

# **Introduction**

## **I**

The present study will explore many critical aspects of the socio-cultural condition of the people of Jalpaiguri district in a new dimension at the micro-level-study. At the outset, it can be said that the district, Jalpaiguri as a part of North – Eastern region of India through the ages from pre – historic period to the post- modern age has a socio- cultural and historical importance and legacy. In spite of that the main-stream historians or intellectuals had not given attention to this region or the people, as a result of which many aspects of different fields of the said region have not been evolved.

It should be mentioned here that the writing of local history as that of Jalpaiguri district is not so easy because of the paucity of source materials and situating far away from metropolitan city like Calcutta or Delhi wherefrom unpublished archival sources can be used easily. Despite that, I have tried my best to explore many un-discussed and unexplored matter including archival sources, Government and private report different types of writing – materials such as district gazetteers, census reports, journals, periodicals, monographs, books, dissertations and most reliable and authentic sources that is oral sources collected from interview with various community's, political leaders, peasants, Jotdars, chukanidars and adhiars of the time.

The district Jalpaiguri, in the past, had a discriminative character unlike other parts of Bengal since its inception considering various aspects such as socio–economic– demographic pattern, ethnic societies, geographical location, land revenue purpose and lastly the characteristics of peasants and agrarian relations.<sup>1</sup>The discrimination was also followed in the different districts of North Bengal. This region, roughly from Karotoya to Brahmaputra was a part of Pragjyotishpur, Kamrup, Kamtapur and Koch kingdom. Many ups and downs have taken place in this region. In this region unlike other parts of

Bengal the influence of Indo-Mongoloid race was followed in the society and culture.

## II

It is relevant to discuss the background of the district, Jalpaiguri. Before the inception of the district in 1869, it was a part of Koch Kingdom comprising large areas of North Bengal and Assam, founded by Haria Mandal, a Mech leader in Chikna hill. Haria Mandal had two wives namely Hira and Jira and four sons namely Bisu, Sishu, Chandan and Madan. It is debateable that who ascended the throne in the Koch kingdom after the death of Haria Mandal. It is assumed from different sources that Chandan became the King but he was not powerful, the real power was in the hands of Bisu. After Chandan, Bishu became the King taking the title 'Singha'. Biswa Singha as a Koch King took recognition from his mother's genealogy as a custom of the tribes; because the predecessors of Biswa Singha from his father side were Mech and from his mother side were Koch. Biswa Singha and his successors became gradually hinduised by adopting religion and culture. Since 1773 the kingdom went under British Dominion, however, twelve kings ruled the kingdom near about four hundred years which was a glorious sign in the history of North Bengal and Bengal as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

The Koch kingdom was gradually being weaker since the reign of Upendra Narayan (1714–1763) because of weakness and conflicts of the Koch kings as a result of which the Bhutanese occupied the border areas of Bhutan and Koch Behar, namely the areas of Dooars. After the death of King Upendra Narayan, Debendra Narayan only a child of 4 years ascended the throne; the administrative work actually was conducted by the ministers advised by royal mother of the king. But after two years, at the age of six years, the king was murdered by a Brahman named Rati Sharma due to a conspiracy of Rajguru Ramananda Goswami. The security forces killed Rati Sharma on the spot and Ramananda Goswami was sentenced to death by Bhutan Raj.

Dhairjendra Narayan, the third son of Kharga Narayan became the King in 1765. Immediately after ascending the throne, King Dhairjendra Narayan killed Dewan Rama Narayan for the evil counsel of the royal administrators and for this action Dhairjendra Narayan was arrested and kept under Bhutanese control, and Rajendra Narayan, the elder brother of Dhairjendra Narayan ascended the throne. After his death in 1772 Dharendra Narayan, the son of Dhairjendra Narayan became the king. But Bhutia king was not satisfied with this coronation, so the Bhutanese invaded Koch Behar. In this critical situation and helplessness, the Nazir Deo prayed for help to the British and ultimately a treaty was signed between Col. Warren Hastings and the King on the 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1773. By the provisions of the treaty Koch Behar became a part of Bengal Presidency and turned into a tributary state, they occupied the areas from the Bhutanese and the arrested King Dhairjendra Narayan was rescued by the English.<sup>3</sup>

