

CHAPTER - VII

IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SOME IMPORTANT MOVEMENTS FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS OF NORTH BENGAL - AN ANALYSIS

A . KPP : Ideological Aspects and its Articulations

Kamtapur upsurge was not a sudden development. It has originated in the middle of the 20th century particularly with the submission of an alleged memorandum to the Government of India by the then protagonists for creating a separate state on the same linguistic, ethnic and cultural grounds, as other states created within the Indian Union. In 1995, Kamtapur peoples' party, a parallel organisation as like UKD was come down at Shivmandir, Police station Matigara, near of North Bengal University under the suprimo of Mr. Atul Roy. He is an employee of North Bengal University, says the foremost aim of KPP is to agitate peacefully in democratic way. His incarnation into the new political role was incidental.

The swinging of separate Uttarkhanda State in North Bengal has been being articulated since a four decades but its trend has gone to be stop, in contrast KPP is systematic within organisational set up, contrivance and acquainted with peaceful oscillation, demands it. Within periphrasis, "Kamatapur Woman's Organisation". "Kamtapur Youth Association" and "Kamtapur Language and literature Council" were consecrated under the supremo of KPP.¹

AIMS AND ENDS

In pursuance of the purpose stated in the constitution of KPP, following aims and ends laid down for the guidance of the people :

"i) The first and foremost aims of KPP are to resuscitate the vanished tradition, culture, language, literature, folkways, folklore of Kamtapur State and to awake among the Rajbanshis and Kshatriya about itself;

ii) Driving away the columny of "Sub-Language "or" "dialect" to revive the statusquo of "Kamtapuri Language" as a distinct is concealed in articulation

iii) Sustaining such organisational purposes KPP take some ends:

(a) correspondance letters, invitation cards should be written in Kamtapuri language;

(b) publication of books, papers, novels should be introduced in Kamtapuri language,

(c) produce the video film to resuscitate ethnic culture and folklore in the language;²

iv) To save the ethnic identity, separate Kamtapur state is being articulated.³ As the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of the famous Gupta Emperor Samudragupta mentions about the existence of the Kamrup territory in the 4th century A.D. During the 15th century A.D. the western part of Kamrup the western part of Kamrup came under the sway of the 'Khan' dynasty to usher a

new kingdom there known as "Kamta".⁴ The present Cooch Behar owes its origin from this Kamtapur land. In 1950, history reveals that the ancient territory of Kamtapur provided its place to develop the present region of Cooch Behar district in West Bengal. But, the Government of West Bengal fails to develop its socio-economic condition. Without formation of separate state of Kamtapur, KPP claims, the socio-economic, cultural and language development are not possible."⁵

v) Drive for collecting the membership from ethnic group of Rajbanshi-Kshatriya and endeavour for expressing its organisation among the middle class.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANISATION

A deliberative Committee was formed to move of some principles and policies of KPP which by constitutional means endeavours to the determinant of Government. KPP was suprimed and intrinsic membered by Mr. Atul Roy and Mr. Lalit Barman, Paresh Roy, Jagoda Nanda Roy, Nasir Ali Pramanick, Bani Madhab Singh etc. respectively. Under the utterance of Central Committee of KPP, the District Committee was sorganised at every district of North Bengal, e.g. the Cooch Behar district Committee was formed by the presidentship of Mr. Subhash Barman, followed the ends and principles to every districts of North Bengal.⁶

The Sikh's demand for autonomy or a separate sovereign state of "Khalistan" is resisted by the Indian government. At the outset it was a demand for greater state autonomy and freedom for Sikh religion. Gradually it became a separatist demand. The Sikh separatists have allegedly been provided

assistance from Pakistan and Sikhs living in various Western countries. Most sophisticated weapons are recovered from the terrorists. And no one can imagine the end of the Punjab crisis. It is both a religious and political war. When the terrorists failed to provoke the Hindus to retaliate on communal grounds, they used the methods of "mass massacre". Yet the Hindus were patient showing on signs of retribution against the Sikhs, except the Hindu backlash soon after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in October 1984.

Ethnic conflict or other forms of sectarianism, Prof. Baral says, would be successful if certain conditions exist. First, there should be a powerful ethnic organisation to mobilise people and to articulate interest. Second, strong international solidarity and support are essential. Finally, a strong neighbour supporting the separatist movement can fuel and provide sustenance to the movement.⁷ A typical assertion of separatism is the case of Kamtapur intriguing as all the above stated conditions are doubted do exists for its success.

Both detective departments of central and state doubts, the secessionists' movements like Bodo organisation and ULFA of Assam select the spot as a peaceful platform for moving the movement. The mother organisation of KPP is Kuch Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti centred at Assam, endeavours to circulate the policy of separatism in North Bengal and Nepal among the members of Rajbanshi and Kshatriya community. Its main purpose is to articulate the resuscitated demands of Independence state of Kamtapur of the 15th century and formed a Kuch Rajbanshi Liberation Front. Department also doubts, the members of Kuch Rajbanshi Liberation Front have been taking the training from the secessionist movements of Assam and seek the only method of securing a chance of government ill decision. But, Mr. Atul Roy negates it and argues that "All" these are accusation of governments and endeavours to indolent the movement of KPP.

PARTICIPATION AND ARTICULATION

After the formation of KPP in 1995, 13 charter of demands' representation was sent to the Prime Minister of India and Chief Minister of West Bengal respectively and many other distinguished national offices. Let discuss a few important points of demands of resolutions :

i) Vibration to constitute Kamtapuri Language

To drive away the columny of sub language of dialect by establishing the statusquo of Kamtapuri language as a distinct, Kamtapur Bhasa O Sahitya parishad was introduced. A Bhasa (language) conference was inaugurated by K.B.S.P. assembled along with mob of son of soils, of Assam and North Bengal on 15-17 June, 1998 at Kumar Gram, Alipurduar.⁸ According to news, it is the first Bhasa conference where in a 15 members expert committee was formed for partaining following resolutions :

a) Demand for inclusion of Kamtapuri language in the Eighth schedule of the Indian constitution ;

(b) To improve the mode of Kamtapuri literature, a three valedictory members - took liability to publish Dictionary, Grammer in language ;

(c) To awake about the status-quo of the Kamtapuri language, the drive for publishing of books, novels, pamphets was taken ;

(d) Great persuasion of conceptual framework enriched itself language

publication should be taken into the resolution;

and

(e) Circulating its importance and legacy of language group meeting, sitting and campaigning are taken in its principles.

