

CHAPTER - IV

Post Colonial Geographical, Administrative, and Political Scenario of North Bengal

The year 1947 was the water-shed in the history of India including North Bengal. After the partition of India a serious problem was created at the northern part of West Bengal that means North Bengal. The Mountbatten plan of dividing India on 3rd June, 1947 on the basis of religion was fully responsible for it. According to this plan, a boundary commission was formed in order to divide Bengal. Its president became Sir Radcliffe who was not aware of this region (North Bengal). In fact, the British Government wanted to complete the work of partitioning India hurriedly. On the recommendation of Sir Syrile Radcliffe the picture of dividing Bengal was prepared. Other four members of the boundary commission named Charuchandra Biswas, Bijan Mukharjee, Abu Saleha Rahaman and Muhammad Akram did not agree on the recommendation of Radcliff Saheb. Naturally Radcliff Saheb drafted the picture of dividing Bengal alone and the Government gave him that right.¹

The mental disaster of the inhabitants of North Bengal came on the day of 15th August, 1947. On that day the power was transferred from the hand of the British Government to the inhabitants of divided India. But Radcliffe Award was announced after two days i.e. 17th August, 1947. In the true sense of the term, though India gained freedom having been so would divided into two parts, it required two days to know which citizenship the people of North Bengal acquire. On 15th August, the greatest catastrophe came to the life of the people of Dinajpur, Maldah and Jalpaiguri districts. Panaullah - the District Magistrate of Balurghat of Dinajpur hoisted the Pakistani flag. Pakistani army appeared at Balurghat High School. Members of the Joint Constituency of Provincial Executive Assembly namely Jillur Rahaman and Moja Chowdhury tried whole heartedly to keep Balurghat in Pakistan.² So on 15th August the fate of Balurghat was oscillating and

a great tension was created in Balurghat town. The Kaliaganj thana of Dinajpur was to be included in Pakistan. At this joy a procession was commenced on behalf of Muslim League on 14th August. The Pakistani flag was hoisted at Kaliaganj railway station.³ Maldah was also on the verge of extreme excitement because the flag was hoisted by Muslim League on the 15th August.⁴ a rumour was spread that on 15th August Jalpaiguri would be merged into Pakistan. Mosaraf Hossain, the Nawab of Jalpaiguri was the member of Surabardi ministry and was a very influential person. He became afraid of thinking that a large number of tea-gardens which belonged to his Zamindari would be on the verge of division. So he made a great propaganda to include the whole of Jalpaiguri in Pakistan with the help of other Muslim League leaders.⁵

After this on 17th August, according to the recommendation of Sir Radcliffe the boundary of both India and Pakistan was determined on the basis of religion. Some district of northern part of West Bengal remained undivided and some divided. As there was no single Muslim majority thana in Darjeeling, it was to be included with West Bengal.⁶ According to the Radcliffe Award five thanas of Southern part of Jalpaiguri named Tetulia, Pachagadh, Boda, Debiganj and Patgram - total 672 square kilometers area was declared to be included with East Pakistan. The part of Jalpaiguri came under West Bengal.⁷ At least fifteen thanas of Maldah district namely Nachol, Bholahat, Shibpur, Gomastapur, Nababganj, English Bazar, Kaliachak, Malda, Habibpur, Ratua, Manikchak, Kharba, Harishchandrapur, Gazole and Bamongola were included in West Bengal.⁸ Radcliffe Commission also divided Dinajpur district into two parts. The two third part of it was introduced as Dinajpur which came under East Pakistan and one-third part as West Dinajpur came under West Bengal. There were ten thanas under the jurisdiction of one –third part named Balurghat, Kumarganj, Gangarampur, Tapan, Raiganj, Hemtabad, Bansihari, Kushmandi, Kaliaganj and Itahar.⁹ So after partition the whole Darjeeling district and ten thanas of Maldah, Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri about one-third part of Rajshahi division were included with West Bengal.