The aggressive activities on the people of Koch Behar by the Bhutias was going by plundering various things, wealth and oppressing the people of Koch Behar. The Britishers were not willing to excite the Bhutia Kings because of their commercial interest with Tibet through Bhutan. For their increasing aggressive attitude to Koch Behar particularly over the Dooars, the Britishers could not be silent; they sent a mission under Esley Eden in 1863. But the Bhutia royal power insulted Eden tremendously in the palace of Bhutan and he had been compelled to sign a treaty which was derogatory to the Britishers. So they invaded Bhutan and started second Anglo – Bhutan war which ended with the treaty of Sinchula in 1865.<sup>4</sup>

After occupation of the Dooars, the present district was formed with the Western Dooars since 1865 and the Jalpaiguri and Rajganj Thanas of Rangpur district since 1869. The district so, formed in 1869, bounded in the North by the Darjeeling district and Bhutan, in the East by Assam in the South by

Rangpur district in Bangladesh and Koch Behar district and in the West by Darjeeling district and part of Bangladesh. The respective areas of the two subdivisions of the district Sadar and Alipurduar have varied from decade to decade.<sup>5</sup>

### III

One important question is why have I chosen such type of topic and the area of research like Jalpaiguri district? Firstly it is relevant to mention here that the research work on social and cultural level either in national level or in regional level is neglected still now. Most of the renowned scholars and historians are eager to involve themselves in the writing of national and international history, though very recently some scholars are coming to explore various aspects of society and culture at micro-level. But it is also true that the mainstream historians or scholars have not come forward to explore the history of society and culture of the district, Jalpaiguri, though it is historically very much enriched. Secondly, there is no district possible in the state as well as in the country like Jalpaiguri where many multi-dimensional demographic pattern and culture is existed for which the district may be called “Mini India”.

So explore the neglected and undiscussed aspects of the social and cultural history of the district Jalpaiguri, I have chosen the present topic.

We have no book or exhaustive work about this topic of historical importance, though we got only a few writings in several papers and journals. A research exploration, therefore on “The Social and Cultural history, of a Bengal district, Jalpaiguri: 1869-1994” is utmost necessary.

As to do this work, further more can be said this will contribute to strengthening a new chapter of the local history of North Bengal and more

assuredly it is one of the socio-cultural history. Now there is a new awakening in the mind of Indian historians for doing justice to local history as well as micro-history, which seems to be a more befitting process of historical research and writing owing to the diversity and plurality of Indian economy, society and culture. Despite the relative paucity of source materials research investigation leading to Ph.D. work on “The Socio-Cultural History of a Bengal District: Jalpaiguri 1869-1994” appears nearly unavoidable for the purpose of increasing our historical knowledge.

In the present dissertation, an attempt has been made to prepare an analytical as well as comprehensive study on the social and cultural history of Bengal district- Jalpaiguri, during the colonial and post colonial period. The history of the district is connected with the colonial rule. Naturally any kind of discussion on Jalpaiguri will not be completed unless we understand the pattern of colonial rule as well as the response of the indigenous people and the settlers. If anyone carefully observes the growth and development of a colonial district like Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling, he or she will find certain kind of distinctive feature in these two colonial districts of the Northern part of Bengal. The creation of Jalpaiguri district was an administrative necessary. So the district was organized on the basis of administrative conveniences rather than the historical or past experiences. The administrative conveniences had finally given the birth of district whose demography, ethnography, geography and culture is like India in miniature form. We will not find any kind of homogeneity in respect of population, language and cultural structure of the colonial Jalpaiguri district was sharply differed from rest of Bengal. Let us examine first the demographic condition on the region on the eve of the creation of a new district.

