

Chapter - 2

Socio-Economic and Political Background of the Origin of the Uttarkhanda Dal

In the present chapter, though we have placed the socio-economic and political background of the formation of the Uttarkhanda Dal, in the same structure and same line, but all these three had not taken shape at the same time. Therefore, the beginning of the three was at the different point of time and that is no doubt the interesting aspect of this chapter. Considering the above view point, an attempt has been made to discuss the same under three different parts.

2.1. In our first attempt, the social background of the emergence of the Uttarkhanda Dal will be discussed. It can be said that the foundation canvas of the Uttarkhanda Dal to some extent was provided by the *Kshatriya Samiti*, the first one that exposed the cause of the *Kshatriya* identity of the Rajbanshis. This new identity question was germinated in the minds of the Rajbanshis in the pre independence period.

It is historically evident that the Rajbanshis of North Bengal started uniting socially and that also very articulately, for the first time, from the last decade of the nineteenth century when the colonial government started its census in 1891. It would not be irrelevant to mention that the demand for *Kshatriya* identity in the last decade of the nineteenth century by a section of the Rajbanshi leaders caused a social rift very vividly between the Rajbanshis and caste Hindus of eastern Bengal and this rift was further widened in the post-independence era and became one of the potent factors for the formation of an ethnic based regional political party, by a section of Rajbanshi leaders. Therefore, the *Kshatriya* identity movement of the Rajbanshis is needed to be discussed and also to see how it caused the aforesaid social fissure.

However, at the outset of this discussion of the *Kshatriya* identity movement of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal, we have to study the background of the society there. It has already been mentioned in the foregoing chapter that the Rajbanshi people constituted the single largest community in undivided Bengal. Socially, they were a homogenous group in

the region. It is to be kept in mind that the main habitat of the Rajbanshi population was in the vast area of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, tarain portion of Darjeeling, the princely State of Cooch Behar, Goalpara of Assam, Purnea of Bihar during colonial period or even in pre-colonial period.¹ The Rajbanshis even lived in the 'tarai region' of Nepal. But this habitat of the Rajbanshis in subsequent period especially in the post Independence period suffered a change after partition in 1947.

It is a fact that the Rajbanshis had dominant position in the society and culture of North Bengal especially in the princely State of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Rangpur. But this situation began to change with the introduction of the Muslim rule over the region. Because in the wake of the Muslim rule, the caste Hindus from the other parts of Bengal started coming in the region as employees in the administration of the Muslim rulers. It is, of course, evident that there lived a few rich Hindu *Jotedars* before the advent of the Muslim rule in the concerned region.² Such a trend went on till the second half of the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the districts of Darjeeling (completed its formation in 1866) and Jalpaiguri (1869) were formed and with this the demographic picture of the region began to transform very rapidly. Besides this, Jalpaiguri made the Divisional Headquarters of Rajshahi Division. As a result of this, various govt. offices, law courts, dispensaries etc. were established there. Thus Jalpaiguri necessitated and accelerated the migration of educated upper caste Hindus from other parts of Bengal. These people settled there as govt. officials, office bearers, clerks and also as other professionals like doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and traders etc.³ Side by side, it is seen that the early settlers of the region, the Rajbanshis were primarily cultivators and associated with land. They did not show any interest in the modern process of development. Therefore, various kinds of facilities which were given by the colonial govt. in various fields were almost entirely availed of by those English educated migrant people. This English educated people had gradually become the most dominant group in the local society, economy and politics due to their proximity to the administrative authority of the colonial govt. They began to treat the local people, i.e. mostly of which were Rajbanshis, backward and inferior communities. Such kind of estrangement on the part of the migrant caste Hindus did indirectly promote caste solidarity among the Rajbanshi people of

the region.⁴ Thus, it is seen that with the changing demographic pattern of the concerned region, the Rajbanshis, once a dominant community of the region, began to be disintegrated. They were also disgraced and insulted socially by the migrant caste Hindus of eastern Bengal which, no doubt, led a fissure between them.

However, when such process of structural change in the society of North Bengal was going on, a new development was seen at all India level in post 1857 era with regard to the anti caste movement. Some scholars generally have argued that in the post Mutiny era, the British Govt. started systemic study about the caste society of India just to face the question of social reform in India. This resulted first census of India in 1872. It brought about an unprecedented response from the Indians to place their respective caste in the census but according to the traditional order in a recognized and prestigious stratum of the society.⁵ But after the publication of the first census report in 1872, the people who belonged to various caste category of South and Western India started a vehement agitation against the Brahmanical domination in the society. They demanded the intervention of the colonial govt. to change this social anomaly. In fact, the census of 1872 lit fire of anti-caste movement in south and western India when it made public the picture of social status of various lower castes existed in Indian society. The aims and objectives of these lower caste movements were against the age-long privileged caste groups and at the same time they demanded the protection of their own caste and opportunity of all kinds. This anti caste movement had its impact on the society of south Bengal. Now in south Bengal also, the intermediary and lower caste people started a same kind of movement against the Brahmanical domination there. It turned immediately into a caste solidarity movement and they began to demand a higher social status which they wanted from the British Govt.⁶

The most interesting feature of the caste movement of the nineteenth century Bengal was that most of the intermediate and lower caste group people demanded the recognition of their *Kshatriya* status. It should be mentioned that in north India we find the existence of four Vedic castes in the social caste structure, but in case of Bengal, it was found that there was no existence of *Kshatriya* caste. Therefore, the lower caste people following *Sanskritization* wanted to acquire *Kshatriya* status in the society which was the easiest path to elevate the social rank. However, this movement of south Bengal made its influence on the people of

North Bengal and there also was started a similar movement. The Rajbanshis of North Bengal, the predominant caste group, probably were inspired by the aforesaid movement of south Bengal. The movement of the Rajbanshis was provoked by the Census Report of 1891. “The census operations had created notion among the members of the various lower and intermediary castes that if they could have their names enlisted in the census reports in the category of twice born, their social rank would automatically be raised and recognized by the indigenous society. So, this kind of false notion of legitimacy that census created in local society led to the sudden growth of caste association and caste movements. This affected the Rajbanshis as well.”⁷ Consequently, the Rajbanshi of North Bengal also started the ‘Kshatriya identity’ movement from the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Thus, against the aforementioned background the ‘Kshatriya identity’ movement of the Rajbanshi of North Bengal was started. But we cannot ignore at the same time, the local condition which also provided a sufficient ground for their demand of ‘Kshatriyahood.’ With this objective in view, the Rajbanshis made effort to make caste solidarity. It has already been mentioned that with the gradual settlement of the immigrant upper caste Hindus in the region which was traditionally dominated by the Rajbanshis, the existing balance in the local power structure was radically changed. Furthermore, those immigrant of upper caste Hindus regarded the local Rajbanshis “as backward, uncultured and even as antyas.”⁸ Apart from this, the immigrant upper caste Hindus used to address them as *bahe* in the most contemptuous manner which they meant their cultural inferiority. Indeed, the word ‘bahe’ in the opinion of a Rajbanshi stalwart personality, was a distortion of the word *babahe* generally used to address a person very affectionately.⁹ Interestingly, the local Rajbanshi people, on the other hand, used to refer to the outsider as *bhatia* meaning a people who came from the direction of ‘bhati’ or ebb tide i.e. from lower part of Bengal.¹⁰ Therefore, it is evident that the attitude of the cultural superiority of the immigrant upper caste Hindus of eastern Bengal and their inclination to look down upon the Rajbanshis was a great hindrance to a closer relationship between the two and thereby chasm was visible in their social relationship. It is to be mentioned in this regard that a sense of alienation arose in the mind of the Rajbanshi elites because of the above mentioned developments. This feeling of estrangement was further enhanced when they were insulted and humiliated openly by some immigrant upper

