

Bengal-Bihar Merger Movement of 1956 : A Glance of West Dinajpur, A District of West Bengal

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Abstract

The proposed study is on Bengal-Bihar merger movement of 1956, and the district of West Dinajpur of West Bengal. In the eve of independence of India and partition of Bengal in 1947, the northern part of West Bengal or North Bengal was separated from the rest of West Bengal. Along with this, there was demand of incorporation of Bengali speaking area of Bihar with West Bengal. In 1953, the States Reorganisation Commission was formed to examine this issue on linguistic line. After forming that Commission, West Bengal put forwarded memorandum, claiming partition of land of Bihar. But there was protest in Bihar against that. Then the Chief Minister of West Bengal and Bihar decided to merge Bengal and Bihar. But movement started against this merger proposal. Then they withdraw the merger proposal and a portion of land of Bihar added within West Bengal by the recommendation of States Reorganisation Commission, which effects on demography, economy, culture of that area of West Dinajpur district of West Bengal and which evoked separatist trend in form of political movements.

Keywords: *Reorganisation, Merger, Language, Culture, Demography.*

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Introduction:

The state of India, earned its independence on 15th August, 1947. During the time of independence and birth of two new countries of India and Pakistan, there was a necessity to partition the Bengal province. Because of partition and demarcation of boundaries between the newly formed East Bengal (East Pakistan) and West Bengal, Boundary Commission was formed under the Chairmanship of Sir Cyril Radcliffe. After the award of that Commission, there was a noticeable problem that took place. The northern part of West Bengal was separated from the rest of West Bengal, which was covered by the land of the state of Bihar. Along with this, after independence of India, there were several demands of formation of linguistic states. During this situation, Government of India appointed States Reorganisation Commission in 1953. After forming of that Commission the state of West Bengal and Bihar submitted several memorandums to that Commission. West Bengal demanded a few portions of land, which were part of Bengal geographically and historically, and for the regular connection West Bengal and its northern part or North Bengal. During this time, several debates had come between West Bengal and Bihar. After that, Bidhan Chandra Roy, Chief Minister of West Bengal and Sri Krishna Singh, Chief Minister of Bihar decided to merge these two states. With the decision, there were several movements, which took place against the Bengal and Bihar merger proposal in West Bengal and Bihar. In front of that huge movement, the merger proposal had to be withdrawn by both the Chief Ministers. After that the Commission recommended to incorporate a few portions of land of Bihar with West Bengal. In this political background of Bengal, the paper attempts to analyse the origin, character and result of the movement against the Bengal-Bihar merger proposal. It highlights the anti-

merger movement in West Dinajpur district of West Bengal, and its effect on that region.

Formation of States Reorganisation Commission

The language and culture of an area had an undoubted importance as they represent a pattern of living, which was common in that area. In considering a reorganisation of States, however, there were other important factors which have also been borne in mind. The first essential consideration was the preservation and strengthening of the unity and security of India. Financial, economic and administrative considerations were almost equally important, not only from the point of view of each state, but for the whole nation. The Government of India had come to the conclusion that the whole question of the reorganisation of the States of the Indian Union should be carefully examined objectively and dispassionately, so that the welfare of the people of each constituent unit, as well as of the nation as a whole, was promoted. The Government had accordingly decided to appoint a Commission to conduct such an examination.¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India was appointed in August 1953 the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) to examine objectively and dispassionately the entire question of the reorganization of the states of the Union.²

The States Reorganisation Commission, which was formed in 1953, consisted of Saiyid Fazl Ali, former Governor of Orissa, Shri Hriday Nath Kunzru, former member of the Council of States and Shri Kavalam Madhava Panikkar, former Ambassador of India in Egypt, of whom Saiyid Fazl Ali was the Chairman of the Commission.³ The Commission investigated the conditions of the problem, the historical background, the existing situation and the bearing of all important and

relevant factors thereon. The Government expected that the Commission would be in the first instance, not go into the details, but make recommendations in regard to the broad principles which should govern the solution of this problem and if they so choose, the broad lines on which particular states should be reorganised and submit interim reports for the consideration of Government. The Commission had liberty to devise their own procedure for their work for collecting information and for ascertaining public opinion. It had ordinarily held their sittings in private. The Commission had a Secretary and such staff and advisers as may be considered necessary.⁴ The Commission invited members of the public as well as public associations interested in the problems of the reorganisation of states to put their views and suggestions before the Commission by submitting written memorandum.⁵

The Memorandum, submitted by the Government of West Bengal to States Reorganisation Commission

According to memorandum, submitted by the Government of West Bengal that the areas which were proposed for inclusion in West Bengal had always formed parts of Bengal geographically and historically; and their affinities to Bengal on linguistic, cultural and ethnic considerations had always been pronounced. It was therefore suggested that the following areas and populations of Bihar named below be rejoined to West Bengal State of India: the whole of Kishanganj sub-division and four revenue *thanas* of the *Sadar* sub-division, namely- (i) Gopalpur, (ii) Kadwa, (iii) Amur and (iv) Katihar of Purnia district of Bihar, total area of 2,537 square miles and total population of 12,73,588.⁶

