

## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUND OF THE PRESS-PUBLICATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS (SABHA-SAMITY) IN NORTH BENGAL

#### 2.1 A GENERAL STUDY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRESS

The Indian press has a glorious history. Specially during the early period of publications, Bengal played a very significant role which subsequently turned to be a socio-cultural and political Movement. When we will be discussing on the press-publications, it is very much necessary to point out the particular character of the press. As we know that the different press in course of times have changed their character, it is obviously necessary to identify its character to learn better about the purpose of the press.

Before we study about the press of our period and jurisdiction, it is necessary to look into the character of Indian press. It is not unlikely to say that the Indian press is not like the British press or French press, 'a press of one language'. It is a press of the major Indian languages in most of which, apart from English, it had its beginnings about the same time. The growth of such press was bound to be multifarious, and at the beginning somewhat diverse. But there has been an underlying unity, with common urges and common conditions. Along with political unity came economic unity, and along with it commonness of development, especially with the enforcement of a common legal system all over the country.<sup>1</sup> In tracing the developments of Indian press during nearly last two centuries, it would be useful to know where the Indian press has arrived.

According to 1977 report of the Register of Newspapers for India, India continued to be the second largest publisher of daily newspapers in the world in 1976, with a marginal increase to 875 from 835 in 1975. In circulation, Indian daily newspapers occupied the third place in Asia, coming next only to the USSR and Japan. Newspapers published in India touched 34.075 million in total circulation, marking a rise of 0.235 million in 1976, as

compared to 1975, when circulations stood at 33.822 million. The growth of circulation during 1971-76 was 4.456 million. The circulation of dailies in 1976 was 9.338 million as compared to 9.383 in 1975.<sup>2</sup> Along with the daily newspapers, the circulation of weeklies also fell, though the circulation of fortnightlies, tri-bi-weeklies and monthlies increased. Though the above information are not directly related with our study, it is presented to have a picture about the press publication which covered almost the major Indian languages and different places of India. Among the daily newspapers and periodicals in different Indian languages English dailies are accounted for the highest circulation figures, Hindi came next, followed by the Malayalam.

Before we discuss about the press of our area of study, let us have an idea about the circulation of newspapers. The largest number of newspaper, 3,289 was in Hindi, followed by English (2,765), Urdu (975) and Bengali (855). At the same time it is evident that the largest number of dailies (252) was in Hindi, followed by Marathi and Urdu (94 each), Malayalam (91), English (89), Tamil (58), Kannada (53), Gujarati (37), Bengali (22), and Telugu (17).<sup>3</sup> There are so many information regarding daily newspapers, journals, periodicals, weekly and fortnightly journals. But we don't need all these things for the purpose of our study. In spite of this it is to be noted that these are the figures given by the Registrar of newspapers for India in his 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Report, 1977.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to say that figures do not tell everything but they tell something. From its origin the Indian Press has grown but not much. In terms of needs, the growth has been inadequate, slow and uneven. Technically, the advance has been little in modern period. M. Chalapathi Rau, in his book, "The Press" have very nicely presented a detail picture about it. In different Indian presses we see that under British rule, it was a story of struggle for liberty and alternating period of benevolence and repression by the Government. It is easy to think in terms of press laws successive Governor General, the Indian Renaissance corresponding to the enlightened outlook of Raja Rammohun Roy and his successors, the great landmarks of the Great Rebellion, the first world war, independence and so on. From this arose a desire

to sponsor a history of Indian press (including regional and local) which would do it in a different way. There were few statistics, though British reviews gave a broad idea of growth in this accounts of struggle between the press and the government. The attempt here is to trace the growth of press against the existing political, social and economic background, to see how fitfully it started, how it had struggled, how it grew under the limitations of literacy and of standards of living. During the colonial period, press publications have got so many limitations and restrictions. So its publications and circulation was not so easy and smooth. So many times, press publications have got threats from British Government by different press ordinances. But we see that the biggest period of growth of the publications took place after independence, under conditions of adult surface and growth of liberty. The Indian Press started as press of dependency and later on the press became the press of developing society compelled to answer many challenges. At present publication of press is not only the medium of news dissemination, but also as a purveyor of advertising service. Such an history called for both objectivity and keen interest in the subject; it had to tell the story of the press as well as reflect the changing life of the people.<sup>5</sup>

It is not known when exactly printing from movable type was invented. CAXTON, England's first printer, set up a press at 'The Red Pale' in the Almonry at Westminster in 1476, having learnt the art in Cologne. The first presses, two of them arrived in India in 1550, though nothing was published till 1557 when a catechism, reputedly by St. Francis Xavier, was printed and circulated.<sup>6</sup> The early Portuguese settlers, followed by a number of Jesuits, needed quick means of communication for conversion. An English Jesuit, Thomas Stevens, believed to be the first Englishman to have leaved in India, translated a Portuguese primer into the local language for the use of college pupils.<sup>7</sup> A press was set up in Punikael in Tinnevelly District, in 1578 and another at Vypicotta in 1602. the next printing press was established in 1679 at Ambalakad, south of Trichur, and there the first Tamil-Portuguese Dictionary was published. The authorities were apprehensive of the effect of printing. The

arrival of thus Englishmen in India and the flow of commercial information led to the formation of the East India Company and its first excursions in India.

## 2.2 PRESS IN INDIA

It is evident that the first newspaper in India were started by those who had grievances against the company and resigned from its service to express them. The first attempt to start a newspaper in Calcutta was made in 1776 by William Bolts. He had resigned from the company's service after censure by the court of Directors for Private trade under company's authority. He made it known he had "in manuscript many things to communicate which most intimately concerned very individual". There was alarm and resentment in official quarter and Bolts was directed to go back to Europe. This was the early story of the publication of press in India.