caste ` bhadralok´ who had their superior cultural attitude. In this context, some instances of such treatment can be cited. Upendranath Barman, a prominent advocate of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya movement described that lawyer Panchanan Barma, one day, by mistake, used the *Toga* (gown generally wears by a pleader) of some Mr. Maitra who was his high caste colleague in the bar of the Rangpur court and went to the court room. Returning from the court, when he realized his mistake, he tried to give it back to Mr. Maitra. But the latter very angrily threw it away saying “I hate to use a ‘toga’ used by a Rajbanshi.” In another occasion, Barma narrated that in Rangpur Normal school boarding house cooked food was thrown away because a Rajbanshi boarder of the boarding house stepped into the kitchen and some higher caste students refused to have the cooked food as a result.¹¹ This resulted in the development of a sense of alienation among the Rajbanshis, leading to the generation of a spirit of community solidarity among them. Their search for *Kshatriya* identity was only a symbolic cultural expression of this emergent collective self consciousness.¹²

However, it should be mentioned that the demand for `Kshatriya identity´ by a section of Rajbanshi people was not first raised in the first decade of the twentieth century. In fact, it can be traced back from as early as in the late eighteenth century when Ratiram Das, a Rajbanshi poet spoke of the *Kshatriya* origin of the Rajbanshis. It may be quoted a few lines from his ‘Jaga Sangeet’ in this connection.

“Hai Re Rajar Banse Lavia Janam,

Parshuramer Bhoje Ebara Saram,

Rane Bhanga Dia Mora Edese Asiachi,

Bhanga Kshatriya Rajbanshi Ei Name Achi.”¹³

The free translation goes like this: “That due to the threat of Parshuram, the *Kshatriyas* had come to northern Bengal and were living there as *Bhanga* (broken) *Kshatriya*. Again the references to a Rajbanshi’s claim of *Kshatriya* origin are to be found in Buchanan Hamilton’s account of Rangpur and Dinajpur.¹⁴ But it was in the last decade of the nineteenth century that the demand for *Kshatriya* status was reiterated more articulately and more organized manner than the earlier occasions when in the Census Report of 1891, the

Rajbanshis were placed synonymously with the Kochs. Thus, it can be said that though the origin of the *Kshatriya* movement could be located in the hatred and humiliation meted out to the Rajbanshi community by the immigrant upper caste Hindus of eastern Bengal, the immediate factor which was responsible for the beginning of the movement was the census of India in 1891. Therefore, it needs to be discussed in brief the initiation of the *Kshatriya identity* movement which was launched practically in 1891.

It is very interesting to note that in various successive census reports since 1872, the Rajbanshi people were not well aware of the caste enumeration in the census. But when in the census in 1891, the colonial govt. decided to place the Rajbanshis and the Kochs on the line of the same caste group, the Rajbanshis for the first time made a protest against this decision of the colonial govt. and demanded to enroll themselves as *Bhanga Kshatriyas* to the census superintendent. But on the refusal of their demand, a movement was started by them in Rangpur. This movement was particularly organized by the leaders of the society, most of whom were *zamindars*, *jotedars* and rich peasants. But the census officials refused to enumerate the Rajbanshis as '*Bhanga Kshatriyas*.' As a result, the leaders of the community in many places of Rangpur declined to fill up the census returns.¹⁵ This event led ultimately to the formation of an organization named "Bhanga Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Bidhayani Sobha." This initiative was taken by Harimohan Roy Khajanchi, a local zamindar of Shyampukur (Rangpur) to promote their caste status in accordance with the Hindu social hierarchy. Several other Rajbanshi leaders of Rangpur also voiced their protest against the move of the census authorities along with Harimohan Roy Khajanchi.¹⁶ Thus, it is very much relevant to point out that Rangpur became the epicenter of the agitation of *Kshatriya* movement in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Following the aforesaid circumstances, the Rajbanshi leaders began to demonstrate openly against the order of the District Magistrate of Rangpur, Mr. F.M. Skyne on February 1891. The *Samiti* under the leadership of Harimohan Roy Khajanchi urged the District Magistrate to separate the Rajbanshis from the Kochs. In this situation, the District Magistrate sought the opinion of the 'Dharma Shova,' the mouth piece of the local 'pandits' of Rangpur. The 'Dharma Sobha' authorized Pandit Jadaveswar Tarkaratna to pass the judgement on the said matter. However, Jadaveswar wrote to the District Magistrate that

the Rajbanshis were the different caste from the Kochs and superior to them and therefore, the Rajbanshis of North Bengal should be regarded as *Bratya Kshatriya* but not as *Bhanga Kshatriyas*. Accordingly, an order was issued by the District Magistrate saying that the Rajbanshis should be permitted to enlist themselves as 'Bratya Kshatriya' in all Govt. Correspondences. The result was that the movement was pacified for the time being in 1891. The Rajbanshi leaders were hopefully waiting for the recognition of their *Bratya Kshatriya* status in the next census report.¹⁷

It would not be wrong to mention that the second phase of the *Kshatriya* movement was begun during the census in 1901. It was found that the expectation of the Rajbanshi leaders to their above mentioned demand to enlist themselves as *Bratya Kshatriya* after the census of 1891 was not entertained. With their great disappointment, this time also the census authorities issued order instructing the field workers to enlist the Rajbanshis just as 'Rajbanshis' and not as *Bratya Kshatriya*. Immediately a meeting was held by the leaders of the community in Rangpur and sent a 'Protest Note' to the District Magistrate, Mr. P.C. Mitra on 1st February 1901 and urged him to enroll them as *Kshatriyas* in the census. But Mr. Mitra in his order on 2nd February, 1901 firmly refused to reopen the case.¹⁸ Thus, it was clear that the recommendation of F. M. Skyne in 1891 were not granted at all. As a result, the Rajbanshi society made an appeal to the census superintendent but the latter replied that "It is now too late to issue any order on the point." Thereafter, the Rajbanshi leaders made another appeal to Sir George Woodburn, K.C.S.I., the Lieutenant General of Bengal on 19th April, 1901 but without any result.¹⁹ However, this move of the census authorities made the Rajbanshis disappointed. Another significant incident which is worth mentioning in this context and which added flame to the fire was that Nagendranath Basu, a caste Hindu scholar, referred the Rajbanshis as 'Mlechchas' in his Encyclopedia in 1901.²⁰ It seems that opposition from some sections of higher caste Hindus was an important factor behind the rejection of *Kshatriya* status of the Rajbanshis.²¹

