

CHAPTER - IV

UTJAS : THE POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL BASIS

The UTTARBANGA TAPASHELEE JATI O ADIVASI SANGATHAN - the UTJAS - an organisation moves against socio-economic, political and cultural discrimination in the area of North Bengal. It was started under the umbrella of North Bengal's youngman Mr. Naren Das with active-participation of the students of North Bengal University in 1979. At the initial phase of the movement, it encountered challenge to the Government and the governmental development programmes were held responsible for the marginalization of SC and ST students in the different sections of University's degree.¹ A new alliance among the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes was formed to agitate against the problem of economic deprivation, the explosive unemployment pressure on land, industrial stagnation and infiltration of Bangladeshi emigrants.

The problem of influx of migrants, cultural differences between the migrants and local Scheduled Castes and Tribes and other Backward classes, restricted job opportunities for indigenious middle class, immobility of the people of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, lack of industrilisation, a competitive labour market, language domination or sense of insecurity of language - culture - religion etc. badly impacted on the minds of North Bengal people compelled to unit under the umbrella of UTJAS, as a alternative political platform. On the first part of 1981, the foundation conference of the UTJAS was held at Narasingha Vidhyapith, at Kadamtala, Darjeeling, where there was mass gathering of delegates from the then five

districts of North Bengal.² The significance of the foundation conference of the UTJAS in the midst of deep darkness around is very great and it is like lighting a little lamp to dispel that darkness which the constitution of the Sanghathan drafted.

CONSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVITY

The objects for which the UTJAS is constituted are :

- i. To fight against the socio-economic discrimination among the members of weaker section of people particularly members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes who are the largest number of citizen of North Bengal.
- ii. To uplift the socio-economic condition of the members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, who have been remaining neglected and backward following traditional mode of agriculture.
- iii. To undertake agitation for the redressal of grievances in any school of thoughts either in economic, cultural, historical or in trade and agriculture andn for the extention, improvement and protection of such matters as are incidental to the attainment of the objects.
- iv. To demand for 60% reservatioin in service and study centre both professional and sectoral or elementary for the inhabitants of North Bengal.
- v. To stop the foreigner's infiltration that has threatened the existence of indigenous people in respect of their social, economical, cultural and political life and that has also threatened communal harmony.

vi. To promote the interests of the people of North Bengal in matters relating to Historical places and to maintain cultural affinity and to protect Monuments of the erstwhile Cooch Behar state.

vii. To endeavour mobilisation for the execution of the B.P.Mandal Commission's Recommendation.

viii. To endeavour for the achievement of the political gain on the basis of alternative preventive measures to the burning problem of India; and

ix. To extend the co-operation among the members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and to increase the participation in agitation.³

Contemporary Issues

To combat UTJAS Andolan, cadre of Leftist Parties in West Bengal identified it as the "Bhatiya Kheda (drive the Refugees out)", because of the contemporary issues, such as (i) - in Assam, the Bengal Kheda (drive the Bengalees out) is agitated by AASU.⁴ The AASU through their Memorandum dated 2nd February, 1980 to the late Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, conveyed their profound sense of apprehensions regarding the continuing influx of foreign nationals in Assam and their fear about adverse effects upon the political, social, cultural and economic life of the State.⁵; (ii) At the same time, Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) was formed by Subhas Ghising on the 30th July, 1980, Subhas Ghising was an army personnel, who retired from the army and started politics. For a long time, he was an activist of the Congress Trade Union (INTUC and NLCC). He had tried to arouse the ethnic sentiments from different regional

political parties. It was after the debacle of the congress in 1977 when the Ghising was systematically cultivated by peoples like Siddhartha Sankar Ray and his prateges like Ramkrishna Saraogi and Laxmi Kanta Bose, in order to develop him as an ethnic front against the CPI(M) in West Bengal. The Prantiya Parishad and the Gotkha League have been washed away in the current wave of ethnic passion and they have virtually joined hands with the GNLF in the Movemen; ⁶

(iii) During the movement of the UTJAS in North Bengal, the demand for a separate hill state was once again revived. In 1979, the UTTARKHAND KANTI DAL (UKD) was set up with the aim of making this a reality by Indramoni Badoni, Yashowant Singh Bisht and others. But as soon as Kahi Singh Aire took over the reins of the UKD, the movement got tremendous boost.⁷ To achieve the target of the UKD, the Dal considered the followings as a threat to the people as well as to Jharkhand Movement's interests :

- i. Native feudal class ;
- ii. Native comprador - bureacrat - capitalist class and agent of social imperialists; and
- iii. Their middle class lackeys.