James Augustus Hicky has the distinction of launching the first newspaper in India. The history of modern journalism in Bengal began with the publication of Hicky's Bengal Gazette, alias Calcutta General Advertiser on January 29, 1780 as a two sheet weekly. The glory of being the first publisher of a newspaper in India owing to an Englishman, who like William Bolts, —a Dutch advertiser came to this country in expectation of a rich harvest from Pagoda tree.<sup>8</sup>

After Hicky's Bengal Gazette came the India Gazette, a weekly newspaper started by Peter Reed and B. Messing in November, 1780.<sup>9</sup> Other papers that appeared after 1780 in Bengal were in Calcutta Gazette (1784), The Bengal Journal (1785), the Oriental Magazine or Calcutta amusement (1785), and the Calcutta Chronicle 1786.<sup>10</sup> Towards the close of the eighteenth century six more papers came out. These were the Calcutta Courier (1795), the Bengal Hurkaru (1798), the Morning Post (1798), The Telegraph (1798), the Oriental Star (1798), and the Asiatic Mirror (1798).<sup>11</sup> All these were English papers and journals owned and run by the Europeans and were exclusively meant for the European society in India. Even in England at that time the press did not do anything for the political awakening of the people. As late as 1795 the *Times of*

India supported the Government in return for a pension of £ 600. Naturally in Bengal the situation was no better.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.3 PRESS IN BENGAL

At the beginning of Bengali Press did not owe its origin to any political consideration. Though it was destined to play a vital role in the political movement of the succeeding years. It was, in other words, a manifestation of the all round awakening that was taking place in Bengal in the early nineteenth century.

The history of vernacular press viz. Bengali journalism begins amid controversy some writers give the honour of being the first Bengali Weekly to the Bengal Gazeti of Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya while others give the credit to the *Samachar Darpan*, edited by J. C. Marshman.<sup>13</sup> Very little is known either of the contents, or about the views on matters of public interest.<sup>14</sup> The year 1818 also saw the birth of the monthly 'DIGDARSAN'. Digdarsan published popular articles on history, politics and science. The DIGDARSAN and the SAMACHAR DARPAN were started by the Serampore Baptist mission.<sup>15</sup> The first issue of Samachar Darpan came out on May 23, 1818. It carried both Indian and foreign news.<sup>16</sup> In April, 1818 William Carey and John Marshman established the 'Friend of India'—an English monthly which was later brought by Robert Knight, the founder of the Statesman.<sup>17</sup> At that time many periodicals were started by the Christian Missionaries exclusively for religious propaganda.<sup>18</sup> The 'GOSPEL MAGAZINE', a bi-lingual monthly journal, brought out in 1819 by the Baptist Auxiliary Mission Society, was one of them. It was the first periodical in Bengal which was started with the sole object of propagating Christian theology.<sup>19</sup> Apart from this, the periodical was involved with some controversial issues in respect of religion. On July 14, 1821, the Samachar Darpan, however, published a letter attacking Hinduism. As a reaction, Raja Rammohun Roy sent a reply to the Editor of Darpan protesting against such improper attack and vindicating Hinduism. When the editor of the Darpan refused to publish the reply, Rammohun, under the name

of Shibprasad Sharma brought out the bi-monthly 'Brahmanical Magazine' in which he vigorously assailed Trinitarian Christianity and tried to prove that it was no better than Hindu polytheism.<sup>20</sup> [Making a scathing criticism of the unseemly attack made on the Hindu religion Rammohun wrote that it was only natural that the conquerors would ridicule the religion of the conquered. Though the Brahmanical Magazine (first published in 1821) had a very short life it heralded the beginning of the long-drawn controversy between the missionary and the Hindu papers.] The activities of the Christian missionaries set in a reaction in the Hindu community. Some of whom felt the necessity of counteracting the missionary criticism. Primarily, with that in mind Tarachand Dutta and Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyaya was the publisher of the 'KAUMUDI'. But owing to differences of opinion on the question of the practice of 'SATI' and other issues Bhabani Charan left the 'Sambad Kaumudi'. He started the 'SAMACHAR CHANDRIKA' on March 5, 1822<sup>21</sup>. It is reasonable to assume that the views expressed in paper – Sambad Kaumudi, reflected the mind of Raja Rammohan Roy. As a counter move the weekly – Samachar Chandrika was brought out by the orthodox Hindus on March 5, 1822.<sup>22</sup>

It is evident from the records that some of these papers were propagating in favour of some religious faith. For example we can mention the name of Samachar Darpan, which had an intention of vindicating Hinduism. On the other hand the 'Samachar Chandrika' was the chief organ of the orthodox Hindus. When the Regulation of XVI of 1829 was passed prohibiting 'SATI', the Samachar Chandrika launched a vigorous campaign against it. Though this campaign was not long lasting and ultimately the system of Sati was abolished, but in the early stage the initiative of socio-religious reforms reflected on papers had both positive and negative approaches.

Within a short time two other monthly magazines were published and they were the PASVABALI, started in February, 1822 and the 'CHRISTER RAJYABRIDDI' started in May of the same year. Thus in the period from

1818 to 1822 altogether nine Bengali periodicals and newspapers came into existence<sup>23</sup>. These newspapers in their early stage were the spokesman of the contemporary socio-religious condition of Bengal. In this connection it can be noted that, Alexander Duff, who had no high opinion of the early Bengali newspapers and periodicals admitted that they were strong manifestations of the newly awakened spirit of the age<sup>24</sup>.

When we are to study about the early Bengali Press, it is evident, from the very beginning, the press in Bengali was under strictest surveillance and control. The government suspicion and dislike for the press was intensified by the 'abusive and disparaging statements' – published in the 'JAM-I-JAHAN-NUMA'. The Jam-I-Jahan-Numa, the first Urdu weekly, was published from Calcutta on March 28, 1822 and its editor was Harihar Dutta<sup>25</sup>.

