

EMERGENCE OF NORTH BENGAL QUESTION : NORTH BENGAL PRESS VIS-À-VIS CALCUTTA PRESS.

7.1 BACKGROUND

The emergence of North Bengal Question is a unique issue of my present study. How and under what circumstances this North Bengal question came to be highlighted is difficult to explain. It is really a peculiar kind of question emerged in the canvas of undivided Bengal both in the colonial and post-colonial period. We find a particular geographical area both in the pre-partition and post-partition period which have been mentioned as North Bengal by a good number of scholars in different places. But in course of our study it is very difficult to trace the origin, growth and development of the North Bengal question both in the intellectual arena and in the politico-social life of Bengal. Nay the west, it is stated that initially it was started as a geographical question, i.e., question of identification of a particular area within the jurisdiction of whole Bengal. It means, the area which indicated the geographical location of a specific area of the Bengal presidency region. But with the passage of time the geographical identification of the area (place) was gradually emerging in the first step as a cultural question and subsequently as a total identity question, in respect of ethnicity, language, culture, socio-economic condition and so may things. But one interesting fact that has to be mentioned, 'this identity' does not mean a political separation. Throughout the period of our study, we find a uniform tendency though there emerged several tribal upsurges, exploitation of Zaminders and money lenders, acquisition of land by the administration for plantation of forest etc. moreover class conflict between the zamindar and the peasants in which the two sides belong to the opposite communities does not qualify any communal riot or social tension.

Recently it is found that North Bengal as a particular geographical area has attracted the attention of so many scholars for their study on different aspects. But it is surprising that those scholars remained almost silent about the

geo-historical profile of present North Bengal. In this context they just like to point out North Bengal as an area comprising five (presently six) districts of the northern part of West Bengal. In the course of a historical study like us we cannot treat the issue so simply. It seems to us that it is really an unprecedented event (issue) in the history of the sub-continent. Because a region which have no any recognized geographical identity, political existence, historical past in the name of North Bengal, administrative unit and overall official recognition, it is a question rather a big question in both the pre-colonial and post-colonial Bengal. In such a situation it is firmly believed by some Scholars that barring certain other factors the 'PRESS', i.e., the print and electronic medias have played in the past and are playing in the present a significant role. If we meticulously observe the proficiency of the metropolitan press vis-à-vis the mofussil press (rural press), we will find a peculiar symmetry. Considering this issue it is found that both are hammering on the issue of introducing the northern part of Bengal as analyse as 'North Bengal' in English and 'Uttorbanga' in Bengali. In support of this view even a layman can have the experience about the use of the term North Bengal and Uttarbanga in everyday life. What is interesting is that sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously and sometimes sub-consciously the administration of the government also introducing this region as 'North Bengal' or 'Uttarbanga'. When we are going to justify this North Bengal question, or identify this region, we must have to point out another issue. It has to be noted that in the pre-partition period this area was administratively known as Rajshahi Division and in the post-partition period as Jalpaiguri Division. But what is funny is that neither the administration of the government nor the medias have never introduced this region as Jalpaiguri Division today and Rajshahi Division yesterday.

7.2 EMERGENCE OF NORTH BENGAL QUESTION

In our daily life we see that the term 'NORTH BENGAL' has become inevitable and essential to some extent. Knowingly or unknowingly this term

(North Bengal) are being used by many people for different purposes in course of their activities. Naturally, it is a major issue for our study that how and under what circumstances it was emerged as a North Bengal question. It is fact that though we understand the background of the application of this terminology of North Bengal or Uttarbanga, but it is difficult to get a clear idea on the emergence of North Bengal question. It may be like that ordinarily it was simply a geographical location and this geographical location in the long run has given the birth of North Bengal question. Of course, there were some other factors linked up with this geographical location and created a situation for the emergence of North Bengal as a question. In this connection it would be worthwhile if we study the pre-colonial history of Bengal, we will find that the region known as North Bengal today was the political epicentre of North Bengal. (See chapter 1) But with the Mughal conquest of Bengal the epicentre was shifted from North Bengal to Dhaka, to Murshidabad and finally from Murshidabad to Calcutta. This shifting of political epicentre from North Bengal to other places (mentioned earlier) had far reaching consequences. It is stated by some local historians who were the son of this region that North Bengal have been set down by the Mughal conquest of Bengal (1576).¹ As a result it is found that since the shift of Bengal from Murshidabad to Calcutta, North Bengal became a distant part from the Capital Region i.e., Calcutta till the introduction of the 'Northern Bengal State Railway'.² It was only after the introduction of the Railways in this region, the communicational disadvantage was partially removed. But at the same time it is also to be noted that since the shifting of the capital from Gour, Pandua, Tanda and Rajmahal to Dhaka the region was gradually becoming an un-inhabited area. Many factors were responsible for this, which are not required to be studied here. But it is a fact that the natural calamities as well as the dreaded diseases were partially responsible for the depopulation of the region as well as inaccessible of the area to the outsiders. It is believed that during this time the region was known to the people of the outside region as 'PANDAB BARJITA DESH'. It was also believed that, North Bengal was a land of jungles, forests and inhabited by

some uncivilised tribes. This feeling of the outside people was gradually becoming widespread in the pre-Railways period. The introduction of the railways during 1878 onwards has partly removed this misconception about North Bengal.³ After the introduction of Railways in this region, the outsiders were becoming interested with this region and sometimes they used to visit this area for different purposes. But incidentally it was a short-lived affair. Within a few decades, so many developments have taken place in our national life as a result of which many people and places of our country had to suffer due to the situation created by the great partition of 1947. In this regard North Bengal is one of the fittest examples for its worst condition in all respect.

