma-‘North Bengal and its People’ in Sukhabilas Barma (ed.) op.cit., p.43.
103. Cooch Behar Gazette, 1947, relevant portions.
104. Biman Chakraborty- ‘Political History of Merger of the Princely States: A Case Study of Cooch Behar’, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, North Bengal University 2001, p.167-170.
105. Durgadas Majumdar(ed.) Sardar Patel’s Correspondence, vol.7, Letter No.464, 4th October 1948, cited in Ananda Gopal Ghosh op.cit., p.38.
106. Interview taken by Biman Chakraborty with late Hemanta Roy Barman, ex-Naib Ahilkar of the Cooch Behar State on 14th August 1992 cited in the Thesis op.cit. p.167, 203.
107. A. G. Ghosh, op.cit., p. 37.
108. A. G. Ghosh, op.cit., p.37.
109. A.G. Ghosh, Malay Shankar Bhattacherya- ‘Indian Nationalist Movement and the Maharajas of the State’, in North Bengal University Review, Vol.-7, No.II, June 1986, p.70.

110. A. G. Ghosh, op.cit., p.37-38.
111. Proceedings of the public meeting of Cooch Behar Peoples' Association, 35, Chittaranjan Avenue Calcutta, dated 10th May 1949 cited in Biman Chakraborty op.cit. p.300.
112. Biman Chakraborty, op.cit. p.181-83.
113. A. G. Ghosh in Sukhabilas Barma ed. op.cit., p.106.
114. Tanka Bahadur Subba- 'Ethnicity, State and Development: A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling', New Delhi 1992, p.88-92.
115. Letter from Nanayappa, Chief Commissioner, Cooch Behar (D.O.No. 284c) dated 22nd November 1949 to A. B. Chatterjee, Joint Secretary, Government of India cited in 'All India Gurkha League 1943-1949' ed. by Bhai Nahar Singh, Bhai Kirpal Singh, New Delhi 1987, p.93.
116. Biman Chakraborty, op.cit. p.176.
117. A. G. Ghosh, op.cit., p.107.
118. Biman Chakraborty, op.cit. 207.
119. Census of India 1951, West Bengal, District Handbook, Cooch Behar, A. Mitra, p.i-ii; Durgadas Majumdar- West Bengal District Gazetteers- Koch Bihar, 1977, p.40-42.
120. A. G. Ghosh op.cit., p.107.
121. Dinesh Dakua- 'Hitasadhani Theke Kamtapuri', Kolkata 2005,