Regarding press publication in Bengali in the early stage, some members of the Governor General's council were strongly in favour of stringent press regulations. The then Governor General, Lord Hastings, incurred the displeasure of the court of Directors by his liberal attitude to the press in India. Lord Hastings left India for England on January 9, 1823. John Adam became the acting Governor General of India. The government first decided to suppress the 'Calcutta Journal' of James Silk Buckingham who had incurred the displeasure of Adam and other high officials by his persistent criticism of the Company's administration. After settling his old score with Buckingham, Adam proceeded to curb the freedom of the entire press in Bengal. An ordinance was issued on March 14, 1823, proclaiming that no one should publish any newspaper, periodical and such other things without obtaining a licence from the Governor-General in council, signed by the Chief Secretary to the Government.<sup>26</sup> The ordinance was placed before the Supreme Court on March 15, and it came into operation from April 5, 1823.<sup>27</sup> But it is interesting to say that in spite of all this ordinance and regulations the Bengali Press played a significant role in respect of social and religious reforms as an open media in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Press as media

of communication with people and ruling authority raised in 1818 under British ruling in India by Sir James Silk Bankham through his first published paper in India where he placed the thought to people that they should be free and fluent in their communication even in British rule. The paper was 'Calcutta Journal', where it was expressed—"As far as Europeans only whether in or out of service the freedom or the restrictions of the press could do little good or harm and would hardly deserve any serious attention". He also told that it could corrupt or disaffect the Indian Army and work for the overthrow of the British power. It might spread among the people the principle liberty and stimulate them to expel the strangers who rule over them and to establish a National Government. A free press and domination of stranger are things which are quite incompatible and can long exist together. Thus the press with the orientation of free opinion became an established thought for the first time in 18<sup>th</sup> century India.<sup>28</sup>

#### 2.4 SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE PUBLICATIONS OF NORTH BENGAL

It has been mentioned that James Augustus Hicky have the credit of publishing the first newspaper in India on January 29, 1780. After that, thousands of newspapers, journals and periodicals in different languages have been published from different corners of our country which have already mentioned in brief. But when we are to study about the press publications from present North Bengal, we see that following one hundred years from 1780 we got no newspaper or journal published from this area. Though Bengal played a very significant role in context of press-publication, but it is surprising that North Bengal did not have any share in that publications. In North Bengal, press publication was a bit late. In our present work we are to study about the press published from North Bengal. Before we enter into a detailed study, it is necessary to look into the background of the publications from the present North Bengal.

During the period of our study it is evident that a series of Books have been published on press and periodicals of different times. But it is surprising that no serious attempt has been initiated by scholars about the importance and contribution of the local newspapers of present North Bengal. (Viz.- Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, and Malda) But it is fact that with the greater part of Bengal, as well as the whole country, more than a dozen of newspapers had been published from North Bengal. In this regard, the pioneer work on newspapers and periodicals was "BANGLA SAMAYIK O SAMBADPATRE SEKALER KATHA" by Brajendra Nath Bandopadhyaya is even today regarded by the scholars as the source material in this field. Next to Brajendra Nath Bandopadhyaya credit must be given to Binoy Ghosh. His famous work on press "SAMAYIK PATRE BANGLAR SAMAJ CHITRA" deserves much credit. Kedar Nath Majumdar, another expert in this field wrote an important book on press-publications earlier than this two scholars. His book "BANGLA SAMAYIK SAHITYA" was published in 1917. Following the above mentioned personalities and getting inspired with their writings on press-publications, some scholars in Bangladesh and West Bengal devoted their interests in writing on press and publications of Bengal. The names of the scholars of Bangladesh are Anisujjaman, Mustafa Nurul Islam and Muntasir Mamun whose contributions in this field are very significant. In their study some references have also been made with regards to the press and publications of Bengal. The names of Dr. Partha Chatterjee and Jitendra Nath Bose must be mentioned in this connection. Their works "BANGLA SAMBAD PATRA O BANGLAR NABOJAGARAN" and "ROMANCE OF INDIAN JOURNALISM" respectively had a great contribution to this subject. Another book on press and periodicals entitled "The Indian press" was published. This is a compilation of articles on the Vernacular press of modern times and it deserves much credit on the subject. In addition to above mentioned works, some other scholars have got some significant contribution on press-publications.

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. Brajendra Nath Bandopadhyaya in his book mentioned the names of a few numbers of publications of this region. But nothing details have been studied there. Considering the position it is found that actually no researcher in that stage was interested to pay attention on the press publications of North Bengal.

Under the above circumstances a primary attempt has been made here to make a study on the background, growth and development of press and publications of the specific area of present North Bengal in the Nineteenth and first half of the Twentieth century. Though primary document on the subject are rare and Archival records are not available, still considering all this things this work have been undertaken. But it is a very difficult task to collect materials and information about of the above mentioned subjects particularly on the present North Bengal. There are so many difficulties in collecting information on the subject. Firstly, very few numbers and copies of these papers are available at present. No chronological order of these papers are maintained.

Our present study starts from 1869 and at that time the geographical shape of North Bengal was quite different. So for our study we require some publications which had been published from Rangpur, Dinajpur and Rajshahi in present Bangladesh. At present, due to non-availability of these publications and geographical disadvantage, it is not possible to collect detailed information about the papers published from Bangladesh. Some papers are preserved at the State Archives of West Bengal and National Archives of India. We have collected our information and documents from Archival sources, District Annual Report and from personal collections and interviews. We are to start our study from 1870 because in this year (1870) the first newspaper in present North Bengal was published from Darjeeling and it was in English. Though the main publications from this area was in Bengali but apart from Bengali newspapers English, Hindi, Nepali and Tibetan newspapers also enriched and

focussed much on its socio-cultural and political activities during this period. So we see that at the beginning, the press and the periodicals of North Bengal were published in some major Indian languages like Hindi, Bengali, Nepali and Tibetan. A good number of newspapers were also published in English. As a result it is evident that the publications of North Bengal during the period of our study was multi-lingual and consequently the progress of such press was bound to be multifarious in character.