After the great partition of 1947 as well as independence of our country, the communication system of North Bengal with outside was again drastically dislocated. The creation of two independent countries viz., India and Pakistan and the geographical boundary of North Bengal again shattered this region from the rest of Bengal.⁴ It appears that after the partition, North Bengal again became a more distant place from the capital city and it had been called a distant Bengal.⁵ During those days, if a person of Jalpaiguri used to visit Calcutta in the post-independence period, it was the most tedious Journey. It was taken more than 35 (thirty-five) hours in the course of journey from Jalpaiguri to Calcutta. This communicational disadvantage during the post-independence period has laid the foundation of North Bengal question. The communicational disadvantage which was lessened by the introduction of railways in this region, again revived and the people of this area felt humiliated and the North Bengal question was coming into existence with a legitimate ground. Somebody may argue and defend in favour of the Radcliff Award, which was an issue of national interest. But arguments cannot rescue the inhabitants of this region from the worst sufferings. This situation (distance between North Bengal and Calcutta, the capital city of West Bengal) was continued up to the construction of 'FARAKKA BRIDGE' (1970).

It is true that the construction of the Farakka Bridge have made a bridge between North Bengal and the rest of Bengal. But the fact is that during this two decades (from partition to the construction of Farakka Bridge) North Bengal really remained as a distant Bengal from the capital region, Calcutta. In fact during this two decades i.e., from partition to Farakka Bridge, the print media of the metropolis vis-à-vis mofussil have constantly highlighted the problems of North Bengal.⁶ If we go through the contemporary newspapers from both metropolis and mofossail North Bengal, it will be evident that both the print medias published so many articles and news related with the pertaining problems of North Bengal.⁷ These medias, no doubt had a positive role and impact on public opinion. As a result it is found that medias have primarily contributed to bring the North Bengal issues to limelight. Quite naturally it can be said that the medias got the credit to laid the foundation stone of North Bengal as a question.

For the purpose of our study (North Bengal question) let us now turn our eyes on the post-colonial North Bengal. Immediately after the independence of our country, so many problems throughout the country have emerged. If we look into the problems of West Bengal in particular, we will see that automatically some questions raised which were confined within the geographical jurisdiction of North Bengal. It is really a matter of great surprise that in post colonial period most of the vital problems of West Bengal were originated in North Bengal. It was to some extent inevitable due to the situation came out for the partition of 1947. Some problems which originated in North Bengal were the question of merger of the Cooch Behar princely state with the Indian union, i.e., West Bengal, the Berubari question located in the district of Jalpaiguri, the Naxalite Movement in Darjeeling district and some other political movements of the hill people in the Darjeeling district. If we consider the character and importance of these movements, we will see that the whole country either got interested or became tensed for the far-reaching consequences of this socio-political situation. Considering the gravity of the situation, North Bengal became a place of attraction to the outsiders. For

instance we can say that the Naxalite Movement started at Naxalbari, near Siliguri in the district of Darjeeling ceased the attention of the whole country. The Cooch Behar merger question and the Berubari question also took an international shape. The questions arose out of these situation were not confined within the jurisdiction of our country only, but an international question. For all these incidents the name and fame of North Bengal was taken into account in the national and international atlas. In indicating the location of Berubari and Naxalbari, the print medias both from the metropolis and mofussil used the term North Bengal frequently. If we look at the newspapers of the contemporary period, we will see that regarding these issues the area known as North Bengal came to be known both in the national and international levels.⁸

We have mentioned that from the post partition period North Bengal for the second time was delinked from the capital city. It is true that the construction of the Farakka Bridge had made a physical bridge between the metropolis of Calcutta and mofussil of North Bengal. But this physical bridge (Farakka Bridge) could not succeed in making a mental bridge between the metropolis and mofussil of North Bengal. In spite of the removal of communicational disadvantage, the common people of both Calcutta and North Bengal remained unchanged for long time. Physical bridge to some extent failed to change the psychological and mental set up of the people which were prevailing since long. In this context we can refer one example. Professor Nirmal Basu, the former minister, Government of West Bengal, and front-ranking intellectual of North Bengal once lamented that, despite the construction of Farakka Bridge, the Uttar Dakshin psychological distance was not reduced.⁹ The statement made by Professor Nirmal Basu was the expression of his realization which he gathered from practical experiences as a political worker. Similarly, Sri Debesh Roy, an eminent literary personality (Academy Awardee) of West Bengal also echoed the same voice.¹⁰ His experience in the cultural field enabled him to realize the psychological distance between the metropolis and the mofussil area of North Bengal. North Bengal as a particular geographical area had to undergo with a series of

circumstances which prepared the background of a mental distance among the people of this region. As a result it is found that the gap or distance between Uttar and Dakshin was inherent among the people of both the region in the sphere of their life. Out of these circumstances so many socio-cultural dimensions have developed and still they are in existence. In such a situation it is very difficult to say anything about it precisely. The issue of this North Bengal question is so complicated and sensitive that it is very difficult to explain. At the same time it is more difficult to reject the issue.

Considering the above situation we are to some extent confused to deal with the problem properly. Within the framework of our study we find North Bengal like a magnetic place due to so many political issue which became national and sometimes international issues. But the North Bengal question was not at all a sudden development. It was a long time process as a result of which a psychological background was already in existence. This psychological background was promoted in course of time and issues. In this respect the medias and association as a vehicle and instrument have sensitised the people of North Bengal and subsequently the issue became so crucial out of which the North Bengal question started to be emerged with some identity question. However, let us have some examples from historical evidences for the growth and development of North Bengal concept.