In order to prepare the study of the proposed field different types of methodology, I have followed. I have collected data from two major sources namely (a) Primary sources as well as (b) Secondary sources. The primary

sources will include census reports, survey and settlement reports, case studies, government records, gazetteers, reports and minutes, memories, autobiographies, interviews, discussions and observations. Myth and oral tradition of the society will be also one major primary source since it has been the main tool of recounting and recording its history from generation to generation.

The secondary sources have included the published and unpublished materials such as dissertations (Ph.D. & M.Phil.), books, monographs, journals and periodicals on the subject of research. To get more informations and real picture of the Agrarian society I shall have to do some field work selecting some villages taking interview with the oldest and experienced people of various communities in the District. Various conventional historical methods, tools and techniques have used as well as consultancy with the scholars, writers and intellectuals of the field to explore the truth without any bias and prejudice.

Only a few research works have so far been completed touching the thematic margin of the present topic of research. Any completed research work has not yet been published on the proposed topic. The existing research work referred to here as follows:-

1. Ranjit Dasgupta in his book “Economy, Society and Politics of Bengal: Jalpaiguri (1869 – 1947)”, Oxford University Press, 1992, analyzed nicely about the Society, Economy and Politics of Jalpaiguri district of the colonial period. It is an authentic and valuable book to know the history of Jalpaiguri. He shows the growth and development of the Society and Economy including agrarian structure, agrarian relation, Tea-cultivation, the condition and the reaction of the tea-labourers in the colonial period. The author also critically analyzed the growth and development of the politics including different political parties and organization which organized and carried on different political

movements in time to time during the colonial period in the district. The author confined his work in the colonial period, but the work of the present proposed topic will explore the Socio-Cultural transition of the district up to 1994. An attempt has been made in the present study of the research work to explore the Socio-Cultural evolution of the district with special reference to the conflict and confrontation between the indigenous culture and the immigrated culture which led the present socio-political tension in North Bengal differing the study of Ranjit Dasgupta.

2. Subhajyoti Roy in his book “Transformation on the Bengal Frontier, Jalpaiguri 1765-1948”, London, 2002, shows the evolution of Socio-Economic, Cultural and Political condition of the Jalpaiguri District in the pre-colonial and colonial period. It is also an authentic and valuable book for knowing the history of Jalpaiguri. Many un-discussed and unknown history and information have been evolved in this book. Here also the author confined his discussion and analysis in the colonial period. Moreover, the author wanted to show different aspects of the society, economy, politics and culture of the district, not a specific topic like the present proposed topic.
3. Dr. Charuchandra Sanyal in his two books – “The Meches and Totos – Two sub-Himalayan Tribes of North Bengal,” The University of North Bengal, 1973 and “The Rajbanshis of North Bengal”, Calcutta, 1965, shows different aspects of the Totos, Meches and the Rajbanshis with valuable information. The analysis on the Meches, Totos and the Rajbanshis has touched the margin of the present proposed topic. The author in his works of these three books does not cover all the aspects of the present proposed topic.

4. Upendranath Barman in his book “Uttarbanglar Sekal O Amar Jibansmriti” Jalpaiguri, 1392 B.S.-shows the evolution of the district in the colonial period. His work of the book also has touched the thematic margin of the proposed topic. Needless to say, this is not a research work but memoirs of a leading personality of the region. Obviously it provides us a lot of information of the post colonial history of Jalpaiguri.
5. Kanak Kanti Bagchi in his book “Land Tanures and Agricultural Development,”Delhi,2003, explained on the evolution of the Land Revenue System, Agrarian Economy and Agrarian relations in the Dooars from colonial to post colonial period. The author of this book mainly shows the land-based economy including the agrarian structure, agrarian relations and its evolution of the Dooars which is a distinctive study from the present proposed topic.
6. Satyabrata Bhattacharya in his Ph.D. thesis explained on the “Financial Management in Tea Industry” which touched slightly the thematic margin of the present proposed topic.
7. Shibsankar Mukherjee in his work “Emergence of Bengali Entrepreneurship in Tea Plantation in Jalpaiguri Duars (1879-1933),” shows nicely about the Bengali Tea Planters, how they entered in the tea cultivation and their contribution in the society and economy of the district. The work of the book has also touched the margin of the present topic.
8. Dr. Reboti Mohan Lahiri (Jalpaiguri District Centinary Vol), Dr. Arun Bhusan Majumdar (Protyus O Prodoshkaler Coochbehar), Hillol Chakraborty, Nirmal Chowdhuri, Sarit Bhowmik, Birendra Chandra Ghosh in their works show the evolution of the district, socio-economic pattern of this district with valuable information collected from different

sources as well as field survey but all the works of these books are not a exhaustive work of the present proposed topic.