Another phenomenon of the publications of North Bengal was that, in comparison with the publications of Calcutta (Kolkata) and East Bengal (presently Bangladesh) the publications of North Bengal was a bit late. This was due to several factors which was mainly the lack of infrastructural disadvantages. Moreover, socio-culturally this area was backward in comparison with Calcutta and some parts of East Bengal (Modern Bangladesh). The literacy rate of this area was very poor. Quite naturally the wave of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance came lately in North Bengal. Throughout North Bengal, the jurisdiction of our study, there was only one institution for higher education in Cooch Behar (The then Victoria College), the native state in the Eastern region. According to contemporary administrative report it is found that the number of recognised high school were only fourteen. Naturally it is found that a few number of Western educated (educationally interested) people were there in North Bengal during the period. Quite naturally, it can not be expected that the people of North Bengal most of whom did not have proper education may have any interest with the publication of newspaper, journal and periodicals. Even in the first half of twentieth century the social picture remained all the same. For instance , one example may be mentioned here. According to the census report of 1931, it is found that the literacy rate in Jalpaiguri district was 4.8%. From this report we can get a clear idea that a very negligible number of people could be interested with publication from North Bengal.<sup>29</sup> In addition to that, there were so many lackings of essential pre-requisites regarding printing and publications in North Bengal. The infrastructure needed for press publication can not be expected in such an area. There were no printing press,

efficient compositor, news media, advertisement and other sources to collect news. In spite of all these difficulties, publications started from the districts of North Bengal, though it was too late.

## 2.5 REASONS FOR LATE PUBLICATION IN NORTH BENGAL

It is known to all of us that before the partition of 1947 'North Bengal' had a different geographical area. The separate identity of present North Bengal, The area of our study came into being after 1947. But we know that before 1947, North Bengal had a different geographical jurisdiction and identity. In the undivided Bengal, this region (present North Bengal) probably had no important cultural and intellectual background. We have so many references that the cultural centres of nineteenth century—undivided North Bengal was Rangpur and Rajshahi, presently located in Bangladesh. At that time, Rangpur was famous for various reasons. Moreover, a large part of Goalpara (in Assam) and Jalpaiguri was attached with Rangpur. The publications from Rangpur was easily available to its adjacent districts. The people of this area considered that the publications from Rangpur was enough for the readers (interested persons) of Jalpaiguri, Goalpara (Assam), and Cooch Behar. When we are discussing about the background of the press publications of present North Bengal and it has already been mentioned that the first publication started in 1870, in this connection, it is noticeable that in 1847, the first newspaper was published from Rangpur and during the late nineteenth century at least five papers were published from Rangpur (in modern Bangladesh). We just mentioned it to explain the one of the reasons for late publication from the districts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar in present North Bengal.

Similarly Rajshahi (another district of modern Bangladesh) was the other centre pot of Malda and Dinajpur. Like Rangpur, Rajshahi was also culturally and intellectually developed. So many cultural and research institutions were established there to cultivate socio-cultural and intellectual activities. 'Varendra Anusandhan Samiti' (1910) was one of them. (see chapter

6.4). In this circumstances, it is quite natural that there must be press-publications from that place. These publications from Rajshahi were enough for the interested people of Malda and Dinajpur. It is also noticeable that only a few number of people of this area were interested in this context. Naturally no attempt was made to publish papers from the area of present North Bengal.

During this period another factor responsible for late publication was the media of Calcutta (KOLKATA), which reached to the districts of North Bengal. 'Education Gazette'<sup>30</sup> 'Sambad Pravakar', 'Bharat Mihir', 'Hindu Ranjika' (published from Rajshahi) all these papers had their agencies for circulation in North Bengal. For example—it can be mentioned that Education Gazette, edited by Bhudeb Mukhopadhaya had its own agents at Jalpaiguri. From contemporary district records it is known that Bhabani Charan Ghatak, Kedarnath Mukherjee and some other persons were regular subscribers of 'Hindu Patriot' edited by Harish Chandra Mukherjee. At the same time Bhabani Babu was the subscriber of 'INDIA' published from London. Naturally it can be assumed that some publication from outside North Bengal met the needs of media for enlightened people of this region. The number of this educated people was very negligible. So it is quite expected that in such an educationally backward area, only a few literate persons will take initiative to publish newspapers or journals of their own from North Bengal. So they did not think it urgent to publish separate papers from North Bengal.

But during the last quarter of the nineteenth century the socio-cultural and political scenario had been changing gradually. Rate of literacy and number of educated person were also increasing. As a result, they got some interest and initiative to introduce print media. Moreover, due to some of the social and political factors, attempts were being made to publish papers in mother tongues (local vernacular languages). In this way the vernacular press in this area were emerging. In this connection, rail communication played an important role. The introduction of "Northern Bengal state Railway" in the year 1878 and the "Darjeeling Himalayan Railway" in 1881 had a great role to play

for the publication from North Bengal. The introduction of railway communication in this region have shortened the distance with the other parts of the country and made contact easier and smooth from one place to another which helped the educated people of this region to think about their own press. This railway communication in this region also made an easy communication between North Bengal and Calcutta. As a result the cultural influence of Calcutta made the enlightened people of the region interested to publish papers and periodicals.