7.3 DEVELOPMENT OF NOTRH BENGAL WITH GEOGRAPHICAL IDENTITY

In our previous discussion (Chapter-1) we have come to know that during ancient and medieval period North Bengal was known by different names. But during the early colonial period this region came to be known as Northern Bengal or North Bengal simply because, geographically it was the northern part of Bengal.¹¹ But during the subsequent years, this geographical identity of North Bengal took the shape of a cultural identity which were being started to be used by the intellectuals and academic institutions. Again, in the post colonial period it is found that the geographical identity of North Bengal

started to be used both as geographical and cultural identity.¹² Somehow, the people of this North Bengal region were more interested to identify or represent themselves by using the name North Bengal or Uttarbanga in various ways. In this respect we have huge number of examples irrespective of caste, creed, race, community, etc. Quite naturally the question arises, how and under what circumstances this development came to be emerged. In this connection, we don't have any scope to explain the background of this development in details. For our study we will just mention some references about the use of the name of North Bengal or Uttarbanga which is very much connected with our study.

It is very difficult to say anything about the use of the word North Bengal or Uttarbanga as a geographical identity in modern times. It is assumed that Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya in his article entitled, 'Banglar Itihash Sammandhye Kayekti Katha' (in Bengali) used the word 'UTTARBANGLA' in written form for the first time.¹³ He used this word Uttarbanga in some other places also.¹⁴ In his novel 'ANANDAMATH' and 'DEBI CHOUDHURANI' Bankim Chandra again used this word. But for the first time we find the use of the word 'UTTARBANGA' in a journal namely 'UTTARBANGA HITAIISHI' in 1887. It was published from Rangpur.¹⁵ Similarly we find the mention of the word Uttarbanga (North Bengal) in a book of Nikhil Nath Roy. While giving a description about the torture of Debi Singha on his riots Nikhil Nath Roy used the term Uttarbanga.¹⁶ Dr. Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyaya also used this term North Bengal. He wrote, "From the geographical position, Assam was practically an extension of North Bengal, so far as its speech and early history were concerned."¹⁷ In the context of our study, the statement of this eminent literary personality had some remarkable significance. Apart from this, Dr. Hem Chandra Roychoudhary, the most outstanding historian of our country had significantly mentioned the term North Bengal. Dr. Roychoudhury wrote, "North of the main branch of the Ganges, now known as PADMA and west of the Brahmaputra lies the extensive region of NORTH BENGAL which embraces the modern Rajshahi Division and the State of CoochBehar."¹⁸ This statement also identify a particular region, came to be known as North Bengal.

Bhagawati Charan Bondopadhaya in his book also mentioned the term Northern Bengal in connection with the introduction of 'North Bengal State Railways.'¹⁹ Referring the same Raja Jagadindra Deb Raikot also used the term North Bengal.²⁰ It was published from Jalpaiguri in the year 1883.

From our above discussion one thing is quite clear to us that on different occasions the use of the word North Bengal or Uttarbanga clearly identify a particular geographical identity which in the long run got some impact on public opinion. Thousands of examples may be referred which identify this particular geographical location. Even for the sake of any incident or information this term 'North Bengal or Uttarbanga' were used very popularly. The print medias like newspapers and journals used it for unlimited times. When during 1897, there occurred a famine in this region, it was reported by 'BAMABODHINI PATRIKA' as 'Famine of North Bengal.' (Uttarbanger Durviksha).²¹ Ananda Bazar Patrika and Amrita Bazar Patrika in their news items referred the name of North Bengal so many times. Not only this the contemporary official reports also used the term of North Bengal to identify a particular geographical position. In this regard we just mention a statement of Andrew Frazer, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. He stated that, "Rangpur, Bagura and Pabna though technically belonging to North Bengal, have more in common with Eastern Bengal and could be best administered from Dacca."²² The purpose of our study is not to show the use of the term North Bengal. In different perspectives this term has been used to initially for the identification of a particular geographical area. So we would not elaborate our study by presenting a long list about the use of this terminology (North Bengal).

While discussing about the North Bengal question, we must have to keep it in our mind that though it emerged as a geographical identity, in the long run so many factors were added with this issue. We have already mentioned some incidents which were to some extent responsible to raise the question of North Bengal. During the colonial rule we see that in addition to the political developments, some socio-cultural factors also contributed to set the question

in the mainstream. Now we will mention about some socio-cultural organizations and their activities which will make the Uttar-Dakshin question more clear.

7.4 EMERGENCE OF NORTH BENGAL INSTITUTIONS OR ORGANISATIONS

For the development of the concept of North Bengal during the pre-independence period we have mentioned some examples. From these references we get a clear picture that both the intellectuals and administrators used the word Uttarbanga or North Bengal very carefully. Historically it is evident that before the establishment of the colonial rule North Bengal was the centre-pot of political, commercial and cultural life of Bengal. But after the shifting of this importance from North Bengal to Calcutta some institutions were set up and a centralised tendency in the cultural and political activities were started. But it was a temporary matter which continued only for four decades. By this time some initiatives were taken for the cultivation of North Bengal study. It was Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, who consciously or unconsciously made the platform for the emergence of North Bengal Institutions or North Bengal studies. The name of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya comes to the forefront because of that he was probably the first Indian to formulate a nationalistic conception of history and chalked out the lines on which it should be written.²³ It was he who made research works in Bengali vernacular on certain aspects of Bengal history.

