

INTRODUCTION :

The history of the origin of the Rajbanshis is a mystery and there has been the absence of unanimity on this issue. The Rajbanshis constituting the most numerous group among the autochthons of the district went through the parallel processes of Hinduization and Islamization. It is, however, curious that usually Rajbanshis are only Hindus and all Muslims referred to as local Muslims are non-Rajbanshis. In this connection it is relevant to note that the Hinduized Rajbanshis form the single largest Hinduized social group in the population of the district of Cooch Behar. The Rajbanshis along with "Paliyas" and "Deshis" are found in the wide stretch of the country extending from the districts of Malda and Purnea (At present in Behar District) to Goalpara in Assam. Rajbanshis both Hinduized and Islamized speak a dialect which according to Grierson "is called Rajbanshi", and while undoubtedly belonging to the eastern range (of Bengali language), has still point of difference which entitle it to be called as a separate dialect.¹

Rajbanshi *intelligentia*, political leaders and social reformers, however by and large strongly disagree with what has been stated above and emphatically deny any affinity between the Rajbanshis on the one hand and Koches, Paliyas and Bodos on the other. Difficulties arise because of the fact that though the Rajbanshis have a rich and complex history it is yet to be written and constructed properly. The history of this people of North Bengal Districts and also of part of Assam suggests that they were once a regionally dominant political power and founded several powerful kingdoms. Their *precise* origin, status and folk history remained mostly obscure. Existing history is largely based on the accounts left by the colonial administrators and colonial ethnographers and what follows below is drawn to a considerable extent from such accounts.

From the various accounts though not always consistent and very clear, it appears that when the British started intervening the Cooch Behar principality, the Rajbanshis belonged to a semi-tribal community who for a considerable period were settled agriculturalists, with regional diversity, raising crops mainly using a plough drawn by Bullock. At that point of time Rajbanshis formed a considerably differentiated peasant society. Buchanan Hamilton who visited Eastern India in the early 19th century considered the Rajbanshis to be the aboriginals of Kamrup and

be strongly categorised by their features belonging to the great eastern race of mankind.²

As a distinct ethnic variety Rajbanshi has been recognised as one of the major social groups belonging to Scheduled Caste category in West Bengal. Rajbanshis has registered as a major scheduled caste in the Northern districts of the state of West Bengal. As per 1991 Census near about 84% of the Rajbanshis of West Bengal live in this district. The reason behind this huge concentration is that the district of Cooch Behar, once a princely state has been the principal bastion of Rajbanshi population. In terms of caste identity nearly 13.5% people of the districts of the northern part of Bengal are happened to be Rajbanshis. Interestingly, there has been no such concentration of any other community or ethnic group which can be equated with the Rajbanshis both in the numerical sense and consolidation sense of the term. A brief analysis of the background of the Rajbanshis is relevant here.

The documented history of this region provides the fact that there had been an independent Rajya (State) named Pragjyotishpur which was formed composing of geography of present day Assam and a part of early Bengal. Different Regional Tribal groups such as Danaba, Kirat, Asur ruled either whole or part of this region. With the passage of time Pragjyotishpur became known as Kamrupa. At a latter stage Aham, Kshen, Coch and such other tribal groups dominated the region at different points of time. These tribal groups used to fight with each other to keep their political ~~whole~~ and had come to a relationship under dominant-dominated continuum. They had to experience with different kind of socio-political interactions and had to come across different stages of interrelations such as conquest, supreme position, assimilation and amalgamation. With this experiences the aboriginal tribal groups had transformed into civilized social groups. With the passage of time the eastern part of Kamrup had gone under the control of Aham tribes and the Western part of Kamrup came under the rule of Coch tribes. The Coch tribes could form a separate Coch Kingdom centering Cooch Behar and Baikunthapur Region.

The root of the Coch tribes lied in the influence of Astromongaloid Tribal groups. Some historians and Anthropologists have questioned the idea of Dravidian-Mongoloid admixture and have stressed the Mongoloid element. However the pre-history and mythology of the region indicate the existence of Aryans in this region

who used to live only river side of Karatoya. Infact there has been no definite information on Coch tribes before 16th Century. The initial identification of Coch tribe could have been made as a part of extended Bodo tribe. The noted Anthropologist and social Activist Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal, in his monumental work on the Rajbanshis of North Bengal has pointed out " Coches are non-Aryan in origin. Some of them adopted Hinduism and became Rajbanshis." A section of the local Rajbanshi intelligentsia, however, straight way defies the argument and as a counter argument they claim that Rajbanshis do have certainly a Kshatriya origin of Northern heartland of India.³ While substantiating their arguments they take resort to old hindu scriptures and mythologies. Thus the ethnic origin of the Rajbanshis has been some-what uncertain amidst opposing arguments. The continuous process of assimilation and integration of Hindu religion gave rise to a new social group called Rajbanshi which was formed as a major breaking away group of the Coch tribes. Besides Coch and Rajbanshis, there have been some tribal groups which are still in existence such as Mech, Rava, Kachari and such others. The Coch Kings ruled Cooch Behar Kingdom for nearly 450 years. During the British rule, the principality of Cooch Behar became a subjugated feudatary state and after India's independence had been merged with India and became a district of the state of West Bengal. The Rajbanshis of the district of Cooch Behar have been the major ethnic group. This social group, over a long period of time has been living with other immigrant social groups. ,

The present study seeks to unravel the complex and tortuous process of metamorphoses that the district underwent in its social, economic and political aspects through-out a long stretch of time. The particularities of the district are that socially it has been a plural society marked by considerable socio-cultural differentiations with its large autochthonous population nearly out numbered by immigrants. Politically the district had been a princely state ruled by the indigenous Maharaja's of Cooch Behar and has been merged with India since 1950 and presently has been in existence as a district of the state of West Bengal. In the economic sphere the district has experienced a kind of colonial economic penetration and exploitation, together with the evolution of the Jotdar-Adhiar relationship marked by multiple forms of surplus extraction and dependency in agriculture marked the district off from the rest of colonial Bengal. Politically, the district was

distinguished by the articulation of three-fold socio-cultural reform and political protest movements i.e., social mobility movement among the Rajbanshis which has been full of peculiarities. The main stream Nationalist movement has been surprisingly absent in the district and particularities of the popular movements that the district witnessed in the closing decades of 20th Century.

In course of presenting the socio-demographic profile of the district, it has been attempted to understand how the initial colonial settlers stigmatized the autochthons as non-arean. With spar of immigration of caste Hindus, Bengalis, Beharis, and Marwaris as also of Muslims from the neighbouring districts such as Rangpur, Pabna, Noakhali and Comilla or East Bengal. The Rajbanshis underwent a process of cultural assimilation and transformation through both Hinduization and Islamization. The changed Rajbanshi hindu and muslims, however remain close up to each other in their socio-cultural moorings than to their respective peer groups represented by the immigrant hindus and muslims respectively. Under the new land ownership patterns introduced by the Cooch behar kings under the direction of Rayats they were reduced, by enlarge, to the status of poor tenants and share croppers (Adhiars). Immigrant Hindus and Muslims either became Jotdars or took to various services and professions in an around the town of Cooch Behar where they have mostly settled. Over the years, these immigrants developed entrepreneurships as junior partners of the colonial masters. The popular autochthonous culture of the district therefore remained syncretic, uncontaminated by communal vices through-out the colonial period and largely accounting for the absence of communal violence and riots erupting in other parts of Bengal off and on, remained confined among the large land owners, jotdars and better of peasants.

