

INTRODUCTION

1. In the proposed dissertation entitled 'The Role of the Press and Associations in Socio-Cultural and Political Movements: A case study of North Bengal, (1869-1969), we have presented a historical analysis about the role of Press and Associations in the Socio-Cultural transitions that have taken place in the present North Bengal districts in the state of West Bengal. However, a part of our study may be out of the present North Bengal because we have taken the study from 1869 which was prior to independence, known as North Bengal including the present geographical area over which our study is concerned. But after the partition of 1947, some parts of the then North Bengal have been merged with the present Bangladesh. It was found that before the partition these places which are presently some districts of Bangladesh were the main centres of Socio-Cultural practices of North Bengal in undivided Bengal. Our area of study i.e., present North Bengal had a very close link with those districts (Rajshahi, Rangpur in Bangladesh) in the course of their Socio-cultural activities. Though the Cooch Behar state had some outstanding contribution in this field but it was a later phenomenon. Initially Cooch Behar was very much associated with the literary activities of 'RANGPUR SAHITYA PARISHAD' which will be discussed in the course of our study. As Press and Association (SABHA-SAMITI) of North Bengal emerged in those places (before 1947), naturally we must have to mention it in our study though presently they are lying with Bangladesh. While doing so we have begun with the geo-historical profile of North Bengal, its background and the origin and development of Press and Associations and the role they played in the contemporary socio-cultural and political movements in the region. In different phases of our study we will focus on several aspects covered by the Press and Associations in North Bengal which ultimately stands as the creators and interpreters of the public opinion, contributing towards the socio-cultural and political transitions of the region. As a result of all these developments it will be evident that the

emergence of the North Bengal question as a distinct geo-political entity and tied with it, the emergence of demands for recognition of socio-cultural identities premised around ethnic, linguistic and cultural bases in the region, have raised. This identity of two-pronged identity question, first the identity of North Bengal as a distinct geo-historical and political entity on the one hand, and secondly, the emergence of a multitude of identity based movements in North Bengal speak of not only the deprivation of the region from the benefits of development, but also the mis/ non-recognition of the socio-political claims of a variety of ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups in the region. In our present dissertation these have been amply illustrated by the emergence of Press and Associations in the region over the years.

2. THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The proposed dissertation will attempt to look into the significant socio-cultural and political transition of the five districts (Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and Malda) of present North Bengal between the years 1869 and 1969. It may be mentioned here that in recent times a growing interest is noticed among a number of historians and the common people for writing regional/ local history which is known to the Social Scientists as area studies. It is felt that case studies at regional/local or micro-level will be helpful in bringing to light many untouched corners of the history of our recent past. It is out of such idea that this work is proposed to be undertaken. In fact an over all study on different aspects of social, cultural and political history of present North Bengal in the colonial and post-colonial period is yet to receive scholarly attention. For this reason the area of present North Bengal (five districts mentioned above) find little place in the main stream of social cultural and political history.

It may however be mentioned here that before the partition of 1947 the area of North Bengal had a vast geographical boundary in which some districts of present Bangladesh like Rajshahi, Rangpur, Pabna were included. During ancient and medieval period this region (North Bengal) had the privilege of

having many famous capital cities. But within the period of our study we find a different North Bengal viz., the northern part of West Bengal. Our area of study had also some historical traditions. The Princely state of Cooch Behar had some different features both in cultural and political activities during the British Colonial rule. As it was a native state of the British, political activities against the Raj were restricted. In spite of that Cooch Behar had witnessed a series of political movements. In the field of cultural activities this area had a glorious past like 'Brahmo-Movement.' The religious faith of Vaishnavism and Saivism were established on the Royal family and their subjects. But during the time of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, the Brahmo religion flourished in Cooch Behar definitely by the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen the Brahmo Samaj reformer of Calcutta.

The most important district of North Bengal is Jalpaiguri which has a distinction in the field of social, cultural and political movement from the colonial period to recent times. Specially in the field of political activities the Associations/ organizations and vernacular press made a significant contribution in the growth of national political regeneration. It may be mentioned here that at the second annual session of Indian National Congress in Calcutta in the year 1886, Jalpaiguri was represented there by participating the session. During the first half of 20th Century, repeated visits of All India Congress leaders like, C. R. Das, Subhash Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu and over all Mahatma Gandhi with several political programme very much influenced the political life of the district.