In the year 1885, the press publication got some opportunity due to administrative reforms by the imperial rulers. The Local Self-government Act of 1885 helped the growth of municipalities in each district. The recommendation for growth of municipalities and this type of local self-government inspired and helped the educated people to ventilate their own ideas and opinions. Quite naturally they got interested for press-publications as it was the ideal medium to fulfil it. By this time the 'Indian National Congress' had already come into being and some people specially politically interested persons have attached themselves with this political organisation. There is no doubt that the establishment of Indian National Congress was a landmark and this incident made some people of this area interested with the political activities. Though before the establishment of Indian National Congress the 'Indian Association and Sir S. N. Banerjee had seized the eyes of the people of Bengal. Moreover, during the last half of nineteenth century, a wave was also in force in North Bengal to organise some Associations to make discussions about social and cultural reforms. In this context press as a media was very much important to generate the public opinion. For example, we can mention the reference of "Dinajpur-Bhatpara Unnatisadhani Sobha" which published a paper named 'SUHRID'. Thus in our present discussion it is found that during second half of the nineteenth century, the enlightened people (Western educated young group) of North Bengal had taken initiative to publish newspapers from their own districts. During this period a series of publications came out and these publications continued for a long period. If we categorise these

publications, we can divide them in two phases; viz. – the publications from pre-swadeshi period to swadeshi and swadeshi to the period of independence. But the objectives of our present study is not like this. In our present discussion one more important factor which helped for the publications was the contemporary situation. The impact of the contemporary political situation and the newly born nationalistic ideas helped to a great extent to generate the minds of the people of this region to meet the need for the press publication and it was in full force up to the period of independence. But it is true that only this atmosphere which is explained are not sufficient for press publications. Some other conditions and facilities are also required for this purpose. The inevitable thing required for publication was the availability of the printing press. Let us now point out some of the early information about the establishment of printing press in North Bengal.

## 2.6 BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PRINTING PRESS IN NORTH BENGAL

During the early period of press-publications there was no scope for availing the facility of printing press in North Bengal. None took any initiative to provide the facility of printing machinery in North Bengal. It is true that due to several factors it was too late to emerge an intellectual class in North Bengal who could have a special interest for this. But it is surprising that even for business purpose nobody took any interest to establish any printing press. It is found that no one extended any effort to establish press (printing machinery) for cultural and intellectual practice. Because, intelligentsias (literate group) did not emerge in this area due to several unfavourable situations which has already been mentioned earlier.

Now in our present discussion, it is necessary to make a brief study about the history of the printing press in North Bengal during the nineteenth century. It is controversial and we cannot say definitely when the first printing press was established in North Bengal. We got no evidence to make a definite conclusion on it. It is assumed that in 1870, a printing press was established at Darjeeling to publish “The Darjeeling News”, a weekly paper. Before the

publication of this paper, we got no evidence about any other publication in North Bengal. So this printing press was the earliest one in North Bengal. But it may be noted that this was not vernacular printing press. It was an English printing press. Journals and papers printed by this press were in English. But the exact date of the publication of the "Darjeeling News" is not definitely known. According to W. W. Hunter, in the year 1871, the circulation of the paper was 150. The news items covered in the paper was mainly about the owners of the tea gardens. So it can be mentioned that the first publication from North Bengal was the "Darjeeling News".<sup>31</sup>

We have some reference about the first Bengali printing press which was established at Jalpaiguri in the same year, 1870. The proprietor of this printing press was the Cooch Behar princely state.<sup>32</sup> The purpose of this press was not to publish any journal or newspaper, but to print necessary papers for the state administrative works like cash book, forms, receipt for land revenue etc. Later on, in the year 1876, due to some administrative necessity, this press at Jalpaiguri was transferred to Cooch Behar town, the head quarter of the state.<sup>33</sup> The establishment of this two printing press, one at Darjeeling and the other at Jalpaiguri was very significant in the history of printing and press publications in North Bengal. This two printing press encouraged interested persons of the adjacent districts and they also took necessary steps to establish printing press from their districts. As a result, we see, within a decade other two districts of North Bengal viz., Malda and Dinajpur districts established separately one printing press each. A printing press was established at Dinajpur in the year 1885 and the other at Malda in 1888. Moreover, one more printing press was established at Jalpaiguri in 1895. On the whole, we see that from 1870 to 1895, there were at least five printing presses in North Bengal. It is significant to some extent that one hundred years back, when a large number of printing presses were started in Calcutta, at that time there was not even a single printing press. But between 1870 and 1895, at least five printing presses were established in the four districts of North Bengal. So, this development in the field of printing machinery no doubt implies that an intellectual and cultural

exercises were coming into force, though it was a bit late. Not only this, it is also evident that during this period one Hindi Press also was established in Darjeeling. The source of our proposition is that during 1889, a Hindi monthly journal was published from Darjeeling under the supervision of 'Arya Samaj'. But at the same time it has to be mentioned that we have no definite proof whether it was printed at Darjeeling or outside. There were references about some publications which were published from North Bengal, but due to the lack of printing machinery were printed at Calcutta. For example it should be mentioned that during 1914 to 1916, the most illustrated paper published from Malda (a district of North Bengal) was 'GAMBHIRA'. It was published from Kaligram, near Chanchole, but printed from Methcalf press of Calcutta.<sup>34</sup> 'GAMBHIRA' was a bi-monthly literary journal. But this publication did not last for a long time. The duration of this paper was from 1914 to 1916.

The editor and at the same time publisher of the journal 'GAMBHIRA' was Krishna Charan Sarkar, the Zamindar of Kaligram at Malda. Its purpose was to make different types of social reforms, to enhance social awareness among the people of different classes of the society.<sup>35</sup> But considering the performance of these presses, the common thing has to be mentioned that most of these printing presses were established with the view of business purpose. The chief objectives of these presses were to print Bills, different types of forms, leaflets, cash books etc. But considering the nature of all the printing presses during this period, the exception which we notice is that during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, only one printing press was established in North Bengal with a view to publish a newspaper. The name of this printing press was 'Krishnakali Press' of Malda.<sup>36</sup> This printing press had a national character. Radhesh Chandra Seth, an advocate, intellectual and a famous nationalist leader was its proprietor. In our later chapter we will discuss in detail about it.