So as to establish the political power of Jharkhand Movement and the toiling mass of the country :

- i. Working class,

ii. Peasantry , and

iii. Progressive national bourgeoisie.

Political power of the Jharkhand Movement will be established only by intensifying class contradictions in particular and participating in the same struggle in all Tribal areas in general. Movement of which will be victorious not through the negotiations with similar struggling forces active in the country, and success of which will be the birth of Jharkhand land, character of the Movement will be class based and revolutionary by nature. That will not only active, to make a separate land for the tribal peoples but also land in general for all toiling groups, all deprived sections of the society.

At the present stages, the Movement embodies two major aspects ;

i. To spread its ideological battle-cry all over the country, to identify other positive forces, who are active to achieve the same goal, to generate move grassroot leadership so that movement can be interpreted within the greater mass.

ii. To demand each scope and right which being assured by the present state power and its structure. For restoration of land for landless, traditional rights on forest and direct participation of local people in the trade commerce and industries as well as preservation of cultural heritage of the rural working classes.

In the present stage, when principal contradiction lies between feudalism and the broad mass movement will surely be land or forest-based as well as other natural resources (like coal, iron ore, mica, copper etc.).⁸

Distinctive Base

According to the souvenir of the UTJAS, it has distinctive features and structures of mode of activities of social change. It's also stated that the equating mode of activities of UTJAS with the nature and process of other regional movements (like GNLFF, UKD, Jharkhand etc.) is not accurate.⁹ The organisation, structure and levels of activities have been rooted at all over five districts (at a present six) of North Bengal. The UTJAS is presided over by Mrs. Ranjana Roy and Mr. Naren Das is the Secretary of the mother (Central) Committee. Yuba Satra Sangathan is the part of organisation of the Mother Organisation is presided over by Mr. Chittya Ranjan Barman and Mr. Provat Barman is the Secretary. It has also a Mahila Branch Organisation which is presided over by Mrs. Ranjana Roy and Mrs. Sulakha Barman is the Secretary. Besides, it has two trade unions : one is Cha Majdoor Kalyan Samiti (C.M.K.S.) at the Dooars area of North Bengal and second is Kishan Majdoor Sangathan (K.M.S.) played vital role all over North Bengal for persuing the benefits of labour and backward groups of people.

UTJAS is organised by unfurling flag. It's flag has four colours in. It has composed of deep saffron, black and red half part and remaining part is white. In the white part of the flag, there is a green circle where in symbol of balance (Naya Danda). The UTJAS strives to make it a flag of socialism, equality and social justice and of all the oppressed sections of the society.¹⁰

The president of the UTJAS, Mrs. Ranjana Roy, pledges the principles and nobilities of the Sangathan that it hates the process of re-constructing of the states, it is expected to construct or re-organise the state on the basis of following conditions of Administrative structure, Geographical boundaries and Socio-economical values but not the following of linguistic,

cultural and basis of communality.

Ideological Genesis :

For a prolonged period of history country has been under the colonial exploitation of the British Imperialism on the one hand and feudal exploitation on the other, which finally transformed into a semi-feudal and semi-capitalistic society under the leadership of industrialists, big landlords, and middle classes, a phenomenal composition, without having any direct link with national means of productions. For this very reason, leadership does not reflect aims and aspirations of the general mass, and cannot materialise any fundamental change in the life of the people.