In the field of press publication and cultural activities Malda district had a distinction. The most illustrated paper published from Malda was GAMBHIRA and it encouraged the intellectual and educated people of the district. In 1320 B.S. the intellectuals associated with the publication of Gambhira arranged Malda Jela Sahitya Sammelan which could be marked as social and cultural practice. Probably this was the first district-wise Sahitya Sammelan in Bengal. Similarly West Dinajpur (at present North and South

Dinajpur) had also some political social and cultural activities. It may however be mentioned here that the Press Publications from North Bengal were mostly regional and Bengali vernacular press. The only exception was the district of Darjeeling. In the hill areas other than Bengali general publications in Nepali, Hindi, English and Tibetan were there. This was due to different linguistic and cultural background.

Our study proposes to begin with a brief description on the background of the press publications and establishment of several Associations. It is well known that the Indian Press had a glorious background. Specially Bengal played a significant role in this field. But the role played by the regional/local vernacular press of North Bengal are yet to receive the attention of the social scientists. Not only the Press, the Associations of North Bengal (SABHA-SAMITI) which were established in different times with the patronage of different personalities made a strong commitment on the socio-cultural and political activities. The Associations and Publication of North Bengal within the period of our study shows how a new socio-cultural regeneration emerged in this region. In this connection we will study the origin and growth of social mobility in North Bengal. The political scenario of this region in the period of our study will also come under the preview of our research. One of our major aims is to trace the emergence and growth of nationalist politics in North Bengal at various levels.

In regard to the period of our study I would like to say something. In the first place, I shall explain the selection of the beginning year of our study. The title theme of our study is the role of Press and Associations (SABHA-SAMITI) on the different aspects of North Bengal. In this regard we had to start our study from the year 1870 because the first newspaper in North Bengal was published in this year. But we have started from one year back (1869) because during this year Jalpaiguri district was formed by the Colonial rulers. The formation of this district was purely an administrative decision. But later on it was framed as divisional head quarter of Rajshahi Division which got a

special importance over which our study is concerned. So the year 1869 is a landmark in the socio-cultural and political history of North Bengal. The reason of selecting 1969 as the ending year of my study is that, in this year a new political dimension started. After independence the socio-cultural and political practices of North Bengal was going on in a normal way. But during 1969 a new political demand started what is known as “Uttarakhanda Andolan” among some local people of this area. I would like to mention here that one of the aims of our research is to highlight the root of some social problems which were generated by the active role of Associations and publications.

3. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

The number of major publications on our study is very scanty. In fact the socio-cultural and political developments in North Bengal during the period of our study still awaits the historians. It is to be noted that a series of publications of press and Association have been published. But so long no serious attempt has been made by scholars to highlight the importance and contributions of the regional, local publications on socio-cultural and political field. The pioneer work on Newspapers and periodicals “Bangla Samayik O Sambadpatre Sekalar Katha” by Brajendra Nath Bandopadhyaya is even today regarded by the scholars as the source material in this field. “Samayik Patre Banglar Samaj Chitra” by Binoy Ghosh also deserves much credit. Some other scholars in Bangladesh and West Bengal devoted their interests in writing on press and publications in Bengal. The name of the scholars in Bangladesh, Anisuzzaman, Mustafa Nurul Islam, Muntasir Mamun and in West Bengal Partha Chatterjee and Jitendra Nath Bose must be mentioned in this regard. But the interesting fact is that none of these scholars have discussed even to a little extent, about the press and publications of present North Bengal. Brojendranath Bandopadhyaya in his book mentioned the names of a few number of publications of North Bengal. But actually no researcher was interested to pay his attention to the area of North Bengal. I would like to draw attention to one important point. Some non-academic researchers whom we want to termed as ‘Loka Aitihāsik’ have

written on some aspects of our study. All of these works are written in Bengali. Other than Press, there are some association in North Bengal. But no scholar have taken interest on the Associations/ organizations.