All those aforesaid factors clubbed together were enough to provoke the Rajbanshi leaders to start a tremendous movement with a renewed vigour and inspiration. This time the social issues were kept in the centre of main objectives of the *Kshatriya* movement. Just at this moment of the *Kshatriya* movement, Panchanan Sarkar, a young energetic, dynamic,

good organizer, resolute.....a lawyer by profession appeared in the picture. Panchanan, no doubt, emerged as the most respected and popular leader of the *Kshatriya* movement for he had great role in awakening the Rajbanshi community. It was under his able leadership that the *Kshatriya* movement took a significant turn. With a view to get the recognition of the *Kshatriya* identity, before the census of 1911, the *Kshatriya Samiti* was formed with Madhusudhan Roy (a lawyer from Jalpaiguri) as its president and Panchanan Sarkar as secretary in 1910 with its sole objective to achieve *Kshatriya* status of the Rajbanshis and their separate identity from the Kochs.²² It was seen that this time the movement was organized on more systematic ways by the *Kshatriya Samiti*. A large number of representatives of the *Samiti* met the Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal and Assam Mr. L. Hare and the Census Commissioner Mr. E. A. Gait and the *Samiti* also sent instruction to the leader of other districts of North Bengal and Assam (Goalpara) to apply to their respective district Magistrate to enlist them as *Kshatriyas* in the forthcoming census.²³ Thus, the demands took great momentum. The movement of *Kshatriya Samiti* this time was so continuous that LSS 'O Malley, the superintendent of the 1911 census in North Bengal remarked that it was 'a most persistent agitation was carried on by the Rajbanshis.'²⁴ He also made a remark in his 'Census Report': "The formal request was granted without hesitation as there is no doubt that as the present day, irrespective of any question of origin, the Rajbanshis and Kochs are separate castes."²⁵ But their *Kshatriya* identity was not granted.

With a view to understand the formidable task that was taken by the Rajbanshi leaders attaining higher social status, the response of the upper caste Hindus especially of eastern Bengal to it should be taken into consideration. Presumably, the upper caste section of Bengal did not welcome *Kshatriya* status movement of the Rajbanshi leaders, rather they made a stumbling block to it.²⁶ It is to be mentioned that during the pre colonial and colonial period upper caste Hindus dominated the socio-religious life of Bengal. Consequently, the *Kshatriya* status movement of the Rajbanshis in the social hierarchy opened the question of adjustment in power relation. Therefore, the upper caste Hindus tried to defy such movement. The caste Hindus also were of the view that there was no concept of *Kshatriya* caste in the prevailing caste system of Bengal. The demand of the Rajbanshi with regard to their *Kshatriya* status was refused by the 1901 census, perhaps, because of the opposition raised by the upper caste

Hindus. Besides, many Brahmin priests also refused to record the caste of the Rajbanshis as *Kshatriya* in various religious and social ceremonies.²⁷ But interestingly enough, the pandit of Mithila, Kamrup and some local Brahmins continued to support the cause of the Rajbanshis and even some of them participated in the movement,.....There were cultural exchanges between them and the Rajbanshis who adopted some of the customs of the Kamrupi Brahmanas.²⁸ It would not be irrelevant to mention here that a Kamrupi Brahmin was a bona fide member of the Uttarkhanda Dal, the main theme of our dissertation which will be discussed in the later chapters. But the important point which is to be kept in mind that the aforementioned incidents and development centering round the *Kshatriya* movement, organized by the Rajbanshi leaders in the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century caused a social and psychological rift between the Rajbanshi elites and the upper caste Hindu *bhadraloke* of eastern Bengal. In other words, the locals who were socially outdistanced as *bahe* and the immigrant caste Hindus known as *bhatias* were turn into two ethno-cultural polarities.

However, it reveals from the discussion of the above paragraph that even by getting the *Kshatriya* status officially and also the *Kshatriya* identity through various social reforms and cultural adaptation, the Rajbanshis got no success in changing the social attitudes of the upper caste Hindus towards them.²⁹ It is evident that such attitude of the upper caste Hindus of Bengal continued even in the post independence period which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

In the post colonial period, Rangpur, the main venue of the *Kshatriya Samiti* went to the erstwhile East Pakistan as a result of the partition in 1947. Consequently, the *Kshatriya Samiti* activities lost their earlier vigour and. However, in the post 1947 period the main centre of *Kshatriya Samiti* became Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and in a less importance in the tarain of Darjeeling, West Dinajpur and Malda of divided North Bengal. It is found during the first two decades of the post independence era that the psychological conflict between a section of educated Rajbanshi people and a section of educated higher Hindu castes of West Bengal, came to the fore. In this context, it should be mentioned that in the 60s (sixties) of the last century, the Rajbanshis were again termed as *bahe* by Shailesh Kumar Mukhopadhaya in his Radio talk in 'Akashbani Kolkata' on 1st August, 1961. It was strongly protested by a

section of educated Rajbanshi youth under the leadership of Sri Kalindra Nath Barman, later the founder secretary of the Uttarkhanda Dal, in various public meetings. In 1967 again, a strong protest was demonstrated by the educated Rajbanshi youth against the inclusion of a short story named 'Bajikar' in the first part of fifth edition of the 'Pathsankalan,' edited by West Bengal Council of Education, which was a text book of class - x (Ten). In that short story of Pravat Kumar Mukhopadhyaya, the term 'bahe' was mentioned and that was the cause of their resentment.³⁰

It emerges from the above discussion that the legacy of the attitude of the educated caste Hindus of eastern Bengal towards the Rajbanshis was still carried on by some sections of the higher caste Bengalee intelligentsia and regarded the Rajbanshis as *bahe* and on the other hand, the Rajbanshis of North Bengal following the same pre independence legacy regarded them as *bhatia*. Thus, this 'bahe' and 'bhatia' dichotomy created a social fissure between them and paved indirectly the way for the formation of an ethnic based political party in North Bengal i.e. the Uttarkhanda Dal.

2.2. It has already been pointed out at the beginning of this chapter that the socio-economic and political background of the origin of the Uttarkhanda Dal had not taken place at the same point of time but at different points of time. Keeping this in view, an attempt has been made to discuss the economic background of the origin of the Uttarkhanda Dal (U.K.D.). In the foregoing chapters it has been stated that the Rajbanshi people formed the single largest community in undivided North Bengal. But the number of the Rajbanshi population in the divided North Bengal after the partition of 1947 had been reduced to a large extent because a considerable portion of their habitats went to the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as per recommendation of the 'Boundary Commission', headed by Sir Cyril Radcliff.³¹

In order to understand the economic background of the core theme of our study, the economic profile of the Rajbanshi people in colonial and post-colonial period is very imperative. It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter that the main habitat of the Rajbanshi people was the extensive area of Rangpur, Dinajpur, princely state of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, *tarai* portion of Darjeeling, Goalpara of Assam and in some areas of Purnia