To create a massive awareness a general assemble was held at Kalier Hat, Dhupguri on 3 May, 1998. Another conference was held on 21-22 December 1996 at Champasari, Siliguri assembled by important dignitaries.⁹ Same type of Seminerative discussion was held at Dhupguri High School premises for distinctive historical importance of Kamtapuri language on 23 September 1997. In discussion, Mr. Girindra narayan Roy says, "Language is identity of man, through which, unit of states, state and culture are formed who gets language, they capture the power." "He animated the creative, intelligent, preservance tendency of translating into written from a dialect of the colloquial, language. The diversity is the soul of culture, Freud says, "One touch of difference leads to racism. But a great deal of difference leads away from it irremediably,..... to equalize, democratized, homogenizepall such efforts will never manage to expel 'the triniest difference' seed of racial intolerance. For that one must pluralize, refine continuously." Here, the plùralistic emphasis on group autonomy is justified.¹⁰ Asserting with the history of language agitation, as Dr. Ananda Gopal Ghosh says, in 1826 a language fight was held between Assam and Bengal, the commissioner administrative form of state was introduced in Assam in 1876 and Assaam got recommendation of Assamese language after agitating it. If they (Kamtapuri) demanded the then separate state, language and identity when about 9 lakh people would say in Kamtapuri dialect most perhaps, they had been got the recommendations. But, at that period, such kind of demand was

not arisen.¹¹ Nowhere, in the state are agitations more a part of life than in North Bengal. Movements of every variety - whether Tebhaga, Naxalbari or Gorkhaland - have not only caused anxiety but also disturbed the peace in the region. Now, the Kamtapuris are demanding a separate state based on a separate dialect and different cultural pattern. The Kamtapuri People's Party is spearheading the agitation.

Through the KPP's activities are limited to some isolated pockets, demonstrators called a 24 hour North Bengal bandh on 16 June, 1998.¹² That the state government was serious about the issue was clear from the fact that it offered to hold talks and a seminar was organised recently on the Language, Culture and Socio-economic condition of North Bengal. The seminar had been organised by the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs. It began at Dinabandhu Mancha on 27 and 28 June, 1998.¹³ About 400 distinguished dignitaries attended the seminar from different parts of North Bengal and it was started having chaired by V.C. of the University of North Bengal. West Bengal Home Minister, Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharya, who attended the seminar, condemned secessionist tendencies and said the door was always open for talks on the Kamtapuri issue. Describing the aims and objectives of the seminar, Mr. Bhattacharya stressed the need for harmony among the various ethnic groups of North Bengal. The seminar assumes special meaning as it comes on the heels of an agitation by the Kamtapur People's Party for a separate state in North Bengal. Instead of criticising the demand for a separate state, he acknowledged the importance of Rajbanshi, the language of the kamtapuris.¹⁴ Under the presidentship of Pabitra Sarkar of the Seminar, Mr. Sukhabelash Barma said, it is the endeavour to revive the cultural entity of Rajbanshi on the basis of acquaintance of its culture, language and identity.¹⁵

At the first day of a two-days seminar, Prof. Grindra Narayan Roy says, "Rajbanshi Society is advancing as much as sense of demand of self-respect is being displayed." Regarding the points of view, Dr. Satyen Barman says, that it is either a language or a dialect should be decided on the basis of time being.¹⁶ Besides these interpretations, the following proposals were produced to protect the language and culture of its to central fields of social studies and opened up new fields of study for subsequent generations :

i) Proponents, in its agenda note for the seminar, say, the concept of history of North Bengal literature should find due place in the curriculum for fifty(50) marks besides, a North Bengal Academy should need to produce;

ii) A recommendations had been made by the experts of seminar set up a Monitoring cell attentively watch to formulation of daily news, Television.

iii) A demand for retreat the word "Babe" from the Public Documents.

iv) These will be placed in the Plan of action and the Government would try to work out a consensus plan of language.

v) Besides these most of the proponents were interested to analyse an importance of socio-cultural base of ethnic groups of North Bengal ;

and

vi) The Department of Information and cultural Affairs tried to douse the controversy over the government's reported move to North Bengal Development, language, culture.¹⁷