Though some of the scholars have focused on some of the problems of this region, very little work has been done so far on the Socio-Cultural history of this region. Recently a trend has grown up for writing regional/local history out of which some Scholars became interested with this area. But the interesting fact is that, as Cooch Behar was a princely state and had a royal background, most of the historical works were confined with its history. Some District-wise attempts have been made by some collective efforts but this is a very little out put for our purpose. Among the earlier works done, mention may be made of Meherab Ali, 'Dinajpure Sangbadikatar Ekso Bachar' (in Bengali), Jahar Sen, 'A cultural profile of Darjeeling', Charu Chandra Sanyal, 'The Rajbansis of North Bengal', Ranjit Dasgupta, 'Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal; Jalpaiguri 1869-1947', etc. These publications are no doubt of great importance and to some extent related with our study. But one thing have to be mentioned that no substantive study connected with the growth and development of Press and Association in present North Bengal have done by any scholar which reflects the socio-cultural life and social transition of present day North Bengal. In fact due to so many factors especially underdevelopment, this type of literary and intellectual practices did not start properly.

However, there are certain other publications and associations, which exclusively deal with the subject of North Bengal. But that study was initiated from those places which are presently beyond the scope of present North Bengal. 'VARENDRA ANUSANDHAN SAMITI', 'RANGPUR SAHITYA PARISHAD', 'UTTARBANGA SAHITYA SAMMILAN' had some outstanding achievements in this field. But after 1947 we had to deal with a different North Bengal, where, such type of Associations did not develop. In spite of all these, literary and cultural practices of this region got much credit which was not explored with due importance.

Apart from this we notice some articles published in different journals and periodicals in different times which were to some extent focused on the subject of our study. But they were almost incomplete and stray and cannot give sufficient information on the growth and development of Press and Associations in this region. Sometimes we find some information on our study from district gazetteers, administrative reports, census report, district handbooks, native newspaper files etc. But all these are not sufficient to understand the main theme of our research. Over all it can be said that we have not any major work on this field of study. So in our present dissertation we propose to throw some lights on the socio-cultural development and cultural regeneration of this area. One more thing has to be mentioned in this connection. For our study, we used the spelling of words as usual what we get in different texts and reports.

4. HYPOTHESIS

This is not a conventional history of the regional, Local Vernacular Press and Association. In my research work I shall make a comprehensive and critical study about the Vernacular Press and different Associations (SABHA-SAMITI) of North Bengal as a creator and interpreter of the public opinion. In fact, from 1870, the year in which appears the first press publication (The Darjeeling News), and within next few years, when a series of publication appeared, some significant changes took place in social and political life of North Bengal. In this work I have narrated how the intelligentsia of North Bengal was responding and reacting to the forces of change, exploitation and injustice under the British colonial administration through the medias and Associations. So from this point of views this issue is going to be one of the major hypotheses of my research scheme.

Though geographically present North Bengal belonged to the radius of the state of West Bengal, the socio-cultural and political condition of this area was something different from the rest of West Bengal. The history of modern journalism in India began with the publication of 'Hickey's Gazette', alias

Calcutta General Advertiser on January, 1780. But in the context of North Bengal, we see that after one hundred years, (1870) a printing press was established at Darjeeling. Similarly a series of publications appeared in different districts of North Bengal and each had a separate background and identity. At the same time, the Associations of North Bengal also played a major role in mobilizing the public opinion. So the second hypothesis of my research is to throw new light on this issue which are not studied earlier by the predecessors.