So, from the above discussion on the overview of literature relating to the proposed topic, it can be said that for the want of exhaustive work of the present proposed topic, it has created a vacuum. So to fill-up this gap a research exploration of the present proposed topic is utmost required and expected.

The investigation is proposed to be conducted on the basis of the following key questions:

1. Why and in what circumstances did the British Occupy the Dooars?
2. Why did the British-India Government introduce separate administrative policies in the district?
3. How did the British-India Government introduce the economic policies in the district and what was the impact of it on the indigenous economy, society and culture.
4. When and how did the Government introduce Tea-cultivation in the Dooars and what role played by the Bengali entrepreneurship?
5. Why did the number of indigenous people decrease at par the census report in the colonial period and how the number of immigrated people increases tremendously?
6. What were the economic, cultural and language problems faced by the indigenous people in the colonial and post colonial period?
7. What are the root causes of the present socio-political condition of the district as elsewhere in North Bengal?

The district can be divided into two tracts in accordance with land revenue systems and agrarian relations namely permanent settled portion, mostly situated to the West of the Tista comprising Baikunthapur pargana and the chaklas of Boda, Patgram and Purba bhag where the Zamindari system was

introduced, the 2<sup>nd</sup> portion of the district was Western Dooars, declared non – regulated area mostly situated between the Tista and Sankosh. No permanent settlement was introduced in the Western Dooars and as it was the non– regulated area, Government was the proprietor of the land. (The spelling of Dooars and Tista are written by different scholar and different administrators in different ways. But in all occasion I have use the spelling Dooars and Tista while I quote the researcher or administrator I use the spelling as they wrote it.)

In the permanently settled portion of the district land revenue was settled with the Zamindars in accordance with permanent settlement which was introduced since 1793 by the British. The Zamindars would not cultivate land directly; they gave land to the Jotdars. Deunia, Basunia, Tahutdar etc who were involved with land became Jotdars and they were powerful during the colonial period. The small Jotdars cultivated land directly but the big Jotdars who had giant size jotes did not cultivate land directly. They would give land to the Chukanidars, sometimes the Chukanidars cultivated land directly sometimes they would give land to the Dar – Chukanidars by Pattani or agreement. In this agrarian structure there were also Dar – dar – Chukanidar though they were very few and they had no right like that of Jotdars or Chukanidars.

In the part of Western Dooars, unlike permanent settled portion of the district, no uniform system or law was introduced for land revenue purposes by the British as they had no sufficient experience and ideas about the system and the agrarian relation of this tract. All most all the areas excluding South Maynaguri and some plain areas of the Western Dooars were full of jungles and natural resources. Only the people of some tribes namely Mech, Toto, Rabha, Garo lived in this tract other than these tribal people no one could live in this part because of the intolerable condition and unhealthy atmosphere.

In the Western Dooars settlement were made under the provision of Act XVI of 1869 and the Waste land rules of 1875 until 1895. In that year Act XVI

was repealed and (x) of 1859 and Act (VI) B.C of 1862 were substituted for it. In 1898 the tenancy Act was extended to the temporarily settled area but provision III of Notification the 964 T – R excluding from its application all lands previously or subsequently granted under written lease for the cultivation of tea or for reclamation under the arable Waste lands rule.<sup>6</sup>

#### IV

As the large areas of Western Dooars were without people or proprietorship, the Britishers easily occupied the tract and became the proprietors of the land and tried to introduce their economic policy in the land. They started survey and settlement works from 1871 gradually, dividing the tract into three parts – (a) Land for agriculture (b) Land for tea – cultivation and (c) Land for reserve forest. The land of the hills and foot-hills of this tract was suitable for tea cultivation. So the tea cultivation was initiated in the Dooars in 1874 at Gajoldoba and since then the number of tea - estates increased gradually.