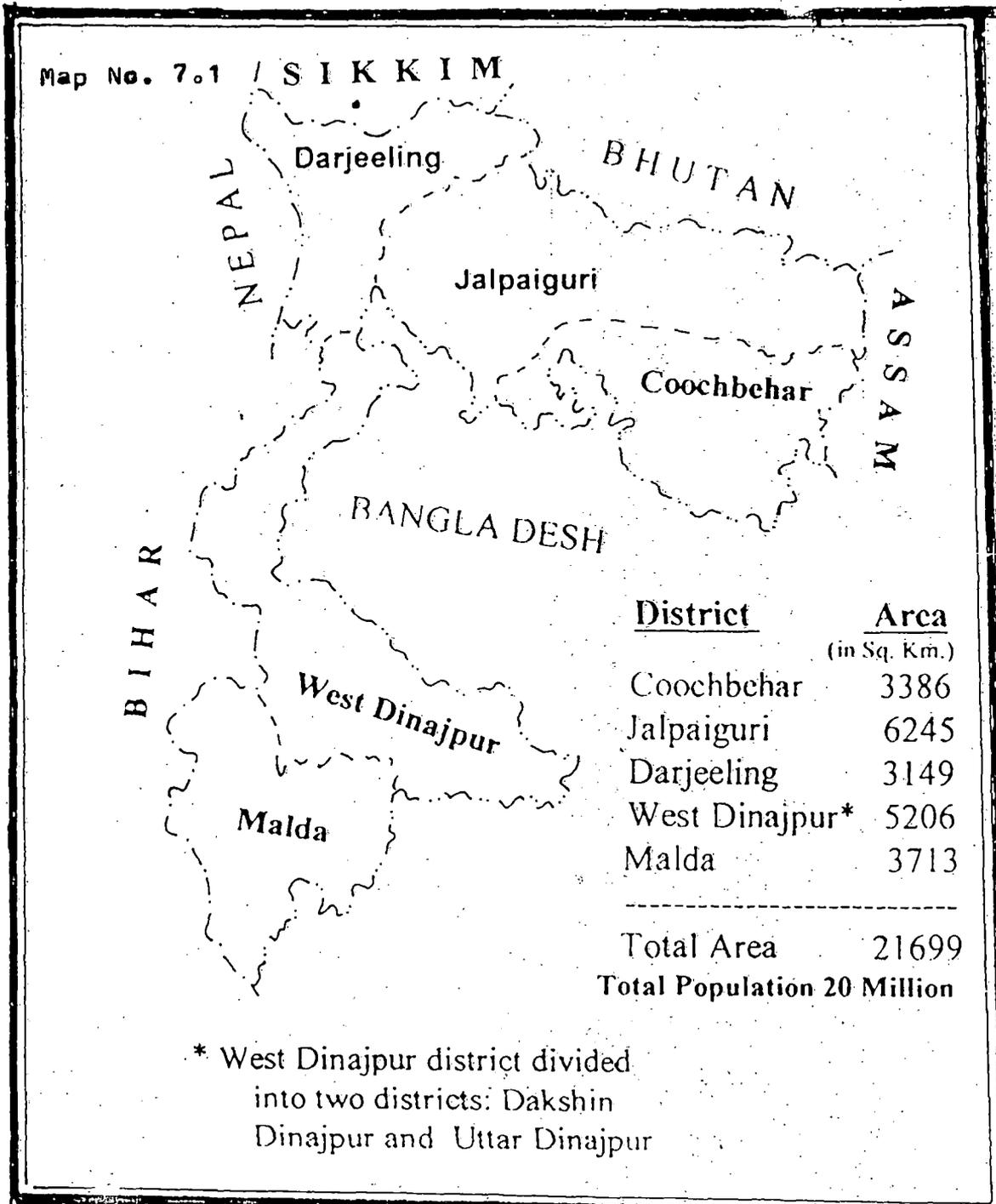
2. Demanded Kamtapur State

The demand is the first of its kind in the area : Kamtapur agitation rocked the North Bengal in 1980's excluding the area of Darjeeling hills by Uttarkhanda Dal and persists still. The trend of agitation gathers exhortation from Jalpesh mandir, Nayanaguri, Duars area of North Bengal. Kamtapur state has been being demanded by various regional dals since. In 1995 the Kamtapur Peoples' Party was formed and assembled with a list of 10 demands, in the demand of Kamtapur Separate State at Shibmandir, Darjeeling on 28 March 1997.¹⁸ On the basis of resolutions and deliberations, the KPP has submitted a list of 10 demands to the Chief Minister of West Bengal : demand for a Kamtapur separate state, drive out foreigners, constitutional recognition to the Kamtapuri language, broadcasting all programmes at Siliguri Akash bani and Doordharshan through Kamtapuri language, demand for found the Kendriya Vidyalaya at Cooch Behar, nationalisation of Tista Project etc.

The KPP has submitted a list of 11 demands to the Prime Minister of India including the demand of separate Kamtapur State on 28 September 1997. A delebrative representation has also submitted to Divisional Commissioner of North Bengal, Jalpaiguri an 11 point, where they wanted to hold a rally in support of the proposed demand of separate state adding with slogan. "No Kamtapur, no rest." Another a rally has been assembled, the president of party deals with to realise the demand in liue of blood, where preface of party, "Kamtapur voice"s are sold.¹⁹

In support of separate Kamtapur state a cycle rally and demonstration had been followed a circumambulation around of districts, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Malda and both districts of Dinajpur separately.²⁰ In

PROPOSED KAMTAPUR STATE



12th general election, KPP gave the candidates in each seats of North Bengal but, in the Panchayat election not participated.²¹ the KPP blocked national Highway 31 at Shivmandir on 12 June, 1997 holding up traffic . It was called a 24 hour North Bengal bandh on 16 June to press its demand. The agitators claimed the local administration had stopped them from entering Siliguri, when they wanted to hold a rally in support of the proposed. The KPP, with supporters on 20 trucks, were stopped on the outskirts of Siliguri. KPP leaders said the proposed bondh was called in support of an 11 point charter of demands for the creation of a Kamtapouri state and constitutional recognition of the kamtapuri language and their organisation did not recognise the West Bengal government's authority over North Bengal since the area in question "was a separate state".