Report of the States Reorganisation Commission

The States Reorganisation Commission first examined the claims made on the Purnea district. The data of the census returned for this district regarding the language spoken, had been challenged by West Bengal. The main controversy in this district, however, related to the classification of the dialect or dialects spoken to the east of the river Mahananda. Grierson and following him O' Malley classified them as North Bengali, but the Bihar Government relying among other evidence on the views of Gait, the Census Superintendent in 1901, had challenged that classification. The affinities between *Kishanganjia* or *Sirpuria* as spoken in the extreme east of Purnea district, on the one hand, and Bengali on the other, seemed to be close. But that dialect was written in the *Kaithi* script, which was allied to Hindi and as one precedes west-wards its affinities with Maithili and Hindi became more marked. Arguments based on linguistic affiliations, whether advanced by Bihar or by Bengal were thus far from being conclusive.⁷

The members of the States Reorganisation Commission thought, that was a matter which should be examined on its merits rather than on the basis of complaints or counter-complaints against one state or the other. Commission attached great importance to the geographical compactness of administrative units was vital to their real political and administrative integration. Apart from the inconvenience in administering geographically detached areas Commission must take a note of the fact that the continued isolation of the northern districts from the rest of West Bengal would tend to foster and accentuate separatist trends in that districts. West Bengal therefore had a good case for a geographical integration of the northern areas. Besides that, even the Bihar Government would extend full co-operation in facilitating traffic between the north and the south of West Bengal, certain

difficulties were inherent in the existing arrangements. These difficulties would be eliminated if portions of the Kishanganj sub-division and the Gopalpur revenue *thana* were transferred to West Bengal. That would enable West Bengal to construct feeder roads connecting the national highway to its other territories and to control road traffic with Darjeeling and other places in the north by eliminating avoidable delays and cumbersome and inconvenient administrative arrangements. West Bengal would also acquire control of the Indo-Pakistan border in this region along its entire length. From an administrative point of view that would both convenient and desirable.⁸

Commission had carefully examined the suggestion that the entire area to the east of the river Mahananda in the Purnea district should be transferred from Bihar to West Bengal in order to provide geographical contiguity between the two disconnected parts of West Bengal. Commission did not consider that necessary, however, to recommend the transfer of any area which might not be absolutely essential in order to achieve the object in view. Taking all the relevant factors into consideration Commission proposed that,

- (i) the portion of the Kishanganj sub-division which was to the east of the river Mahananda; and
- (ii) a portion of the Gopalpur revenue *thana* contiguous to the territory mentioned in (i) and extending down to national highway in that *thana*,

should be transferred to West Bengal. The actual delimitation of the new boundary would have to be settled after a detailed survey. The details of this transfer would have to be left, therefore to the Government of India, acting in consultation with the State Governments concerned. But it should be ensured that control of the national

highway in the Gopalpur revenue *thana* was vested in the Government of West Bengal.⁹

During the time of making the recommendation, Commission had to take note of the fact that the eastern portion of the Kishanganj sub-division was predominantly inhabited by Muslims who would view with concern the transfer of this area to West Bengal on the ground that their linguistic and cultural rights might suffer and that the possible resettlement of displaced persons from East Bengal might dislocate their life. These fears were not without justification. It would, therefore, be necessary for the west Bengal Government to take effective steps such as the recognition of the special position of Urdu in this area for educational and official purposes. The density of population in that area was such that there was little scope for any resettlement of displaced persons. The West Bengal Government would, therefore, did well to make a clear announcement to the effect that no such resettlement would be undertaken. This would go a long way in their opinion in dispelling doubts and fears.¹⁰

The demand of West Bengal for the portion of land of Bihar

Bengal and Bihar was incorporated in same province, i.e., Bengal Province till 1912. In 1912 Bihar had been separated from West Bengal as a separate state. From 1912 to 1956 Bengal and Bihar was two separated state. After separating from Bengal, the Bengalis of Bihar demanded to incorporated Bengali inhabited and Bengali speaking areas of Bihar with West Bengal. The intellectuals and politicians of West Bengal supported this demand and they also demanded to incorporate these areas with West Bengal. West Bengal took a major role in National Movement.