The third research hypothesis is to draw a complete picture of national movement in press and in the activities of Associations (SABHA-SAMIMTI) in North Bengal. During the period of our study we see so many unknown persons and untouched incidents were there which were reflected in the contemporary news papers of North Bengal. These papers will also present a vivid account of the prosecution of the editors and journalists of the nationalist press by the colonial rulers. As a mark of public protest, the peasants and masses of North Bengal also participated in the nationalist movement against the colonial rulers. In this regard the response of the masses organized by different Associations of North Bengal which were reflected through medias are to be studied meticulously. The regional/local Associations of North Bengal (SABHA SAMITI) had also some significant contribution in mobilizing the socio-cultural reforms and popular protest movement against the colonial rulers. This is a unique feature of the social history of present North Bengal. This question is to be studied in proper socio-historical perspectives.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first research question which greatly pre-occupies my mind is the question of North Bengal identity. Generally, the northern part of West Bengal is known as North Bengal. But is there any legal stand or decision in any form to identify this area as North Bengal? The question arises, how this area (Northern part of West Bengal) got a separate identity? This separate identity of North Bengal is no doubt an outcome of a long time socio-cultural and

political exercise. This research question has to be studied in some detail in my research work. It is fact that media and Associations in their own exercise have highlighted the issue of separate identity of North Bengal. Most important was the role of Associations (SABHA-SAMITI) which prepares the ground and demand for separate social, cultural and linguistic identity. We know, from the first half of the 19th century Bengal produced a huge number of Associations which had significant contribution in socio-cultural change. During the period of our study, we find a considerable number of Associations (SABHA-SAMITI) in North Bengal. For example we can mention the name of some associations/ organizations like-‘Dinajpur Bhatpara Unnatisadhani Sabha’, Malda Jela Sahitya Sammelan, Cooch Behar Sahitya Sabha, Arya Natya Samaj, Jalpaiguri Sahitya Samiti, Nepali Sahitya Sammelan, NEBULA, Hillmen’s Association, Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti, Hindu Mahasabha. Muslim League etc. With their effort and under the guidance of the intellectuals of this region a series of newspapers came out which highlighted the social and cultural features of North Bengal.

The second issue of my research question is the separate identity question of language, ethnicity, culture and the process of social change in this area of study. How the people of this area raised their voice for the recognition of their language culture etc. We have to draw our attention on the Associations of North Bengal which gathered public opinion and that were ventilated through the publications of North Bengal. As a result a separate identity in all spheres emerged and some social crisis and tensions have been generated. At the same time the publications from Calcutta also played some role in this question of separate identity of North Bengal. It is surprising that in the Calcutta Press publication we see many articles and news which highlights the North Bengal sentiment.

In recent times we all are aware of the fact that some social unrest and problem on identical question of North Bengal is going on in this region. Even some people are in favour of a separatist movement demanding the recognition

of their language, culture and separate geographical boundary. Whether it is justified or not that is not my question. But where lay the truth and root of their separate identical question have to be studied carefully in our research. I would like to trace the forces that operated behind such type of separate identity and regenerated a new socio-cultural dimension. In recent times this North Bengal gets much importance. Naturally the question arises why not so long. Perhaps, the Associations (SABHA-SAMITI) with their certain agenda have been found to be the operator of the sentiment of the common people. It may be mentioned here that a powerful social mobility had emerged and spread among a certain group of people of North Bengal particularly in Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Darjeeling district.

6. METHODOLOGY OR THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to prepare this dissertation I would like to follow different types of methodology. Materials from the West Bengal State Archives and National Archives, District Collectorate Record Office and also the oldest libraries and institutions will be collected and consulted very meticulously. It is unlikely that I will get sufficient materials on my study in the Archives and National Libraries. I am sure that for my study I shall get sufficient source materials in the Report on Native Newspapers. Being a study on North Bengal some important source should be available in the oldest libraries of the different districts of North Bengal. I think Cooch Behar State Library will help me much in this regard. I will have to make considerable use of local materials such as the records that has been present at the Collectorate Record Offices, contemporary weeklies and Journals published from North Bengal. Apart from all these, I will like to give much importance on oral history study. I will meet with many people as possible who were either active or close witness to the socio-cultural and political life of North Bengal in the first half of the twentieth century.

