

Preface:

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.

It is undeniable that the vast demographic changes have occurred in the Eastern and North-eastern parts of India. In this regard North-Bengal is demographically changing-prone zone. There is ample scope for an analysis of facts, factors behind such demographic changes. More importantly the nature, pattern, the motives and specially the multi-dimensional impacts upon the region itself are to be brought in the limelight, if one is to understand the historicity of phenomenal demographic changes in North Bengal region. Since time immemorial the region is inhabited by different group of people. It is evident that North Bengal is the meeting place of different group of peoples with different cultural identities. The Aryans, the non-Aryans, Dravidians, the proto-Austroloid and the Mongoloid all have settled here. In the ethnological framework of North Bengal we see that the Koches, the Bodo-Kacharis, the Meches, the Garos, the Totos the Limbus, the Kiranties, the Lepchas are of Mongoloid origin and the early settlers of North Bengal. The Rajbanshis were the dominant among the early settlers of North Bengal.

But the colonial periodic and post-colonial periodic politico-socio-economic developments transformed the region greatly bringing a large-scale transformation in demography of the region. The continuous process of in-migration (immigration) in compare to the negligible out-migration (emigration) in the form of or invited migration in colonial period, forced and

refugee migration in post-partition period and infiltration in post-Bangladesh liberation period and return-migration or the evacuee in post-independent period structurally and compositionally changed the demography. Thus North Bengal became diversified with number of pockets of demographic geography such as Nepali dominated hill regions, tribal dominated Terai and Duars region, Muslim dominated southern-North Bengal and border North Bengal and Rajbanshis dominated rural areas of plain-North Bengal and East-Bengali migrant (Bhatias) dominated urban-plain regions of North Bengal. This obviously and naturally affected the economic-cultural and political scenario of North Bengal.

For an objective clarification of demographic change in North Bengal, its geo-historical development or evaluation should be examined from historical perspective. The geographical expression of North Bengal is meant by the six districts of Northern part of West Bengal. The colonial periodic North Bengal was largely different from the present form. Then North Bengal geographically extended from the Northern part of the Ganges to the Western bank of Brahmaputra. The territory comprised by Dinajpur, Bogura, Pabna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, maldaha, Darjeeling, princely State Cooch Behar, part of Purnea, part of undivided Nadia, part of Goalpara and Kamrup of Assam. Though geo-politico and administrative organization and re-organization under colonial rule North Bengal achieved a greater geo-political significance, which in association of post-independent Indian reorganization the region got the present geographic boundary. I have taken this geographical area to investigate the changing pattern of demography through the colonial and post-colonial period (1871-1991).