

Abstract

The study of 'Demography' is a multi-faceted as well as multi-disciplinary phenomenon being the most important and core or central aspect of empirical social science. Different parameters such as Geography, Politics, Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, Linguistics and above all history are applied in scrutinisation of multi-lateral aspects of the phenomenon. So the scholars from above said disciplines have flocked into this empiric population study breeding number of taxonomic label over the issue such as Geographical demography, economic-demography, Political-demography, Sociological-demography, anthropological-demography, cultural-demography etc. in the modern historical research enterprise. In this respect the vivisection of the phenomenon from historical point of view is not so much traditional and practiced one. But if we make an in-depth scrutiny of recent politico-cultural-economic problems in association of 'identity question' and 'regionalism' it will be apparently found that the problem is deeply rooted in the changing profile of demography of the concerned area. On this ground following the modern research cal trend of regionalism I have chosen our present day North Bengal for an exposure of its changing demographic profile during colonial and post-colonial period (1871-1991) from historical perspective to establish the historicity of economic, cultural and political changes highlighting some problematic questions which are being faced by North Bengal, the bottle-neck region of India.

In fact geo-politically North Bengal occupied an advantageous position as a migrant-prone zone. Till 1576 North Bengal was politically heartland of Bengal. Though politically its importance declined after Mughal Emperor Akbar's victory of Bengal and transfer of the capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka, there emerged a new sun in Cooch Behar-Jalpaiguri-Goalpara in Northern part of North Bengal. Under the British rule the region emerged as new developing area. After the second Anglo-Bhutanese war in 1864-65 it became strategically much important to the Government. Under the colonial rule the economic development, communicational development led to the pulling of different group of people from different part of Bengal and other provinces of India into North Bengal. The storm of Partition in 1947 had a great effect in changing demography by forcing the East Pakistani Bengalis into our discursive area of North Bengal. Later on the post-partition boundary organization and reorganization like Bengal-Bihar Boundary Act, 1956, anti-Bengali movement in Assam and Burma, Chinese occupation of Tibet, Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950(the upheavals in North-East India), Indo-Chinese war of 1962 Indo-Pak war of 1965 and liberation movement of East Bengal and liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 brought North-Bengal in all Indian limelight militarily, strategically and economically from one

point of view and directly or indirectly effecting the demographic structure of the region from another. Thus within 1991 the demography of North Bengal is being changed and bringing change itself affecting the economy, culture and politics of North Bengal.

An important aspect of the cultural development with demographic change was the assimilation of the some of the castes with others for due to close contact with each other and for other reasons. In this context the assimilative transformation of the Bhumijas may be exemplified. In 1891 Risley told that the Bhumiaj, a tribe not only lost their original language but also spoke only in Bengali and worshipped the Hindu deities. They even adopted the Brahmanical gotra. Even a large section of the Bhumijas was enrolled in the rank of Hinduism. In writing 'The People and Culture of Bengal' in the fourth chapter of 'The Aborigines in Bengal' it has been written in 2002 that 'It would appear that they have been fully assimilated within the Hindu fold in such a way that they have now been transformed into a Hindu caste with its tribal name.' Dr. Nirmal Das wrote that in North Bengal there are number of bilingual tribes who speak Bhot-Chinese language at home but used Rajbansi in public. However, the assimilation has been depending on the numerical strength of the communities in existence. Being surrounded by the numerically vast dominated counterparts the minors became forced to accept the cultural trends of the major communities. In cases of too small number of people the communities with absorption of the hegemonic culture turned themselves assimilated. This happened both in cases of hill, plains, terai and duars regions of North Bengal. Besides, trend of assimilation alienation also emerged in cases of relatively numerically strong communities. In that context with embracing the cultural trends and social habits of the superior section they also continued practicing their own. Thus a cultural continuity and change continued to be happened in course of formation and re-formation of demographic profile of North Bengal. with this the economic transformation of the region leading to the socio-economic transformation in core-peripheral and polarity de-polarity of the demography led changes in inter-community and intra-community behavior in the demographic arena of North Bengal. Thus the epithet of the dependency to disillusionment got proliferation in long run. All these had been and have been stimulating the political mobilization of the demography.

Thus a great and sizable transition may be observed in the investigation of demographic profile of North Bengal through the centuries. In this context the period of hundred twenty years between 1871 and 1991, a long linear period of demographic formulation, de-formulation and re-formulation of North Bengal, the area under investigation, is of a great significance both historically and demographically. For within this course of history the colonial, post-colonial and post-Bangladesh liberation war periodic geo-political relations of South Asia based on

demographic distribution had greater impact over the demography of the region and North Bengal in Indian part of Bengal remained an exploring area of investigation taking its

demography under serious consideration. But in spite of a good number of scholastic studies of this region there is no comprehensive understanding of the demography of this area which is being tried to depict in this study. The study with this object followed a voluminous statistical

analysis of the demographic data to explore the reality of the demographic profile in relation to inter-ethno-cultural equation and relation based on socio-economic and politico-cultural changes in this and of this region from historical perspective.