The inclusion of Tetulia thana of Jalpaiguri district with East Pakistan gave a great shock to this district because Tetulia was a direct communicative thana with Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Dinajpur. Due to inclusion of Tetulia with Pakistan, West Bengal was divided into three parts. On one side of West Bengal there was the river Ganga and other side was covered with Maldah and one part of Dinajpur. This part had no connection with Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling. Cooch-Bihar was the native state. There was no rail connection between North Bengal and the rest of West Bengal. If Tetulia was to be included with West Bengal, a direct connection could be made between Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling with Maldah and Dinajpur. Besides this distance could be decreased with Calcutta and any part of India to Jalpaiguri and north eastern zone. Khagendra Nath Dasgupta—the M.L.A of Jalpaiguri district said to the editor of *The Ananda Bazar Patrika*, “Jalpaiguri district was adversely affected when the British Government left India.” This district was divided on the basis of non-Muslim majority. Between this, the number of people of this district was 2,43,811. In it the number of Musalmans was only 1,08,428.¹⁰

The demographic structure and political situation of Jalpaiguri district was solely responsible for transforming these five thanas to Pakistan. At the thana level Mr. Radcliffe drew the dividing line on the basis of people and religion. The caste-Hindu, Scheduled Caste Hindu and other Scheduled tribes like Santal, Rajbanshi was seen as a different entity at the Census of 1941. Consequently, the Muslim at Jalpaiguri was regarded as the majority group and the caste Hindu as the minority group. For the caste-Hindu was unable to accept the scheduled caste – Hindus and others under their own banner. On the other hand the scheduled caste Hindus accepted the Muslim League whole heartedly. Jogendra Nath Mandal—the leader of scheduled caste group was an ardent supporter of Muslim League. It is interesting to note that Premhari Barman, Nagendra Nath Roy—the members of elected legislative assembly from the area of scheduled caste Hindu proposed for the inclusion of Jalpaiguri to East Pakistan.¹¹ We can see the same picture with regards to the members of elected legislative assembly from the scheduled caste area of Rangpur. If Hathibandha and Dimla thana of Rangpur were included to

West Bengal, the fixation of the boundary of North Bengal became easy and the Chittmahal problem was not created.

There was no clear conception about the inclusion of 20 thanas of Dinajpur to East Pakistan according to the recommendation of Radcliffe Commission because Dinajpur was a Hindu based district. Among the ten thanas of Thakurgaon sub-division, the three were Hindu based tract. But they were included with Pakistan.¹²

Before partition an uncertainty was created in the sphere of Maldah district. In 1947, Sir Jadunath Sarkar gave a memorandum to the Boundary Fixation Commission and thereby he appealed for including Maldah and Rajshahi under the banner of west Bengal.¹³ Though English Bazar of Maldah was a Hindu based area, the whole Maldah district was Muslim based district. For this Lord Mount batten took Maldah district under the grip of Pakistan in his historical plan of dividing India on 3rd june,1947.¹⁴ According to Radcliffe Award, the five thanas were included to Pakistan. Among them Nachol was the Hindu based thana. On the other hand, among the ten thanas of Maldah district (which were in India), Kharba, Kaliachak, Harishchandrapur and Ratua was Muslim- majority areas.¹⁵ In fact, the division system of commission was not clear in this sphere.

Before pointing out frontier, Sir Radcliffe did not give emphasis on the important problems of this area. Due to the lack of time and lack of knowledge about the map of adjoining areas and disagreement among the members of commission the erroneous Radcliffe Award was made.

After independence emphasis was given on the future of native state. It is true that before 15th August, most of the native state gave sign to the instrument of Accession. Jagaddipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur of Cooch-behar agreed to join the Indian Union although he signed to the Instrument of Accession after two years that means in 1949.¹⁶

A great tension continued among different political parties about the inclusion of Cooch-Behar with West Bengal. A political party named Hitasadhani sabha protested against the inclusion of Cooch-behar with West Bengal.¹⁷ The

Muslim members of Hitasadhani Sabha was in favour of including Cooch-Bihar with East Pakistan. Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah - the Revenue Minister and Satish Singha Roy –the Education Minister delivered a lecture at the public meeting of Mekhaliganj saying that Cooch-bihar state was to be taken outside Indian Union and Cooch-bihar State Congress was to be destroyed.¹⁸ The Maharaja was determined about it.