So long we have discussed about the background of the printing press in North Bengal. On the basis of this discussion we got a clear idea about the

background of the printing press and publications in North Bengal. Though it was too late in comparison with the publication of Calcutta and some parts of North Bengal of undivided Bengal (Rangpur, Rajshaha) but considering the character of some of the publications of North Bengal it is evident that the publications from this area played an important role in all perspectives, viz., social, cultural and political. But the fact is that, these papers have not been properly maintained and preserved in the Archives. Having a detailed investigation on the subject of our study it is found that from North Bengal, more or less we have publications from all the five districts, viz., Darjeeling, Cooch Behar, West Dinajpur (presently North and South Dinajpur) Jalpaiguri and Malda. But we see that the publications of all the districts of North Bengal are not equally important. But the publications from Jalpaiguri and Malda have some special political, social and cultural background and it will be focussed specifically in the course of our study. The publications of Darjeeling were totally different due to its socio-cultural particularly ethnical and linguistic background. As Cooch Behar was a princely state, it had some compulsion in this respect. From West Dinajpur, there were as such no important publication. All these things will be discussed categorically later on.

## 2.7 A GENERAL STUDY ON THE BACKGROUND OF THE ASSOCIATIONS (SABHA-SAMITI) IN NORTH BENGAL

The growth of public organisations and Associations in Bengal was closely related to the growth and development of the Bengali press. Though the foundation of the 'Asiatic Society' by William Jones and thirty gentlemen representing the elite of the European community on January 15, 1784, was for various reasons a landmark in the cultural history of the nation. Yet Raja Rammoan Roy's 'ATMIYA SABHA' founded much later may rightly be regarded as the pioneer of truly Indian public associations of the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup> Before we enter into the study about the Associations or SABHA-SAMITI of North Bengal, it is necessary to look into the background of the Associations in North Bengal emerged later on. In this context Raja Rammohan

Ray was no doubt the pathfinder on it.<sup>38</sup> In 1814 Rammohan Ray retired from service and after sometimes settled down in Calcutta. In Calcutta he came in contact with a number of persons whose minds were influenced by the western education and who therefore fully sympathised with his rationalistic views and principles. With their cooperation Rammohan founded in 1815, the 'Atmiya Sabha' which held meetings for propagating the monotheistic doctrines of Hindu Scriptures.

Before he settled down in Calcutta, Raja Rammohan Ray spent a good time in Rangpur and engaged himself in different types of social works. Many reports of the meetings held at Rangpur and his sayings and doings there much have reached them and he was already an interesting personality to many. Amongst the learned associates of Raja Rammohan Ray, Hariharananda Tirthaswami was very much connected with Rammohan's work at Rangpur.<sup>39</sup> Rammohan's outstanding contribution to the cause of social reforms remained as a landmark to the countrymen. But his social reforms could not be done so easily. Chiefly with a view to defend Hinduism he started publishing a periodical/ journal in English and Bengali called 'BRAHAMANICAL MAGAZINE' or the missionary of the Brahmins. But Raja Radhakanta Deb along with his conservative Hindu friends protested against him by presenting a petition to the Governor General on behalf of the orthodox section of the Hindu community. Soon after in January, 1830, an association of orthodox Hindu, called the 'DHARMA SABHA' was established. The method which these people then began to practice in their social agitation were organisation to stir up latent and unvocal opinion, petitions to Government, abuse of opponents and social ostracism. Even in Rangpur, Rammohan's circle aroused the hostility of orthodox critics who were headed by Gaurikanta Bhattacharya, the author of a tract—Jnananjan, against the reformers.

Many similar associations of different people, different ideas and objectives sprang up during this period. Among these to mention a few were 'Gaudia Samaj' (1828), Academic Associations (1828-29), Sarbatattva dipika

Sabha (1832), Sadharan Jnanoparjika Sabha (1838), Tattvabodhini Sabha (1839), Sarbasuhakari Sabha (1850), and Bidyotsahini Sabha (1853).<sup>40</sup> Most of these organisations (SABHA-SAMITI) had started their own organ to get their views and ideas communicated to a broader section of the population.<sup>41</sup> From social point of view all these organisations had some important contribution in the socio-religion reforms. Apart from these socio-religious organisation and institutions, a good number of political organisations were established. The political leaders of Bengal did not rely on the contemporary press and platform alone for carrying an agitation for political reforms. They also realised the necessity of organising political associations. The first to be established in Bengal was an association, called 'BANGABHASA PRAKASIKA SABHA', founded in 1836. The name and activities of this association are little known. The first reference to it occurs in an anonymous letter published in the Jnananneshan on December 17, 1836. Bangabhasa Prakasika Sabha regarded the Government measures as highly injurious to the country.<sup>42</sup> It decided to summon a public meeting to discuss the proposal of sending a petition to the government signed by five thousand persons. A circular was accordingly distributed widely among the people in Calcutta and its immediate neighbourhood.<sup>43</sup> Actually our study is not concerned with the Associations (Sabha-Samiti) of Calcutta. But it is necessary to know how and under what circumstances the associations and institutions began to emerge. In July 1838, 'Zamindary Association' the name of which was soon changed to 'Landholders Association' was established. It was open to all persons having any stake in the land irrespective of caste, creed or country and it would keep in touch with all the districts.<sup>44</sup> Another organisation 'The British India Society' was established in July 1839, by Mr. Adam in order to rouse the interests of the English public in Indian affairs. The Landholders society of Calcutta decided to co-operate it and appointed a committee to supply regular information to the later and about the India's grievances and demands.<sup>45</sup> Another important Association was 'Bengal British India Society'. It was founded by Dwarkanath Tagore after his return from London in January 1843. There were thus two political associations

in Bengal since 1843, viz., the 'Landholders Society' and the 'Bengal British India Society'. The first represented aristocracy of wealth, and the other, aristocracy of intelligence.<sup>46</sup> These two existing political associations in Bengal silently merged themselves into a new one named, 'The British Indian Association'. This Association was founded on October 29, 1851.<sup>47</sup>