Notwithstanding Bankim Chandra's insistence on writing in Bengali, scholars in the field of historical research preferred to write in English. Naturally Bankim Chandra's dream was not materialized for a long time. After a few decades when the 'VARENDRA RESEARCH SOCIETY' was founded in the year 1910, Bankim Chandra's dream of research in Bengali on certain aspects got a solid footing and research in vernacular language (Bengali) started. It was the Varendra Research Society, the richest Non-Government Institution in India which for the first time started to explore on regional

aspects of North Bengal and it was written and published in Bengali. Professor N.N. Bhattacharya of Calcutta University very nicely stated that, 'The Calcutta-based Scholars and Institutions-though they did not remain aloof from the nationalistic fervour-were not interested in writing in Bengali. The task was eventually taken up by a North Bengal Institution, the Varendra Research Society.'²⁴ At the same time professor Bhattacharya in his article also stated that, "It is painful to observe that such a glorious achievement was treated with absolute indifference by Calcutta-based Scholars and intellectuals. The foundation of the society and its museum-building did not find any coverage in the newspapers. Neither the Asiatic Society of Bengal nor the Vangiya Sahitya Parisat came to report the functioning of the Varendra Research Society in their respective organs notwithstanding numerous requests."²⁵

It is surprising to all of us and we can't say anything about the reasons of their indifference and silence. But one thing which can easily be assumed that the Calcutta based Scholars in the early stage were not mentally prepared to recognize a separate Institution in North Bengal which had a separate cultural identity. It may be like that, for research works in different fields, there were already some Institutions like Asiatic Society of Bengal and Bangia Sahitya parisat and these institutions were very much sincere and active. So separate Institution for the same purpose were supposed to be unnecessary. Whatever may be the reasons for their indifference, but the reality was that some scholars of this region felt it urgent and accordingly they stepped forward and achieved something outstanding contribution which highlighted different aspects of North Bengal with its special cultural identity. So many unexplored aspects of history, archaeology and literature have come out and it attracted the attention of the scholars not only of Bengal but also the scholars of national level.

Apart from Varendra Research Society we must have to mention about another organization i.e., 'RANGPUR SAHITYA PARISHAD'. This was the only organization which got the credit to popularise the concept of North

Bengal or Uttarbanga among the literate people of this region. The 'RANGPUR SAHITYA PARISHAD' was established in the year 1905, and as its mouth organ a journal namely 'RANGPUR SAHITYA PARISHAD PATRIKA' was published by this organization. About the objectives of this Rangpur Sahitya Parishad, it is said that, "As a Branch of BANGIYA SAHITYA PARISHAD this institution was inaugurated with the avowed object of (1) Making archaeological discoveries in North Bengal and Assam..."²⁶ (See chapter 6.5). From the objective of this organization it is clear to us that the parishad was very much interested with the studies of North Bengal on various aspects and published a series of books and articles. If we look at the contents of the Parishad Patrika, it will be evident that a good number of articles were published which mainly focused on the subjects like history, archaeology, literature and Folk culture of North Bengal.²⁷ The parishad patrika gave a special emphasis on the subjects confined within the geographical jurisdiction of North Bengal. As a result it is found that North Bengal study were gradually getting importance and institutional recognition. In this connection, one more thing requires to be mentioned here. Like Varendra Research Society and Rangpur Sahitya parishad some other institutions were also established in other parts of Bengal and Assam. During 1916 another institution namely 'RĀDH ANUSANDHAN SAMITI' (R.A.S.) in the Rādh region of South Bengal was established. 'KAMARUPA ANUSAHDHAN SAMITI' (K.A.S.) in Assam was also established. The organisers of the Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan' were the main force behind the establishment of K.A.S. To some extent it was the credit of the organisers of Rangpur Sahitya Parishad that in addition to North Bengal they took a special initiative to form a separate organisation/ institution for cultural and literary practice of a particular region of Assam. In the subsequent years it was found that this Institution (KAMRUP ANUSANDHAN SAMITI) with its literary and cultural activities inspired the total Bengali community of North-East Assam and an atmosphere for literary and other cultural activities developed. The conferences of this Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti held at Gouripur and

Kamaksha were attended by a good number of interested persons from North Bengal.

Again, with the establishment of the 'RĀDH ANUSANDHAN SAMITI' in South Bengal some literary and cultural developments took place there, but the basic difference between the 'RĀDH ANUSANDHAN SAMITI' and the 'VARENDRA ANUSANDHAN SAMITI' was that the later was from the very beginning much aware with its geographical/regional identity. Due to this special geographical awareness the issues of North Bengal came into limelight and became so popular. Later on, some other factors (discussed earlier) raised (geo-historical, political, commercial, cultural) which have given it a new shape and so many questions came into existence. Naturally the question arises again, how and under what circumstances the Institutions of North Bengal got the credit of some remarkable activities? It can be justified simply because the background of North Bengal issue was so active and some psychological factors were also inherent as a result of which the North Bengal Institutions survive for long and the question of North Bengal identity or North Bengal question emerged. In this regard we must remember that since long back North Bengal always had a special regional, geographical and cultural background and it was always in the mainstream. At the beginning of this chapter we have already explained about its geographical, political and cultural importance. Quite naturally it is very much justified that the North Bengal institutions will remember their past, feel proud of it, expose their geo-historical identity and other related issues. If we meticulously observe the issue of North Bengal question we will find that it was a long drawn process and a psychological background have accelerated it as a result of which the question came to be prominent.