of Bihar. According to the census report of 1921, which has already been mentioned, more than 89% of the Rajbanshi population lived in the districts of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and the princely State of Cooch Behar. The Rajbanshis are mostly agricultural people. Therefore, almost all of them lived in ‘villages, which were very thinly populated and they had built their small huts around the house of a *Jotedar* or ‘Giri’. Thus, a Rajbanshi village consists of comparatively a bigger house of a land holder and a group of smaller and meaner houses of his share croppers (*adhiars and bargadars*).³² It should be mentioned that almost all the *Jotedars* belonged to Rajbanshi community. However, it is clear that agriculture was the only economic activities of the Rajbanshi people in North Bengal during pre-colonial and colonial period may some decades of the post colonial period too. But in the rural agrarian structure in the area under study, there was the rich farmer–share cropper system. To quote Sugata Bose, “The Jotedar-adhiar system of North Bengal grew out of conditions wholly a typical of the older settled origins of West Bengal and east Bengal.” He continues, “During the nineteenth century, the Jotedar-adhiar pattern became the dominant feature of the agrarian structure in much of North Bengal.”³³ The process of this agrarian structure in rural North Bengal was started in the way of the following developments. There were large tracts of waste lands and with a view to reclaim them, those lands were assigned to opulent persons at a low fixed rents. These wealthy land holders in turn gave to poor cultivators to bring them under cultivation. However, once the the cultivation was started properly, the cultivators who were engaged by the land holders began to pay them half of the produce (in kind). Thus, those cultivators under rich farmers became the share croppers or *adhiars*.³⁴ In this process, the *jotedar-adhiar* system grew in North Bengal. But one important development in land revenue system in the colonial period should be noted that there were some regions of North Bengal viz. Rangpur, Dinajpur and part of Jalpaiguri (minusing Western Dooars) where the Permanent Settlement system was prevalent. On the other hand, in western Dooars of Jalpaiguri, *tarai* region of Darjeeling, and in Cooch Behar state *Jotedari* system was introduced. In the *Jotedari* system, land was given to *jotedars* and rich farmers by the Govt. on condition of annual payment of fixed rent.³⁵

However, whatever may be the origin of the *jotedari-adhiary* system but the fact was that the *jotedars* were the most dominant group in local agrarian social structure. An

interesting feature is to be mentioned that “till the coming of the nineteenth century most of the land in North Bengal was in the possession of the local people i.e. the Koch, the Rajbanshis, the Mechs etc. Unlike the upper caste gentry, these local people did not face the problem of status inconsistency if they themselves cultivated the lands.³⁶ Therefore, there was the absence of non-cultivating upper caste gentry in North Bengal. “But the situation began to change from the late nineteenth century onward with the immigration of the upper caste Hindu gentry in the area.”³⁷ Thus, the number of non-Rajbanshi *jotedars*, most of whom were upper caste Hindus, were increasing since then. For instance, in Jalpaiguri, while the number of *jotes*, held by the Rajbanshis decreased but those held by the non-Rajbanshis i.e. Marwaris, upper caste Bengalees increased sharply.³⁸ Thus, changes were found in the pattern of land control in North Bengal and in that process of transformation the Rajbanshis were gradually pushed by the immigrant non-Rajbanshis. Prof. Tapash Kr. Roy Chowdhury in this respect, made a discussion in length in his article “Duars-E-Bhumi Rajasywa Byabasthar Bibartan”(in Bengali)³⁹ about the land alienation with statistics that due to various reasons transfer of land from the hands of the Rajbanshis to the non-Rajbanshis took place in Jalpaiguri district. It has been also stated that the overburdening of taxes also caused the transfer of land very considerably in this region.⁴⁰ The same view was also revealed in various land revenue reports. In Falakata *Tahasil* only, it was reported that 205 *jotes* were sold off and buyers of those lands were Marwaris and other non-Bengalee businessmen, and “other persons” many of whom are Bengali *Babus*.⁴¹ Thus the situation which was created by the transfer of land (*jotes*) to the non- agricultural communities had serious consequences on the existing pattern of jote management. The number of absentee *jotedars* gradually increased.⁴² In Cooch Behar, it is found that there was a drastic change in the land-man ratios as well as the ownership of land in that state. Mr. Bucket, the settlement officer of Cooch-Bihar state wrote in 1872: “From calculation made, I found that out of about 150,000 “Bighas” of revenue paying lands included in 185 “ taluks,” about 81,000 “Bighas” are held by foreigners, of the remaining 69,000 “Bighas,” less than a third is held by cultivating *jotedars* and the remainder by resident joteders, who did not actually cultivate lands but live on profits derived from Chukanidars(next to jotedars in land holding hierarchy)”.⁴³ Thus, the people from outside mostly of those were in the administration of Cooch Behar State and

who were more resourceful than the local people captured a large number of *jotes*. By 1872, in the State 50% of the revenue paying land had transferred to the hands of the immigrants.⁴⁴

It appears from the above explanation that there was a massive change in the land ownership in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The process of transfer of land continued even after the post independence era. It has been noticed that in the post First World War period when general economic depression prevailed all over the world, the Rajbanshi *jotedars* of North Bengal again started selling their *jotes* and such trend had changed in the ethnic composition of land holding class to a large extent.⁴⁵

It is to be noted in this respect that in North Bengal the land owners and their under tenants had the same social origin and mostly belonged to the ethnic group of the Rajbanshi community. Therefore, “a low level equilibrium existed in this society during pre-annexation and early British period which maintained its economic and social stability....., on the whole, the area did not show any socio-economic dynamism which would give rise to social stratification, economic inequality and political consciousness.”⁴⁶ Consequently, there was no social stratification based on caste in the concerned region. Thus, North Bengal showed a sharp contrast to other parts of rural Bengal in British India. However, this socio-economic structure in rural North Bengal began to change rapidly in the post First World War period which had already been mentioned. The result was that “the Rajbanshis who once dominated the local society were gradually subordinated by the newly settled dominant upper caste people mostly Hindus.”⁴⁷

Again the rise in prices of food grains and other necessities of daily life as a result of the Second World War seriously affected the middle and poor peasants and this culminated in the great Bengal famine. This crisis provided opportunities to the merchants, money lenders and speculators to invest their capital in land. The net result of this development was the transfer of land from small *jotedars* and middle peasants to rich farmers, money lenders and speculators.⁴⁸ “In North Bengal large scale transfer of land from the Rajbanshis to the non-Rajbanshis, which had been started from the late nineteenth century, was only accelerated further by these later developments.”⁴⁹

Thus, it is revealed very vividly that the alienation of lands which was started from

the late nineteenth century continued till 1947 caused economic displacement in the Rajbanshi society. Furthermore, it had other serious social effects. It is noticed that many of the Rajbanshi *jotedars* had turned into *Chukanidars* and in turn, *Chukanidars* into *Dar Chukanidars* and *Dar Chukanidar* into *Dar Dar Chukanidars* and ultimately into share croppers or *adhiars*, who sold their lands but they had become so under a new owner of the same land they once owned. “Although there is no record of any serious protest movement amongst the Rajbanshis against the immigrant *jotedars*, a mute resentment of the sufferers against this new social order was manifested in the reaction of the Rajbanshi *adhiars* at the time of the ‘Tebhaga movement.’”⁵⁰ It would not be wrong to point out that the phenomenon of the transfer of land from the hands of the Rajbanshis to those of the non-Rajbanshis, in course of time, developed a sense of resentment among the depressed group of Rajbanshi community.

Now let us explain the economic profile of the region under study and thereby the declining economic condition of the Rajbanshis as a whole in the post independence period. But in order to understand the problem the educational aspect of the Rajbanshi community in the colonial period is to be studied first. Because, the declining economic condition of the Rajbanshis as a whole was well related to their educational status or attitude towards modern education.

