

KAMTAPUR MOVEMENT IN NORTH BENGAL GEO-ETHNO- ENVIRONMENTAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACTS

Ethnic diversity as well as ethnic politics is playing a decisive role in functioning of modern states throughout the world. Our country is not an exceptional one. In case of India ethnic consciousness has risen mainly in post-independence era. The demand for formal recognition of the distinct identities often varies from legal and institutional safeguards and discrimination, cultural autonomy for identity preservation, increasing federalism of the state structure and decentralization of political power to separate independent homelands.

Particularly, along with the partition of India, North Bengal witnesses a series of changes in its social, demographic and economical fabrics. Sudden influx of refugees from erstwhile East Bengal, (Pakistan) later put a new pressure on the existing resources and competition among the inhabitants of this region. That ultimately led to some kinds of unrest on ethnic line and divide, particularly between the indigenous and immigrant population. So the economic, political and social unrest which are going on in North Bengal over last three decades need to require thorough scrutiny.

The primary objective of the proposed research is to examine the origin and development of Kamtapur movements led by Rajbanshis, the major ethnic group of North Bengal, from ethno-historical –geographical and environmental perspective. In particular, with reference to approach, the study will try to explore the ethnic dimension of the Kamtapur movement in a historical frame of reference and the logic of employing the term ‘KAMTAPUR MOVEMENT IN NORTH BENGAL GEO-ETHNO-ENVIRONMENTAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE’.

The merger of the then princely state, Cooch Behar with West Bengal on 1st January 1950 and converted it from a state to a district of a province became a turning point in the history of North Bengal. Large part of Rajbanshi population in general was unhappy with the merge of so called independent princely state with West Bengal as a district of the province. Their unhappiness and discontent increased with the passage of time when they found that the successive government did hardly take any comprehensive steps for the socio-economic development of the region.

After the partition of the country on religious ground the social-political scenario of North Bengal abruptly changed. Various social groups were communally divided. Religious and ethnic identities vitiated the entire atmosphere. Large scale migration from the then East Pakistan to North Bengal greatly changed the demographic scenario of the region. All these aggravated the socio-political problems. The Rajbanshis were bewildered. The state government could not come forward with any comprehensive programme for the development of this area. The non-

Rajbanshis became dominant in all spheres of life. The peasants, workers and other section of people belonging to lower stratum found no way out to overcome this situation. The traditional working class and peasants movements could not properly deal with ethnic, linguistic and political issues. Ultimate fall out of which was the emergence of Uttarakhand and Kamtapur movement in recent past.

The separation of Goalpara from North Bengal and merger with Assam in 1874 is another important event as it divided Rajbanshi community after the division of traditional belt of the Rajbanshi homogeneity and because for the first time after 1874 a section of them has formed a common platform- Greater Kamta United Forum for the common interest of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya community of West Bengal and the Koch Rajbanshi Kshatriya Sammilani of Assam.

Notwithstanding the fact that a number of studies have been conducted on the ethnic unrest in North Bengal including the movement of Rajbanshi community for the formation of Kamtapur state yet there is scope to review and address problem.