

Abstract

Title:

Social and Cultural History of a Bengal District, Jalpaiguri (1869-1994)

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. Jalpaiguri district was formed in 1869 with the Western Dooars, situated in the Eastern part of Tista and the Sadar Sub-Division comprising with Baikunthapur Pargana, Chaklas of Boda, Patgram and Purbabhag, situated in the Western Part of Tista. 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.

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, Drucpa, Tharu, Jalda,

Toto etc. People who converted into Hinduism from Koches were called Rajbanshis and the people who converted into Islam from Koches were called Muslims.

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-Mongoloid group, naturally Hinduised culture entered in the society of the Rajbanshis gradually. 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 Brahmanical culture and European culture.

Analysis of the main theme:-

The main theme of the present study has been analyzed by the Seven Chapters. 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. In spite of conversion into Islam the indigenous Muslims locally known as *Nasya Sheikh* could not leave their previous culture, customs and life style. So in this regard it is followed that there were many similarities in their socio-economic and cultural practices between Rajbanshis and the indigenous Muslims.

The 2nd chapter deals with the immigration and emigration of different communities and classes of people and the formation of a new demographic

pattern in the district. Before the coming of the Britishers, some tribal communities namely Mech, Toto, Garo, Rabha, Druupa lived in this area. But after the coming of the Britishers and introductions of their new economic policies in the field of the 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 in the society and culture of the Jalpaiguri town.

In the 3rd chapter I have shown the cultural scenario of the district in the colonial period. The culture of Jalpaiguri district particularly in the Dooars had a distinctive character unlike other parts of Bengal. The culture of the people of Jalpaiguri can be divided into two categories namely 1) Indigenous culture and 2) Immigrated culture. The immigrated culture also can be divided into two categories namely the a) Aryan culture or Sanskritization and b) Western culture or European culture. The indigenous culture means the culture of the indigenous people, called 'the son of the soil', mainly the Rajbanshis, tribals and some local Muslims.

The 4th chapter deals with the changing scenario of the society 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. For these devastating communal riots huge number of people left their motherland and settled in the district like other parts of West Bengal being refugee, to save their lives. 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. After facing many crisis and problems they could find their way of life, they could stand their business and got their position in the society. As a result of which discrimination between indigenous people and migrated people was created.

It is shown in the 5th chapter the emergence of the Middle class and their activities in the district, Jalpaiguri. I have shown the middle class people of the district into two categories who took a vital role in the development of the society and culture that was indigenous and immigrated. They had great role and contribution in every aspect of the society, economy, politics and culture.

In the 6th chapter I have shown how the immigrated people dominated on the indigenous people in every aspect of the district such as administration, politics, economy, education, culture etc. The cultural life of the people can be divided broadly into two categories namely the traditional culture of the indigenous people and the culture of the Barna Hindus migrated from outside the district. Other than these there are some cultural instances of the Muslims (outsiders) Christians and some Europeans. A new culture in the changing scenario emerged in the district in the post- colonial period.

The 7th chapter is an analysis of the conflict and confrontation in the society of Jalpaiguri. 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 crisis of losing their lands, ethnicity, cultural heritage and freedom of identity for which a socio-political tension is going on in different parts of the district, nay North Bengal.

Preface

The present study deals with the socio-cultural condition of the Jalpaiguri district in the colonial and post-colonial period. During this period, the socio-cultural condition of the district has been changed in different times by different rulers such as under the reign of Koch rulers, the Bhutani rulers, the British rulers and ultimately the post – independent governments. The present researcher shows the changing socio-cultural condition and its impact on the society of the district.

Jalpaiguri District witnesses a distinctive feature in many respects of society, economy, culture and demographic pattern unlike other parts of Bengal districts. Many ups and downs have taken place, many parts of the district such as Boda, Patgram, Pachagar, Debiganj and Tetulia had to cede to Pakistan at the time of partition of India. From anthropological point of view different types of tribal people have been living in this district, other than tribal, people of different castes and religion also living here which makes a mixed society. ‘Unity in Diversity’ is one of the characteristics of this district. But recently, a socio – political tension and militant activities are seen in the soil of North Bengal, particularly the district of Jalpaiguri. One of the most vital causes of these tensions and activities lies in the land – related issues which is shown in the present study.

In Jalpaiguri, unlike other parts of Bengal, British Government introduced two separate systems in the field of administration and land revenue. Regarding land revenue and agrarian economy, British government introduce permanent settlement in Baikunthapur pargana and chaklas of Boda, Patgram and Purbabhag situated to the west of Tista river, on the other hand the Western Dooars situated to the east of Tista was declared as a non–regulated area where no permanent settlement was introduced, British Government

himself was the proprietor of land. Here lands were granted by lease or agreement to the Jotdars and the proprietors of the tea – gardens.

Regarding agrarian relations, the district particularly the Western Dooars witness a distinctive character unlike other parts of Bengal. Here, the relation between Sharecroppers and their *Giris* (Jotdars and Intermediaries) was co – operative more or less except few instances of indigenous Jotdars and absentee Jotdars coming from other professions were more oppressors than the indigenous Jotdars. The relation between sharecroppers and their *Giris* among the Rajbanshi community was paternal. The Jotdars or *Giris* treated their Sharecroppers or *Projas* like a sons or daughters, even at the time of marriage of the *Projas*, the Jotdars dropped water on the head of bride and bridegrooms called *Panichhita* and became parents of the bride and bridegrooms and performed all the duties from both sides as parents and their son until death.

In the post–colonial period the work of Land Reforms Programmes was started since 1950's, but practically the Programmes was started during the period of United Front Government in 1967 and 1969, as well as left Front Government since 1977. Land Reforms Programmes in the district as elsewhere in west Bengal became a boon to the landless people and sharecroppers, because they had their right on land, on the other hand, many indigenous Jotdars or Intermediaries, particularly of the Rajbanshi community had lost their land , many of them become destitute for their simplicity, illiteracy, and having no experience of other professions like southern and eastern parts of Bengal as a result of which many discontents and grievances have been growing up in the mind of Rajbanshi people which led to socio – political tensions in the district as elsewhere in North Bengal.

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In spite of my best trying and hardworking there may be errors. I am completely responsible for that.