In the fifties, the British Indian Association was quite active and was complemented by the historian—Rutledge, as the great counterpart of similar English organisations. The 'Black Acts' controversy, in which the young Bengal leader—Ramgopal Ghosh—figured, led to much political excitement. As a result, there was the formation in 1851 of 'the British Indian Association' in which all groups joined in radicals, moderates and even the conservatives. The British India society of the radicals and the landholders association of the moderates being now both defunct, the new association forged a new comprehensive unity for the furtherance of Indian interests and defence of Indian rights. Unlike the two older bodies again, the new institution was exclusively Indian in membership. Debendranath Tagore, as the secretary of the Association, sent out a circular letter to other metropolitan towns to take up the work of organised agitation.<sup>48</sup>

## 2.8 ASSOCIATIONS IN NORTH BENGAL

Until the late nineteenth century, we don't have any information about Association or SABHA-SAMITI in North Bengal. The association of North Bengal in the initial stage could not play any significant role in the political, social and cultural history. Even with wide variation in cultural, social, ethnological identity of the people of the Himalayan region, under-development is the common factor bringing them together. Barring a few localised centres the density of population in the region was low. Virtual absence of roads and consequent difficulties in transportation narrowed down the range of social and economic contact with the outside world purchase of and sale of handicrafts and surplus of crops used to take place in the weekly or bi-weekly hats and also at the annual Mela or Fair in every year.<sup>49</sup>

It is well-known to all of us that the 'Indian Association' was established by S. N. Banerjee on July 26, 1876, though the formation of such a body was considered a year earlier i.e., June, 1875. Surendranath Banerjee in his 'A Nation in Making' reminisced : 'Political work in the mofussil was then a new thing, and the new-born enthusiasm for political progress that we are able to evoke in the most distant parts of the province is one of the most pleasant and enduring reminiscences of my life'.<sup>50</sup> From the first annual report it is known that the association which had started with the membership of 70, had risen to 200. In the very first year of its existence, the Indian Association affiliated a number of Associations in different parts of the country, united to it in sympathy, and having a common scope of action. These Branch Associations were in Bogura, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Pabna etc. This was principally achieved by the all India political tour undertaken by Surendranath Banerjee on behalf of the Association.<sup>51</sup> From the information we observe that the all Indian political Association had its branches in some areas of North Bengal in the undivided Bengal. As our study is concerned with North Bengal which have changed its geographical shape in course of time, it is necessary to say that both socio-cultural and political associations emerged and played a significant role.

Like the Indian association, 'Brahmo Samaj' was another important socio-religious organisation which has its branches and activities in different towns of North Bengal. Keshab Chandra Sen joined the Brahmo Sabha in the year 1858 and within a few years he proceeded to stir it up from the stagnation into which it had fallen after the great days of the 'Tatvabodhini' movement. He started a 'Sangat Sabha' for religious discussions.<sup>52</sup> He launched out on mission tours, and appearing an all India figure. In East Bengal he aroused enthusiasm and alarm the district towns to build Brahmo group. The Brahmo Samaj was also established in various places of North Bengal. From Miss Collect's Raja Rammohan Ray's biographer Brahmo year book, Brahmo Samaj was established at Boalia in Rajshahi in 1859, Cooch Behar in 1873, Dinajpur in 1870, Jalpaiguri in 1870, and Rangpur in 1862.<sup>53</sup> in these district towns of

North Bengal so many socio-religious reform works were undertaken. In North Bengal Brahma Samaj activities became manifest, in the early eighties, in such places as Jalpaiguri, Saidpur and Siliguri, owing to the presence of Chandicharan Sen, well known as North Bengal workers.<sup>54</sup> He devoted all his spare time to the cause of Brahma Samaj at Jalpaiguri in North Bengal. After his departure the Samaj had suffered decline and the work partly being kept up at Jalpaiguri, by a number of Brahma families who have temporarily settled down there.<sup>55</sup>

The nineteenth century movements to reform the Hindu Society and Indian religion, like Brahmaism and Bhaktivadi Saktadharmo of Ramkrishna and Muktibadi Sevadharmo of Vivekananda, also made their impact in North Bengal. The Brahma congregation Hall of Jalpaiguri was established in the year 1901 (other opinion in 1904) and Ramkrishna Mission was established in 1923. Both Ramkrishna Mission and Brahma Samaj did much for the spread of modern education the benefit of which also reached to North Bengal. This two institutions gave much importance on education specially, the female education and social service. But it is found that their influence and sphere of action were limited to the educated middle classes of the urban areas.<sup>56</sup> It is evident that throughout the period of British rule Jalpaiguri remained essentially a rural and plantation district. But at the same time it is also evident that some voluntary organisations for social service named like 'ARYA SAMAJ' was formed in Jalpaiguri on July 20, 1904. This institution had a great role for the cultural practices and cultural activities of the district. Still this institution is in existence and playing a significant role in the cultural activities of the district. It may also be noted that this Arya Natya Samaj, an institution of glorious past is going to celebrate its centenary year. While discussing about the associations and institutions of North Bengal (SABHA-SAMITI) we have a lot of associations in different districts of North Bengal. Among them some were political and the others were working in socio-cultural areas. We have mentioned the name of such associations in some places which are at present laying in modern Bangladesh. But we have to mention those Associations

because before the partition 1947 those places were situated within the jurisdiction of North Bengal in undivided Bengal. Moreover, it is also necessary to mention that Rangpur and Rajshahi were the centre pot for socio-cultural activities in North Bengal. But after 1947, the jurisdiction of North Bengal has been changed and present North Bengal, the area of our study came into existence.