Principal obstacles of such rejections and static state of affairs occurred due to following facts :

- i. Due to the existence of native feudal class;
- ii. Due to the existence of native comprador bureaucratic capitalist class , and
- iii. Due to the easy access of multi-national companies into the aspects of national economy.

Today India is under an absolute exploitation of the different imperialist and neo-colonial powers. At the same time she is exploited by the national neo-feudalism and comprador - bureaucratic capitalism.¹¹

To combat such problems of socio-economic structure of India, UTJAS expects to reform it by introducing following heads :

1. The relationship between caste system and state of economy :

According to Herbert Aptheker, "At first glance, surely one would think that such arrangements would defy basic alteration" where classes control production, communication, education, law and ideology in general, and the whole state apparatus with its facilities for persuasion and repression, does it not appear that the easiest thing to do would be to maintain such a system? It is no wonder, then, that every exploitative ruling class in the past has insisted that its system, or "way of life" was splendid and manifestly destined to last forever. But it is a wonder that though every ruling class, in every epoch, everywhere in the world, has insisted upon this "common-sense" view, they have all, every where, in time, been proven wrong.¹²

Caste is a fundamental aspects of the social structure in India, but, not class basic structure. Along with the "economic foundation" upon which it is based, caste forms major parametric variable of the Indian political system. The role of caste in political dynamics is gradually increasing since the British rule of India economy. UTJAS says, in this respect, a major factor in reinforcing the role of caste is its importance in competitive polities. Caste is one, because of the most easily identifiable social clusters whose members can be motivated for collective or parallel action. Therefore, politicians remain keen to exploit this factor for their own gain. As a result, process of modernisation of India industrilisation, mechanization of agriculture and green Revolution, are not possible to develop to everywhere especially it helps to defer between rural and urban economy. All kinds of development and industrialization vested at urban level exploiting rural economy where from all means of raw-materials come through is the cause of suffering of the weaker sections of people who are rural living. It is clear in the case of North

Bengal, Assam, Swotonagpur, Orissa Adivasi Anchal, Madya Prodesh etc, where in minerals, forestry and agricultural raw materials drain at urban areas from their villages.¹³

2. Threat of Refugee Influx :

The infiltration of Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Nepales emigrants have put this North Bengal in a quandary.¹⁴ According to Marcus Dam, writer of "Bhutanese refugees and the Indian game of politics", "Indian authorities continu to thwart attempts by Bhutanese refugees settle in camps along Nepal's eastern border to march back to their homeland. The problem of these displaced people is expected to snowball into a major geopolitical crisis in North Bengal, especially Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, because, they are sandwiched between Nepal and Bhutan."

In the early eithgties, expulsion of Nepalese from Nagaland and Meghalaya lit the first flame of what snowballed into the seccessionist Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling. the ethnic sentiments fanned then altered the contours of politics in the hills, resulting in the emergence of new, forces, a new leadership and the setting up of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council.¹⁵ Those sentiments are still a significant factor in local politics which are harmful to the areas of North Bengal to maintain the increasing rate of population, UTJAS says this. In the present embroglio, even the West Bengal Government seems to be trapped in a situation involving Nepal and Bhutan. The migration from Bhutan began in the late eighties when thousands of people of Nepalese origine were denied citizenship and expelled from the country. J.C.Samaddar wrote a letter to the Editor of the Statesman dated on March 6, 1996 headed as "Threat of Refugee Influx", that the political turmoil in Bangladesh in is sure to hit its economy hard

with the loss of production following unending spells of agitation, the Government may have to go in for massive foreign aid. India is concerned about influx of refugees. the infiltration across the border, now a trickle, may take a turn for the worse.¹⁶

The UTJAS articulates, infiltration migrants have polluted the regional balance relating to the North Bengal's socio-economic development and treated to loss cultural identities of the weaker section people.¹⁷ Sajal Basu asserts, "A particular group shifts its identity, its distinctness, otherness as an ethnic, nation in course of age-long feeling of being discriminated, a sense of insecurity and aspiration for a larger share in power."¹⁸