The existing conceptual framework for understanding our research proposal is generally derived from the conceptual frameworks of studying

conventional history. One single method is quite inadequate for various reasons. So in the process of our research, we will have to follow different type of research methodology to understand the questions concerned with our study. As our study is concerned with so many dimensions of history like social mobility, social transition, social awareness, cultural regeneration, growth of public opinion in a particular geographical area, our research methods frequently involve surveys, together with follow-up procedures like sampling, Scaling and various techniques of data processing. In a region, like present North Bengal these processes of data processing hardly find any place due to non-availability and non-preservation of contemporary evidences like Regional newspapers, journals, periodicals, proceedings and memorandum of the Associations. So we have to adopt a technique of combination of descriptive analysis and use of selective data for the purpose of our study. It is found that neither case study method nor survey method could be practicable options for the study of North Bengal. Hence our dependence on contemporary literature, Reports, Newspaper clips, proceedings are to some extent an essential rather compulsion. But this sets an obvious limits to our study. However, in our research method we used intensive interviews with relevant persons like political leaders, intellectuals, common people, local non-professional and non-academic writers (Loke Aitihāsik) to over come the limitations to some extent.

Though our study is basically developed on qualitative data (Primary Source), it is quite impossible to clarify our problem in the frame of a specific method. So in various ways we have to use secondary sources. This is because, dictated by the imperatives of our methodological preference for an emergent analysis, we began our study with secondary research. This provided us the opportunity to grasp the contextual peculiarities and historicity on the socio-cultural movement like ours. We undertook the collection of data pertaining to the origin, objectives, issues, demands and strategies of the movements under study. Further, we proceeded to the study of the responses to the movement from the rulers and civil society. Finally we restored to archival research. This exercise helped us to design a broad framework for the analysis of the socio-

cultural and political movements in Bengal in general and the movements in North Bengal under study in particular.

With these sources proper the present work is proposed to study the different aspects of 'North Bengal' and the socio-cultural developments of this region within the period of our study. To this end, the whole study has been organized into eight chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. The first chapter entitled 'Geo-Historical profile of North Bengal' connected with a brief historical background of this region. This chapter will attempt to give a description of that geographical area of North Bengal which have changed its area and shape in course of times. The second chapter will focus on the background of the Press-publications and Associations (SABHA-SAMITI) in North Bengal giving some highlights on the origin, growth and development of Press and Associations in general. Next there is a chapter in which discussion will be made on some important publications and Associations and their role in the contemporary socio-cultural and political movements in North Bengal. The fourth chapter will make a brief study on the growth and development of some Non-Bengali Vernacular Press and Associations in Non-Bengali dominated areas of North Bengal i.e., Darjeeling hill areas. In this chapter mention must have to be made about some English papers also. As this area had some different ethno-linguistic background, quite naturally they performed their literary and intellectual activities through the press and Associations which had some Non-Bengali origin. Chapter five makes a brief study about the contribution of the Regional Vernacular Press and the Associations in the freedom movement of our country in the regional level. This chapter will also attempt to discuss on political awareness of this region through the local Regional press and Associations along with the all India Dailies within the broad canvas of national political environment. This chapter followed by another chapter on Regional Associations (SABHA-SAMITI). Here an attempt has been made to discuss the various activities of the regional associations in the field of socio-cultural development of North Bengal. Here we will see how regional organizations/ Associations influenced the interested people of this

area for their socio-cultural development. The next chapter (VIIth chapter) deals with a unique question i.e., Emergence of North Bengal question. Though the North Bengal question has got some psychological as well as historical background, it is very much relevant considering the present socio-cultural and political situation. How the North Bengal question emerged through the medias will be discussed in the course of our study in this chapter. In the last chapter (chapter VIII) we have discussed the problems connected with emergence of Ethnic, Linguistic and Cultural identity question. Though identity question is not the main theme of our study, somehow it has raised as an aftermath of our study due to ethnic, linguistic and cultural background of this region. Apart from the theoretical framework of identity question, it will be discussed simply as a historical evolution and its analysis.

Conclusion of the thesis contains the summary of findings of the study. Without any elaboration it will just mention some important facts which are already discussed in the course of our study in different chapter.

The appendices contain the lists of some rare documents like photocopies of some old newspapers, journals and periodicals, leaflets, news items and heading of some articles which were preserved in the archives and old libraries. Some documents are also collected from individual preservations of some distinguish personalities of the different districts of North Bengal.