There were no sufficient labourers to work in the tea – gardens, because population were very meagre and the local people were not interested to work as labourers, only the few people of Nepali Communities immigrated in the Dooars and worked in the tea – gardens as labourers. So the planters would bring labourers of Oraon and Santal communities from Chhotanagpur and Santal Parganas through Sardars. After coming and joining in the tea –gardens as labourers they could not return to their houses as and when necessary. They became like slaves and they had to tolerate different types of oppressions by the authorities of tea – gardens, money lenders, traders etc.

Beside tea –cultivation, Britishers introduced Jotdari system creating jotes and giving it to the Jotdars. At the initial stage the Jotdars need not have to give any kind of revenue or tax to the Government. But subsequently

revenue was imposed on them and the revenue increased gradually after every settlement. Like the permanently settled portion of the district most of the Jotdars would not cultivate land directly; they would give lands to the Chukanidars by lease or agreement, again Chukanidars also gave land to the Dar – Chukanidars. In some places Jotdars cultivated their lands by share croppers or Adhiars locally known as Halua with 50% share of crops. The Jotdars or intermediaries whose land was cultivated by the Adhiars were called ‘Giri’. As there were huge amount of land and population were very meagre, so the people of different Communities and classes immigrated in the Dooars from neighbouring Cooch Behar, Rangpur, Dinajpur and elsewhere of Bengal, they obtained lands by lease and became Jotdars. The Jotdars also would bring Adhiars from outside the Dooars giving them many facilities to cultivate their lands.

## V

In the pre-colonial period, the area of the district particularly the area of the Dooars was full of jungles, most of the area was without people because of the intolerable condition and the hard diseases namely Malaria, Kalaazar etc, only the people of some tribes namely Mech, Garo, Toto, Rava, Drucpa, lived there. Some tribes of Bhutanese lived there but before coming of rainy season, they left the place to save them. Surgeon Rennie wrote, “The inhabitants chiefly consist of a tribe called the Mechis who appears to be the only people so constituted as to be capable of permanently enduring the climate.”<sup>7</sup> The life of these tribes were very simple, kept themselves out of modern civilization and complexity. They had their own customs, laws and culture by which they were governed. Every tribe had separate septs or ‘Gotras’. Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal writes, “Although the Bodos including the Meches become mixed with other people they have retained their distinctive septs or *Gotras*.”<sup>8</sup>

In the Northern part of the Dooars, the Meches and the Garos lived there habituated with shifting cultivation. They settled in a place few years,

cultivated in the land in their own way, after few years they shifted into another place and settled there and their life was cycling in such a way.<sup>9</sup> In the Southern part of the district there were settled cultivators most of whom were Rajbanshi community.

Western Dooars was under Paro Penlop, the Governor of Western Division of Bhutan. J. C. Haughton showed the land tenures in different parts of the Dooars in such way Goomah, Raphoo and Bhalka were under small Zamindar or tehshildars (petty revenue collectors) wholly under Bhutia rules, Buxa was under a Bhutia officer (Dooar Deo), the Northern part of the Dooars were under Mech sardars and the plain of Mainaguri was divided among the Zamindars the family of Hargobinda Katham one khurgodher Karji and the Raikot of Jalpaiguri.<sup>10</sup> The officials under Bhutanese who were involved in collecting revenue and sending to Bhutan, the Royal power, can be furnished from the point of power and position in such way – Soobah at the highest level. The exact powers and functions of each of these officials cannot be ascertained with any degree of accuracy, but all of them were important links in the chain of tribute extraction; each was responsible for passing on the tribute to their immediate superiors.<sup>11</sup> The Kathams in the Dooars took a significant role in collecting revenue, though their position was under Subah. Below the Subah there were a class of subordinate officials known as Kathams. They were resident in the plains and exercised immediate control in the management of the Dooars in the great majority of cases the kathams were directly appointed by the title – *Deed (sanad)* of the Deb Raja, though subordinate in rank of Bhutanese administration in the plains. It seems that the appellation ‘Katham’ was prevalent only to the west of the Gadadhar. Eastward it took the forms of ‘Luskar Wuzder or Mundal.’<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted that on the eve of the formation of the district, the Dooars area was mainly dominated by the tribal people on the hilly areas and the people of Rajbanshi community in the plain areas of the Dooars. The