Social fragmentation of the district could not be cemented by an overarching nationalist ideology. Due to the absence of the basic ingredients and an all engulfing political platform with the inevitable result that the different social groups drifted into diverse political channels. Caste Hindus opted for the Congress and the hindu Mahasabha Muslims in most cases joined the Muslim leagues and the Hinduized Rajbanshis, though watering down their loyalism, failed to develop an anti British stance over-night. The leftist forces consolidating within the Congress intervened in such a fragmented political setting and sought to bring together the agriculture labourers and Adhiar peasants within the fold of its trade unions and Krishak

Samities. Thus hitherto unmobilized social forces could be brought to the political scene of the district during the 1940's escalating anticolonial militancy and taking on simultaneously the oppressed sections of the society.

The Rajbanshi Kshatriya movement in Cooch Behar was basically a movement for having a kind of elevation in the Hindu Social order or traditional Hindu caste hierarchy. The Rajbanshi Kshatriya Movement was emerged during the first decade of 20th Century and had been growing during the 1920's under the leadership of Sri Panchanan Barman. From the very beginning the Kshatriya Samity did not commit to any political opposition to the British Raj. Infact the Kshatriya Movement kept away from nationalist freedom struggle (which was indeed barred in the state of Cooch Behar), the movement representing the aspirations of the incipient Rajbanshi middle class and also Rajbanshi Jotdars had its beginning in striving for upward mobility and for recognition of a distinct socio-cultural identity. However the movement which in 1917 had asked for special representation in the legislatures, had been developing, during the 1920's also as a political movement and looking upon the British Government as the patron of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Movement.

In its annual conference held during the 1920's the Samity regularly reiterated its firm loyalty to the British Government. In its various resolutions the Samity concentrated on the demands for formation of a Rajbanshi-Kshatriya batallion, nomination of adequate number of Rajbanshi-Kshatriyas to the District Boards, Union Boards, Municipalities etc. that is, local self-Government institutions suitable measures for spread of education and increased job opportunities for the educated Rajbanshi-Kshatriya youth. Old issues like the importance of strict adherence to the rituals and rousing of social awerness against the introduction of dowry in the Rajbanshi society were also stressed.⁴

In a sense the Samity sought to enhance the social, economic and political position of the Rajbanshi community in general and of a counter elite in particular through greater patronage from the colonial regime. It is out of such an understanding that the Kshatriya Samity leaders pursued a loyalist political strategy. Three other important aspects of the movement deserved mentioned here. Firstly, it has already pointed out that as a part of the movement's quest for wider social recognition of a high caste status, the Samity had established contact with the

Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha in 1920. Later on formal organisational links were forged and Sri Panchanan Barman was elected an office bearer of the All India body.

Secondly, the movement's appeal contained a mixture of evocations of the past glory of the Rajbanshi-Kshatriya and Hindu revivalism with at times explicit anti Muslim tones. The outrage of sexual priority of Rajbanshi and other Hindu women by Muslims became a recurrent issue. The ideal of "dangdhari-mao" or weapon wielding hindu women was put forward. The Samity developed a close relationship with the Hindu Sabha and sent representative to the provincial conferences of the Sabha. however, some native Muslims started taking part in the Samity's conferences. The 18th Conference even referred to the need for developing unity of Hindus and Muslims of local origin against the vatrias (aliens), that is immigrant Bengalis.

Thirdly, the agrarian perspective needs to be highlighted. Rajbanshi rank holders, jotdars and substantial peasants were among the supporters of the movement. Astonishingly the movement never raised any agrarian issues at its own initiative. But on two *occasions* the Samity had to take instant ~~on~~ moves to amend the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. Sri Panchanan Barman was made a member of the Coommittee to consider such amendments. While on the question of relations between land lords and jotdars who were either tenure holders of Raiyates, he was keen to further the interests of these two groups against the zamindars, on the question of given recognition to the Adhjar or share cropper. His position was decidedly against the Adhjar. Such an attitude towards agrarian relations kept the potential of the movement considerably restricted.

An aspect deserving particular attention was that against the background of the Constitutional negotiation continuing since the appointment of Simon Commission, the Kshatriya Movement too became involved in the issue of political reforms and there was less stress on that of improvement of the ritual and social status of the Rajbanshis. Bangiya Jana Sangha, an organisation representing the Rajbanshis Kshatriya and several other backward but "non-untouchable" caste groups was formed.⁵ It may be observed that in a move to have a united lobby against the

caste Hindus. Several low caste "Sabhas" formed the Bengal Depressed Classes Association which represented the Nama Sudras and other untouchable and depressed castes. Interestingly, Kshatriya Samity leaders because of their claimed higher ritual and social status were keen on demarcating themselves from the former and organised the Bangiya Jana Sangha.

• In the memorandum submitted to the Indian Franchise Commission (1932) on behalf of the Sangha Panchanan Barman stated that the Rajbanshis and other backward class "should be represented by reserved seats..... through Joint Electorate".⁶ It is from this position that the Kshatriya movement supported both Government declaration of August 1932 with provisions for reserved seats and separate electorate for the depressed classes and later on its modified version that reserved seats but joint electorate under the Puna pact. It is worth while to note that this position differed from the position of several other caste movements, particularly the Nama Sudra movement which was agitating not only for seat reservation but also for separate electorate. To take advantage of job reservation, special educational facilities and electoral politics the Kshatriya Samity asked for the status of Scheduled Caste and this was granted.⁷ There was some reservation within the Rajbanshis about this status, but the Samity leaders argued that the term "Scheduled" was not related with ritual and social status of a caste and that the category "Scheduled Caste" just referred to certain caste included in a Schedule for electoral purposes. Hence there was no ground for having any misgivings.

The policy of the Colonial Government was to encourage political aspirations of the lower caste including the Rajbanshis in a bid to keep the nation divided and weak. Thus, addressing the 15th and 16th conferences of the Kshatriya Samity held in July 18, 1935, F.W. Robertson, the Rajshahi Divisional Commissioner observed that "the Government had recognised ~~in~~ the Rajbanshis as one of the Scheduled Castes and would surely especially consider their claim for government services and also other matters of interest to them". The Govt. of India Act 1935 widened the franchise to a certain extent and provided for joint electroate in the case of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes. The first election under the Act was held in early 1937. Since Cooch Behar was feudatory

state, the election was held only in Jalpaiguri and Siliguri Constituency. The election outcome revealed the complex and fragmented features of society and politics in the districts of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri and the failure of the Congress leadership to overcome disjunction between the nationalist forces and other social and political forces which was active in the district. The new Constitution of India of 1950 has retained the position of the Rajbanshis as one major Scheduled Caste social group.

