

PREFACE

The forward march of human life throughout the world has been passing in the midst of unrest reflecting the loss of confidence on each other which leads to an unrest in their social and political life. The understanding of relationship that were built up through a processes of social and economic condition are fragmented in to pieces like the glass vessels stumbling against the wall of desponding as if it breaking our heart in to pieces. The people and society as a whole are confused as they are failed in many cases why these are happening? The people or community who were subservient yesterday why there is a reflection of recalcitrance over the muscle of their face? Whether this is the appearance of the flame of the torch of rebellion of Spartacus or the awkwardness of the people who were accustomed to remain under the boot of the elite dominating class of the society? In to the guileless glance of yesterday's faith the sign restless self –confidence has rocked the notion of many traditional thought and belief of many people.

At the every stage of community life there has been started the process of introspection of self identity and the question of ethnicity becomes the most crucial question to be given answer not only by the social scientist but as well by the almost researchers and scholars of all discipline of science. The restless sound of the footsteps are echoing from every corner to raise one' own triumphant history.

In the past few decades movement for ethnic autonomy has marked the political discourse not only in North Bengal and North East India but throughout the country as a whole even we describe it as problem of global phenomena. While some of them strongly advocating the need for autonomy within the present administrative set up, other resolutely expressed their support for more militant , secessionist ideas of political and geographical demarcation of territory.

The question of ethnic diversity as well as ethnic politics are playing the decisive role in question of social relation and watering the germination of the feeling of regionalism which ultimately led for the march of demanding a separate state to accumulate the political power to govern the region where they claim demographic majority within region. It is also playing a decisive role not only the functioning of state power but also becoming the important factor in creating the social and political unrest in almost all countries of the world. India is not an exceptional one.

Several attempts were made and theories have been placed by so many social scientists to explore the root of the feeling of regionalism. Some of them based on social consideration. Other tried to find its root on the point of economic position and uneven distribution of the development. Other tried to formulate their theories on the cultural factors and linguistic issues. Very few tried to explore the geographical and the environmental impact upon this crucial issue.

It must be brought in mind that India has the complex situation which cannot be matched with any country of the world. One glaring example can be cited here which is enough to show this

complex condition. A single district like Jalpaiguri has 151 different languages and dialects. Such complex socio-economic and demographic position cannot be explained by any single theory. In the recent period of history of North Bengal attracted the attention of the scholars, politicians, administrator as it has become the focal point of political agitation on ethnic issues of variegated nature and characteristics. Keeping aside the Naxalite movements as it was a political movement having the different dimension, the G.N.L.F movement of the hills, Uttarakhand, the Kamtapuri or the greater Coochbehar movement – all in sequence or contemporaneously reflected the complex realities of socio-political and economic condition of North Bengal.

Apart from hill areas of Darjeeling Dist. and a little part of adjacent areas of hills of Duars of Jalpaiguri Dist. the dominant racial origin in the rest of North Bengal is Rajbanshi community. Although this majority people of singular racial origin had given a new shape to their socio-cultural characteristic of this region many conflicting theories of their origin and identity were advocated by the both foreign and Indian scholars during the colonial period long before the remarkable work of Charu Chandra Sanyal, entitled, *The Rajbanshi of North Bengal (A study of a Hindu social Group)*, published by the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, in 1965, where an attempt was made to throw enough light on their origin and identities. But his observation about the origin and the identity of the Rajbanshi as Koches a non-Aryan in origin has been challenged by the strong section of the Rajbanshi community. The demand for a Kamtapur state or the Greater Cooch-Bihar state by the Rajbanshi community is a riddle wrapped in ethnic controversy inside an enigma which demands a conclusion to be drawn in characterization of the nature of this movement taking in to the account of the socio-political dimension.

Many theories have been advanced by social scientists for defining and identifying the nature and causes of ethno-national movements based on shared meaning of common descent, real or imagined that elites in the appropriate group formulates in order to mobilize political support for a variety of objective ranging from autonomy to secession to statehood.