3. Drawbacks of Front Policy :

UTJAS articulates, Front Policy fails to bridge between the alternative process of culture and generalization of mass concepts. Accordingly, the socio-economic development has not been achieved, yet in all means of production mainly due to drawbacks of land reforms.¹⁹

On coming to power in the late seventies, the Left Front announced a three-faced programme. It encompasses :

i. Operation Barga which implies recording the names of the bargadars to ensure their right against forcible or motivated eviction;

ii. A 75:25 share cropping ratio between the bargadar (share cropper) and the land-owner where the cost of production is borne by the former ,

and

iii. A minimum wage rate of Rs. 8.10 for the daily labourer.

Let it discuss in detail -

i. Operation Barga, on the face of it, checked eviction of bargadars. But, barga recording does not mean that whatever comes before the Settlement officer claiming to have been the bargadar of a particular plot of land will be recorded as one. Nor should operation Barga mean that whatever the bargadar says will be the sole deciding factor. Regard should also be paid to what the other party says. But, the inclusion of "Presumption clause" in the Land Reforms Act 1955 implies presuming that the share cropper is bonafide and the onus on the land owner.

The pace of Operation Barga was quite affected by the judgement given in the case of Biswanath Ghosh vs Government of West Bengal. It is held that both the parties, landowner and bargadar, will be given the opportunity to speak for themselves and barga recording can only be on the basis of careful consideration of the views of both the parties. Soon after the judgement came out, disgruntled landowners took refuge in cooked up cases filed against their bargadars and succeeded in securing injunctions. Bargadars, not always being on a sound financial footing, found it difficult in many cases to proceed against the landowners with counter petitions specially when the modus operandi regarding notification was a veritable point for consideration.

It is virtue of Article 226 of the Constitution of India which gives power to the High Court to allow injunctions, consequently, vested interests were largely benefitted. In effect, not only the total area of vested land hit by injunction stood at 1,70,010,05 acres as on June 30, 1979 but the recording

of bargadars was stalled for nearly two months in the middle of 1979 following the judgement. The said judgement also affected the attitude of banks, to find ground for refusal to pay loans to bargadars for cancellation of interim certificates. Though the State Government had later been able to stay the judgement, problems of operation barga cropped up in several ways :

a) At the initial stage the bargadars in a number of cases and places were found to be reluctant to record their names. What they feared most was a break in the landlord-bargadar relations which could stand in the way of their getting easy and timely loans for cultivation and even sometimes for sustenance.

b) There were cases where the bargadars faced the threat of social boycott if their names were recorded, where "istafnama" from bargadars was forcibly obtained by the land owner, where even after the bargadars were recorded, the land involved was found to be subject to litigation.

ii. Regarding the 75:25 crop sharing ratio between the bargadar and the land owner, the cost of production is to be borne by the former, the bargadar has to take sole responsibility for cultivating the land. Majority of the bargadars being poverty - stricken, it has been observed that the job of cultivation is left half done unless financial assistance reaches them in time. A recorded bargadar hardly gets any loan facility from his land owner. Here comes the question of institutional credit. But the experience of the public sector banks has been quite exasperating as far as loan recovery is concerned.

Inability of institutional sources to provide financial assistance to the vast majority of recorded bargadars has also been responsible for the reason

why 75:25 crop sharing ratio has not been widely in evidence. The common phenomenon has been a 50:50 crop sharing arrangement with both the bargadar and land owner sharing half the cost of production. And in places of bargadar sharing the entire cost of production, the share-cropping ratio between bargadar and the landowner has mostly been 60:40 and in some cases 66.5 : 33.5.

iii. The issue of Rs. 8.10 as minimum wage to daily labourers caused more concern in the rural sector than ever before, but the achievement has not been quite significant. While the CPI(M)-led Kishan Sabha urged payment of the minimum wage as stipulated, except for some sporadic incidents, no organised movement could be made in this regard.

First, because the supply of labour being in excess of its demand, labourers very often agreed to whatever was offered.