The KPP has been active in these parts for quite some time. Police had failed a demonstration they had planned when the Chief Minister attended a rally at Shivmandir in February, 1997, before the Lock Sabha elections. They had rigged up a makeshift gate that said : "Welcome to Kamtapur state Mr. Jyoti Basu."²²

The then chairman of left front, Mr. Sainen Dasgupta, who was narrating local people, said to foil the bandh and stand against it.²³ In against the bandh, the state rural Development Minister and leader of Darjeeling, Mr. Ashok Bhattacharjee commented, "It is the agitation of the despondency men, it is an unreasonable and not a historical so far."²⁴

The 24 hour North Bengal bandh evoked a mixed response on 16 June 1998 as KPP supporter s turned violent in the Siliguri sub-division and Jalpaiguri district. Most shops and schools were closed in Siliguri sub-division and vehicles stayed off the road. Nearly all shops and business establishments remained

closed. Government employees, however, turned up for work. Later in the day, Outskirts of Siliguri town limped back to normalcy. The bandh had no impact in the three hill sub-division and in the tea plantations. The bandh also had no effect in Cooch Behar district, while considered a KPP stronghold. In Jalpaiguri district, agitators burnt an Assam State Transport Corporation Bus and another of the North Bengal State Transport Corporation. KPP supporters went on the rampage at Dhupguri, Maynaguri and Kumargram of Alipurduar subdivision of Jalpaiguri.²⁵ Widespread violence marked the 24 North Bengal bandh, 56 persons were arrested from Siliguri-Sub-division and parts of Jalpaiguri districts. In a complaint to the Sabhadhipathi of Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad, the Tea Planters Association has alleged that KPP has demanded huge sums of money for tea gardens in the Terai region. Seeking protection, the TTPA has also alleged that KPP supporters were instigating tea garden workers to indulge in anti establishment activities.²⁶

Naxalbari Police arrested Mr. Atul Roy, President of Central Committee of KPP, district President and two other leaders of KPP of Darjeeling on charges of extortion from tea gardens in the Terai region and for instigating violence during the KPP bandh on 16 June 1998.²⁷ The Col-ML leader, Mr. Kanu Sanual has demanded a judicial probe into the police 12 rounds firing to the agitators at Batasi during the KPP bandh on 16 June 1998. Demanding the immediate release of all arrested KPP activities. Mr. Sanyal said, he planned to meet the chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, and seek his intervention to establish peace and law and order in North Bengal, because police were terrorising people in villages and forcing men to flee their homes after the 16 June incident. He rejected the statehood demand of the KPP and the Uttarkhanda Dal as "illegal", since the Kamtapur Kingdom had ceased to exist long ago and its people had assimilated with the rest of the populace.²⁸

Another the 24 hours North Bengal bandh was called by the All Kamtapur Student's Union and supported by the Kamtapur people's party in demand of recognition of Kamtapuri language and preservation of Kamtapuri culture and heritage on 11 September, 1998.²⁹ It was also supported Kamtapur Women's Rights forum.³⁰ Despite stringent police bandobast in key areas a state one was damaged wear the medical college and other bus at Kapaidaugga, Cooch Behar.³¹ The bandh had no effect in Cooch Behar, Malda, Dinajpur. Altogether 210 AKSU and KPP activists were arrested from different parts of the Siliguri sub-division. The Matigara police arrested 30 AKSU supporters from North Bengal University premises. The impact of the bandh was most felt at shivmandir and Kumargram of Alipurduar subdivision of the Jalpaiguri. In Siliguri proper, the bandh evoked little response.³²

At present, the problem of Kamtapur had suffered neglect at the hands of successive governments. The problem needs immediate attention.

3. Refugee Problem

The issues of citizenship, illegal immigration and stateless persons overlap. So, the treaties signed or accords reached by various governments are interspersed with causes, consequences, and implications of migration. The Assam agitation, followed by similar movement against "foreigners" in Meghalaya displacing thousands of Nepalis and others from there, was related to the increase of population due to uncontrolled migration. But the strategy of Assam student leaders was to invoke Assamese sub-nationalism with which to mobilise the masses for forceful bargaining with the central government. After a series of protracted negotiations for finding out an acceptable base year (cut off year) for granting citizenship and for detection and deportation of "foreigners", an accord

was reached between the student leaders and the centre on August 15, 1985. All the negotiations since 1980 concentrated on the detection on the basis of the constitution and the relevant laws, namely, the citizenship Act, 1955, the Foreigners Act 1946, and the Passport Act, 1952.³³

The memorandum of KPP explicitly states the, "Profound since apprehension regarding the influx of foreign bations into North Bengal and fear about adverse effects on the political, social economic and cultural life of North Bengal.³⁴ Apart from the demand for a separate state, comprising North Bengal districts and parts of Assasm, the Kamtapuris have been insisting on the de tection of foreigners' name from the voter's list with 1971 as the cut-off year. They have demanded the introduction of an inner permit to check the influx of foreigners.³⁵

By far the most important factor affecting the Bengali psyche has been partition. Even after five decades, the trauma continues. Till same years back some 2000 Bangladeshi nationals from across the border infiltrated everyday into west Bengal. A matter of sentiment was in course of time made into a political plank to inflate the vote bank. It was forgotten that a geographical boundary with a certain number of inhabitants cannot be a state for Bengalis, irrespective of their place of birth or religion.³⁶

The West Bengal government is serious about the kamtapuri demand for a separate state is clear from the fact that it has offered to hold talks: "the s door was always open for dialogue" says Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharya on the 27-28 June 1998 seminar on the language, culture and socio-economic condition of North Bengal organised by the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs at Dinabandhu Mancha, siliguri.³⁷ But, political experts feel the acceptance of

this demand will only encourage secessionism.

B. AAKSU : Idollogical aspects and its articulations

Acknowledging UKD its mother organisation, All Kamtapur Student's Union was composed of School. College, University Students. AKSU started his end of protestant activities against anti-social ailments, in rural level and protective measures for enduring socio-cultural norms of Rajbanshi. AKSU demands that it is a non-political association, a a union of socio-cultural reformation. to increase the value of sicio-economic and cultural patterns of Rajbanshi it proceeds to save from corrupt culture as a path-finder of Rajbanshi society.

To attain such ends and purposes of the Union, a new committee was reformed at village, Pakhalu para, Rajganj by a secret meeting demolishing the old Committee under the Bhatī nagarī police station of Jalpaiguri. For the post of presidentship and secretariate of a new committee of AKSU were nominated by Mr. Vishnu Mohan Patswary and Mr. Khajendra Narayan-Singha respectively.³⁸ To content massive improvement of Union's ends and ideologies at the rural level, a committee was formed for each districts of North Bengal separately, and it also formed at block level and village level respectively.³⁹ It has a white party flag delineated with a buckler and sword in middle.