The slow but steady process of migration of the caste Hindus from the neighbouring district of erst while East Pakistan has accelerated the process of syncretization in the district. The immigrant Bengalis — both Hindus and Muslims coming from outside the district came to be known in the local parlance as Bhatias (Outsiders) The district also came to be traversed by Marwari Merchants and Traders as well as some Behari Traders. Many of the Bhatias both Hindus and Muslims had been the officials in the princely state administration and few of them were lawyers, petty traders and jotdars. Thus follows that the district's population came to have an extra-ordinary admixture of diverse social collectivities. The society as it stood in the late 19th and early 20th Century was characterised by fragmentation into various castes, religious communities, ethnic groups and linguistic cultural groups. Amidst the presence of majority indigenous people called Rajbanshis, the society of Cooch Behar had been and still has been under a continuous process of interaction between the different social groups.

Economically the Rajbanshis of the districts are dependent on primary sector nearly 91% of the Rajbanshi Working Force are engaged in agricultural sector, mostly as cultivators, some as agricultural labourers. In service sector other social groups had relatively more workers than the Rajbanshi. A little more than 4% of the Rajbanshi workers are service holders. The Rajbanshi participation in household industries, manufacturing industries, construction works, trade and commerce, transport and communication has been on the rise but till date such participation is negligible. The relative proportion of Rajbanshi workers dependent on cultivation has been declining. Along with a sharp fall in the number of cultivators, there has been considerable increase in the proportion of agricultural labourers among the Rajbanshis. The decadal growth rate of agricultural labourers among the Rajbanshis

was more than 141%. This substantial increase of agricultural labourers among the Rajbanshis substantiates the fact that the increase is due to land alienation. However among the off farm employments, the participation of the Rajbanshis in manufacturing industries and services has not increased in any reasonable rate. However in services there has been a little rise. It has been amply proved that despite urbanisation and such other factors the Rajbanshis have not been experienced with any significant change in the employment pattern.

• By the end of the 19th Century, the Rajbanshis aspired to raise their social status by claiming Kshatriya status and wanted a promotion from a lower to a higher birth in the regional caste hierarchy there-by gaining greater prestige and respectability in terms of the conditions of caste system prevalent at the time. This has been a peculiar social mobility movement asking for a better placement at the hierarchically arranged Hindu Caste structure, while on the other, the caste movements of that contemporary period had been to defy Hindu Brahmanical Caste structure. In this respect the Rajbanshi Kshatriya movement has been a mismatch in comparison with the other caste movements in India. Such a social mobility movement within the immobile traditional Hindu Caste structure gave rise to a class of urban based gentry in the Rajbanshi society, while most unfortunately the majority of the poor Rajbanshi remained as they were. Thus the nature of socio-economic relationship between Rajbanshis and non-Rajbanshis of the area remained unaltered. While almost of the same time under the leadership of the educated Rajbanshi there had been the effort of getting the Rajbanshis included in the Schedule of the Constitution and to have Scheduled Caste status. Such an anomalous position of the Rajbanshi of being a Scheduled Caste on the one hand and member of Kshatriya Varna on the other, created considerable confusion about their real social identity.

Even after the introduction of various development programmes for the Scheduled Castes in five years plans, the overall socio economic condition of the Rajbanshi is no good at all. A sense of relative deprivation prevails in the minds of Rajbanshis that they are relatively backward than people belonging to other social groups. Such a feeling of deprivation and state of backwardness enuniated a kind of sensitization among the Rajabnshis. They become discontent with what they expect and what they get in the prevalent system. Kamtapuri - Uttarakhand movement

has been one of such manifestations of the discontent. Against this backdrop, a detailed study of Social Welfare Administration of the Rajbanshis of Cooch-Bihar is not out of place.

Social Welfare Administration as an area of research has been a new field warranting the attention of the policy planners, political practitioners and public administration professionals. As an area of study Social Welfare includes two fundamental attributes; (a) the utilization of welfare measures to support and strengthen the family as a basic social institution through which needs are met; (b) the intent to strengthen the individual capacity to cope with his life situation. Moreover social welfare encompasses the well-being and interest of large number of people, including their physical, mental emotional, spiritual and economic needs. In short, social welfare includes the basic institution and processes related to facing and solving social problems which affect large number of people and which require some kind of concerted group effort to resolve. In India, the term social welfare has come to be used in a restricted sense - provision of social welfare services for the socially underprivileged groups - scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, denotified communities, orphans, women, children, physically and mentally disabled and economically underprivileged such as destitutes and unemployed. Social Welfare programmes are directed to ameliorate their conditions.

While attempting to understand social welfare administration it has been rationally argued, "To achieve the aims and objectives of social welfare, the government formulates social policies and in pursuance thereof, enacts social legislation, delineates various projects, schemes and administrative apparatus in the form of ministries for the implementation of all the activities undertaken in the sphere of social services, social work, social legislation etc., would be considered to belong to the realm of social welfare administration."⁸ Social Welfare Administration has been viewed as a "problem centered" discipline and "as an approach to solve social problems".⁹ Indeed, social welfare is increasingly becoming a subject of importance in the life of a political system destined to become a welfare state. However social welfare administration encompassing every act, every technique and every consideration in the process necessary to transforming social policy into social services, the entire field of social welfare administration has not been well conceived and still it is in a formative stage.

Admittedly, it would be hardly an exaggeration to look to social welfare administration which makes use of finding of any of the social sciences which are relevant to its sphere, which includes the solving of social problems, the implementation of social policy and the promotion of Social Welfare. But its distinctive character is that it combines and benefits from any of the conclusions of the social sciences which assist it and uses them as tools in the performance of the functions which are its particular concern."¹⁰

The American Council of Social Work Education views, "administration is a process of transforming community's resources into programme of community service in accordance with goals, policies and standards which have been agreed by those involved in the enterprise. It is creative in that its structure and relationship in such a way so as to alter and enhance the total product. It involves the problem solving process of study, diagnosis and treatment."¹¹ Social Welfare Administration as a complex process of activity deals with the study of development, structure and practice of social service. It is broadly defined as the study of social services whose objective is to improvement of condition of life of individual in the setting of family and group. It concerns with basically social problems and primarily with the ways in which society responds to these problems. In short, Social Welfare Administration is concerned with action proceeding from social pathology to social legislation and social policy, continuing to the study of executive action and to appraise how the social welfare policies affect the citizenship need.¹²

Most of the scholastic writings on Social Welfare Administration differ from each other while conceptualising the subject matter, principles and content of Social Welfare Administration. However a generalization may seem inescapable on the scope, nature and principles of Social Welfare Administration from the realm of intellectual exercises so far made on the subject. Five broad categories of scope may be worked out : (a) Social problems - cause of social problem and remedy of it through social reform and legislation detect social evils and combat them through people consciousness; (b) For the public good various social services being adopted through the provision of education, health and upgrading backward people, women and handicapped; (c) Social security to compensate for the loss of income due to old age unemployment through social assistance; (d) to serve the individual, family and community people through social functioning by method of group work and

community organization; adopting social policy and formulating them to achieve welfare through social action. ¹³