Because of this reason British Government separated Bengal in three times- in 1905, in 1911-12 and in 1947 to diminish active role. No other state of India faced this type of misfortunes.¹¹ In every separation Bengal lost its size, Bengal became a state of 1,00,000 square miles area to a state of 30,000 square miles area.¹² Along with this, with the partition of 1947, West Bengal became a separated state. Because the northern districts of West Bengal were separated from the rest of part; and the gap were covered by the land of State of Bihar. That's why West Bengal claims a portion of land of Kishanganj of Bihar, to connect with the rest of part, and for regular boundary. Along with this, Bihar had become a separate state, isolating from Bengal, the Bengali speaking areas which was incorporated in Bihar, these areas were inseparable parts of Bengal, historically, linguistically, culturally and geographically.¹³ After the independence, the size of West Bengal became one-third so West Bengal demanded to incorporate the Bengali speaking areas of Bihar with Bengal, to increase the size of Bengal.

With Indian independence, West Bengal got a lot of miseries after the independence. The 2/3 areas of Bengal was incorporated with East Pakistan, which became the main reason to distort co-existence of agriculture and industry. This problem became more dangerous when *lakhs* of refugees came to West Bengal from East Pakistan. According to the Census of 1951, the total number of refugees was 20.99 *lakhs*, who came from East Pakistan to West Bengal.¹⁴ In this situation, there was a demand of Bengali speaking areas of Bihar with West Bengal to demolish the refugee problems and reorganization of economic structure of West Bengal.¹⁵ But in this time the Central Government of India rejected this demand. On 7th August 1952, Legislative Assembly of West Bengal accepted this demand, made by Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, a renowned politician of West Bengal.¹⁶ The basis of this demand was,

Bengali literature and culture was demolishing in Bihar because of Hindi dominance. So, to protect Bengali literature and culture from the Hindi literature, the Bengali speaking areas should incorporate with West Bengal.

Protest in Bihar against the decision of transfer of portion of Bihar to West Bengal

To prove the irrationality of West Bengals demand upon the areas of Bihar, Bihar Government also demanded upon those areas. They demanded that from very past, these areas was inseparable part of Bihar from the historical, geographical, cultural and social aspects.¹⁷ From the socio-economic and cultural context of West Bengal, these areas were totally different and co-related with the future of Bihar. So from every side Bihar Government denied this demand of West Bengal. The members of States Reorganisation Commission, H. N. Kunzru and K. M. Panikkar had come in Darjeeling in the 2nd week of May of 1955. During this time, a counter demand, against the demand of West Bengal was raised by the state of Bihar that, they wanted to form a state with three northern district of West Bengal, namely, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Bihar, which would be called as Uttarakhand. They also wanted the Maldah district of West Bengal also because, there was not any communication by land routes in between these districts and the state of West Bengal. The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy met with Commission in Darjeeling and claimed that majority of the people of these districts were from Bengali speaking community.¹⁸

‘Bihari Association’ demanded that the areas demanded by West Bengal from Bihar were irrational and full of false-hood.¹⁹ The areas demanded as Bengali speaking area, actually most the people of these areas could not speak in Bengali and

their mother tongue was North Bengali too. A large part of population speaks in *Khotta, Kurmali, Santali, Radhi-Bali* and other languages which was different from Bengali language.²⁰ 'Bihari Association' and people Bihar realized that as an issue of protection of Bengali language and literature and solving refugee problems, West Bengal Government wanted to acquire the areas of Bihar.²¹ In 1955, the members of States Reorganisation Commission were visited in Purnia, when they entered in Purnia, a massive mass movement was started against the decision of the transfer of land from Bihar to West Bengal. Mainly the businessmen of Kishanganj led the movement. The business of sub-divisional Head-quarter Kishanganj was depended upon Islampur. Even Kishanganj was not agreed to losing four tea gardens including Debijhora. In another side, Islampur was a Muslim majority sub-division. Because of this, many cases of Islampur were filed, regarding the ancestral land; and all the cases were solved in Kishanganj court. For these, the lawers of Kishanganj were against the transfer of Islampur to West Bengal; and the then dwellers of Islampur were not agreed to lose the facilities of education and treatment (medical). Because, in that time there were no educational and medical facilities in Islampur. Along with this, it can be mentioned that the pre-eminent people of Islampur were also against the decision of incorporation of Islampur with West Bengal. It may be assumed that, the reason behind it was, they could not be afforded with the middle class Bengali community of Bengal.²²

Proposal of States Reorganisation Commission, 1955:

The States Reorganisation Commission formed in 23rd December 1953, published their report on 10th October 1955 and suggested to incorporate 800 miles area, situated in Kishanganj, eastern side of Mahananda river of Purnea district from

Bihar to West Bengal.²³ But this proposal did not make the people of West Bengal and Bihar happy.