Being doubted about the term of "Kamtapur" the scheduled conference of AKSU was resisted by order to draw at the playground in fornt Kumar gram police station on 20 December 1995. At this time, it is enlisted as a terrorist regiment by police. Being former accountable involvement with AKSU, in the same way, "Testa film Society was not permitted to commence its functions."⁴⁰

During this period, AKSU started promptitude is doing unity among the members in Cooch Behar District TUI KAY - AKSU, MUI KAYAKSU, JAKRAY KAY - AKSU (who says AKSU, who is I - AKSU, who articulates - AKSU) is AKSU's slogan. Raising the slogan its overspreading promptness forms at Mathabhanga subdivision of Cooch Behar evidently. Indenting of meeting and processions of AKSu are organised not only in Cooch Behar but also near Jalpaiguri district when formulation of policies acquainted with ideology of Union at Kumar Gram Village of Alipurduar police station a friction was happened between AKSU and C P M⁴¹

On 30 June, 1997 at Goswaihhat under Dugguri block, a two day conference was held at Raja Mohan High School where a list of 13 demands was taken as follows :

i) Demand for recognition of Kamtapuri as a language in the constitution of India.

ii) Demand for introduction of Kamtapur Education Board of Secondary and High Secondary instead of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and West Bengal council of Secondary Education respectively.

iii) From primary to graduation level of education, the medium should demand be read in Kamtapuri language;

iv) 80% (percent of total programmes of Radio and T.V. of North Bengal Zone should be drawn on Kamtapuri Culture and mode of living of Kamtapuris.

v) Demand for declaratiion national holiday on the birth day of Thakur

Panchanan, Abhas uddin and Chilla Roy with regards.

vi) Demand for security of culture and ethnicity of Kamtapuri from anti-cultural trend through governmental protective initiation.

vii) 70% seats should demand be reserved for Kamtapuri students in North Bengal Medical College, North Bengal University, Engineering College, Training College.

viii) To introduction a new university at Cooch Behar should demand be entitled as Thakur Panchanan University.

ix) Demand for drive out refugees who came in 1971 from foreign countries.⁴²

Articulation of Autonomous administration is added in the resolution of AKSU. To attain the ends of demand, the several ethnic groups are assembled at different parts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar is doubted by respective department of West Bengal Government. the source of information is dealt with it has made of a new collaboration with Dooars Jharkhand and Gorkha Associations. To attain the ends of Autonomous administration all ethnic groups agitates jointly in entire area of North Bengal. By creating unsteady, ardour situation, the ethnic groups strengthen their demands of autonomous administration. to quick its andolon (revolution) the groups envisages its agitation on brutist way .

Besides these, demand for introduction of panchayat Raj at tea plant

areas and localities of forest of North Bengal, full pay holiday of tea plants labours, introduction of Kamtapuri and adhibashi language in the North Bengal University as means of medium, to improve agriculture and industry base of economy of North Bengal total revenue of North Bengal from all means of sources should demand be invested evidently. It is said that Samajbadi Jana parishad was newly formed and also added with the agitation of Autonomous administration of North Bengal.

Oppression against Scheduled Caste Rajbanshi is claimed that endeavour of withdrawn the Rajbanshi from the lists of Scheduled Castes with a protection by Kshatriya society. The people of Cooch Behar irrespective of Caste and creed now, do not like to remain under the government of West Bengal due to political economical and cultural ground. The demand for separation of Cooch Behar State under Art 3 of the constitution of India as the present government of West Bengal fails to keep the assurance to ameliorate socio-economic condition of Cooch Behar. It is fact that more than 80% people of Cooch Behar now have been living under poverty line. At present they have no other alternative but to file a writ petition to the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India under Art 32 of the constitution of India to convert Cooch Behar to Union Territory as per agreement and assurance to the government of India which was made on 11th September, 1949.⁴³

Campaign for Self - rule

Bandh - Weary North Bengal faces yet another threat of disruption to its normal rhythm. This time from the Kamtapur people's Party which has called a two day - on 12 and 13 May 1999 bandh throughout the region in support of a demand that seems to have been resurrected from oblivion over past year -

the carving out of a separate Kamtapur state from the six districts of West Bengal lying to the north of the Ganga.

Much as this region is used to bands being called on the slightest pretext by different political parties, it has also suffered the threat of being splintered as various groupings, fired by the sense of exclusion from key centres of power, clamour for chunks of the region in this campaign for self-rule.

Perhaps what makes North Bengal so susceptible to such political disaffection is the representation of multi-ethnic aspirations. The cauldron might not have quite reached boiling-point, but it is certainly simmering. And here it is the different languages spoken by the different ethnic communities that is slowly but surely shaping the altogether essential axis of sub-national conflict. Such a perception seems to have so designed itself that it forms the base for the demarcation of autonomous political entities. The outcome: the Kamtapur peoples' party, the Uttarkhand Dal and the Gorkha National Liberation Front (in the Darjeeling hills).

Though the clamour for self-rule - which in this case means the fracturing of West Bengal into separate geographical units - has over the past few years merged into the political soundscape of North Bengal, the first tremors were felt in the Darjeeling hills. Since then the violence - splattered Gorkhaland agitation of the mid '80s took off at a tangent but not before West Bengal went through with its maiden experiment in the setting up of an autonomous council. The ripples created in the hills seemed to rekindle the political aspirations of the ethnic groupings in the plains, self-reinforcing eddies of primordial discontent, and opening up a new chapter in the campaign of the Kamtapur Peoples' Party.