The town known as Rajshahi was always a famous centre of learning. Its importance was further augmented when it was transformed into headquarter of Rajshahi district in 1825 and that of Rajshahi division in 1875. Facilities for Western Education were created in the town through the establishment of high schools and college between 1828 and 1873. A Sanskrit College richly endowed by Rani Hemanta Kumari Devi of Puthia Raj Family was founded here in 1894. The aristocrats and landlords of this area worked jointly to establish in 1878 the 'Rajshahi Association' which provided a forum for reading papers on history, science, literature and art. A branch of 'Bangio Sahitya Parisad' was opened about this time at Rajshahi (1907) in addition to that eleven journals and periodicals were published from Rajshahi between 1865 and 1900 including the 'Jānankura' (1872) the 'Pratibimba' (1872) and 'Aitihāsik citra'. The last named, which was edited by none other than Akshay Kumar Maitreya was indeed very important because it was probably the first historical journal in vernacular language (Bengali) in India. It is also interesting to note that Akshay Kumar Maitreya began to publish this historical quarterly at the suggestion of great poet Rabindranath Tagore who was highly impressed by the literary efforts of Maitreya aimed at making his country-men conscious of their glorious historical past.<sup>57</sup>

Another important institution was the 'Varendra Research Society'. This was founded in June 1910 as a centre for the promotion of higher studies and research in the history of Bengal at the liberal patronage of Kumar Sarat Kumar Ray of Dighapatiya Raj family. Kumar himself acted as the president of the society with Akshaya Kumar Maitreya as the Director and Ramaprasad

Chanda as the honorary Secretary.<sup>58</sup> This institution, with its best effort founded a Museum which was historically very important. The museum of the society became a storehouse of antiquities which included sculpture , epigraphs, coins, terracottas, metal ware paintings and manuscripts collected from various phases of Bengal. For the proper utilization of all these collections the society built up a big library. It also arranged archaeological tours and excavations to attract students, teachers, and persons interested in history and antiquarian studies.<sup>59</sup>

In the context of present North Bengal the area of our study, we will make detailed discussion on different type of associations in a later chapter (see chapter 6). Some of which are already mentioned. Though there were some variations among the associations of present North Bengal, in spite of this their importance in respect of our study cannot be denied. In the present context we would like to mention the name of some associations of present North Bengal which had a significant contribution for the socio-cultural development of the region.

First of all we would mention the name of 'COOCH BEHAR SAHITYA SABHA', an outstanding socio-cultural association of North Bengal. It was founded in 1915 with the Royal patronage and it had achieved a significant contribution for the promotion of literary and cultural practices.<sup>60</sup> Next to Cooch Behar, a series of Associations/ organisations were founded at Jalpaiguri with different aims and objectives. Among them some were very much relevant with our study. Here we are to mention the names of some associations/ organisations.

- i) Debating Club, Jalpaiguri (1887)
- ii) Arya Natya Samaj, 1900 (another opinion 1904)
- iii) Jalpaiguri Sahitya Samiti (1928)
- iv) Jalpaiguri Muslim Sahitya Samiti (1931)
- v) The Anjuman-I-Islamia, Jalpaiguri (1892)

vi) The Indian Tea Planters Association (1915).

Apart from these Associations/organisations some other Associations were also founded at Jalpaiguri and they were GANA KALYAN SAMITI, MARWARI RELIEF SOCIETY, INDIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY, SISUNIKETAN, SISUMAHGAL, SISU-UDYAN and MILE-MISE (for reference see Chapter 6.2).

In Darjeeling district, we also get the reference of a good number of associations/ organisations which were to some extent different character from the associations of other districts of North Bengal (see chapter 6.10). Several associations/ organisations mostly of cultural and literary character emerged at Darjeeling to ventilate the grievances of the hill people and to fulfil their aspirations. The associations emerged at Darjeeling were as follows :

- i) Nepali Sahitya Sammelan (1924)
- ii) Gorkha Dukkha Nivarak Sammelan (1932)
- iii) Nebula (1935)
- iv) Gorkha Samiti, later on 'Gorkha Association (1926)
- v) Gorkha Library (1918)
- vi) Hillmen's Association (1917)

In addition to these associations some other organisations/associations (samities) were formed in Darjeeling district and they were—Nepali Sahitya Adhayan Samiti (Kalimpong), Nepali Sahitya Prasar Samiti (Siliguri), Arya Samaj (Darjeeling Branch), Gorkha League (Darjeeling Branch). The details of all these associations/ organisations are studied in Chapter 6.10.

In Malda district, we also find some associations/ organisations which exercised some socio-cultural activities. Radhesh Chandra Seth, a renowned intellectual cum nationalist and Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar, renowned scholar and nationalist, were the main force to establish and activate these organisations. The associations/ organisations founded in Malda were ;

- i) Rampur Boalia Dharma Sabha (Malda Branch). Its exact date of establishment is not known.
- ii) Malda Zila Sahitya Sammelan (1317 B.S.)
- iii) Malda National Council of Education (1907)
- iv) Malda Mhammadan Association. (1890)
- v) The Malda Association (1887)

The activities and contribution of all these associations/ organisations of Malda will be discussed in chapter 6 (see Chapter 6.11).

Like all these associations/ organisations mentioned above, we don't have information about association from West Dinajpur district (presently North and South Dinajpur). A very little are known in this respect and we will mention it in course of our study. Hence, in the present North Bengal districts, we find a huge number of associations emerged in course of different times. In our present context, most of these associations/ organisations got significant contribution for the socio-cultural and political development of North Bengal.

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