Secondly, where a farm hand was employed at the wage of Rs. 8.10 there existed the threat that he would be rendered helpless when the peak season was over. This point is linked with the prospect of providing substitute work both in the peak season as also in the lean periods.

Though the Food For Works scheme introduced in the late seventies was a step in this direction, it could neither offer job to all at a time nor could it give wage worth Rs. 8.10. And now, in the early nineties, the situation has not changed for the better though the minimum wage rate stands elevated to somewhere between Rs. 21 and Rs. 27. Despite the fact that the centrally-sponsored schemes like the Integrated Rural Development Programme and the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana have been excessively relied on by the Panchayats to provide work to the innumerable farm-workers in the rural

sector, those in the advanced districts like Burdwan, 24 Paraganas and Midnapore enjoy, on an average, a wage rate as higher as Rs. 27 while others in Purulia or West Dinajpur get only Rs. 21 in the absence of any organized movement.²⁰

UTJAS says, one should not miss the dismal performance of the manufacturing sector contributing a marginal rise in SDP from 24.6 percent in 1980-81 to 25 percent in 1991-92. Again, even distribution of the benefits of land reforms has not been possible, while three districts - 24 Parganas, Burdwan and Midnapore - can afford a better wage rate, the disparity in the rate of daily wages to agricultural labourers among other districts in West Bengal especially six districts of North Bengal is not only alarming but also a pointer to the amount of loss the not-so-organized rural wage earners are facing in a State where Marxist politics hold sway.

UTJAS argues, also, while the benefits of vested land recovery and distribution are believed to have contributed to the present agricultural growth, it is not an unmixed boon. The land holding pattern has structurally changed with the number of marginal holdings reaching 4.1 million in the early 80's from 2.5 million in the 70's. If let discuss the case of the beneficiaries of vested land distribution, there too the task remains juxtaposed between individual zeal and personalized economic relations between the farmer and the jotdar-cum-money lender, while improper recycling of institutional credit cannot turn to tide. It is also notable that both the CPI(M)-led Kisan Sabha and the Pancayat leadership appear weak-need to tackle such a tricky situation.²¹

Sangathan also argues, the process of selection in every-sphere of production and services, follows the policy of intellectuality rather than

capability of doing (Dowhik Sakti). Rights and privileges among the elitists harm to mode of livings to the weaker sections people especially scheduled castes and tribes of India.

4. Social Justice and Security :

To analysis with special reference to North Bengal where nativist sentiment has been contained in state politics, though the sentiments often are used in politicised form. We would proceed through analysing the linguistic movements and development creation of language through it, identity aspirations and ethno-politics, the regionalism of politics in West Bengal and the nation-nationality - ethnicity complex and regional variations in it.²² This would help us to examine the whole gamut of nation-state theory, the nature of Indian nationalism and the politics of regional movements in North Bengal in recent times.

The constitution of India recognises eighteen major languages spoken by a large majority of the people and hundred of other languages and dialects are spoken by the people in rural areas. Hindi is the official language. Since each of the states has an official language, those who speak another language as their mother tongue often regard themselves as belonging to a linguistic minority. The largest "stateless", linguistic minorities are Bodo (0.5 million); Nepali (1.4 million); Konkani (1.5 million); Santhali (3.8 million) etc. Another set of linguistic minority groups comprises those who speak an official language other than the language of the State in which they live. These minorities are concentrated in Assam, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. In West Bengal, scheduled castes and tribes of North Bengal still form as backward class, "stateless" linguistic

minorities compared to other regions. This region is geographically important because the boundaries of Assam, Bhutan, Bihar, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sikkim. Tea, timber, tobacco (TTT), agricultural fertilization and minerals are found in abundance in the area but the people of North Bengal are not satisfied as regards to the development of industries related to these products.