This happened a year ago, at a time when there seemed to be emerging - at least in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts - a sort of para-politics of clashing public identities and ethno centric aspirations. Among other things that it sparked off were the demands by ethnic groupings like the Mech and the Rajbanshi for recognition of their respective languages in local schools and universities. Not that the political unrest in the neighbouring Bodoland Autonomous council areas have had no influence on the local ethnic communities in the two districts.

Students assumed positions at the front line in this upsurge of ethnic consciousness, with the local language of the minorities suddenly developing a coerciveness of their own. and coming into existence, within a few years after the formation of the All Bodo Students' Union, as if on cue, was the All Kamatapur Students' Union in the Plains and the All Gorkha Students' Union in the hills. The local language and its recognition soon became not so much a question of lingua franca than a political idiom with linguistic conflicts tending to emerge in the form of crises in education centres, as distinct and distant from the usual areas of political combat.

Egged on by the AKSU, the Kamtapur Peoples' party fired its first salvo at the administration by calling for a bandh throughout North Bengal on 16 June 1998 under flak was Writers' Building, charged for its Calcutta centrality. And though, according to local reports, the bandh did not elicit much of a response, the leadership engaged itself in a long-drawn-out process of reassemblage to make its first attempt at capturing power by participating in the panchayat polls held in the Siliguri subdivision in April 1999. For a debutant in electoral politics, the results were not discouraging. The party captured 18 gram panchayat seats, mainly in the Matigara and Naxalbari areas, and came a

surprisingly close second in a few others, giving a few moments of worry even to formidable opponents like the CPIM..

The ruling Left Front's anxieties have only been accentuated by the ethnic maelstrom in North Bengal as these communities remain vulnerable to resentments buried within primordial loyalties, even through the possibilities of social reform and material progress rest on their integration into a well-ordered polity. The triumph of regional outfits in the March Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council elections was not only a washout for the national parties in the fray but also provided new impetus to the ethnic groupings in the plains for at least seeking electoral reckoning.⁴⁴

The public rally held by the Kamtapur Peoples' Party and the AKSU at Madhabhanga in the Mayanaguri area of the Dooars in the first week of May 1999, was, according to reports, the "biggest attended meeting held in North Bengal at Atharokhai, Shivmandir so far." It was there that the speakers called for a two day bandh beginning from 12 May 1999 in the region.⁴⁵

The Congress, like the Left, is opposing the bandh call even through it continues to blame the Left Front for, in the words of a party leaders, "encouraging the emergence of divisive forces like the KPP through its failure to fulfil its promises to the people during 22 years of its rule."⁴⁶ Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar police are tightening up security for the 12-13 May, 1999 and the Left parties are trying to build up public opinion against it.⁴⁷ The bandh had only a marginal effect on normal life in the towns, but evoked some support in rural areas, particularly in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts and parts of Siliguri sub-division. It was called in support of the twin demands of separate state and the introduction of Kamtapuri as a medium of instruction. Additional forces have

been requisitioned to help police maintain law and order through the two bandh days.⁴⁸ The bandh, according to party leaders, was enough to mobilise the Kamatapuri people in the region and declared as a "historical phenomenon."⁴⁹

Recently a delegation of AKSU leaders had gone to Delhi to submit a memorandum to the President of India demanding constitutional recognition of the kamtapouri Language including to charter of demands as follows :

"i) direct the state of West Bengal to recognise Kamatapouri language of at least 67 lakhs inhabitants of 21,784 sq.km. of former Cooch Behar Part 'C' state under article 347 of the constitution of India and simultaneously appoint a Special Officer under article 350B subject to such officer being acceptable for us ,

ii, Central Government scheme to educate the children of Kamtapuri people in their mother language, be introduced under Central Supervision.

iii. as a token of such recognition by Government of India introduce 2 hours time daily to broadcast didactic programmes in Kamtapouri on farming, economy, talks and other indigenous cultural AIR sessions instead of broadcasting pop music foreign to our listeners with limited programme on Television;

iv) ensure local development by creating employment under the Government with 70 per cent over all reservation for indigenous Kamtapuri young men and women.

v) direct that trade and industry notify all job vacancies to Employment

Exchange and prevent direct appointment by depriving eligible local and indigenous unemployed persons.

vi. ensure financial assistance to indigenous entrepreneurs in trade and industrial projects,

vii. ask the State Government of West Bengal to grant State Holidays on the Birthday of Vishwa Mahabir Chilarai on Maghi Purnima Day and name of portion of National High way (Siliguri to Cooch Behar) in memory of the greatest Kamatapouri Hero Chilarai.

viii. direct that North Bengal University be renamed after Maharaj narayanan who was the greatest learned king of kamtapur, who spread learning;

ix. direct that the ancient Cooch Behar Raj Palace, Gosanimari Rajpat and other antiquarian and archaeological heritage be protected and the whole of the Cooch Behar Palace be preserved as Kamtapur Museum (instead of being made a Hotel as contemplated)."

x. In the ensuing census of the people of the districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, all 3 (South, North and West) dinajpur and Malda with mother tongue and citizenship be correctly enumerated by compulsorily employing one indigenous enumerated on each batch of workers.

Besides these charter of demands, AKSU demands to control of the Union over the West Bengal in respect of identity, culture, language and equal treatment of Kamatapouri people of erstwhile Cooch Behar part 'C' State.⁵⁰

However, there was no specific commitment from centre. Not to forget that the bandh will be yet another demonstration of the quickening ethnocentric aspiration in this region that is North Bengal, with its indigenous population of Rajbanshis who form the spine of the Kamtapur movement.

C. UUSM : IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS AND ITS ARTICULATIONS

The new forum will press for a Uttar Banga Unayyan Parisad, the Uttar Banga Unayyan Sangram Mancha was set up at a two-day convention which ended on 22 December 1996 at Ananda Model High School, Jalpaiguri for an autonomous planning board with executive power for the region of North Bengal. Six organisations have jointly set up a common body. "Uttar Banga Unayyan Sangram Mancha". The six organisations are :

- * Forward Bloc (S)
- * Cooch Behar Rajbanshi Youth Organisation
- * Samajwadi Jana parishad
- * Uttar Banga Tapasili Jati O Adibasi Sangathan

and

- * Two CPI (M-L) factions, including the one led by Mr. Kanu Sanyal.