As an effective means of social transformation, welfare measures are undertaken to maintain the social order and to achieve social equilibrium and justice. Precisely, social welfare refers to those services which are designed for those weaker and vulnerable sections of community, who, due to some socio-economic backwardness, are unable to compete with main-stream of the society. Social Welfare encompasses services relating to socially disadvantaged section of the community. It is rightly observed, Social Welfare is the organized system of Social Welfare institutions designed to aid disadvantaged individual and group satisfying standard of life and health. It aims at personal and social relationships which pursue to develop their full capacities and the promotion of their being in harmony with the needs of the community. ¹⁴ Occasionally, Social Welfare Administration is viewed from a limited sense meaning executive function of management or the operationalisation of social welfare services. In a broader sense, it includes all gamut of welfare services from the determination of functions and policies, planning, supervision, accounting and keeping records or maintenance of services.

Although Social Welfare Administration is an offshoot of Public Administration, considerable differences exist between the two. Social Welfare Administration has been a late starter and via Economics and Political Science the subject has come to the fore in 1946. While Public Administration as an academic discipline has started its journey during early decade of the twentieth century, Social Welfare Administration has been a sub-discipline of Administration. It is a branch of modern Development Administration. As a sub-set of Public Administration Social Welfare Administration searches and identifies the social problems and tries to initiate measure to eradicate such problems. Its scope extends the provisions of social welfare services for the deprived sections of the society. The Study Team on Social Welfare and Welfare of backward classes suggested for a five-fold classification for the content of welfare services. These are (a) Socially underprivileged groups - (i) under-privileged groups; scheduled castes; scheduled tribes; and other marginal classes of the society; and (ii) orphans, widows, unmarried mothers, women in moral danger, aged and infirm; (b) women and children; (c)

socially mal-adjusted beggars, prostitutes, delinquents, newly discharged persons from correctional and non-correctional institutions; (d) physically and mentally handicapped persons - including blind, deaf, dumb, mentally disabled, diseased, temporarily handicapped, mentally retarded or ill; and (e) economically underprivileged such as destitutes and unemployed.

Irrespective of the nature of the civilised state systems, social policy has been a general characteristic feature. Some writings have tried to identify the degree of correlation between the economic development and social policy. Such studies suffer from demonstration of statistical association to development a causal explanation. Such studies suggest for weakness in other explanations such as the explanation of social policy growth in specific countries which rests heavily upon deeds of heroic individuals or pressures from specific ideological political parties. We may concentrate on the study to know how they together are related to the theme of growth of the welfare state following the explanations provided by theorists broadly under the liberal democratic tradition.

Broadly speaking, the idea of social welfare emanates from two basic premises : (a) Market liberals; (b) Political liberals. The concerns of market liberals has been to develop ways of distinguishing the a social effects of market processes in a way which will enable them to identify situations in which state intervention in society is necessary from those in which it will unnecessarily interfere with the working of market mechanisms. They recognise that the complex economics of industrial societies work in ways which produce disfunctions which may either destabilise market systems or produce social effects which will lead to political opposition. They believe that most social allocation issues are best handled by market mechanisms and their concern is to delimit the exceptions to that rule. The 'market liberals' identify, therefore, a necessary role for the state to prevent individual economic actors operting in restraint of free trade, to maintain law and order, and to solve social problems which arise when individual actions produce undesired collective effects which the market mechanism cannot control. Political liberals are of the view that democracy is seen to work as a process in which competing elites, leading political parties bid for mass support. The growth of economic institutions providing a mechanism for resolving conflict arising out of

the latter. The problematical aspect of these political process is that the political elites^{Went} a political market place in which they bid for power and to capture the mind of the people. They offer benefits particularly social benefits. This leads to this rapid growth of social services and state expenditure.

Primarily social welfare encompasses two approaches such as residual and institutional. Residual approach includes welfare institutions such as family, group, voluntary and non-governmental organizations. They begin to emerge only when the usual structure of supply, the family and market breakdown. Institutional approach on the other, presupposes an organized system of social services and institution designed to aid individuals and groups to attain satisfying standard of life and health. It emphasises on personal and social relationships which permit individuals to the fullest development of their well-beings in harmony with the needs of the community. Social welfare administration is the mechanism of translating social policy into action. However the implications behind the operational isolation of policies are varied and many. Such differentiation and heterogeneity produce ambiguities and nonconformities in conceptualising and delimiting the nature and scope of social welfare administration. Admittedly, the structure of social welfare administration remains diversified and confused. The subject has been struggling hard to find out a suitable approach. One can search for the existing models to locate and identify the acceptable alternative approach to social welfare administration. The models are : a) Residual model (marginal respons^{ns}ibility of state for the ease and well-being^{of} citizens); b) Achievement Performance Model (Education, health, social insuarance and Public assistance); c) Redistributive Model (State provide the services of health, education, housing and welfare according to the needs of citizens).¹⁵

Social Welfare Administration in India :

Independent India inherits the culture of social welfare which is intrinsically linked with her social dynamics. Being a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic India always stands on the principle of social, economic and political justice to her people. The Indian state is, therefore, supposed to seek for remedy the situations of inequalities, disequilibrium, disadvantages through regulation, distribution, subsidies etc.¹⁶ Since independence, the government of India, has been

assuming ever expanding responsibility for welfare measures aimed at achieving a state of physical, mental, social and economic well-being of our people and not just at overcoming specific evils. Such welfare measures are being provided not merely to aid people but to enlist their help and cooperation in social welfare programmes in terms of recognition of the worth and dignity of the individual through the media of social policy. Social policy is the institutionalized control of services, agencies and organization to maintain or change social structure and value. Social policy is also a set of inter-related decisions of political actors for the achievement of means and goals within a given situation. In order to achieve the means and goals used to evolve, extend and stabilize a pattern of welfare services for weaker sections, there is a need for sound administrative infrastructure. In fact, welfare measure are the outcome of a well-defined system of public administration. In this context, it is worthwhile to study the minimum facilities and amenities provided by the welfare administrative agencies in rendering the social services.¹⁷

The preamble to the Constitution of India firmly declares that its aim is "to secure to all citizens justice, economic and political, equality of status and of opportunity". Evidently the Constitution has drawn up the chapter on Fundamental Rights in order to ensure that each citizen has these rights. Article 14 assures equality before law and equal protection of law. Article 16 (1) asserts "There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state. Article 38 lays down that "the state shall strive to promote the welfare of the people in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life. Article 335, however asserts, "The claims of the members of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes shall be taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration in the making of appointment to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the union or of a state". Similarly Article 340 (1) provides for the appointment of a commission 'to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes and to take steps to remove such difficulties and to improve their condition. Thus, there is a conflict between the principle of equality of opportunity and right of freedom as enumerated in Article 16 (1) and the fact that millions of citizens are ^{to} socially and educationally improve their education so that they could utilize the equality of opportunity accorded by the Constitution.