So long we have discussed about the North Bengal Institution like Varendra Anusandhan Samiti and the Rangpur Sahitya parishad. Now we will mention something about one more organisation of North Bengal which in its literary activities initiated North Bengal studies with a special care. The name

of this organisation was 'UTTARBANGA SAHITYA SAMMILAN', (North Bengal Literary conference). About this Literary conference we find the reference that, "It was in the 3rd year of Parishad's existence the first North Bengal literary conference met under the presidentship of Akshay Kumar Maitreya and Babu Surendra Chandra Roy Chowdhury, the Secretary of Rangpur Sahitya Parishad, has appointed as permanent secretary of North Bengal Literary conference."²⁸ From this statement two things are evident. Firstly, it appears that Babu Surendra Chandra Roy Chowdhury who was the secretary of Rangpur Sahitya Parishad, himself was appointed as the permanent secretary of this organisation. (North Bengal literary conference).²⁹ So there is no doubt that the Rangpur Sahitya Parishad itself was the initiator to form this new organisation. Secondly, it is evident that this 'Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan' (North Bengal literary conference) was the first organisation which used the word 'Uttarbanga' with its name for the first time in the greater North Bengal, in undivided Bengal, before 1947.³⁰ In this connection, the formation of this organisation was very significant to raise the concept of North Bengal or some particular aspects.

However, it is found that after a long preparation, the first conference of the 'Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan' was held in the Town Hall of Rangpur in 1908 and was presided over by Akshay Kumar Maitreya, the most illustrious son of North Bengal. In our discussion in Chapter 6, we have already mentioned about the Scholarship and specially his activities in the field of North Bengal studies. So many distinguished literary personalities attended and participated this literary conference with a view to give emphasis on literary practices in North Bengal. Though the conference held at Rangpur, it was found that the representatives to attend the conference came from almost all the districts of present North Bengal, Calcutta and even from Assam.³¹ The conference started with a condolence in memory of Sj. Girish Chandra Lahiri, a literary personality of North Bengal.³² If we look at the proceedings of this conference (Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan), it will be evident that from the presidential address, so many issues related with the identity of North Bengal

have emerged. The past glory of North Bengal, outstanding literary achievements of some writers and authors of North Bengal, even Ram Mohan's doings and Sayings while residing in North Bengal (Rangpur, mentioned earlier), all were pointed out in the presidential address of Akshay Kumar Maitreya.³³

Apart from the presidential address, the speech delivered by its secretary was also remarkable in the context of the North Bengal study. From both the addresses of the president and the secretary of the organisation it is very much evident that the tendency to elucidate the pride of North Bengal were always active. One of the organisers of this conference very categorically reminded the representatives present there that 'the place where you all have stepped down was once a land of glory. With the emergence of some periodicals like SAMACHAR DARPAN, PRABHAKAR etc. in Calcutta, 'RANGPUR BARTABAHA' also started its publication from Rangpur and consequently it (Rangpur Bartabaha) appeared in a competition with 'PRABHAKAR' in the context of literary activities.³⁴ So it can be said that this organisation (UBSS) from the very beginning had an intention to revive the past glory of North Bengal. One more thing may be mentioned that where as the 'Bangiya Sahitya Parishad' was already existing, what was the necessity of U.B.S.S. as a separate organisation? We don't have any definite argument to answer this question. But from our discussion one argument stands and that is love and emotion, which initiated the stalwarts of this region to bring the past glory of North Bengal to the notice of the people of this area. Not only this, some Awards and Felicitation were also given to some distinguished personalities. Among them, mention may be made that the Elite society of North Bengal honoured Sri Nagendra Nath Basu with the Award of 'PRACHYAVIDYA MAHARNAB'. Maha-Mahopadhyaya Pandit Jadabeswar Tarkaratna was honoured as 'the glory of North Bengal',³⁵ Kishori Mohan Chowdhury of Rajshahi and Maharaja Nripendra Narayan of CoochBehar state were honoured as the 'Grand old man of North Bengal' and 'the pillar of North Bengal' respectively.³⁶

Another outstanding achievement of the 'Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan' was to collect archaeological evidences, manuscripts and pūnthis related with folk literature and folk culture from all the districts of this region to reconstruct the history of North Bengal. For this purpose some representatives were appointed from some of the districts of North Bengal. Here, we are giving a list of the interested persons, appointed for this purpose.

Malda District – Sj. Pandit Rajani Kanta Chakroborty.

Sj. Pandit Radhesh Chandra Seth, B. L.

Sj. Pandit Tarakeshwar Bhattacharya, M. A.

Jalpaiguri District - Sj. Umagati Roy, B. L., Advocate

Sj. Gobinda Sankar Sarbbadhaksha, B.L.

CoochBehar Dist - Sj. Pandit Kokileswar Bidhyabhusan, M.A.

Sj. Amir Uddin Ahmed, (Advocate)

Sj. Mahendra Nath Adhikary, Kanungo.³⁷

From this list, one thing is clear to us that the present North Bengal was very much interested and active with the literary activities of Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan. More interestingly it is noticed that the Sammilan adopted a resolution to build up a house in the name of 'UTTARBANGIA SARASWAT BHAWAN.' Among all these activities, one thing is being noticed that each and every efforts undertaken either by Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan or the Varendra Anusandhan Samiti very carefully and sincerely highlighted different aspects of North Bengal. Even the Particular word 'North Bengal' or 'Uttarbanga' were used very consciously which in the long run have become an instinct among the people of this region. So, in present days when we find the used of this word (North Bengal) in different perspectives, and both the print and electronic medias are using this word to identify a particular geographical area, it is expected that one should remember its background. In the course of our study (1869-1969) the popular use of this word and identification of a particular region as Uttarbanga does not mean anything unnatural and unreal.

Our discussion in this context are sufficient enough to justify our problem i.e., North Bengal question. We all know and agree that after the partition of 1947, officially there are no existence of North Bengal. The area over which our study is concerned is officially known as West Bengal. But the reality is something different, the background of which has already been discussed. During 1960s onwards it is found that a tendency has been grown up to use the word North Bengal or Uttarbanga by some small group of people with the name of some Regional political parties³⁸ which seems to be a psychological separatist tendency. But that is beyond the scope of our study.