A general body with 18 members from the six organisations (including with President and Secretary for each organisation) was formed and a steering committee with six members under the Chairmanship of Mr. Kamal Guha, General Secretary of F.B.(S) and former Agricultural Minister of West Bengal

for socio-economic development of North Bengal.⁵¹ Mr. Kamal Guha of the Forward Bloc (S), the firebrand leader, who was minister in successive Left Front Governments, had expelled from the Forward Bloc for his virulent criticism of Mr. Jkyoti Basu over the creation of the Tinbigha Corridor.⁵²

Ends and Principles

For a Uttar Banga Unayyan Parsad, Manch took resolutions for partaining following ends and principles :

- i. Each dal or organisation will exercise the role distinctly according to its ends and ideology of the Manch ;
- ii) These who are agitating for economic and social development of North Bengal, such kinds of individuals and organisations are to be welcome as co-sharer endeavour except the regionalism has been tended to ally itself with parochialism, communalism, intolerance, bigotry, persecution of minorities, capitalism and narrowness.
- iii. New membership should be accepted in the Manch on the recommendatioin of the general body.⁵³

Plans and Programmes

Since independence, the region of North Bengal was not only neglected in the field of socio-economic and political but also crisis of ethno-cultural identity, without autonomous Development Council, the improvement of independent tradition and history, geographical environment, socio-economic condition and political structure of North Bengal should not be possible, Manch articulates that its agitation will be started at grassroot levels.⁵⁴ The articulation of formation

of UttarBanga Unayyan parsad is not a new agitation, but it was arisen under the platform of UTJAS firstly, at present it is being resusciated by the Uttar IBanga Unayyan Mancha.⁵⁵

A present a press conference a Jalpaiguri Circuit House on 23 December, 1996, Mr. Guha said, the Manch will hold a citizens convention at Dhupguri on February 9, at Cooch Behar on February 20, at Raiganj (North Dinajpur) on March 16, in Berhampur on March 17, 1997. It will organise a rally on March 23 in Siliguri. According to pre-plan scheduled of Manch, a general meeting was held at Cooch Behar Rash Mela maiden on 20 February 1997, where Mr. Guha, chairman of Manch, Mrs. Ranjana Roy, President of UTJAS and leaders of CPI (M-L), Samajvadi Jana Parishad, Rajbanshi Youth Association dealt their revolutionary speech to implicate the people for assemblage to uttarbanga Unnayyan Parsad. to carry into effect of its Sangram a general meeting was held in Siliguri and Jalpaiguri on 30th March and 18 November, 1997 respectively.⁵⁶ All leaders dealt with strategy of parsad, demanding an autonomous planning Board for North Bengal and fighting Sankosh canal project in North Bengal. to urge people of North Bengal about review of Sankosh canal project, a cycle rally was started from Balurghat on 9 November 1997, a decision was taken in the general meeting of the Manch and finished at Barobisa via Jalpaiguri, Mayanaguri, Dhupguri, Khagenhat, Jateswar, Tapsikata, Alipourduar, Majit kana.⁵⁷

Once the project is completed, West Bengal is expected to receive about 12000 cusecs of water daily from the Sankosh - Teesta rivers to help the State Government make up partially for the Gnaga water to be shared with Bangladesh at Farakka.⁵⁸ According to the proposed project, a 143 km long canal will be

dug from the Bhutan point of the river to the Teesta barrage. The implementation of the project is threatening to turn the entire Sankosh Gangadhar basin, along with Golakganj under Dhubri district, Kokrajhar district and its adjoining areas as well as eastern Cooch Behar into a stretch of barren land. Water from the Gangadhar river is used by the farmers in the area. It is diverted to fulfil the commitment made by India in the Indo Bangla treaty on sharing of Ganga waters, it will have disastrous effects on those who practise agriculture in this particular area.⁵⁹ The canal will acquire to damage about 1144.16 hectares forest land, 196.18 hectares tea garden, 342.52 hectares paddy land. This canal will cross over big 8 rivers - Raidak Gangadhar one and two, Nonai, Kaljani, Torsa, Daina and Jaldkaha and endanger the life of 21 thousand people.⁶⁰

If implemented, the Sankosh project will have a catastrophic impact on the economy. The proposed 120m canal will pass through the core area of the Buxa Tiger Reserve, Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary, Gorumara National Park and Hasimara forest. The implementation of the project will have adverse effects on the habitat of a highly endangered species. The elephants, for instance, which have been travelling between Assam, Bhutan and North Bengal will suffer most. According to environmentalists, the project is a matter for great concern because, one of the feeder channels (of the Sankosh river) will cut across the three reserve forest areas. S C Das additional inspector general, forests, says that fears about the consequences of this huge project have already been expressed by the Tiger Crisis Cell and the Steering Committee of Project Elephant, "We cannot allow the only home of rhinos, elephants and other wild animals in West Bengal to be disturbed by this project at any cost."⁶¹

The present uncertainty over the project has been sparked by a note sent to the Ministry of External Affairs by the office of the Additional Inspector

General of forests, under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, in New Delhi recently. the External Affairs Ministry has been asked to reconsider the project.

The reason:

i. if constructed, the project would endanger the environment in large areas of North Bengal ;

and

ii. If constructed, the damage would affect Buxa Tiger Reserve, Jaldapara Wild life Sanctuary and Gorumara National Park located in the region.

A copy of the note has been also sent to the State Government. According to a Senior State official of Writers' Buildings, the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests has been written that these national Parks are, "very important projected areas of North Bengal, with a sizeable population of tigers, elephants, bisons and flors and fauna we cannot allow the only home of the wild rhinoceros in West Bengal to be disturbed by the project."⁶² "Any development work which could effect the conservation of these highly endangered species in these prime projected areas should be excluded," the note added and Manch also articulated.