society of the tribal people was mainly ethnic- based. They were governed by themselves by their way of life following their ethnic culture keeping themselves out of the ambit of the so called civic society. They had their own systems, customs and manner for conducting their society. They had *Moral* or *Mandal* (Leader of each group or sept) who lead or conducted their society like a democratic manner. They never would go to the ruler or administration of the civic section. For any kind of problem or crisis they assembled in a particular place in presence of their *Moral* or *Mandal* for discussions and solution. After discussions they would reach their way of solution declared by the *Moral* or *Mandal* and as such everybody had to obey that decision, nobody could deny it. In this regard Dhaniram Toto of Totopara in the Jalpaiguri district informed that Totos never would go out of their society for any kind of problem. If any quarrel or clash occurs among the people in their society they do not go to the court or police Department for salvation even today.<sup>13</sup>

In the field of medical treatment also they were completely depended on their ethnic society i. e the procedure of the indigenous treatment led by local *Ojha* or *Kabiraj*. The medicines prepared completely by the indigenous manner from various plants and other indigenous things without any chemicals or things imported from outside were the backbone of their lives. Even today most of the tribal people of ordinary section depended on the indigenous systems of treatment. Biswaram Narjinary, a teacher of Alipurduar High School, a member of Mech community of Hemaguri in the district of Alipurduar told that still now in most of the cases of their diseases they followed the indigenous system of treatment. In case of critical condition or serious condition they consulted with the Doctor.<sup>14</sup> Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal stated in his book that the people of Mech community of the Dooars followed the indigenous system of treatment for their diseases. He took an interview with Ruda Suba, 77 years old of Mech community who informed that he never went to the Doctor and in his 77 years old he never used *Masari* (mosquito net), he slept in open sky at night using a *khatiya* (*Kot*) on the courtyard or in front of the house.<sup>15</sup>

In the permanently settled portion of the district situated in the western part of the river Tista and the plain areas of the Western Dooars the most of the people were Rajbanshis and local Muslims in the pre- colonial and colonial period. There were many debates regarding the origin or ethnic identity of the Rajbanshi people. But most of the scholars have admitted that the Rajbanshi people and the indigenous Muslims locally known as *Nasya Sheikh* of the district and the neighbouring areas of Cooch Behar originated from same group of human race i. e Indo- Mongoloid race. In the later period of historical evolution of human society Indo- Mongoloid people were divided into many branches or groups such as Koch, Mech, Garo, Rabha, Druckpa, Tharu, Jalda, Dobhasya etc. People who converted into Hinduism from Koches were called Rajbanshis and the people who converted into Islam from Koches were called Muslims.

All most all the English writers or scholars shown that the Rajbanshis were originated from the Koches; as such they wanted to say that the people of Rajbanshi community and the Koches were the same stock of the society. H. H. Risley writes, 'Kochh, Kochh- Mandal, Rajbanshi, Paliya, Desi, a large Dravidian tribe of North- Eastern Bengal, among whom there are grounds for suspecting some admixture of Mongolian blood.'<sup>16</sup> Dr. Franchis Buchanan Hamilton also showed the Rajbanshis and the Koches in the same stock of the society. He wrote, 'I have no doubt, however that all the Koch are spring from the same stock and that most of the Rajbanshis are Koch'.<sup>17</sup> Mr. Hodson and Dr. Latham also showed the Koches, Meches and the Kachharies in the same group i. e. Indo- Mongoloid group. Mr. Hadson who is followed by Dr. Latham, identifies the Kochs, the Mechs and Kacharis etc. As all being members of one great Mongolian race of Tranian or non- Aryan origin; and both these writers express the opinion that the Koch or Rajbanshis are merely the most Hinduised form of the common stock.<sup>18</sup> But the above mentioned opinion denied by the Rajbanshi intellectuals such as Thakur Panchanan