Cooch-Bihar Projamandal opposed at first against this type of activity of Hitasadhani Sabha. The Communist and Forward Bloc members had complained to the sub Chief minister Sardar Patel and said that Maharaja and his dear ministers are trying to make a deep relation with Pakistan.¹⁹ Sardar Patel himself wrote a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru saying that Hitasadhani Sabha is very much sympathetic towards Pakistan.²⁰ Another party named Cooch-bihar People's Association wanted to include Cooch-Bihar to West Bengal. When the Prime Minister came to Calcutta on 14th July, 1949, a memorandum was placed on behalf of Cooch-Bihar People's Association.²¹ Cooch-Bihar State Congress had also begun a movement to make Cooch-bihar as an integral part of West Bengal. In order to solve this problem many personalities named Sarat Chandra Basu, Shyama Prasad Mukharjee, Prafulla Ghosh, Bidhan Chandra Roy and Upendra Nath Barman proceeded.

After long warp and woof Indian Government declared the matter of including Cooch-bihar with West Bengal and on 1st January, 1950 Cooch-bihar was included as a district of West Bengal.²²

In 1950 a movement had begun for reorganizing language based states. In the post partition period the problem also greatly affected West Bengal. In order to solve this problem the Central Government had formed the S.R. C in 1953 and the State Reorganization Act had passed in 1956 at the parliament. According to this Act, a proposal was given for organizing fourteen states and six central administrative zones. In order to make a relation between the northern part of West Bengal and the remaining part of state, some Bengali language based tract of Bihar was demanded by West Bengal to the commission. Against this proposal Bihar also demanded three districts of West Bengal viz, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and

Cooch-behar. Besides this, a new state named Uttarakhand was also proposed.²³ During reorganization, a dispute continued between Bihar and West Bengal for taking the inclusion of Maldah. From 1876 to 1905 Maldah had gone under Bhagalpur division.²⁴ Although it was under Rajshahi division before it, Bihar again demanded Maldah under it.²⁵

The demand of re-organizing northern part of West Bengal was reasonable from the geographical, administrative, economic and cultural points of view. Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy had realized the necessity of connecting some portion of the state with North Bengal and said that some Bengali language based tract of Bihar should be included with Bengal. Side by side, in order to make communication with Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Maldah and Murshidabad it was very much essential.²⁶ but the most important problem arose with regards to West Dinajpur because Bihar was the medium of connecting this district with Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri. Besides this, a corridor was necessary for a connection between North Bengal and South Bengal with regard to Dinajpur. For fulfilling this purpose a proposal was placed for including some parts of Purnea district of Bihar within jurisdiction of West Bengal. With a view to including Kishanganj subdivision with West Bengal different political parties and leaders sent a proposal to S.R.C and remarked that “we attach great importance to the geographical compactness of administrative units, because we are of the view that the physical integration of such units is vital to their real political and administrative integration. Besides, inconvenience in administering geographically detached areas we must take a note of the fact that the continued isolation of the northern districts from the rest of Bengal will tend to foster an accumulated separatist trend in these districts. West Bengal therefore has a good case of geographical integration of the northern area.”²⁷

But in 1950 when the commission had entered Purnea, a great mass movement took place against the inclusion of some parts of Bihar in west Bengal. The business community of Kishanganj took leadership at this movement.²⁸ Shyam Nandan Sahay, the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Bihar University had delivered a lecture at Lok Sabha on 20th December, 1955 saying that ‘most of the Muslims in

India live at this part of Bihar.’²⁹ So he was not in favour of transferring this area to west Bengal. Against this statement Sri Upendra Nath Barman on behalf of Congress remarked “If the culture of fifty lakh Muslims is not in danger, why should the culture of only two lakh Muslims be in danger?”³⁰