Educationally, the Rajbanshis were backward in comparison with other lower caste and backward communities of Bengal. There were various reasons for such backwardness in the field of education. It was found that the Rajbanshi in general did not show any interest to have education and as a result of such indifferent attitude of the community toward education, there was a few number of educated Rajbanshi till the first decade of twentieth century.⁵¹ It would be very pertinent to mention here a very popular rhyme prevailed among the Rajbanshis in this connection which goes thus: “*Jata Pada Tata Soda*”- the free translation is that “The more you read, the more you be corrupt.” It also reveals the general attitude of the Rajbanshi community as a whole towards education. This apart, the main source of livelihood of the Rajbanshis in general was the income generated from land which was in abundance and more than the need. For this reason, probably, the community as a

whole believed in the maxim: “*Uttam Krishi Madhyam Ban, Dhik Chakri, Bheg Nidan.*” It means cultivation is the best one, trading comes next, service is hateful, and begging is the last resort.

But another opinion in this context is to be mentioned. To the poor cultivators mostly the *adhiars* of the *jotedars* with huge debts which was to be repaid to their *Giri*, the question of education for their children was irrelevant to them. Contemporary sources reveal that they found that the half-educated or with minimum education, their children could neither work in the fields of cultivation nor could live a respectable life in the learned society. Moreover, the section of the community could not also afford to send their children to schools rather the children had to help their parents in the field of their livelihood.⁵² On the other hand, the *jotedars* who were the pivot of the Rajbanshi society and easily could afford their children to send for education, did not also feel it necessary to provide education to their children. “The *jotedars*..... objected to their children going to school or being taught, even at home, to read and write. They had an idea that children would desert ploughing and agriculture and take to writing petitions or doing *Babugiri* (acting the *Babu*).”⁵³ There was also a general concept among the *jotedars* that a minimum knowledge of keeping accounts for the purpose of maintaining *zamindari* or *jotedari* was sufficient for their sons, and that had been provided by their *sarkar* or accountants of their estates. In addition to that they did not want their sons having services in the govt. offices because they themselves recruited a number of employees in their *zamindari* or *jotedari* areas.⁵⁴ So, the *jotedars* also satisfied with their landed property and as a result, had no interest in govt. services. Apart from this, there were some practical social problems for the Rajbanshi students to take education staying in school boarding houses because of caste hatred existed in those hostels.⁵⁵ For instance, Upendra Nath Barman, one of the leading figures of the *Kshatriya Samiti* referred in his autobiography that he had faced such caste hatred from upper caste Hindus in his student days at Cooch Behar Victoria College hostel during 1916-20.⁵⁶ Such a situation was also a very discouraging for their education.

Another point is also to be mentioned that the *Zamindars* of other parts of Bengal had much contribution for the cause of educational development in their respective areas both in terms of economic and physical enterprises. But in case of North Bengal, the *jotedars* had no

such contribution in developing education in their respective areas.⁵⁷ However, it was considered that such kind of initiatives should be the concern of the govt., on the other hand, the govt. considered that schools should be set up in the urban areas not in the rural one. Therefore, no active measures were taken from any corner for setting up of educational institution to provide education among the Rajbanshis of the regions. It was only after the election of 1937 which was held as per the provision of Local Self Govt. Act of 1935, that the local Rajbanshi jotedars felt the necessity of higher education. And from that time onwards, initiatives were taken to establish M. E. schools in the villages. In Jalpaiguri, M. E. schools were elevated to the level of H. E. Schools not before 1945. Though there has been an all round quantitative development in education since 1947.⁵⁸

In the princely State of Cooch Behar, the picture of education among the Rajbanshis was also not so encouraging. Upendra Nath Barman quoted G.T.B. Dalton, the Deputy Commissioner of Cooch Behar (1882-1883) with regard to the condition of education in the state thus: “When we (the British) took charge of affairs in 1864 there were two schools aided or unaided are returned until 1866-67.” However, it was only during the reign of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur that many primary and secondary schools were set up. A college in the name of Queen Victoria was established by him in 1888. It was the first Degree College of the then North East India.⁵⁹ But the fact is that these opportunities mostly were availed of by the outsiders. The Administrative Report of 1931 reveals that out of forty seven candidates who appeared in the examination, only eleven were Rajbanshi students of Cooch Behar.⁶⁰

The Census Report of 1911 reveals that only 51 out of 1000 Rajbanshis of North Bengal (undivided) were literate, the male-female ratio was even worse.⁶¹ Thus, it is seen that like the people of other castes of Bengal, the Rajbanshis also were indifferent towards women education. Upendra Nath Barman in his autobiography quoting Walter Hamilton, the composer of the East India Gazetteer stated that so far as women education among the Rajbanshis was related “In Rangpur it is considered highly improper to bestow any education on women and no man will marry a girl who is known to be capable of writing” With regard to general education, Barman quoted, “Few indeed were born in this district are qualified even for the occupation of a common clerk or writer.”⁶² It was only in 20s of the

last century that Bimala Roy, daughter of Madhusudhan Roy, a leader of *Kshatriya Samiti* took initiative to run a Girls' school named 'Matrimandir' in Jalpaiguri in 1925.⁶³ Thus, it appears that majority of the Rajbanshi people remained within the fold of illiteracy and it was higher than other low caste communities of contemporary Bengal who were under the same socio-economic condition.

Thus, it is noticeable that the response of the Rajbanshis towards modern education was very poor. But at the same time it should be kept in mind that the centre of modern education almost during the whole colonial period was Calcutta and its surrounding areas. North Bengal on the other hand, being situated far away from Calcutta, the educational activities here in North Bengal did not get much attention. Therefore, the opportunities for education were limited as most of the people of Rajbanshi community lived in villages.⁶⁴

The above mentioned condition in the field of education of the Rajbanshi community during the colonial period had its adverse effect on their economic life which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

It is very relevant to mention that though the land reform policy of the Govt. of West Bengal were welcomed by all the political parties and accrued good results, but in case of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal, those reforms had adverse effects to a large extent, especially on the Rajbanshi *Jotedars* of northern part of North Bengal. It has already been said in the preceding discussion that the Rajbanshis were entirely dependent on land and agriculture for their income and livelihood. The lack of sufficient formal education kept them abstain from other professions like business, govt. service or any kind of entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is noticed that after the introduction of Zamindari Acquisition Act of 1953 and West Bengal Land Reforms Act of 1955 when a large number of *Jotedars* lost their *jotes* in excess to the limit 25 acres, led them to a miserable economic condition. It was a death blow to their basic economic foundation and traditional source of income, to say, the only source of income. Having no knowledge of modern education modern agricultural techniques as well as lack of experience of worldly life and traditional habit of consumption compelled them to live on selling their remaining lands. In maximum cases, the purchasers were the immigrant Bengali cultivators of erstwhile East Pakistan.⁶⁵ However, the *Jotedars* of the region under review

could not reconcile with the Land Acquisition Policy of the United Front Govt. This distinct landed gentry of this part of North Bengal could not bear the brunt of the Act of 1953 and was ruined economically within a decade and a half since 1965 when the land reform programme was implemented by the United Front Govt.⁶⁶