Barma, Upendra Nath Barman and many others who wanted to say that Rajbanshi and Koches are not the same stock of social groups because Rajbanshis were Hindus belonged to the second position of the traditional Aryan group of Hinduism, on the other hand Koches were the tribal people. This debate was going on during the Kshatriya movement was going on since the census report was published in 1881.

Other than the Rajbanshis and the tribal people, indigenous Muslims mainly living in the Sadar Sub- division of the district played a vital role in the society of the district. It is hard to say when the Muslims immigrated in the district as in the other parts of North Bengal, but it can be said that at the time of invasion of Iktiyar Uddin Baqtyar Khalji to Tibet through North Bengal one Tribal leader named Ali Mech was converted into Islam thereafter many Hindus particularly the lower caste people were converted into Islam. It should be mentioned here that in spite of conversion into Islam the Indigenous Muslims locally called *Nasya Sheikh* could not leave their previous culture, customs and lifestyle; they could not give out their food habit, their mother tongue and the social practices. So in this regard it is followed that there were many similarities in their social- economy and cultural practices between Rajbanshis and the indigenous Muslims.

There was no caste system or *Varna* system among the Rajbanshis. It is found that either in the land holder classes or intermediaries and the cultivators or sharecroppers there was no social restrictions or barricade among the people of Rajbanshi. There were huge instances of marriages that were performed between the bride- grooms and bride of the landholder classes i.e. Jotdars, intermediaries etc. and the sharecroppers who were belonged to the same stock of community. Not only that there was no custom of untouchability or *Jalachal* system between landholders and sharecroppers of the Rajbanshis, rather they got together in different occasions where they took their meal sitting together and enjoyed themselves.

There are many instances in social and cultural practices and customs which prove the difference from the culture of the Aryans. It is historically true that the Rajbanshis were converted into Hinduism from the Indo-Mongolian group, naturally Hinduised culture entered in the society of the Rajbanshis gradually. There were so many instances of Mongolian culture in the Rajbanshi people which is going on still now. The culture of the Rajbanshis has been discussed in the specific chapters of the thesis, in a nutshell it can be said that the Rajbanshis were simple minded and completely agriculture oriented people. Like other Monglian people they loved the nature. They lived peacefully co-operating with other communities. The Rajbanshis and indigenous Muslims having many similarities lived closely extending their hands to each other communities.

Beside the indigenous society and culture of the district I have shown in the present thesis how the immigrated people of different castes, religions, creeds and classes formed the society and what was the condition and pattern of their culture. Among the immigrated people two main stream culture entered this region like other parts of Bengal and dominated the society that was the Brahmanical culture and European culture. It is discussed that the people of higher castes such as Brahman and Kayasthas immigrated in the different parts of Bengal in the different phases from ancient to colonial period and extended their culture on the indigenous people as a result of which many indigenous people became Hindus and led their lives in accordance with the Hindu shastras and culture and gradually many indigenous customs and culture of different communities had been abolished. On the other hand by the penetration of European culture and Christianity many people converted into Christian and accepted the Christian culture hampering the indigenous culture.

## VI

Another aspect I have shown in my thesis which was a question of identity crisis faced by different tribal communities in the district. Once, before

the coming of the Britishers, some tribal communities namely Mech, Toto, Garo, Rabha and Drucpa lived in this area. But after the coming of the Britishers and introductions of their new economic policies in the field of agriculture, trade and industry, different types and classes of people immigrated in the Dooars as a result of which population increased gradually and a new demographic structure was formed. For introducing the new economic policy and systems in the land and immigration, the tribal people lost their ethnicity or ethnic life where they habituated with shifting cultivation and Governed by themselves out of so called civic society.