In 1955, for linguistic, administrative and geographical interests, Chief Minister of West Bengal, Bidhan Chandra Roy demanded to incorporate Purnea of Bihar with West Bengal.²⁴ States Reorganisation Commission placed their report on 30th September 1955, in this report some part of the district of Purnea was suggested to add with West Bengal.²⁵ In this decision the people of Bengal were depressed because the demands of West Bengal were fully avoided. In the news paper of 14th January 1956, it was published that the volume of area which was recommended to given by the States Reorganisation Commission from Bihar to West Bengal had denied by the Government of India and the amount became half.²⁶ In this disappointing news, Bidhan Chandra Roy went to Delhi along with Sri Atulya Ghosh, Chief of Pradesh Congress, in 15th January, where the Chief Minister of Bihar Sri Krishna Singh was also present.²⁷

Proposal of Bengal-Bihar merger, 1956:

On 16th January the decision of the Government of India was declared about the report of States Reorganisation Commission. In this time one more important incident was happened, on 15th January 1956 both the Chief Minister of Bihar and West Bengal were discussing about the recommendation of States Reorganisation Commission. Exactly then Sri Krishna Singh proposed for reunification of Bengal and Bihar and Bidhan Chandra Roy confessed it.²⁸ On 23rd January 1956, Bidhan Chandra Roy and Sri Krishna Singh signed in a historical agreement to solve these problems, which was the unification of Bengal and Bihar; that means, unifying Bengal and Bihar, like the previous of 1912.²⁹ Both the Chief Minister thought that

this unification was only way to solve this problem. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru welcomed this proposal of unification and told that the peoples of these two states should accept the initiatives of these two leaders and the peoples of other places in India should wake up and solve their problems in this way. Congress Working Committee also welcomes this unification proposal and the President of this Committee, U. N. Dhebor told that, the unification was an important step.³⁰

The features of united Bengal and Bihar State:

- i) The name of the unified Bengal and Bihar state would be West Bengal and Bihar United Province, as it was in the case of Kochi and Travancore.
- ii) There will be two Government languages in this unified state- a) Bengali and b) Hindi. Bengali and Hindi language and cultural unity and selfness should be maintained.
- iii) There will be a Governor, a Cabinet Assembly, a Legislative Assembly (*Bidhan Sabha*), a Public Service Commission, two High Courts. Both the two High courts would work equally. There would be two zonal Council, to supervise the activity of Five Years Plan.
- iv) The first capital of this unified province will be Calcutta and the second one will be Patna. In this unified state the law and administration will be same.³¹

The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Bidhan Chandra Roy was confirmed that, it was necessary to merge West Bengal and Bihar for the prosperity of whole the country, and he gave hints that he might resign if the unification proposal should not be accepted. He believed that only the reunification can develop industries and

which can employ almost 15 *laks* unemployed. There was no hope for West Bengal to survive except unification.³² The fact was that, the two-third area of Bengal was incorporated within East Pakistan. The refugee problem was responsible for miseries of West Bengal. So Bidhan Chandra Roy might have thought that Bihar was a vast state and had resources like minerals. So that Bengal would be benefitted from merger with Bihar. But the question raises that why Sri Krishna Singh agreed the unification proposal? It can be presumed that he had thought that Bengal was divided and a small state also. So if the unification happens they would be able to govern Bengal-Bihar. The All India Congress Committee had also agreed to the merger which gave a strong effect to his demand. Both the Chief Ministers stated that if two states would be unified, then that would be the largest state in India and there will be more development in this unified state.

Support for Bengal-Bihar merger proposal:

The West Bengal Pradesh Congress President Atulya Ghosh supported the unification of West Bengal and Bihar province and told that it was a right step in right time. He also commented that, when there were debates about the reorganization of boundaries and Bengali speaking areas, this proposal of unification brought positive aspects.³³ The General Secretary of West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee, Bijay Kumar Nihar supported this unification and commented that Bengal should lead the country again.³⁴

The people of Bihar supported the proposal for unification of Bengal and Bihar with a very encourage. The Finance Minister of Bihar, Anurag Narayan Singh said that this unification should solve all these debates and West Bengal and Bihar should proceed for development.³⁵ R. L. Chandrapury, leader of All India Backward

Classes Federation appealed to the peoples of Bengal and Bihar to support this unification for a bright future, introduction of new age, message of new positive relation and a better lifestyle.³⁶ Supporting Bengal-Bihar merger, R. R. Divakar, Governor of Bihar, commented that it was a idea of reunion.³⁷

In spite of few protests, 157 members in Bihar Assembly voted for this proposal and 25 members voted against that. But all the 13 members of Jharkhand Party were forbearing from voting.³⁸ When Bengal-Bihar unification proposal got the majority in the Legislative Assembly of Bihar, in the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal the members opposed against this proposal.³⁹ The Muslim community of West Bengal had separate concept upon the unification of Bengal and Bihar. Regarding the unification proposal 19 Muslim leaders of West Bengal supported and welcomed it as a proper step. They also commented that the peoples who had affection for the country would not oppose the unification proposal because it was a right step in right time. The minorities hoped for the strong country so that they were criticizing against the opposition of this proposal.⁴⁰

Opposition to the Bengal-Bihar merger proposal:

Most of people of Bihar supported the unification of West Bengal and Bihar, but the Bengalis of West Bengal protested against it. On 24th February, the Chief Minister of Bihar, Sri Krishna Singh proposed for unification of Bengal and Bihar in Patna Legislative Assembly. On 25th February 1956 this proposal was accepted in 157-25 votes.⁴¹ Though in West Bengal Legislative Assembly, the majority of the ruling party voted for merger, but most of them thought that they would have to face problems for this merger. Violence spread all over West Bengal against this Bengal-Bihar unification proposal of Bidhan Chandra Roy. Politicians like Prafulla Ghosh,

Jyoti Basu, Meghnath Saha, Hemendra Prasad Ghosh, Atul Gupta, Bimal Singha, Mohit Moitra, Gopal Halder, Kazi Abdul Odud stood against this proposal.⁴²

Explaining the importance of Bengal-Bihar unification proposal, in context of this opposition Bidhan Chandra Roy said that 3 millions of Bengalis were living in Bihar then and 2.5 million people of Bihar were living in West Bengal, there were many industries in West Bengal but there were no natural resources in West Bengal which was in Bihar. So from every side both the states were dependent on each other. If they should be unified, it would become a strong state from every aspect. He also said that this unification was extremely needed to solve the refugee problem. So this Bengal-Bihar unification would enrich West Bengal. He also thought that Bengali language and literature will not be spoiled because of Hindi majority. He also remembered to the Bengalis that before 1912 Bengali language and literature was not spoiled and on the context of that time Bengali language and literature will be able to preserve the individualism.⁴³

In another side, explaining the unification of Bengal and Bihar, Sri Krishna Singha commented that after this unification the Bengalis of Bihar would think that they are living in their own state and the people of Bihar who resided in West Bengal would think the same. From the very past there was a good relation between Bihar and Bengal though they were separated just before few decades. In the unification of Bengal and Bihar, the people of Bihar would participate joyfully and none of the people of Bihar would think that they would be subdued by the Bengalis.⁴⁴

There were protests against Bengal-Bihar unification in Bihar also. The President of Bihari Association, Baldev Sahay organized a movement to preserve unity of Bihar and he strictly opposes this unification proposal. He said that the result

of this unification may become dangerous. He did not wanted to through the people of Bihar in uncertainty.⁴⁵

The opposition of the Left front parties of West Bengal and Bihar against the unification proposal was most important. The leftists of West Bengal explained that the unification proposal was a matter of unwillingness of the peoples. They proposed for reorganization of states in the basis of language. Bhupesh Gupta, politician and leader of C.P.I and Jyoti Basu leader of C. P. I. M. and later Chief Minister of West Bengal found the unification proposal a wrong step from the basis of language. In the unification proposal, the proposal of reorganization of states in the basis of language and the incorporation of Bengali speaking areas in West Bengal was strictly denied; for which they fought for a long time. They were confirmed that the peoples of Bengal and Bihar would not consent and they will be unified against the proposal which was happened never. Jyoti Basu also commented that the unification of Bengal and Bihar would make the entire problems complex, instead of solving them.⁴⁶ The Leftists participated in protest movement and strike against the merger of Bengal and Bihar. In 24th February 1956, there was strike in allover Bengal against the merger. The peoples of West Bengal spontaneously supported the strike. After the success of the strike, the leftists declared that if Congress High Command has the ability of watching and hearing then they would be able to realize that the peoples of West Bengal proved they were against the unification.⁴⁷

Within a very short period, anti-merger movement spread to more or less every districts of North Bengal. Charu Chandra Sanyal, Congress leader and member of Legislative Assembly of West Bengal and editor of the weekly Bengali newspaper "*Janamat*" wrote in the editorial, about West Bengal and Bihar unification problem that, to form a Hindi linguistic state, it was necessary to destroy Bengal. Consequent

Satyagraha movement was organized in Jalpaiguri against merger. Alok Mukherjee, Manash Basu, Badal Sarkar and many others P.S.P. members were imprisoned for 7 days. Mukulesh Sanyal, Nirmal Kumar Basu, Satyajyoti Sen participated in the movement from Forward Block. Strike was held for 2 days. In Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district, the movement against Bengal-Bihar merger became massive. A strike was called for 48 hours. *Satyagraha* was held for two weeks in the court. Prabhat Das, Basanta Ghosh and others participated in *Satyagraha* movement from Socialist party. The agitators say was, “*Bangali Bihari bhai-bhai, bhasa bhittik rajya chai.*” (Free English translation: people of Bengal and Bihar were like brother-hood, but they want linguistic state). They were scared that the existence of the Bengalis might be demolished if the merger would be happened.⁴⁸