Frayed Edges for Sustenance

Development of North Bengal or lack of it is now a much debated subject. And as the political parties remain locked in claims and rejections life is any thing but blissful. Bandhs are called at will, days are wasted in unproductive exercise and development takes a backseat. The overriding feeling being that

its nobody's concern !

Let us take a look at how they work at cross-purposes. In 1998, the West Bengal Government proposed setting up a North Bengal Development Board with sanctioning Rs. 45 crore.⁶³ But in the year of 1999 budget session, finance minister Mr. Ashim Dasgupta chose to put it on hold ! This is certainly not evidence of good governance. Similarly, Forward Bloc (S) leader Mr. Kamal guha's demand for an autonomous planning board (with executive power) for autonomous planning board (with executive power) for the region has not washed with the people either . On the 23th March 1999, the 24 hour North Bengal bandh was called by the Forward Bloc (S) and supported by the Congress (a two-day convention, April 11 and 12, 1998 of the Secular Democratic Front, comprising the Congress and the Forward Bloc (S), demanded a development council for North Bengal and a Bill for autonomy in this area. The front has rejected the twin proposals of a Gorkhaland state a much favoured demand with the political organisation of the Darjeeling hills and that of a Kamtapur state which has begun to snowball in the plains areas of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts including parts of Assam). demanding an autonomous planning board for North Bengal comprising with Peoples' representatives and intelligentsia of North Bengal as members for the past few years. "The parthy is all the more glarring " is clear that no representation from North Bengal in the 12 member state planning Board headed by Mr. Jyoti Basu.⁶⁴

However, if "Boards" and "Council's " are agencies for development, non-representation in the state planning board might have robbed North Bengal of its share of benefits. It is in desperate search for a forum !

True, North Bengal is racefully lacking in infrastructure and job opportunities but its potential cannot be want only ignored. While tea and timber contribute significantly to government coffers, there has hardly been any effort to develop these industries. Mr. Kamal guha has claimed that out of 1.3 million agricultural hectares in North Bengal, 200,000 hectares have already been lost to soil erosion tea gardens, and the land acquired by the BSF to set up camps and otherwise. As a result, more and more people belonging to the agrarian community are leaving their villages in search of manual labour, an avenue which is again becoming constricted because of free infiltration from Bangladesh. similar views have also been expressed recently by some Naxalite organisations and the transferred Area Suryapuri Organisation. The latter is active in the Islampur and Chopra areas in North Dinajpur. there are also apprehensions that another peasant upheaval may break out soon unless the situation is handled carefully. And that is speaking just about the plains areas of North Bengal. Blessed with the most beautiful mountain formation in the world, North Bengal has not been able to exploit it and earn the magic rupee.

Speaking about development, the Federation of Chambers of commerce and Industry, North Bengal, the apex business organisation in the region, feels the prospects in North Bengal are tremendous. While the climate conditions are just about right in the hills to set up precision industries, the plains are ideal for agro-based and value added product units. Besides proper utilisation of land and raw material available in the region, such ventures will create job opportunities by the thousands. In this context, focin Secretary, Biswajit Das says repeated appeals to the State government to pout more accent on the region and set up one mother industry in each of the six districts of North Bengal which would facilitate the growth of ancillary indistries, has fallen on deaf years. Tax concession is, however, the only positive sign.

Then there is the role of the banks and financial institutions, pathetic enough as to be found wanting. While the small scale sector finds the going increasingly tough because of the negative attitude of bankers, the credit deposit ratio for the state in general and North Bengal in particular is quite low. While there are no industrial cells in the banks to deal with matters of small-scale units, there is no office of the Bureau of Indian Standards to upgrade the quality of SSI products, Das says.

Tourism is another sector which remains undernourished, starting from the historic ruins of Gour-Malda to the wilderness to the Dooars and then the blue mountain yonder. North Bengal's biggest potential lies in this direction.⁶⁵ Despite its rich heritage, Cooch Behar still has to find a place on the tourism map of the State "Even though the government has taken some steps to preserve historical sites and monuments, a lot remains to be done", says Tapas Bakshi, a State Bank of India Official. The existence of jheels and rivers in the area provide opportunities for boating, fishing and water sports. Not many have been to or even heard of Rasik Beel, the largest majority bird sanctuary of North Bengal. Spread over 2500 ha, the sanctuary needs proper care and maintenance to attract tourists, says a forest department official.⁶⁶ With the Government thinking of a heritage tour package areas like Gosanimari and Rasik Beel may form part of it, In spite of its importance, the archaeological excavation of the mound at Gosanimari began almost five centuries later.⁶⁷ A team of 20 specialists of Archaeological survey of India, Calcutta circle excavation was started under the supervision of Mr. Shimadri Behari Ota, Director of West Bengal on 20 March 1999.⁶⁸ It is another instance of collective apathy. Naba Bidhan Brahma Mandir, the century old temple of Cooch Behar is in a decrepit condition thanks to the negligence of the Debottar (Religious) Trust Board of the town. district Planning committee, Department of tourism, Government of West Bengal and a section

of local public representatives.⁶⁹

But all too sadly neglected, whatever haphazard growth has taken fails to attract more than a crowd on a shoestring budget. Those who depend on the trade, still live off whatever attraction was introduced by the British. When there are the ponderables like "what could have been" and "what has not been", on the one hand, there are two sureties on the other which spell down for North Bengal every year. Landslide in the hills, floods in the plains. Granted that natural disasters are beyond human control, timely steps and measures can limit the damage. Temporary measures are taken when these disasters can hardly check the loss of life, property and crop.⁷⁰

The problems are one too many and with the changing demographic pattern in North Bengal, these are getting all the more complex. It is time the problems were addressed in the true since word, for a frayed edges are already showing.

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