In post independence era, following the partition of 1947, a large number of refugees came from erstwhile East Pakistan in this region especially in its northern part. Like other parts of Bengal, the govt. was busy to give priority to the cause of rehabilitation and problems of the refugees. Therefore, most of the vested lands were distributed to those landless refugees.⁶⁷ It is deserved special mention that at this time the *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti* in its meeting at Checha Khata in Alipurduar sub division of Jalpaiguri in 1955 under the president ship of Upendra Nath Barman mentioned in one of its resolutions that the govt. should give priority at the time of distributing of those vested lands which were acquired after the Act of 1953 to the Rajbanshi landless cultivators as they were the original inhabitants of this region and dependent fully on land. It also recommended for the inclusion of one representative from the Rajbanshi community in the land distribution committee.⁶⁸ So far as the problems of the Rajbanshi *Jotedars* were concerned, their condition was phenomenally deteriorated because unlike the *Zamindars* of Eastern and Central Bengal they completely abstained themselves from other economic enterprises. Their absence in the tea enterprises industry in North Bengal is a peculiar one. They did not show any interest to provide their offspring's education or involved in trade, commerce and industry etc. instead, land was their sole source of livelihood.⁶⁹

However, it has been argued by scholars of this field that land acquisition policy of the United Front Govt. created a fear amongst the *Jotedars* and big land owners of the region because land was not only their source of livelihood but also a symbol of high social status. Another important point is that though a few *jotedars* kept in hidden a few *jotes* (benami lands),⁷⁰ yet in a long run they could not retain such lands and sold them to the migrant refugees for more profit. It was because they could not keep pace with the rapid change that was taking place around them due to their idleness and traditional dependence on fate.⁷¹ It should be mentioned in this connection that according to the social scientists the migrants are always vibrant enterprising.

Another mentionable fact is that it was frequently complained by the Rajbanshi leaders of the region are that most of the leaders of the land grabbing movement were the refugee *bhatias* of erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Consequently, at the time of distributing of the vested lands to the landless cultivators the opportunity of occupying *Khas*(vested) lands was availed of by the ‘outsiders much more than the landless Rajbanshis of the region under study. Therefore, a sense of deprivation among the landless Rajbanshis developed and discontent was started among them.’⁷²

So, it appears from the above discourse of the economic background that the land alienation process which was started from the late nineteenth century and continued during the whole colonial period and it culminated in the post 1953 and 1955 era with the abolition of *Zamindari* and *Jotedari* system. But it is to be mentioned here that though a substantial number of *jotes* was transferred to the non-Rajbanshi people during the colonial period, there was found no reaction on the part of the Rajbanshi people or their pivot, the *Jotedars* against the new immigrant *Jotedars* or colonial govt. The reason might have been the consolation that their lands were not physically transferred from them, only the ownership of *jotes* had been changed and they just became *adhiars* or under-tenant under the new *jotedars*. They, as usual, used to till the land and satisfied getting half-share of the produces. In this respect a Rajbanshi maxim ‘*Paravati Hai, Tao Parahati Na Hai*,’⁷³ worked well in their psyche. Now they became ‘Paravati’(dependent on others for food). But in the post independence period especially in the post 1965 era, the picture was different. This time, it is found, the *Jotedars* were almost alienated from their lands (physical transfer) and the same was transferred to the immigrant people. The latter became their real competitors in every field of worldly life even at the grass root social level, govt. jobs etc., and the failure of the Rajbanshis to compete with them for the reasons explained above, made them frustrated and prepared a ground for forming a political party of their own to address their grievances.

2.3. The political background of the origin of the Uttarkhanda Dal should be understood tracing it back from the changing character of the *Kshatriya Samiti* activities. In chapter 3, it will be seen that the Uttarkhanda Dal was born in the womb of the *Kshatriya Samiti* in the

late 60s of the twentieth century. It has already been noted while discussing the social background of the origin of the Uttarkhanda Dal that the Rajbanshi community was started uniting socially to maintain their ethnic identity from the last decade of the nineteenth century and the process of this social dynamism took a great momentum with the formation of the *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti* on May 1910 in Rangpur. Though it was started as a social organization, but with the passage of time it changed its outlook and decided to involve itself in electoral politics after 1920s onwards. This is evident from the fact that the *Samiti* fielded its candidates in Legislative Council elections between 1920 and 1929 and the Assembly elections of 1937 and 1946.⁷⁴

It is to be mentioned in this context that systematic efforts, initiated by the *Kshatriya Samiti* for all round socio-economic development of the Rajbanshi *Kshatriyas* were described by M.N. Sri Nibas as changing nature of mobility, ‘the actual shift in emphasis being from acquiring the symbols of high status to the real sources of high status i.e. political power, economic power and education.’⁷⁵

It is well known to all of us that by the Montague-Chemsford Reform Act of 1919 the Diarchy was introduced in the province of British India and the size of the Provincial Legislative Assembly was further enlarged. Each Constituency was divided as Muhamadan and non-Muhamadan by this Act. Accordingly, in Rangpur, the non-Muhamadan Constituency was formed of two members and therefore, every voter had the right of two votes. In 1920 Council election, *Kshatriya Samiti* fielded Panchanan Barma as its candidate in the non-Muhamadan Constituency in Rangpur. The other candidates in that constituency were Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Asutosh Lahiri and Jogesh Chandra Sarkar. Sarkar was supported by the *Kshatriya Samiti*. Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma and Jogesh Chandra Sarkar were elected from that constituency.⁷⁶ It should be kept in mind that there was no reservation facility to the Rajbanshis till 1935. In the next Council election, *Kshatriya Samiti* this time fielded Panchanan Barma and Nagendra Narayan Roy as its candidates. The other candidates were Kshetra Nath Singha who was an independent candidate, Jogesh Chandra Sarkar and Bijay Chandra Dasgupta, the candidate of Swarajya Party. It is very interesting to note that though the Swarajya Party had won almost all seats in

Bengal but in Rangpur the two *Kshatriya Samiti* candidates defeated the *Swarajists*.⁷⁷ Thus the election results of two successive Council elections, proved the fact that Rangpur was the stronghold of the *Kshatriya Samiti*.

But in the election of 1926, *Kshatriya Samiti* candidate Panchanan Barma was defeated in East Rangpur Constituency. This time the Rangpur non-Muhamadan Constituency was divided into East and West Rangpur non Muhamadan Constituencies. However, in the West Rangpur Constituency *Kshatriya Samiti* candidate Nagendra Narayan Roy had won the election. In the East Constituency, Congress candidate was elected.⁷⁸ However, in the election of 1929, Panchanan Barma was again fielded as the candidate of *Kshatriya Samiti* and this time in the West Rangpur Constituency. Panchanan Barma defeated his nearest rival of Congress party Dr. Atul Chandra Saha.⁷⁹

It would not be wrong to mention that Rangpur was the ‘capital’ of socio-cultural renaissance of undivided North Bengal in the nineteenth century. It has already been discussed in the foregoing paragraphs that the *Kshatriya Samiti* movement too was flourishing centering round Rangpur from its very inception. In Rangpur there was a good number of Rajbanshi *Zamindars* and *Jotedars* who dominated the whole society. These Rajbanshi *Jotedars* and *Zamindars* like their counter parts of other castes also encouraged the cause of socio-cultural development and the spread of education.⁸⁰ Thus it is proved that Rangpur was the heart of all activities of the *Kshatriya Samiti*.