The Commission gave more importance to the language with regards to reorganization. In this sphere we get a report of the commission about the language of this tract. The report is, “The affinities between Kishanganj of Suryapuria as spoken in the extreme East of Purnea district on the one hand and Bangalee on the other seem to be closed.”³¹ So when Shyama Nandan Sahay remarked that this tract was Urdu language based, Upendra Nath Barman suspected about this matter.³² He stated, ‘If this tract of Kishanganj goes to West Bengal, unity will be made between Behari Muslims and Muslims of West Bengal. Inspire of this if they are eager to learn Urdu, there will be no bar about it----’ the West Bengal Government will give them permission.³³ But Maulana Azad, the then Education Minister opposed vehemently in the Central Cabinet for the inclusion of Kishanganj with West Bengal . He said that most of the inhabitants of Kishanganj are eager to live in Bihar, not in West Bengal. So this part should be kept in Bihar³⁴ the ministry accepted the argument of Sri Azad. At last, the commission suggested that some parts of Kishanganj sub-division on the east bank of Mahananda River were to be included with West Bengal and the rest would be in Bihar. Against this statement on 4th October, 1956 on behalf of Raiganj Boundary Adjustment Committee under the leadership of Sri Nisith Nath Kundu (the president of Boundary Adjustment Commission) a memorandum was presented to Lok Sabha and West Bengal Bidhan Sabha. In this memorandum it was stated that Barsai Thana of Purnea district of Bihar and middle part of Mechi and Mahananda River will be transferred to Bengal for serving the interest of Uttar Banga and the rest of Bengal with regard to their unification³⁵but their demand was not fulfilled. Although the commission had ignored the demand of Bihar in the sphere of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch-Bihar and Maldah but in the matter of re-organizing West Dinajpur district the argument of Bihar had got most importance.

In 1956, according to Bihar and West Bengal Bill (Transfer of Territories) Chopra, Karandighi, Goal-pukur and Islampur—four thanas of Kisanganj Sub-division were included in Darjeeling district and on 2nd November, these four thanas came under West Dinajpur district in place of Darjeeling.³⁶ It is interesting to note that Islampur was declared as a Sub-division.

The report of S.R.C failed to fulfil the aspiration of the inhabitants of North Bengal. The inclusion of whole Kisanganj Sub-division to West Bengal was very much essential for communication between North Bengal and the rest of Bengal. West Bengal hoped that the rental part which it had lost during partition will be included partly through State reorganization. In the real sense of the term, the commission had tried utmost for the welfare of West Bengal but this attempt had totally failed due to the interference of Central Cabinet.

After 1956, the northern part of West Bengal that means North Bengal took a new shape. The boundary of West Bengal was extended due to the inclusion of some new tracts. But it was seen that the areas which had extended, created psychological problems of the inhabitants of these tracts. For example, after reorganization of both Cooch-behar and West Dinajpur, both had become prantiya Zela and Assam, Bihar were designated as frontier states. There was no unity between them with regard to language, religion etc. So, a burning question was raised in the arena of language, religion, economy and politics. Due to the lack of real social and cultural plan there was no continuation of development in these tracts. Social tension gave birth to different political movements.

Different problems had risen with regard to land reforms, language and administration. The part of Kisanganj of Bihar which named was included Islampur Sub-division with West Bengal. There was a vast difference between land reforms of Bengal and Bihar. A tradition continued in West Bengal in the sphere of land reforms. There was no such tradition in Bihar; naturally a question was created in this tract. There was an existence of various languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Urdu and Suryapuri in this tract. So a great demand arose to give same status to the all-existing languages. Besides this, there was a demographical change due to the advent of strangers and refugees from neighboring states in

West Bengal. The mass of this tract became backward in every sphere of life. Consequently one type of separation gradually took shape into their minds. This type of mentality gave birth to a new organization named TASO (Transferred area Suryapur Organization). The members of this organization tried their best to preserve their Suryapuri language and culture.³⁷

As Cooch-Bihar was under native state administration for a long period, a special mentality formed in the mind of its citizens. They were not agreed regarding the matter of including Cooch-bihar with West Bengal. Being the inhabitants of native state, they had enjoyed special facilities regarding education, medical treatment and service. They became angry and demanded Cooch-bihar as a separate state. The ethnological character of these inhabitants, economic backwardness and influence of East-Bengalese and Bhatia were solely responsible for this. An ethnological social movement started. On the verge of time some social movements were transformed into political movements.