Following the above situation at the time of survey and settlement works by Mr. D. H. E. Sunder, separate colonies were established for Mech, Garo, and Santal communities (Sunder Report). After few years it was found that different castes and classes of people entered into the colony as a result of which number of Mech people was going down and it was more wonderful that after few years it was followed that there was not a single Garo in the colony and that more than half of the Jotdars were outsiders mainly Oraons.<sup>19</sup> Why the number of Mech people was going down and the Garos left the place? From the report of Mr. Milligan and the writing of Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal it is found that the Meches and Garos left the district and moved towards East. Without any hesitation it can be said that they left the place due to losing their ethnicity and facing an identity crisis.

## **VII**

Another aspect which I have shown in my present thesis is the changing scenario of the society and culture in the post-colonial period. It is well known that on the eve of the independence and partition of India a devastating communal riot was started in Bengal and Punjab between Hindus and Muslims. Lacs of people were murdered for the ferocious communal riots.

For these devastating communal riots huge number of people left their motherland and settled in the different parts of West Bengal being refugee, to save their lives. These migrated refugee had no shelter, no food, no accommodation to survive except very few. Most of them had taken shelter in the various colonies of different parts of West Bengal where no healthy atmosphere, no sufficient food. The refugees only survived like animals. Government did not take proper measure to the refugees. In the context of North Bengal, the condition of the refugees was slightly different because comparatively the density of population was low than south Bengal. Secondly, there were huge amount of *patit* (wastage land) land particularly in the district of Darjeeling and Western Dooars of Jalpaiguri district there were large amount of forest or jungles where no human being could live. Only few tribal community people could live there. Thirdly, in the different districts of North Bengal most of the Jotdars and Zamindars were Rajbanshi community who dominated on the land and agrarian economy. The majority of the Jotdars in Jalpaiguri was Rajbanshis, a scheduled caste and next to them, Muslims. The chukani holdings would be under them. For a caste- Hindu such a position was socially undesirable. As it happened most of the Muslims were converted.<sup>20</sup>

The condition of the migrated people coming from East Pakistan was very pathetic at the initial stage. But after few years the migrated people got shelter in different colonies in the towns and villages also. Later on, during the period of United Front Government and Left Front Government huge number of lands had been acquired by the government by the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955 and distributed to the landless people. Many refugees got their shelter in these lands. In the town people coming from East Pakistan suffered at the initial stage. But they also gradually settled in the different parts of the town. Not only that these migrated people dominated the society and culture of the town in the later phase having obtained different jobs of the government and being solvent economically occupying the position in trade

and commerce as a result of which a discrimination between indigenous people and migrated people was created.

To summarise the introduction, it can be said that the present study deals with many un-discussed, unexplored and unknown aspects and problems of the society and culture of the district. As a result of the social economic and cultural crisis many discontents and grievances have grown up in the minds of the indigenous people, particularly the people of Rajbanshi community and some tribes. They have been feeling crises of losing their lands, ethnicity, cultural heritage and freedom of identity for which many Sub- Regional movements namely Uttarkhanda Movement, Kamtapur Movement, Gorkhaland Movement and Greater Cooch Behar Movement held in different phases since independence in different parts of North Bengal. Beside these movements terrorist activities are also going on in the soil of North Bengal which created a dreadful and panic atmosphere in the society. It may be said that all the movements and activities, particularly the terrorist one cannot be supported from the point of national integration and maintaining peaceful environment in the society; on the other hand these movements should not be neglected or restrained by force. Everybody should realize the causes and roots of the discontent and grievances of the depressed people. It may be concluded with the remark of Sailen Debnath, “The people in power of the government, in different political parties in Delhi and Kolkata, in the southern delta of West Bengal, in the bureaucracy of the Central and the State Government as well as in the powerful groups of Delhi and Kolkata based intellectuals, must come forward to build up an atmosphere of sincere efforts in redressing the problems and deprivations of the aggrieved people of the most neglected areas of North Bengal in general and of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and of the Dooars in particular so as not to see more trouble to brew up from the dens of sufferings, agitations and tensions.”<sup>21</sup>

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