Meanwhile, there was an important development at all India level when the demand of Depressed Classes was published by “the Minorities Sub-Committee Report” of the First Round Table Conference. It is very significant to note that the *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti* also made an effort to figure the Rajbanshi community in the list of other backward classes and secure reservation. Interestingly, the demand of the Depressed Classes was the separation from the Hindu population and to be treated as a distinct community for electoral purposes which was a complete contrast to the *Kshatriyahood* demand of the Rajbanshi community. However, the matter was referred to the Indian Franchise Committee, headed by Lord Lothian.⁸¹ In the memorandum of 1932, submitted to the Indian Franchise Committee on behalf of the Bangiya Jana Sangh, an organization of the representative of the *Kshatriya*

Samiti and several other backward but 'non-touchable' caste groups formed in 1928, Panchanan Barma stated that 'the Rajbanshis and other backward classes should be represented by reserved seats....through joint Electorate.' Thus, the *Kshatriya Samiti* supported the provisions of the August Declaration of 1932 for reserved seats and separate electorate for the depressed classes and subsequently its modified versions i.e. reserved seats but joint electorate under the Puna Pact of 1932.⁸²

It is to be stated in this connection that the *Kshatriya Samiti* expressed its firm loyalty to the British Govt. very often from 1920 onwards. It is mentioned in the resolution of the seventeenth Annual Conference of the *Samiti*, dated-1333 BS (1926) that "We Kshatriyas were expressing our sincere and firm devotion and loyalty to the (British) Raj." Expressing such loyalty to the British Govt., the *Kshatriya Samiti* took several resolutions demanding their nomination to the District Boards, Union Boards, Municipalities etc.; suitable measures for spreading of education and the increase of job opportunities for the educated Rajbanshi youths as the community was educationally and economically backward. But the demand of the *Kshatriya Samiti* was not entertained by the Franchise Committee, headed by Lothian in 1932. Its demand was rejected on the ground that "it was clearly incompatible with their insisted demand to be recognized as twice born or Kshatriyas." Several other castes like Teli, Mahishya etc. had voluntarily withdrew their names from the list of backward classes.⁸³

However, there was a controversy within the community itself with regard to the question of enlisting the Rajbanshis in the list of scheduled caste. But the same was resolved with the initiative of Panchanan Barma who argued that without protection and reservation in electoral politics, education, service and administration, the community would not be able to augment their social position merely by caste pride. The *Kshatriya Samiti* at last accepted the suggestion of Panchanan Barma and made an appeal to the Reform officer, Govt. of Bengal for enlisting the Rajbanshis as scheduled caste. The *Samiti* pleaded the socio-political backwardness of the community to the Reform officer. In the mean time, the term 'Depressed Classes' was replaced by that of 'Scheduled Castes' by a resolution of the Govt. of India in 1933. Finally, when the list of scheduled castes for Bengal was published, the Rajbanshis were also figured in the list and till today, the community is enjoying the benefit of the system.⁸⁴

Under the Act of 1935, the first general election to the Provincial Legislative Assembly was held in 1937. The *Kshatriya Samiti*, this time also projected its candidates. The candidates were Pushapajit Barma and Kshetra Nath Singh from Rangpur Constituency, Upendra Nath Barman in Jalpaiguri–Siliguri Constituency, Premhari Barman and Shyamaprasad Barma from Dinajpur Constituency. All these candidates of *Kshatriya Samiti* were elected. It was ‘for the first time that such a large number of Rajbanshi leaders could win the election and this was a direct benefit derived from the reservation of seats.’⁸⁵ The Rajbanshi *Kshatriya* leaders associated themselves with both the ‘Jana Sangh’, and the ‘Bengal Depressed Classes’ Association.’⁸⁶ It should be mentioned that the Jana Sangh was formed by the Depressed classes in 1922 and Depressed Classes’ Association was formed in 1926.⁸⁷ After 1937 election, the Krishak Praja party under the leadership of Fazlul Haq formed the Coalition Govt. with Muslim League after being denied by the Congress Party. But within three years the govt. was toppled in 1940. As a result, a new Progressive Coalition Party was formed consisting of Krishak Praja Party, the Nationalist party under the leadership of Shyamaprasad Mukhapadhyay and Independent Scheduled Caste Party under the leadership of Yogendra Nath Mondal. The elected members of the *Kshatriya Samiti* joined with the Independent Scheduled Caste Party.⁸⁸

However, in the post 1937 era, there was a change to a large extent in the political attitude of the leaders of the *Kshatriya Samiti*. The confrontation and contention were started among the leaders of the *Kshatriya Samiti* for getting nomination from the *Samiti* in 1946 election. Consequently, in that Assembly election in Bengal, the Rajbanshi candidates won from Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur but not as candidates of the *Kshatriya Samiti*. It is found that Mohini Mohan Barman, a Rajbanshi leader won from Jalpaiguri-Siliguri Constituency with the support of the Congress, but Upendra Nath Barman in the same constituency was defeated though he was backed by the *Kshatriya Samiti*. Only one *Kshatriya Samiti* candidate from Rangpur, Nagendra Narayan Roy was elected in 1946. Thus, the *Kshatriya Samiti*, once a strong and powerful organization of the Rajbanshis in undivided North Bengal which contested and won over elections against the nationalist political parties like Indian National Congress, Swarajya Party, Communist Party of India etc. started disintegrating in post 1937 era.⁸⁹ It is argued by the scholars that the death of veteran leader

Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma must have an impact on the disintegration of the *Kshatriya Samiti*. Upendra Nath Barman also became a member of the Constituent Assembly of India with the support of the Congress Party.⁹⁰

In post independence India, the *Kshatriya Samiti* lost its earlier vigour and spirit due to the partition in 1947 both in respect of social and political activities. Again the main centre of *Kshatriya Samiti*, Rangpur went to the erstwhile East Pakistan which was a severe blow to the *Kshatriya Samiti* and its socio- political activities. It was, of course, Jalpaiguri next to Rangpur was another important centre of the *Kshatriya Samiti* movement in the pre and post Independence era.⁹¹ It was Upendra Nath Barman who was entrusted the responsibility by Panchanan Barma to expand the activities of the *Kshatriya Samiti* in and around of Jalpaiguri in 1925. Since then he toiled hard to spread the movement till 1946. It is very interesting to note that after his defeat in the election of 1946, Upendra Nath Barman joined the Indian National Congress and became member of the Constituent Assembly. With this, it would not be wrong to say, the *Kshatriya Samiti* lost its political dimension in post Independence era. Thus, it reveals from the above discussion that the *Kshatriya Samiti* not only maintained their separate social identity but at the same time a kind of feeling of separate political identity in Assembly joining in Independent Scheduled Caste Party in 1940. It can be noted therefore, that in the pre Independence era, both the social and political separation were completed both from theoretical and practical points of view.⁹²

In post independence era, because of the partition, the Headquarters of the *Kshatriya Samiti* in divided North Bengal was shifted to Dinhatra first in 1954 and then to Jalpaiguri in 1957. Thus, initiative was taken to reorganize the *Kshatriya Samiti* in divided North Bengal. A very important part was played by Upendra Nath Barman in this respect. But it should be remembered that by this time, the *Kshatriya Samiti* was turned into merely a social organization because almost all its important leaders had joined the national parties in post Independence period. Besides, the Rajbanshi community was deprived of its geographical conglomeration because of the partition of 1947. It made a considerable amount of demographic dislocation which perhaps was a final blow to the socio-political movement of the *Kshatriya Samiti*. Although, the *Kshatriya Samiti* in divided North Bengal initially started its activities with full vigor and enthusiasm but it began to lose its spirit gradually. The

scholars are of the opinion that the socio-political programmes, taken by the *Samiti* in the pre independence period had lost its dynamism during the post independence period. Not only that, leaving aside the political issue it again transformed into a social organization. The resolution of the subsequent conferences proved that fact.⁹³ Thus the *Samiti* confined itself to the social reform programmes only and that also with limited ways. In the 1960s, it is found that, some of the members of the *Kshatriya Samiti* were not satisfied only with its social activities and clamoured for the revival of the political activities of the *Kshatriya Samiti* which will be discussed elaborately in the third chapter.