Part IV of the Indian Constitution specifically indicates a detailed list of programme of action relating to social welfare and justice. The provisions ranging from Articles 36 to 51 relating to Directive Principles of State Policy; under this Chapter highlights the goal of social justice by providing responsibility to the state to translate that goal into reality by necessary legislative action. To improve the well-being of the people is the primary objective of the Directive Principles with an added notion to fulfill the social welfare objectives. Thus social welfare is increasingly being recognised as a subject of vital importance in the life of a nation destined to become a welfare state. Precisely, Art 41 of the Indian Constitution has been the primary source from which the Indian state has derived the authority of social welfare programme. The Act suggests "The state shall within the limits of its capacity and development, make effective provision for screening the right to work, to education and public assistance in case of unemployment, oldage, sickness, disablement and other case of unemployment, oldage, sickness, disablement and other cases of undeserved want". Art 46 of the Indian Constitution corroborates the notion that "the state shall promote with special case, education and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of explanation."

The operationalisation of social welfare programmes in India calls for an elaborate system of administrative management encompassing both the centre, state and the local level administration. All these three levels constituting of three different branches give rise to the wider public administration structure of welfare administration. Ever since the beginning of our independent state craft, different committees and commissions have been constituted to judge the efficacy of the welfare administration in India. The study reports of these committees, in general, sought for a concerted programme of action of different departments on the basis of collaboration and cooperation. The Renuka Roy Committee¹⁸ pointed out, the various social welfare subjects were dealt with in different Ministries and the Plan and Policies of social welfare could never be used as an integrated approach and direction. The Committee recommended for a setting up of department of social welfare. The study team suggested that administration of a social welfare policy initiating, reviewing and watching implementation of social welfare legislation and

bringing a uniform pattern in social welfare administration. The constitution and administration of a central cadre of welfare administration had also an important prescription of the Committee.¹⁹ The study team appointed by the Administrative Reforms suggested in its reports that rehabilitation and welfare should be concerned with the single department and the department should then be grouped with a department of Labour and Employment.²⁰

Social Welfare Administration connotes an all pervasive form which includes every aspect of social backwardness for promotion and development. The socially depressed, repressed and economically weaker sections of the society have been one of the principal facets of Social Welfare Administration in India. This deprived section has not shared the fruits of development but in relative terms they lay far behind. Thus people living at the bottom of social and economic hierarchy should be geared up and brought up to the main stream by way of realising the targeted welfare programmes made for them. In India both the centre and the state governments have their specific departments for the development of the socially backward and depressed sections of the people. The welfare programmes for this targetted group include programmes relating to education and training, economic uplift; health, housing and other programmes. There have been certain centrally sponsored schemes and certain state specific sponsored schemes for the development of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes community. Since the study seeks to view the socio-economic status of a scheduled caste group and the impact of welfare measure on this group, an analysis of the initiatives and measures for the development of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes undertaken by the Indian state craft would not be out of order here.

WELFARE OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES : A Brief Historical Outline

Historically speaking, the first ever expression of a Backward Class consciousness came only after the reforms of 1919. The census of 1919 divided the Hindus into three categories : a) Hindus; b) Animists and Tribals and c) Depressed classes and the untouchables. Such a classification has ushered in a new political dimension to the problems of the depressed classes. The modern

systematic effort for the welfare of the depressed classed was, however, attempted with the introduction of Montague-Chelmsford Reforms 1919. Official efforts, afterwards were on towards improving the condition of depressed classes. In 1923, by issuing a resolution the government stipulated that no grants would be paid to any aided educational institution which refused admission to the children of the depressed classes.²¹ Towards the close of 1927, a Statutory Commission was constituted to review the working of the Government of India Act of 1919 and make a fresh recommendation for Constitutional advancement of depressed classes. The Commission was headed by Sir John Simon. In its reports the Commission preferred to call depressed classes as scheduled castes. The Round Table conference (1930-32) reopened the question of separate electorate for the depressed classes. Being a delegate to the Round Table conference Dr. Ambedkar reasserted the claim for separate electorate for untouchables. However such opinion was strongly opposed by Gandhi. Ultimately a settlement was arrived at under the Pune Pact which led to the cancellation of Communal award made only a month before the Pune Pact was signed. The government of India Act of 1935 embodied the Provisions of the Pune Pact with certain modifications. Another feature of the Act was the substitution of the term depressed classes for scheduled castes.

A comprehensive review of the Act of 1935 reveals the fact that the British Indian States ~~intended~~ intended that the interests of the relatively backward communities should be safeguarded by a system of special protection. Thus the policy of protective discrimination became a passionate feature of British policy in India leaving aside the question of reservation of the seats in the legislature. Efforts have been made to improve the socio-economic conditions of the scheduled castes and tribes. The independent India followed altogether the same path for the development of scheduled caste and tribes set by the British Policies. Since independence India has been pursuing a novel as well as unique policy guided by the principle of protective discrimination towards the weaker section of the society. The Indian Constitution provides a strong number of provisions to enable the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes to catch up the process of mainstream national development. The Articles relating to the development of the weaker sections comprising of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are of both permanent and temporary implications. Some of the Articles may be mentioned to corroborate the statement.

Article 15(4) lays down that "the state to make special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Article 16(4) enables the state to make the provisions for the reservation of posts, in favour of any backward class of citizens which in the opinion of the state, is not adequately represented in the services under the state. It has been laid down specifically in Article 46, that 'th^e state shall promote with special care, the education and economic interest of the weaker sections of the people and in particular, of the scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all form of exploitation".

In order to fulfill the promise of Directive Principles of State Policy, specific provisions have been outlined in Articles - 164, 275, 330, 334 of Constitution of India. These Articles provide for the reservation of seats for scheduled castes in the state legislatures and in the Parliament. Under Article 335 of the Constitution requires the state to take into consideration, the claim of the member of scheduled castes in the appointment of various services. Article 17 of the Consitution declares that untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. "The enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence, punishable in accordance with law."