7.5 NORTH BENGAL AND THE INTELLECTUALS

During the course of our study about the Uttarbanga Sahitya Parishad, it is found that so many aspects of North Bengal came into prominence and it gained much popularity among the common people of this region. Similarly, some intellectuals were also influenced by this concept of geographical identity. In this context we are to mention one example. During 1922, the Eighth conference of the 'Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan' was held at Rajshahi and was presided over by 'PRAMATHA CHOWDHURY', a front ranking literary personality of Bengal.³⁹ In the course of his presidential address the words he uttered about North Bengal have added a new mark to the North Bengal study. A few words of his speech in Bengali are as follows;

"I cannot avoid the call of North Bengal. As my country, first of all, I consider this province (North Bengal)..... It will not be exaggeration, if I express my feeling about North Bengal as something fundamental. Because, on the soil of this region (North Bengal) I was born and brought up."⁴⁰ On the occasion of his presidentship on the session (Eighth conference of the Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan). Pramatha Chowdhury himself admitted that, "I could not exempt my self form this chance to be the group leader of the intellectuals of North Bengal the scope of which was provided with this occasion."⁴¹ These words and expression of a person like Pramatha Chowdhury, a top ranking intellectual and literary personality of Bengal no doubt had some

distinction and the assemblage in the conference were highly pleased and proud of it. When a person like Pramatha Chowdhury have expressed his view about North Bengal with these words, more specifically as a province, naturally the geographical identity of this region gained more importance which had a far reaching impact during the later period. The initiative taken by Akshay Kumar Maitreya (already mentioned in chapter 6), Pramatha Chowdhury and others for the cause of North Bengal study have really awakened the so called elites and the literate persons of this region. Quite naturally it was found that so many unexplored fields of study related with history, archaeology, Folk culture and literature were coming into light. Due to this initiative (Process) so many unknown things of North Bengal came to the notice of the literate people and they really became proud for their birthplace (motherland). As soon as the new generation of this area came to know their glorious past, they became very much influenced by it and got encouraged for further study on different aspects of North Bengal. It can not be denied that the initiatives taken by Rangpur Sahitya Parishad, Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan and Varendra Anusandhan Samiti have got same significant contribution for the purpose of North Bengal study. In this connection it should be mentioned again that the 'RANGPUR SAHITYA PARISHAD PATRIKA', the spokesman of this organisation was the main key to popularise the word and concept of North Bengal among the inhabitants of this region as well as in whole Bengal.⁴²

It has already been found from our discussion that the 'Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan' (USS) with its distinguish literary activities created an excitement among the people. The activities of this literary conference have got some wide spread circulation and the local newspapers of the other districts of North Bengal sincerely reported the functioning of the Sahitya Sammilan. For example, we just mention and quote one of the advertisement Published in 'TRISROTA' a weekly news-journal of Jalpaiguri, which had perhaps the best circulation in North Bengal. The advertisement about this Sahitya Sammlan, published in 'TRISROTA' of 22nd July, 1928, was as follows:

UTTARBANGA SAHITYA SAMMILAN (USS)

“The eleventh conference of the Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammilan will be held at Rangpur Town Hall on 12th and 13th Sraban, (1335), 28th and 29th July, (1928).”

“To revive the name and fame of the literary practices of North Bengal and to make a success all kind of help and co-operation are Solicited.”

Sri Gopal Lal Roy.

President of the
Reception Committee and
Raja Bahdur Tajhat.⁴³

Apart from this, a series of references may be mentioned in this context. But one thing we find that the outstanding credit for North Bengal study certainly goes to Akshay Kumar Maitreya, who throughout his life devoted himself very dynamically to establish the diversity and past glory of this region. Fazlul Haque, a renowned researcher of Bangladesh and the Biographer of Akshay Kumar Maitraya clearly wrote that, “It was Akshay Kumar Maitreya who firmly believed that Varendra Bhumi was the core place for the history of whole Bengal. Therefore he sincerely tried to place North Bengal as the centre-pot of the cultural history of Bengal.”⁴⁴ Though he did so many research works to explore and expose the past glorious history of North Bengal, at the same time throughout his life Akshay Kumar tried his best to establish North Bengal remarkably in the cultural life of whole Bengal. In this connection, one of the prominent personality attached with Varendra Anusandhan Saniti mentioned that, “In him North Bengal got a man of wide interest and versatile talent, a great scholar and a forceful writer and antiquarian of rare acumen and a lifelong inspirer of literary and research activities.”⁴⁵

In this connection we can mention the words of Professor Gourinath Shastri, a renowned scholar of our country, Professor Shastri said;

“I am particularly happy to be with you in a university which is situated in a part of Bengal well-known for its tradition of learning. Varendramandala one of the twenty four Mandalas of Paundra-bhukti which was the ancient name of North Bengal, attained a cultural identity in the Pal-Sena period: in our times the intellectual urge of this parts of Bengal found its expression in the work of VARENDRA ANUSANDAN SAMITI which has made an outstanding contribution to an understanding of our civilisation.”⁴⁶