After re-organization, different movements extended at northern part of West Bengal. A political party named Uttar Khand was founded in 1969. Kamtapuri Liberation Organization had also demanded separate state named Kamtapur. On the other hand, The Greater Cooch-Bihar Association has also formed in Cooch-bihar. Their slogan was the foundation of greater Cooch-Bihar state. In order to legalise their movement. The greater Cooch-bihar Association started organizing mass meeting, procession etc. The influence of these movements was comprehensive mainly on northern part of Uttar Banga namely Maldah and Dinajpur.

The re-organization of North Bengal had created various problems not only in internal affairs but created complicity with alien state on frontier matter. Among these problems two are the most important. They are Berubari problem and Chittmahal problem. It is interesting to note that these Chittmahal or Berubari problems are mainly visible in Jalpaiguri and Cooch-Bihar district particularly.

The post colonial North Bengal is now consisted of seven districts namely Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch-Bihar, Maldah, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and

Alipurduar. Side by side the number of Sub-division has augmented. Again formation and re-formation of thanas have brought a change regarding of this administrative permutation. Barring this, the growth of population has created various socio-economic and cultural difficulties and badly influenced the administration through different demands and protests.

For example, Raiganj Sub-division being situated at the middle part of West Dinajpur, the majority people of Raiganj and Islampur Sub-division started a movement for transferring district town at Raiganj for their facilities. Sri Nisith Kundu _ an eminent lawyer of Raiganj supported this legal demand and discussed about this matter with Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy- the then Chief minister of West Bengal and Dr.Roy promised to fulfil his demand. He declared in a public meeting of Islampur that as per the Government's decision the district town will be transferred soon to Raiganj. In this respect the Governmental department was built at Karnojora. But the public of Balurghat had begun a movement against this decision. Consequently the decision was dismissed. After many years the C.P.I.(M) Government divided West Dinajpur into two parts. As a result the two districts had been formed –viz., Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur. The district town of Uttar Dinajpur was situated at Karnajora of Raiganj. Balurghat was regarded as the district town of South Dinajpur.³⁸

During colonial period Darjeeling was a Non-Regulated area before 1860 and from 1870—1874. In 1874 it was declared as a Scheduled District town and gradually took the position of a Backward Tract and also was regarded as 'Partially Excluded Area'. In 1980 'Gorkha National Liberation Front' started movement for separate Gorkhaland state which took an extreme shape in 1986-88. Consequently in 1988, 'Darjeeling Gorkha autonomous Hill Council' was formed. Yet the peace had never comeback there. A movement was again started in Darjeeling under the leadership of Gorkha Janamukti Morcha. As a result Darjeeling took the new administrative character through the creation of Gorkha Territorial Administration.

On the other hand Alipurduar Jela Nirman Devi Mancha (AJNDM) took a crucial role to make Alipurduar as a separate Jela. Sri Nirmal Das—an eminent

person of Alipurduar had a particular role in this matter. An Administrative Reforms Committee consisting of five members was formed in this respect. AJNDM gave a memorandum to the committee stating that the area of Alipurduar is greater and it is far from Jalpaiguri district town with regard to distance³⁹. But Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha leadership vehemently protested against the creation of Alipurduar as a separate Jela. In this context Harka Bahadur Chhetri –the leader of G.J.M.M commented, “There are six months to go before the GTA’S functional. We do not want the sub-division of Alipurduar to be re-organized.”⁴⁰ But inspite of a long time resistance of various groups, Alipurduar is formed and regarded as a separate district.

Thus, in the post colonial period North Bengal was reorganized. It had a great impact on economy, society and culture of North Bengal.

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