Article 338 (as ammended) by the Constitution Sixty-fifth Ammendment Act 1990) provides for the National Commission on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to investigate and monitor all matters relating to safe guards provided for persons belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, examines specific complaints with respect to the deprivation of their rights and safeguards, and presents an Annual Report to the Union on the working of these safeguards and make recommendation as to the measures to be taken by the union or any state for effective implementation of other safeguards. The Union and the state governments are to consult with the Commission on all major policy matters affecting scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. In fact, such a Commission was first established in 1978²² and that has been renamed in 1997.²³

Keeping in view the Constitutional provisions different Committees, Commissions, working groups, Advisory Board and Panel were set up for the

accomplishment of the objectives contained in the Constitutional provisions. These are :

- a) Backward Classes Commission, January (1953), headed by Kaka Saheb Kalekar;
- b) Untouchability offence Act (Ammended in 1976) Protection of Civil Right Act, 1955;
- c) Centre Advisory Board for Harijan Welfare, Government of India, 1955 and 1969;
- d) Committee on Plan Project (1958) Report, 1959;
- e) A study group on Welfare for Weaker Sections, under the chairmanship of Jai Prakash Narain, 1960;
- f) Employment Committee (April 1966) Committee on untouchability of Schedueld Castes (Report 1969);
- g) Yarde Working Group - 1967, Ministry of Home Affairs;
- h) Three Parliamentary Committees (I-1968, II-1971 and III-1973) for the implementation of Constitutional safeguard for the welfare of scheduled castes;
- i) Centre Co-ordination Committee, 1974, chaired by Minister In-Charge, Home Affairs;
- j) Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976;
- k) Joint Committee of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, 1978.
- l) The Backward Classes Commission (1977), headed by B.P. Mandal
- m) A high Power Panel on Miniorities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections, 1979.²⁴

The Constitutional provisions and prescriptions provided for expanding responsibilities for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and lessons of last fifty years led us to review the operations of the plan process of development and welfare of weaker sections. The different Five Year Plans provided opportunity to work on certain specific programmes meant for the development of the said sections. The first Five Year Plan adopted major programmes for increasing educational facilities with an objective to percolate down to the weaker section of the community. In the second Five Year Plan measures were undertaken through centrally sponsored schemes for socio-economic upliftment of Harijans. The third Five Year Plan focussed on economic upliftment programmes through voluntary organizations. Greater emphasis was given to effectuate the institutionalised services such as schools, hospitals, housing, co-operatives, industrial centres for the welfare of scheduled castes. The fourth Five Year Plan involved in the curative and ameliorative Programme. This Plan proposed to lay emphasis on consolidation, improvement and

expansion of services so that the process initiated in the earlier plan is accelerated. The fifth Five Year Plan envisages that the main thrust for the development of these classes will come from the general sections, while the activities of backward classes welfare sector will be supplemented in future. In this plan, for the first time specific programmes were made for Scheduled Castes and the Tribes separately. In the Sixth Plan Special Component Plan, Special Central Assistance and Scheduled Castes Development Corporation were highlighted for bringing total development during this plan period. Specific schemes for the welfare and development of the Scheduled Caste were implemented. The eighth Five Year Plan took sincere initiative in the form of programmes for the promotion of educational and economic development of Scheduled caste. Necessary infrastructural support building had also been initiated for the cause. The thrust area of the ninth Five Year Plan has also been into streamline the mechanism of planning and implementation of programme covered under Special Component programme. The ninth Five Year Plan highlights on the following issues : a) to provide guidance with reference to employment opportunities; b) to improve the performance of educational development; c) to identify causes for inter-caste variation in availing benefits under the scheme and to chalkout the remedial action.

Social Welfare Administration relating to Scheduled Castes primarily concerns with three important strategies undertaken during different plan periods. These are : a) Special Component Plan, b) Special Central Assistance, c) Scheduled Caste Development Corporation. The Special Component Plan (SCP) was designed to channelise the flow of benefits and outlays from the general sectors of development in the plans of the state and central ministries for the development of the Scheduled Castes in the physical and financial terms. The Plans were envisaged to help the poor scheduled caste families through composite income generation programmes. Such family oriented programmes were expected to cover 52 per cent Scheduled Castes agricultural labourers, 28 per cent small and marginal farmers, share croppers, leather workers, weavers, fishermen, traditional artisans, sweepers and other like workers through composite income generating programmes.²⁵ Family development programme, educational upliftment, tangible improvement of living condition with an excess to service for a quality of life, to develop the human scheme, to promote the occupational mobility, to eliminate middle-man in the economic activity, to develop the women and the children of scheduled caste have been the major plan component of SCP.

Two national level institutions were set up for the economic development of scheduled castes and the tribes : a) Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation and b) National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Financial Development Corporation. Such financial institutions were created with an objective to enable them to act as a catalytic agent in developing schemes for employment generation of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Moreover, under the Poverty Alleviation Scheme it is presumed that 30 per cent of the beneficiaries would belong to Scheduled Caste and scheduled tribe categories under integrated rural development programme. Besides this programme under Jawhar Rojkar Yozana (JRY) scheme preference is being given to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes so far as the wage employment programme is concerned. At the grassroot level the village Panchayat 15 per cent of annual allocation is being spent on works relating directly to the benefits of Scheduled Caste and the diversion of fund made for Scheduled Caste is not foregotten.

Special Central Assistance (SCA) Programme was initiated by the government of India in March 1980 to accelerate the development of Scheduled Caste families. The special Central Assistance has given thrust to the development programmes for the Scheduled Caste, especially in core sector like animal husbandary, agricultural occupations and diversification of agricultural labourers. The SCA is specifically meant for the most vulnerable groups among the Scheduled Castes, namely sweeper, scavengers, bonded labourers etc.²⁶

The Scheduled Castes Development Corporation has been set up by the government of India in different states having greater Scheduled Caste population to mobilise institutional credit for income generations scheme. The objective was to ensure optional returns from the investment made for the economic upliftment of the target groups. Such financial corporations play catalytic role in developing schemes for employment generations among the Scheduled Caste populations. The promotional role of the corporation has been in terms of identifying Scheduled Castes clusters through special surveys and motivating the Scheduled Caste beneficiaries, assessing their needs and financial requirement to formulate different remuneration schemes for different occupational groups.²⁷

Besides the above general programmes, the centrally sponsored schemes include post matric scholarships for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students, pre-matric scholarship for the children of those engaged in unclean occupation, book banks for scheduled caste/tribe students studying in medical and engineering colleges, girls hostel scheme for scheduled caste, central aids to voluntary organizations for the development of scheduled castes and tribes. In addition to this centrally sponsored arrangements, the state governments do have their definite programmes for the development of scheduled caste and scheduled tribes both in actual basis and in virtual terms, the development programmes relating to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes are realised through the state government.

A sound social welfare administration machinery is urgently required for actualising the programmes and strategies undertaken for the amelioration of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The administrative agencies engaged in realising such programmes and policies are spreaded all over the country. Admittedly social welfare administration in India has been in action at three levels at our political system. The organizational and institutional framework may be delineated as under.

The Central Level :

The Ministry of Welfare is the Chief repository of Policy Planning and Co-ordination of the developmental programmes relating to Scheduled Castes and scheduled tribes. In the Ministry, there is a separate wing headed by the Joint Secretary assisted by three Directors, four Deputy Secretaries, six Under Secretaries and Research Staff, Desk and Section officers to perform various task and duties. The Ministry has also a Consultative Committee of the members of Parliament which relieves the policies, programmes and strategies. The Committee also advises on the matters relating to the general welfare of the scheduled castes. The Cabinet Secretariate has also a Secretary who looks after the work relating to Scheduled Castes and Tribes in various Ministries of the Government of India (Recently this post has been abolished). In addition to these, there is (i) National Commission of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (ii) Planning Commission (backward Classes Division) and (iii) National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Financial Development Corporation.