It is well settled that ethnicities located in specific territorial boundaries have claim to be classified as regions and therefore have legitimate claim to the autonomy at political and economic levels. In fact the, the urge for self governance and aspiration of economic development is at the root of such a claim (report of the regional Autonomy committee, 1999; 11 as quoted by S. Chaturvedi, *The Ethno and the Geo; Politics of Autonomy in a borderland named Jammu & Kashmir*)

In general, it is explained, one of the most basic factors for the movement of self determination which is generally termed as secessionist movement is the uneven development in economic and social field within the state itself. Again, the cultural dominance by the dominant group may consider as another important cause for watering the germination of regional movement as it provoke the feeling of inferiority complex which ultimately give birth a psychological state of mind what is known as 'identity crisis'. In this context it requires to examine whether in the

name of national integration the meaning of national integration should be another name for assimilation. It is again require to examine the very concept of 'main stream' identity as it has been seen that in the name of national identity an attempt is made to absorb the weaker section of the community in the fold of the stronger section causing the feeling of alienation by the former. This also may be considered as one of the cause for this kind of ethnic movement.

North Bengal along with a considerable part of Assam, the areas of the present survey is not merely a geographical region of this subcontinent but they offer a historical contrast. While discussing about the ethnic diversity and conflict in the survey area we must take the fact in to that account that the Eastern part of India were the most populated part of the subcontinent with its fertile soils. On the other hand , the northern part of west Bengal and Assam –Arakan basin and ringed by Southern Himalayas Rim , was tee sparsely populated cross road for traders , migrating tribes and fortune seekers Warriors . It does not mean there is no similarity in the eastern part of sub continent, there are still similarities as well, notwithstanding the fact, historically and culturally, the differences between the two regions are many, similarities stem partly from the contiguous geographical location and partly from a shared colonial experience.

The primary object of the present study is to explore the source of the present ethnic conflict. We need to peep into the pages of history to understand the present situation reveals the facts that this region has long been the site of bitter conflicts over resources between strategic interest groups. During the national upsurge the ethnic conflict did not surfaced because during the colonial period the conflict was mainly articulated against the colonial ruler and their feudal collaborators.

Cooch Behar which was an independent kingdom for more than four hundred years before becoming a princely state during the colonial rule merged with the province of West Bengal after independence ignoring the fact that it nursed a distinct identity and culture for the indigenous people who rule this part for more than four hundred years under the umbrella of their kingdom. This conflicting condition still remain a factor that provoke the demand for autonomy either in the form of autonomous region or the form of state hood within the provincial boundary within the country.

The present study is to find out the source of this ethnic movement of Rajbanshis one of the major ethnic groups of North Bengal and a part of adjacent Assam. It also is needed to acknowledge the inherent attitude of man in general. The aspiration of population to determine its own destiny by itself has long been recognized by nations legitimized by the traverse history of human civilization. The persuasion for the demand of self determination in the form of a state as demanded by Rajbanshis community arises out of historically evolved distinct identities of different ethnic groups that gave birth to different socio economic formation.

The present study, while making an analysis of different approaches meaning and nature of ethnicity and nature of their conflict seek to explain the root of their origin in terms of specific

movement namely the Kamtapur movement. This study also seeks to find out the influence of environment and geographical factors upon this movement. It is again to see the impact of the change of the demography of the particular region taking into the account of changed demographic pattern of North Bengal upon the present unrest of this region.

North Bengal has its own history a part of which only is known by the common people as the dominant section of the people did not feel it necessary to include in the mainstream history inspite of its long traditional past. This area is equally rich in natural resources but not used for the development of the region, rather this part of the state treated as the source for the raw material supply. This region is the region of tea industry but why the local largest ethnic group like the Rajbanshis did not find any interest to join as the labour of tea industry although there was heavy demand for the labour is a matter to study. Except tea there is no other industry came into existence as a result the economy activity still remains in the hand of agricultural activity. The question bears the importance in determining the causes of the present ethnic problems in this part of areas because despite the high level of education land continues to be the main source of livelihood but immigrants encroach on it and that causes shortage of land. Local community resents the fact that immigrants prosper on the land by encroaching upon while they are left behind.

My present study is to examine the role of this changed demography to convert the situation in to ethnic conflict as the land shortage failed to create productive jobs. Moreover the strategic geographical position of this region should be taken in to consideration as if this unrest allowed to continue without finding its root it may turn in to explosive situation which may affect the national interests as a whole.

Against this background this present study takes into account the socio –political –economic – environmental and geographic variables with an aim to examine the nature of such ethnic conflict.

It is needless to mention that any study of on- going movement or unrest will face so many limitations. The present ethnic unrest is entering in to newer and newer forms and the strategies undergo abrupt changes and their goal deviates from its previous position the conclusion that one may draw is bound to be tentative. Knowing this limitation the present study will try to explore all possible variables to reach a tentative projection of the future.