For our discursion about the identification of North Bengal we have made an elaborate study. We know that presently North Bengal is nothing but a particular area of West Bengal. But one striking point is that why North Bengal or Uttarbanga are getting so importance? Why the question of North Bengal are used so popularly even today? To understand this questions we have to look at back for the proper understanding of this North Bengal question. In this regard we have referred a good number of examples which explained both the political, geographical and cultural background of this region. It has also to be noted that some other conferences were also held in the northern region of Bengal and they also used the term North Bengal. In 1919, a ‘Rayot Conference’ of North Bengal was held and Pramatha Chowdhury presided over this conference. In 1923, a ‘North Bengal Workers Conference’ was held at Jalpaiguri. Sri Shyamsundar Chakraborty of Jalpaiguri presided over this conference. Deshbandu Chittaranjan Das was present in the conference as the chief Guest.⁴⁷ In 1935, another conference i.e., “Uttarbanga Ahale Hadeesh Sammelan” was held at Rangpur. In 1944, a workshop in the name of “Uttarbanger Loke Samashya” was held at Jalpaiguri and Sri Amiya Kumar Chakraborty delivered a lecture in this workshop.⁴⁸ During the month of April, 1945 a students conference “Uttarbanga Chatra Sammilan” was held at Jalpaiguri and it was presided over by pandit Laxmikanta Maitreya. Sri Badal Sarkar was the secretary of the Reception committee of this conference.⁴⁹ JANAMAT a reputed newspaper published from Jalpaiguri have covered the proceedings of this students conference.⁵⁰ The news about the concluding part of this conference was reported by ‘JANAMAT’ as follows;-

“A conference of the pro-congress students was held on 15th and 16th April, in the Arya Natya Samaj, Jalpaiguri, S. Binoyendra Chowdhury, Principal of the Ashutosh College, Calcutta, presided over the conference.⁵¹ In 1946 (June), Uttarbanga Congress Sammilan was held at Raiganj. Desh Netri Lila Roy presided over this Sammilan.⁵² A Conference of the “Uttarbanga Chatra Congress” was held at Siliguri, during March, 1947. Ashru Kumar Sikdar and Anandamay Bhattacharya were the main organisers of this conference.⁵³ After a few months another conference of the students of North Bengal was held at Siliguri in Darjeeling District. Sri Sudhir Kumar Biswas was the President of the Reception committee. So many eminent personalities attended this conference, some of them were Arabinda Basu (cousin of Netaji Subshah Chandra Bose, Haridas Mitra, Bela Mitra, Nirmal Basu (later on a cabinet minister of West Bengal), Mukulesh Sanyal, Amar Ray Pradhan (Later on Member of Parliament), Rabi Biswas (Mantu Biswas) and some others.⁵⁴

7.6 PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH, AND THE ROLE OF THE PRINT MEDIA.

From our discussion it is evident that a particular geographical area both in the pre-partition and post-partition period have been mentioned as ‘North Bengal or Uttarbanga’ by a good number of Scholars. In this connection, we have got an idea or picture about the origin, growth and development of the concept of North Bengal or Uttarbanga. Though North Bengal got some geographical identity and later on a total identity in respect of ethno-linguistic and cultural practices, but this identity never meant a political separation. But one interesting fact is that this concept of North Bengal is gradually getting so much importance. Though this region is situated within the geographical boundary of the present state of West Bengal, instead of that the term North Bengal are being used by the Government also. When we see that officially this concept of North Bengal is not recognised, in spite of this the government is using this term for different purposes. A good number of Government Institutions have been established which used this term ‘North Bengal’ in their

name. North Bengal state Transport Corporation, 1960, North Bengal University 1962, North Bengal Medical College 1967, North Bengal Agricultural University 2001, etc. are the best example of it. We know that there are thousands of Institutions or organisations which have denoted their names by using the term North Bengal the example of which are not required to be mentioned. In addition to those Non-Government organisations or Institutions when we see that the Government is also officially using this term 'North Bengal' it adds something new for our' thinking about the concept of North Bengal.

It has already been discussed that North Bengal (the area of our study) had a glorious past and from the beginning it was in the mainstream of history. But due to certain situations in different times, specially during the pre-partition and post-partition period this region became a victim due to some political decisions. Above all it can be said that with the emergence of the colonial rule North Bengal have lost its importance for its geographical location. Due to so many factors specially its distance from the capital city and geographical location. North Bengal became a place of disadvantage. Quite naturally North Bengal became a distant place to the outsiders. At the same time it has been noticed that being a distant and disadvantageous place North Bengal became to be deprived in all respect (communication, Education, Industrialization, Treatment, and over all development). In spite of all these developments, the psychological background which was inherent among the people of this region could not forget their past. In every occasion, this psychological background got the expression in different form. The print medias of both North Bengal (mofossail towns of North Bengal) and the Calcutta metropolis were the main force (power engine) to continue this expression of North Bengal issues.

It is quite natural that the print-media of North Bengal will have some interest to highlight the issues of North Bengal. From pre- partition period to the present days this tendency are being maintained by most of the newspaper and periodicals of this region. Janamat, Trisrota, Muktibani, Gourdoot,

Gourbarta and some other papers were the best example of it.⁵⁵ Even after independence, four paper were published from Jalpaiguri 'SAPTAHIK UTTABANGLA; edited by Sri Sudhir Kumar Biswas was first published from Jalpaiguri and later on it was published from Siliguri, in Darjeeling Dist. One peculiar thing we notice that more than two papers were published from Jalpaiguri in the same name, i.e., 'UTTARBANGA' in the year 1951 and 1961. In the year 1969, another paper was published from Jalpaiguri in the mane of 'UTTARBANGA PATRIKA'. The editor of this paper (literary journal) was Sri Debesh Roy an eminent literary personality of Bengal.⁵⁶ Apart from those more than a few hundred newspapers, periodicals and journals were publish from North Bengal who used the word 'UTTAR' or 'NORTH' in their names. If we go through some of the issues of these papers it will be evident that most of them always had a special attention on different issues of North Bengal. So as print media, when these papers of North Bengal were sincerely highlighting this region, naturally the North Bengal identity question comes to limelight.