At the State Level :

The Constitution of India has assigned the welfare of Scheduled Castes and tribes to the State List. State Governments have evolved some institutions (High Power Committee) to strengthen the status of Scheduled Castes and tribes specially in the state such as Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. State Planning Boards have been maintaining administrative linkages with the political support of the High Power Committee. But in the three states of Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala and Maharashtra, Planning Boards have been entrusted with the task of maintaining administrative linkages with the help of nodal department of social welfare, Scheduled Castes and tribes welfare. It was only in five states, Bihar, Goa, Punjab, Haryana and Orissa that nodal departments have been entrusted with the task of establishing administrative linkages with all the sectoral departments implementing the programmes for the development of scheduled castes.

At the Local Level :

At the local level, implementation of SCP are supported by SCA and augmented by Scheduled Caste Development Corporation. District is considered as a unit of administration. The work of welfare and development of Scheduled Castes at the district level is taken up either by Zilla Parishad under the chairmanship of President under the overall supervision and control of the collector who operates through Additional District Magistrate or District Development Officers. In addition to the DRDA, nodal department of Social Welfare and sectoral departments also caters to the needs of weaker sections. The district technical officers are the main executive responsible for the implementation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes programmes. The District Social Welfare officer of the nodal department collaborates with the District Technical Officers to ensure the proper implementation of Scheduled Castes Schemes and related development programmes. At the Block level, the work relating to the development of weaker sections is looked after under the overall incharge of BDO. Each BDO is assisted by ADOs who cater to a particular area of activity of a group of villages. At the grassroot level, village Development officer/Panchayat secretary under the supervision of Gram (Village) Panchayat plays a prominent role in regard to the implementation of schemes/programmes for the welfare and development of weaker sections (SCs, STs and OBCs).²⁸

The major institutional mechanisms evolved to safe-guard the interest of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are : a) Office of the commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; b) Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; c) National Commission for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes replacing the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; d) National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes with enhanced power by virtue of Sixty-eighth Ammendment Act 1990; e) the backward class division of the Planning Commission; f) National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation.

Justification of the Study :

A detailed discussion has been attempted so far to conceptualise social welfare administration welfare policies, institutional and administrative arrangement to provide a definite canvas to present the scheduled castes as the Principal Component of Social welfare administration. A brief note on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Welfare Administration has also been attempted. All these exercises have been made with a broader objective to understand Scheduled Caste Welfare Administration (in India at the micro level) both conceptually and empirically. Scheduled Caste studies in India remained for long preoccupied with the socio-political and economic cross currents manifest at the national level. A study of the community under diversified local regional ambience has been scarce. The *subaltern* sholars had attempted and have been attempting to dissect the variegated nature of colonial exploitation and resistance against the same under local setting. However, a composite study of social, economic and political dimensions of life of a specific scheduled caste community and its development perspectives at the micro scale, has, mostly, still been unattended. Admittedly a study based on micro level data and on the field experience on social welfare administration of Rajbansis (a definite and dominant variety of scheduled caste in West Bengal) of the district of Cooch Behar is relevant and timely.

Indeed social welfare in India have moved from traditional concept of care and rehabilitation of destitute and handicapped to ~~with~~ the development orientation. The development needs refer primarily to the needs of physical and material well being of these who are so far unattended and therefore becom^e backward. The deprived sections of the society constituting of (in most of the cases) Scheduled Castes and

Scheduled Tribes should be taken much care of. Since they cannot share the fruits of development and in relative terms lag far behind, the sense of relative deprivation or some kind of alienation may spark off protest and dissent at the bottom of the social hierarchy. A thorough investigation of the development programmes so far undertaken for the scheduled castes in the district of Coochbehar and an impact study of welfare programmes on them would help us in understanding whether gaps remain between actuality and reality. The study has a definite social relevance with a potentiality to provide alternative strategies and alternative administrative machineries for realising the alternatives to be presented after thorough investigation.

Review of Literature :

The subject like Social Welfare Administration dealing specifically with scheduled castes has been a recent intellectual phenomenon. Admittedly, there has been a dearth of literature on this specific area. However, the subject of weaker sections and backward classes has been more or less thoroughly investigated by sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, economists, for example Srinivash's study on "Social Change in Modern India" (1966), *Beteille's* study on "Society and Politics in India" (1977), Fuller's study on "Caste Today" (1968), Hanumantha Rao's study on "Poverty and Developed characteristics of less Development Regions in India" (1979), Yogendra Singh's study on "Indian sociology - social conditioning and Emerging concerns (1980).

From the above studies one can have a kind of introspection of the Indian development process. The studies concentrate on the issue that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have over a long period of time constituted the most exploited, poor and dependent section of Indian society. The scheduling of these sections in the Constitution has been the nation's commitment to raise their status to the level of other sections of population of the society. Some of the studies have attempted to analyse extensively the impacts of the steps taken for the development of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The changes in the status and aspirations of the scheduled castes have been studied by several scholars. Important issues arising from these studies during the 1970s and 1980s deal with theoretical and ideological changes in the paradigms of the studies (Omvedt : 1971, 1976; Patankar and Omvedt : 1979), the process of social mobility among the scheduled castes and social and cultural tensions in their relationship with other castes and their social and cultural

implications (Ommen : 1984 a, Y. Singh : 1978, 1985, Omvedt : 1980; Kulkarni : 1980 : Mencher : 1980, Reddy : 1973; Chauhan : 1980; Sengupta 1971; Sharma : 1976; I.P. Desai : 1976 ; Bose : 1981; Paranjpe : 1971 Agarwal : 1977). Studies of the problem of education and development among the scheduled castes have been made by scholars both individually and teams sponsored by ICSSR or the Home Ministry, Government of India (Chinis : 1972, 1979, 1979, 1981; Desai : 1974, 1976, 1978; Shah : 1973, 1982; Pimpley : 1976). Some studies have analysed the mobilization among the scheduled castes caused by their awareness of social inequalities that result in social movements.²⁹ There is hardly any study which focussed on the impact analysis of development measures undertaken so far for scheduled Castes and scheduled Tribes especially on the Rajbansis - a dominant Scheduled Caste variety in the northern zone of the state of West Bengal. However some studies on Rajbansis other than development studies have so far been undertaken.

Little research has been done so far on the subject under study. The classic printed monograph of Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal has well been acclaimed as a path breaker to understand the cultural perspective of Rajbansis. His book entitled "Rajbanshis of North Bengal" (1965) has been a unique of its kind which provides and indepth study of the Rajbansis including a study of their material culture and the background of their social organization and their language. The primary emphasis of this book was to provide a detailed survey of the dialect of the Rajbanshis. Obviously, this study has not touched upon the area on the process of socio-cultural and political transformation and problems of the Rajbanshis.