During the closing years of the colonial rule in India, an interesting political development took place in the princely State of Cooch Behar with the establishment of the *Hitasadhani Sobha* in 1946, the first political party which was recognized by the State. This political development in the princely State of Cooch Behar is needed to be discussed because, though the *Hitasadhani Sobha* did not make any direct influence on the formation of the Uttarkhanda Dal, but it had indirect impact on crystallizing the ethnic feeling of the Rajbanshi people of North Bengal in the post Independence period.

It has already been mentioned in chapter-1 that Cooch Behar was a princely State and became a district of West Bengal after Independence on 1st January, 1950. In this princely State also the majority of the population belonged to the Rajbanshi community. Apart from this, the Khens, Brahmins, mostly Kamrupi, the *Nashya-Sheikh* Muslims also made a part of the population. But the people who were in the State were broadly divided into two categories i.e. Cooch Beharis and non-Cooch Beharis. Cooch Beharis meant the local Rajbanshi Hindus and Muslims (*Naishya-Sheikh*), the Kamrupi and Maithali Brahmins (who settled there since the time of the beginning of the Hinduization) and some other low caste Hindus such as Sahas, Jogis and some local tribes.⁹⁴ The non-Cooch Beharis were constituted mostly by the outsiders who came into the State for the purpose of the state service and held different important and higher administrative posts. They mostly belonged to higher caste Hindus of eastern and central Bengal. A good number of outsiders also owned lands and became *Jotedars*. Besides, the higher caste Bengalees, the Marwaris, Beharis etc. were also there. However, the Bengali outsiders were termed by the local Rajbanshis as *bhatias* (the meaning has already been explained in foregoing discussion). The outsiders, on the other

hand, called the local people as *deshi* and in some cases *bahe* (this dichotomy also prevailed in other districts of undivided North Bengal which had already been mentioned). Thus “a good ground was already prepared for social and political conflagration in the princely State of Cooch Behar’.⁹⁵

However, in order to understand the birth of the *Hitasadhani Sabha*, the political situation in the Cooch Behar State is to be discussed in brief. The system of Govt. and administrative structure of the State was completely different from the British Indian territories because it was a princely State. In the state, the king (Maharaja) was the fountain head of all authority and power. After 1942 election, an Executive Council was formed with His Highness, the Maharaja as its president. Besides, the Chief Minister of the State was its vice president and also other three ministers were its members. All ministers were accountable to His Highness, the President.⁹⁶ However, it should be mentioned that a Legislative Council was there in the State since 1909 at the time of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur. But its members were either official or nominated. The election system in the said Council was introduced in 1941 by the State Legislative Council Act (No-3) at the time of Maharaja Jagadipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur and provision was made there for a direct election of eight members. Out of these two members (one Hindu and one Muhamadan) would be elected by the *jotedars* of the State, one by the members of the legal professionals of the State, and five by the members would be elected from each of the five sub-divisions of the State.⁹⁷ It was against this background that the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was formed on 19 May, 1946. It has already been stated that it was the first political organization, recognized by the State. The interesting feature of this new political organization was that the leaders belonged to a particular ethnic group of people. The president of the *Sobha* was Khan Chaudhury Amanatullah Ahmed, the vice president was Dharani Shankar Bhattacharya and Satish Chandra Singha Sarkar, the secretary was Jaladhar Saha and assistant secretaries were Majiruddin Ahmed, Kumar Purnendu Narayan and Satish Chandra Roy.⁹⁸ But it is to be remembered that the *Hitasadhani Sabha* was established with the blessing of the Maharaja Jagadipendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur. Thus, with the support of the Royal authority the ‘Sabha’ spread its wings at the grass root level within a short time i.e. from 1946 to 1949.⁹⁹

The *Hitasadhani Sabha* immediately earned mass popularity and support which

moved the long drawn background of the aspiration of the Cooch Behari people. The objectives of the party clearly proved the undercurrent aspirations of the local people of Cooch Behar. However, in its programmes the leaders of the Sobha had identified the root cause of their problems to the deprivation of the indigenous people (Cooch Beharis) in all spheres of life and for this, they blamed the outsiders particularly the higher caste Hindus of central and eastern Bengal. According to the *Hitasadhani* leaders, these outsiders had encroached on their area of opportunities.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, they aimed at acquiring political power through which they could restore their privileges and established their hegemony over the State. So, it can be said that sharing of political power was given priority from the very beginning of the foundation of the *Hitasadhani Sobha* by its leaders. For this reason, they launched a tremendous movement against the caste Hindus and raised slogan 'Bhatia Hatao' (move out the *bhatias*). Abbasuddin Ahmed, a renowned '*Bhaoiya*' singer stated that the predominance of the outsiders was the main reason behind the '*Bhatia Hatao*' slogan.¹⁰¹ It is very interesting to note here that the meetings of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* used to be started with an inaugural song, composed by Anwaruddin, the younger brother of Abbasuddin Ahmed. The content of the song was fully anti outsiders or anti-*bhatia* in spirit. Few lines of the song will clear the statement which is as follows.

'O Mor Cooch Behari Bhai Re,

Sabar Ghare Jale Suraj Bati,

Tomar Ghare Kane Andhar Rati?'¹⁰²

(The free translation is, Oh my brother of Cooch Behar, the house of everybody is full of sunlight but why is your house full of darkness?).

So, an ethnic and caste based division took place in the state. Scholars of this area have argued that a kind of ethnic consciousness developed in this princely State which was reflected in the election of 1946 when *Hitasadhani Sobha* gained noticeable majority. Khan Chaudhury Amanadullah Khan Ahmed and Satish Chandra Singha Sarkar of the '*Sobha*' were elected and were appointed as the Revenue and Education Ministers respectively.¹⁰³

Thus, the Cooch Behari identity question of the *Hitasadhani Sobha* had encompassed

all the Rajbanshis in one point. Though it was not the objective of the *Sobha* it was actually, a byproduct of the *Hitasadhani Sobha's* movement. However, the Hitasadhani-Cooch Behari identity as well as power politics was ended but with the remnants of the *Hitasadhani Sobha*, a new kind of politics was started, though in different ways. The basic issue was revised and enlarged from Cooch Behari identity to the Rajbanshi identity. It was not a prototype of the *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti* movement, though in many respects its objectives were identical.¹⁰⁴ It should also be noted that though the *Hitasadhani* movement had no any direct impact on the formation of the Uttarkhanda Dal, but the conception of *deshi* or indigenous people, coined by the leaders of the *Hitasadhani* movement had an indirect influence on the leaders of the Uttarkhanda Dal when it was found that the latter was clamouring for the development of the local people (*deshi*) of North Bengal and expressed their grievances against Calcutta centric rule or the rule of the South Bengal political leaders especially of Calcutta. However, all these will be discussed in detail in the following chapters of our dissertation paper.

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