The neglected such areas cause problems of regional imbalance. This result in a feeling of separatism arises in the minds of these people. It also results in violent movements. There is an increasing demand in states fall move autonomy. Because of , minorities have gained an increasing group consciousness and this shows no signs of withering under the forces of modernisation. These demands include demand for the creation of new states (Jharkhand, Gorkhaland and Uttarkhanda State) linguistic recognition, reservation, security. Besides, there is an increase in demand for separate states. This also results in a greater tension between centre-states. Inter-state tensions, social tensions and tensions in big cities become common.²³

It denotes that Regionalism assumes four main forms in the political field :

- i. Secession from the Indian Union;
- ii. Demand for separate statehood;
- iii. Demand for fulfilled statehood; and
- iv. Inter-state disputes.

5. Decentralization as means of solution :

UTJAS asserts that the problem of deprivation and exploitation is not only North Bengal's obstacle but general pursuit of Indian social system. The modernization and centralization of big industries at urban are not the means of attainable variables to dispose of casteless and classless society, to attain the goal of developmental social system. There should be established decentralized socio-economic and political power at the grassroot level. It is also suggested that small cottage industries relating to indigenous self-products are sustainable which will be based on capability of intellectuality and manpower instead of big industrialization and foreign technologies.²⁴ The people in the villages should actively participate in the development activities regarding agriculture, public health, education, irrigation, animal husbandary etc. Not only the rural people should participate in the implementation of programmes, they should have the authority to take decisions regarding their requirements and necessities. People through their chosen representatives determine the local policies, and executive their own programmes in conformity with the real requirements of the community. This is democracy at the grassroots. The people at the lowest level are associated with the governance of the country. The people's institutions have been entrusted with the responsibility of taking decisions and supervising the implementation of programmes.²⁵

6. Impact of MNCs :

When India became independent, many foreign companies expanded their business. The country followed the policy of "mixed economy" which ensured that the public sector and the private sector including MNCs could co-exist. Entry was however restricted and there were many laws that

regulated foreign capital.

In 1977, the Janata Government threw out Cococola and IBM which became symbols of India's hostility to MNCs. But, other MNCs like Philips, Liver, Siemens and Sujuki continued to stay and prosper. By 1991, the Govt. found that it had little foreign exchange to meet the import bill even for an essential item like oil. It approached the World Bank for a loan, which imposed conditionalities such as opening the Indian economy.²⁶ Foreign capital, thus, had to be allowed into the country to increase a sluggish growth.

With the opening up of the economy, foreign investment was wooed in a big way by India. Even states like Bengal, which had a communist Govt, started inviting foreign capital. MNCs saw India as a huge market. Its huge population and increasing incomes meant that it would be a ready market for their products.²⁷ Many companies came to India in virtually every sector of the economy.

But, were these companies working in the national interests ? Were these companies working in the interest of weaker section people especially SC and ST ? The distrust that the foreigner had remained since the country had faced years of colonial rule. The rule had started when the East India Company had landed on Indian shores with the intention of commerce. Gradually, it ended up with complete domination. Was India going in the same way again ?

UTJAS argued that this was another form of colonisation. The companies would impoverish the country by taking our capital. At first glance this indeed seemed the case. A company, Cargill seeds, faced trouble because it was feared that it would take over the seeds business, the

backbone of Indian Agriculture, in which the country had achieved self reliance. The companies also seemed to be entering frivolous sectors like soft drinks and fried chicken which required no technology. But the sectors were highly profitable.

UTJAS criticises that what we are seeing today in the name of economic reforms is actually western domination and erosion of our sovereignty.

Another cause of distrust was the Bhopal disaster, where a multinational company, Union Carbide, was involved in an industrial accident but had backed out of its responsibility. Such an accident anywhere in the west would have seen huge legal suits and resulted in the closure of the company²⁸. Clearly, the MNCs did not think that lives of Indian people were as valuable as that of a person in a developed country.

7. Provincial Autonomy :

UTJAS expects the formation autonomy council or administration should be introduced not on the basis of caste and linguistic but for achieving following objectives. :

- i. Administrative facilities;
- ii. Geographical location;
- iii. Considering socio-economic condition;

and

iv. Autonomous Council for Dalit and weaker section people of the Society.²⁹

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