Another pioneering effort has been made by George Grierson on his "Linguistic Survey of India" (1932). In his study he has briefly touched upon the dialect of the Rajbanshi society of North Bengal. In fact, Grierson's study helps one to understand the nature of dialects of the area of our consideration. It has not shown the process of socio-cultural and political formation of the Rajbanshis of the district of Cooch-behar or of the region. In the recent past some writers have come out with their works to study and understand the society, economy and polity of Bengal with and eye to review the ethno-cultural histriocity of the local areas. The pioneering work to this direction is Ranjit Dasgupta's "Economy, society and politics in Bengal; Jalpaiguri " (1869 - 1947), 1992. In fact this is perhaps the maiden attempt to

understand with an analytical eye the society, economy and politics of Rajbanshis of the North Bengal region with special reference to Jalpaiguri.

The above study of Professor Dasgupta offers a historical cut-out of the district of Jalpaiguri right from the creation of the district by the colonial administration through amalgamation of parts of Rangpur with duars, annexed from Bhutan, in 1869 down to India's independence and partition in 1947. The author has sought to reveal the complex and varigated process of metamorphosis that the district underwent in the given time frame of the study. But the study has not touched upon the issue of Rajbanshis as Scheduled Castes and their socio-cultural transformation and assimilation down through history. Omkar Goswami's article on "Agriculture in Slump : the peasant economy of the East and North Bengal in 1930's" (1984) has been an attempt to understand the histriocity of economy of the area under study. However, their works have not dealt with the area on which the researcher proposes to venture. Moreover, the article of Shekhar Bandopadhyay, "Towards a coporatePluralist society : caste and colonial policy of protective discrimination in Bengal 1911 - 1937" in the Calcutta Historical Journal 1986-87, is an eye opener to study the undercurrents of culturo-economic and politico-administrative trends and events behind the institutionalisation of the colonial policy on caste in the new historical situation. However, this is not a detailed study which intended to provide definite light on the issues and factors of a particular social group. Dr. Rajat Subhra Mukhopadhyaya's study on "Uttarakhand Movement : A sociological analysis" and the Rajbanshis of North Bengal : A comparative Demographic Profile 195 - 81 and Socio-economic Transformation of the Rajbanshis and Kamtapuri-Uttarkhand Movement in North Bengal (1995), has been an attempt to revisit the social-demographic profile of Rajbanshis and their socio-cultural assimilation and transformation. However, these studies are constrained by the lack of a kind of specific discourse on the subject proposed to be taken by the researcher.

In the light of above statements of different studies so far conducted by the scholars of the field, it can well be concluded that the problem specified of the proposed study has still been unattended. Precisely issues and implications involved in the social welfare administration of scheduled castes in the district of Coochbehar within a broad spectrum of the state of West Bengal has not been investigated by any scholar of the discipline. As there is hardly any study on Rajbanshis as Scheduled

Caste group focussing on administrative arrangement, implementation process and impact of welfare and development programmes, the present study has been of high order with a potentiality of both academic and administrative meaningfulness and would definitely logically find place.

Objectives :

To adumbrate, the study seeks to explore the present socio-economic conditions of the Rajbanshis (a scheduled castes variety largely prevalent in West Bengal) of the district of Coochbehar with a view to look to the development programme at the operational level and their impact on Rajbanshis and to suggest ways and means by way of attempting one conclusion. The objectives of the study may be specified as under :

- a) To study the Rajbanshis of the district of Coochbehar as a distinct social group having distinctive homogeneous characteristics;
- b) To examine the present socio-economic status of the Rajbanshis;
- c) To review the occupational structure, occupational mobility, nature of land holding, family income, expenditure and indebtedness of the Rajbanshis of Coochbehar;
- d) To examine the role performance of the specified government departments engaged in the betterment and development of the Rajbanshis of the district;
- e) To review the development programmes undertaken by the Centre/State operationalised through the Panchayat Raj institution and the rural banks, different rural development agencies, cooperatives in augmenting the benefits of the Rajbanshis of the district;
- f) To measure the different components of physical quality of life index, the level of political consciousness, awareness, extent of political participation and voting pattern of the Rajbanshis of the district;
- g) To review the development programmes and to seek opinion of Rajbanshis as beneficiaries within a time frame of ten years;
- h) To suggest suitable remedies and guidelines for improving the living condition of the Rajbanshis in the district of Coochbehar in the light of welfare administration efforts so far undertaken.

Study Methodology :

Keeping in view the objectives of the study, a concerted plan of action has been drawn up for conducting an intensive field work of two Panchayat Samities (Coochbehar II and Mathabhanga I) of district Coochbehar of the state of West Bengal. Since the universe of the study is the district of Coochbehar sample selection should be restricted in order to meet the requirements of scientific investigation. Relevant tools and techniques of data collection and sampling plan in accordance with statistical guidelines have also been prepared. A suitable methodology has been evolved to facilitate the collection of information and data from various sources including consultation of official records directly connected with the scheduled castes (mostly Rajbanshis), discussions with the officials engaged in the task of development of scheduled castes both at the policy making and operational level. Thus the design of the study has been mostly observational and explanatory in nature.

In order to understand the problem of adoption of welfare measures for scheduled castes of the district certain interacting field level departments of the district administration responsible for the development of the resources, physical and institutional infrastructure, social services, welfare activities, district rural development agencies, department of social welfare, agriculture, three tiers of panchayat raj institution, scheduled caste development and financial corporation were consulted. With a view to identify the magnitude of the problem the role and functional responsibilities of officials at the micro level of the districts were evaluated. Thorough interviews have been made with these micro level institutions engaged in the task of development and implementation of welfare programmes for the scheduled castes and tribes of the district. Keeping in view the nature of the universe of investigation two Interview Schedules were prepared for officials and beneficiaries for the collection of data from five Gram Panchayats of each of the referred panchayat samities of the district of Coochbehar. For studying the organizational structure, administrative tasks and support system, necessary data have been collected from field administration.

The study has been conducted in 1997-98, 1998-99 and 1999-2000 (March) in ten Gram Panchayats of Panchayat Samities of Coochbehar II and Mathabhanga I. The selection of Gram Panchayat have been made on the basis of some criteria,

for example, concentration of Scheduled caste population, backwardness and advancement made so far necessary economic support system and infrastructural facilities provided to them under different development and welfare programme.

For conducting the study apart from interviewing the officials of different departments such as Collector, Additional Collector, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Development and Financial Corporation, District Planning Officer, District Panchayat Officer, District Agriculture Officer, Manager of Central Bank (lead bank of the district) Project Officer, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe Welfare Department of the District have also been interviewed. For collecting the necessary data, for this micro study a culturoanthropological approach has been adopted. In addition to this, a micro empirical method of analysis have been adopted in the preparation of different variable of adoption of welfare measures, specific question have been asked to the selevtive responsdents (officials, non-officials of different levels of the district and the beneficiaries of the selected village Panchayats under two specified Panchayat Samities of the District). With a view to deduct their emotional involvement in rendering and receiving welfare services, formal and informal discussions with the local functionary of the Panchayats in respect of practical implications of different ways of meeting social needs in general, and future strategy to be adopted in particular have also been observed and studied.

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26. *Ibid.* p. 63
27. *Ibid.* p. 65
28. *Ibid.* p.p. 66, 67
29. *Ibid.* p.p. 17, 18