So long we have explained the role of the print medias of North Bengal and we found some special attention of these papers for the cause of North Bengal. Simultaneously, the press published form Calcutta Metropolis also played an important role for the cause of North Bengal.⁵⁷ Let us have some examples from Calcutta press which covered some issues of North Bengal in course of different incidents. Even to report any incident of a particular North Bengal District, the Calcutta medias preferred to use the term North Bengal. On 31st July, 1964, a considerable portion of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar District became the victim of flood. 'DAINIK BASUMATI' a Bengali Daily Newspaper published form Calcutta covered this incident. The Patrika (D.B) wrote that, "Due to the over flow in most of the rivers, North Bengal have been drowned."⁵⁸ One article entitled "Uttarbanglar Shibratri o Shibmandir" was also published by Basumati.⁵⁹ During 1965, a severe food crisis was occurred in this region. D. B. reported it as, "Uttarbange Vayabaha Khadya Sankot".⁶⁰ About the administrative measures some news were also published in D. B. (Dainik Basumati). The Headline of news was, "Uttarbanger Prasashanik

Byabastha Dhalia Sajar Byabastha".⁶¹ One more news was like "Uttarbangaer Katta."⁶² From these references it is found that along with the North Bengal medias, D.B. a Bengali daily published from Calcutta also highlighted the North Bengal issues time to time.

'ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA', another front ranking Bengali Daily Newspaper published from Calcutta also paid due attention on some North Bengal issues. On several occasions Anandabazar Patrika (A.P.) published so many news and articles using the name of North Bengal. To stop the price-hike of rice and paddy, the West Bengal Government supplied it to some places of North Bengal. This measure of the government was reported by A. P. (Anandabazar Patrika).⁶³ During 1964, the agriculture and production of food-grains were hampered due to the drought. It was reported by A. P. and the news in Bengali was like, "PRACHANDA KHARA, UTTARBANGE CHAS-ABAD BARBAD".⁶⁴ "UTTARBANGER SIKSHABRATI DR. REBATI MOHAN LAHIRI"⁶⁵ and "UTTARBANGE BANYA"⁶⁶ these two Headlines containing news on respective issues were also published in A. P. These are only a few examples about the attitude of A.P. on the North Bengal issues. We can mention thousands of reference about North Bengal issues which were reported by A.P., a publication from Calcutta. It may also be mentioned that the A.P also treated the news of any particular district of this northern region as the issue of North Bengal. These could be mentioned by using the name of the concerned district. But the peculiar thing we notice that along with the North Bengal print medias, the medias of Calcutta also mentioned them as North Bengal issues.

'To understand the attitude of the Calcutta press about North Bengal we have referred some examples from D.B. and A.P. It should be remembered that before the construction of the 'Farakka Bridge', North Bengal was detached from the rest of West Bengal in true sense at least geographically. But after the construction of the Farakka Bridge, this communicational disadvantage was removed and the distance between North Bengal and the capital city was

shortened. In spite of this we find that North Bengal remained as a distant place. Though the geographical distance was shortened, the psychological distance between the two regions remained almost same. The psychological distance which was prevailing for long remained more or less even after the construction of the Farakka Bridge. In support of this statement we can refer one example from Ananda Bazaar Patrika. In 1983, Anandabazar Patrika published one Editorial entitled, "DURER BANGA UTTARBANGA."⁶⁷ This editorial published in A. P., was very much sensitive and at the same time significant. After the construction of the Farakka Bridge when the geographical distance was shortened, at that stage also we find that North Bengal remained as distant land to the medias of Calcutta.⁶⁸ The Anandabazar patrika in its publication used this term 'North Bengal' or 'Uttarbanga' for different purposes. It is found that in 1985, A.P. Published so many advertisement using the word Uttarnaga.⁶⁹ Not any Anandabazar Patrika some other medias of Calcutta also maintained this order to identify this region. For example we can mention that during 1985, Madhab Bhattacharya wrote an article entitled, "UTTARBANGER CHARITRA" and it was published by AJKAL, another leading Bengali daily published from Calcutta.⁷⁰ It is found that two years later, after the publication of an editorial, the A.P. wrote another editorial titled as, "UTTARBANGER UNNAYAN".⁷¹ Perhaps it was the second editorial of A. P. which focused on the issue of North Bengal. In the same year, it is found that another editorial was published in A.P. The title of this editorial was "UTTARBANGER DABI."⁷² The title itself is self explanatory. There is no difficulty to understand that some demands of the North Bengal people were reflected in this editorial of A.P. So many examples are there published in the Calcutta print medias which got some reflection on different issues of North Bengal. The local or regional papers published from North Bengal, i.e. North Bengal press for their own interest may highlight the issues of North Bengal. In this regard we have mentioned so many references earlier. For ready reference we can again mention that TRISROTA of Jalpaiguri covered so many issues of North Bengal.⁷³ But at the same time when the press of Calcutta are giving

special emphasis on the issues of North Bengal it indicate something, and it cannot be explained so simply. Even after the partition of 1947, when present North Bengal is essentially a geographical part of West Bengal, North Bengal is still maintaining a separate geographical identity. Along with the North Bengal press, the Calcutta press also consciously or unconsciously giving a special emphasis on the identity of North Bengal. Though we have used some reference of Calcutta press beyond the scope of our study (after 1969), this is just to understand our problem properly. In spite of all kinds of unity, commonness, administrative uniformity common law and order and over all one state jurisdiction (West Bengal), some differences are there. From pre-partition to post partition period, even to day some of these differences are prevailing. The print medias of both Calcutta and North Bengal certainly have some contribution to raise this North Bengal question. Though there are some historical background of North Bengal, but with the passage of time this North Bengal psychology could have been changed. But the reality is something different as a result of which the North Bengal question emerged. To point out all the factors for the emergence of North Bengal question further research are definitely required. It is not at all so simple job. But in spite of all these, it can be said that the print-medias of both North Bengal and Calcutta got some role to raise the North Bengal question.

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