In the movements of West Dinajpur against the merger, Congress leaders also participated along with the Communist Party, P.S.P., R.S.P. and other leftist parties. In the district level movements against the merger R.S.P. leader Dhiren Bannerjee and Communist leader Jamini Majumder were in the leading role. The important leader of Raiganj Sub-division was Nisith Nath Kundu and along with him there was P.S.P. leader Satyaranjan Das, Rabi Bhowmick etc. Congress leader Prafulla Mukherjee, Sudhir Moulick and others also participated in the movement. Hundreds of *satyagrahis* participated in imprisoning programme daily. A special jail was inaugurated in Raiganj for the movement against the merger. In the rallies against the merger police charged *lathi* few times. Dhiren Banerjee along with other Communist leaders was arrested and sent jail.⁴⁹ In the leadership of Snehakana Singha, a member of ‘Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti’, Subhadra Ghosh, Jharna Ghosh and other women participated in the *satyagraha* and imprisoned themselves. Leftist students played a

drama at Milan Para, Raiganj, written by Digen Bandyopadhyay in which there were five thousand spectators were gathered.⁵⁰

When the people of West Bengal did not agree for the unification in any condition, Bidhan Chandra Roy met with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad and Pandit Gobinda Ballav Panth in Delhi to discuss about the future of unification. Pandit Gobinda Ballav Panth assured Bidhan Chandra Roy that if the unification proposal would not be effective then as a recommendation of States Reorganisation Commission the Bengali speaking areas of Bihar would be incorporated with West Bengal.⁵¹ Justifying all the sides, Bidhan Chandra Roy, wrote a letter to Sri Krishna Singh, Chief Minister of Bihar in which it was told that the peoples of all stages of West Bengal are against the unification. He also mentioned that, Bihar Government should confess reorganisation of boundaries between West Bengal and Bihar as the recommendation of States Reorganisation Commission.

Withdrawal of the proposal of Bengal-Bihar merger:

In the pressure of Leftists movement and in the demand of Bengali people Bidhan Chandra Roy agreed reorganization of boundaries between Bengal and Bihar. In 3rd May 1956, discussing with the Cabinet Ministers Bidhan Chandra Roy declared the decision of withdrawing Bengal-Bihar merger proposal. But he did not discuss about this topic with Sri Krishna Singh, Chief Minister of Bihar.⁵² The people of Bengal were against the merger, following that he yielded to public opinion. He informed his decision to Chief Minister of Bihar, Sri Krishna Singh and Minister in charge, Ministry of Home Affairs. In news of Anandabazar Patrika of 6th May 1956, it was told that the Government of west Bengal has ordered to release

prisoners who had been arrested for movement against unification of Bengal and Bihar. In a non-government report it was demanded that the number of the prisoners was approximate 10,000.⁵³

After the withdrawal of the merger proposal Bidhan Chandra Roy demanded to incorporate the Bengali speaking areas of Bihar to West Bengal and this demand made the people of Bihar more agitated. All the people Bihar had only one demand that they should never give any small portion of land to West Bengal. In another side, in the decision of the cancellation of Bengal-Bihar merger proposal peoples of west Bengal became very happy. Jyoti Basu commented that it was their huge achievement and their movement was not failed. He also commented that they will start a movement to incorporate the Bengali speaking areas of Bihar to West Bengal.⁵⁴

Implementation of the Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Bill, 1956:

In this situation, B. N. Datar, Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Home Affairs, placed the Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) bill in Cabinet in 25th July 1956. He said that West Bengal Government demanded 11,840 square miles area but States Reorganisation Commission proposed to incorporated 2500 square miles area with West Bengal. West Bengal had huge similarities between language, culture and history with this proposed area. A traditional state like Bihar, where the great Ashoka was born, the great leader Rajendra Prasad was born; they will not oppose this proposal.⁵⁵ Hriday Nath Kunzru said that the Bengali speaking areas should be incorporated within West Bengal in the basis of linguistic majority. It was unable to decide that, with which language Kurmali and Khotta was related.

Ramaswami Mudaliar commented that Bengal had been divided to earn freedom. So West Bengal should get the proposed land to solve their refugee problem. But Joypal Singh, M. P. Mishra, B. N. Tiwari of Bihar opposed the proposal and told that they are against any kind of transfer of territories with West Bengal.⁵⁶

After many debates, in the initiative of N. C. Chatterjee, Hiren Mukherjee, Chaiti Majhi, Nirmal Chattopadhyay, Bhajahari Mahato, notable politicians, in 17th August 1956 the Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Bill was passed in Lok Sabha (House of the people). In 28th August 1956 this Bill was placed in *Rajya Sabha* (Council of States). In spite of opposition of two non-Congress members, R. P. Singh and T. Borda, this Bill was accepted in *Rajya Sabha* in 22-2 votes. The member of *Rajya Sabha*, K. P. Singh said the people of Bengal and Bihar should set their mind to live together friendly their first loyalty was for India second loyalty was upon Bihar and then it should be upon West Bengal. West Bengal had a reputation of patience and kindness, the birth place of Rabindranath Tagore and Subhash Chandra Bose, should never misjudge with them.⁵⁷

The Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Act, 1956:

It was decided to add the area with the state of West Bengal by the Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Act that the portion of Kishanganj subdivision of Purnea district which lies to the east of boundary line and that portion of Gopalpur *thana* of the said district which lied to the east or north as the case may be of the said boundary line of the State of Bihar.⁵⁸ After implementation of that Act, from 01.11.1956 Chopra and Thakurgaon police station of Kishanganj subdivision of the district of Purnea, Bihar was added within the district of Darjeeling of West Bengal with the Government Notification 3859 G. A., dt. 01.11.1956.⁵⁹ The Islampur police

station of Kishanganj subdivision was incorporated with Darjeeling district on 01.11.1956 by the Government Notification 3859 G. A., dt. 01.11.1956. Goalpokhor police station of Kishanganj subdivision was incorporated by the Government Notification 3861 G. A., dt. 01.11.1956.⁶⁰ Karandighi of Katihar subdivision of the district of Purnea, Bihar, was incorporated by Government Notification 3862 G. A., dt. 01.11.1956, with the district of Darjeeling.⁶¹ The areas of the police stations of Chopra, Karandighi, Islampur, Goalpokhor which were included in the district of Darjeeling from the State of Bihar in pursuance of the provisions of the Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Act of 1956, by the Government Notification 3858 G. A., dt. 01.11.1956, is further added with West Dinajpur from Darjeeling district by the Government Notification 3875 G. A., dt. 02.11.1956.⁶²

Conclusion:

During the time period of 1950's with the formation of States Reorganisation Commission, there were several demands of creation of new states, and reorganisation of existing states. One of them was the demand made by the Government of West Bengal as reorganisation of state by incorporation of portion of land of state of Bihar with the state of West Bengal. Because northern part of West Bengal was separated from the main land of West Bengal, and that gap was covered by the land of Bihar. In that situation, there were several protests in Bihar, regarding the claims of West Bengal. So the situation was difficult, at this juncture the two Chief Ministers of West Bengal and Bihar, Bidhan Chandra Roy and Sri Krishna Singh decided to merge Bengal and Bihar province. After that, there were several movements in Bengal and Bihar also, regarding the Bengal-Bihar merger proposal. In West Bengal, the protest movement was leded mainly by the leftists. In Raiganj of West Dinajpur district of West Bengal, there were huge mass movements

regarding the merger proposal. Not only in West Dinajpur, there were movements in another district also. So at this situation Bidhan Chandra Roy decided to withdraw the merger proposal and claims portion of lands from Bihar, for regular boundary and few areas which were formed part of Bengal historically and geographically. After that, there were huge protests in Bihar, claiming that they would not give any portion to West Bengal. But after so many debates, the States Reorganisation Commission recommended to incorporate portions of land of Purnea district of Bihar, which lied to the east of the river Mahananda.

During the time of States reorganisation, Commission kept focus on the Muslim peoples of eastern part of Kishanganj subdivision, because they were worried about their language, culture etc.⁶³ That is why Commission promised about preference of Urdu language in those places. This area was affected by migrants of Bangladesh (East Pakistan) and several other places, in this way the demography of this area changed. This evoked several movements and organizations like T.T.P.D.O. (Transferred Territory Peoples Development Organization), T.A.P.O. (Transferred Area Peoples Organisation) and T.A.S.O. (Transferred Area Suryapur Organisation) during 1980's and 1990's, based on separatism.⁶⁴ So the reorganisation of that region of West Bengal and Bihar did not bring happiness to the people of that area specially the Islampur sub-division of West Dinajpur, and which had immense negative effect. Because the inhabitants of that area started movements claiming separate district, separate constituency; because they think that they had been neglecting in the facilities of economy, politics, education, health etc. So the reorganisation did not solve their problems.

Notes and References:

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- ² Bipan Chandra and others, *India since Independence*, Revised and Updated, Penguin Books, India, 2008, p.128.
- ³ Monmohan Chakrabatti, *Op.Cit.*, p.222; and Bipan Chandra and others, *Op.Cit.*, p.128.
- ⁴ Monmohan Chakrabatti, *Op.Cit.*, p.222.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p.223.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p.224.
- ⁷ Monmohan Chakrabatti, *Op.Cit.*, p.228
- ⁸ Report of the States Reorganisation Commission, New Delhi, 1955.
- ⁹ Monmohan Chakrabatti, *Op.Cit.*, p.229
- ¹⁰ Report of the States Reorganisation Commission, New Delhi, 1955, *Op.Cit.*
- ¹¹ Memorandum submitted to the States Reorganisation Commission by the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee, Calcutta, 1954, p.i.
- ¹² The Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Bill, New Delhi, 1956, p.iv.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ Memorandum submitted to the States Reorganisation Commission by Bihari Association, Patna, 1954, p. 124.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.70
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 116.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 166.
- ¹⁸ Saroj Chakrabarty, *Mukhyamantrider Sangey (Suhrawardi Theke Bidhan Chandra Parjanto: 1947-1962)*, Part-I, Saroj Chakrabarty, Calcutta, January, 1977, p. 207.
- ¹⁹ Memorandum submitted to the States Reorganisation Commission by Bihari Association, Patna, 1954, *Op.Cit.*, p.166.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 258.
- ²¹ *Ibid.* pp. 207-208.
- ²² Dr. Partha Sen, 'Paschim Dinajpur Jelar Sangey Islampur Mahakumar Sangjuktikaran-Itihas O Mulyayan' in *Madhuparni, Bishesh Paschim Dinajpur Jela Sankhya*, Ajitesh Bhattacharya (ed.), Balurghat, 1399 B. S., p.3.
- ²³ Report of the States Reorganisation Commission, New Delhi, 1955. *Op.Cit.*
- ²⁴ Saroj Chakrabarty, *Op.Cit.*, p.206.

²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 218-219.

²⁶ *Anandabazar Patrika*, (A daily Bengali newspaper, published from Calcutta,) Dated: 14.01.1956.

²⁷ Saroj Chakrabarty, *Op.Cit.*, p. 230.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.231.

²⁹ The Statesman, (A daily English newspaper, published from Calcutta,) Dated: 24.01.1956.

³⁰ *Anandabazar Patrika*, Dated: 24.01.1956.

³¹ The Statesman, Dated: 01.02.1956.

³² *Anandabazar Patrika*, Dated: 25.02.1956.

³³ The Statesman, Dated: 25.01.1956.

³⁴ *Anandabazar Patrika*, Dated: 25.01.1956.

³⁵ *Jugantar*, (A daily Bengali newspaper, published from Calcutta,) Dated: 24.01.1956.

³⁶ The Statesman, Dated: 28.01.1956.

³⁷ The Statesman, Dated: 01.02.1956.

³⁸ The Statesman, Dated: 26.02.1956.

³⁹ The Statesman, Dated: 15.02.1956.

⁴⁰ The Statesman, Dated: 29.02.1956.

⁴¹ Saroj Chakrabarty, *Op.Cit.*, p.235.

⁴² *Paschimbanga, Purulia Jela Sankhya*, Tathya o Sanskriti Bibhag, Paschim Banga Sarkar, June 2007, p. 202.

⁴³ *Jugantar*, Dated: 06.02.1956.

⁴⁴ *Anandabazar Patrika*, Dated: 25.02.1956.

⁴⁵ The Statesman, Dated: 26.01.1956.

⁴⁶ *Anandabazar Patrika*, Dated: 24.01.1956.

⁴⁷ *Jugantar*, Dated: 25.02.1956.

⁴⁸ Ratna Paul, 'Banga-Bihar Sangjuktikaran Andolan, 1956: Ek Bismrita Adhyay', in *Bhutan O Himalay Banga : Prasanga Siksha, Samaj O Sanskriti*, Dr. Ananda Gopal Ghosh and Ratna Paul, N.L. Publishers, Siliguri, 2015, p.117.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Dilip Ghosh Roy, 'Shahar-Kendrik Gana Andolan : Raiganj Mahakuma', in *Madhuparni, Bishesh Paschim Dinajpur Jela Sankhya*, Ajitesh Bhattacharya (ed.), Balurghat, 1399 B. S., p.217.

⁵¹ The Statesman, Dated: 26.03.1956.

⁵² The Statesman, Dated: 04.05.1956.

⁵³ *Anandabazar Patrika*, Dated: 06.05.1956.

⁵⁴ *Anandabazar Patrika*, Dated: 04.05.1956.

⁵⁵ The Statesman, Dated: 26.07.1956.

⁵⁶ The Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Bill, New Delhi, 1956.

⁵⁷ The Statesman, Dated: 29.08.1956.

⁵⁸ Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Bill, New Delhi, 1956, *Op.Cit.*

⁵⁹ Jatindra Chandra Sengupta, *West Bengal District Gazetteers: West Dinajpur*, Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁰ B. Ray, Census 1961 West Bengal, District Census Handbook, West Dinajpur, The Superintendent of Government Printing, West Bengal, Calcutta, p.iv.

⁶¹ Monmohan Chakrabatti, *Op.Cit.*, p.282.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.293.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁶⁴ Ratna Paul, 'Swadhinata Uttar PaschimBanger Uttarangser Punargathan Janita Samassa', p. 134; and Abhijit Dutta, 'Uttar Dinajpur Jelar Islampur Mahakumar TASO-r Bikash', pp. 182-183, in *Bharat Tirtha Uttarbanga*, Dr. Ananda Gopal Ghosh, and Dr. Ashim Kumar Sarkar, (ed.) Sangbedan, Maldah, 2011.