

## **The Saga of the Hitasadhani Sabha, 1946 – 1950 : A case study of ethnic identity and power struggle in the erstwhile princely state of Cooch Behar –**

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### I

The emergence of the Hitasadhani Sabha, an ethno-linguistic based political group or Association was an important episode in the closing phase of the princely State of Cooch Behar. It emerged in the most critical phase of her history. And it played a very significant role in shaping the fate of the lonely princely State of Bengal. What was more important is that the lion's portion of the 'Cooch Behari' people was emotionally associated with the Hitasadhani Sabha. Its popularity was almost overwhelming. But the funny thing is that neither the non-Cooch Behari, nor the Bengalis of the surrounding areas did like the Hitasadhani Sabha's aims and actions. Until now, no serious academic attempt has been made by any academicians or non-academicians to unfold the rise and decline of the Hitasadhani Sabha in the context of peculiar ethno-linguistic and social hierarchy of this tiny princely State. Even both the antagonists and protagonists of the Hitasadhani Sabha had not written any memoirs on this tumultuous phase barring Sree Hemanta Kumar Roy Barman, a high-official of the princely State as well as the 'Son of the soil' and Sree Dinesh Chandra Dakua, a former Minister, Government of West Bengal and a veteran Marxist Political worker of Cooch Behar. Their studded silence is unhistorical and also irrational. As disciple of Clio, we cannot support this type of unhistorical attitudes of the onlookers or the participants of the Hitasadhani Sabha. This behaviour of the contemporaries are depriving the scholars and researchers of the regional history on area studies to carry out research on this most important issue of the history of northern North Bengal and Western Assam. Frankly speaking, to understand the post-colonial and the post-modern political and social tensions of Cooch Behar nay the northern North Bengal i.e. Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Siliguri plains, one cannot shut his or her eyes over the event of the immediate past i.e. the formation of the Hitasadhani Sabha. Objectively speaking, the Greater Cooch Behar peoples Association is the successor of the Hitasadhani Sabha with minor differences. Psychologically speaking, both are staying in the same place only with the difference of times.

Another important lacuna is to be mentioned here also. The lacuna is that the Governmental Records on the Hitasadhani Sabha are also scanty. We cannot understand how it was happened ? It is not unlikely that the records and the information related to the Hitasadhani Sabha were destroyed intentionally by some one or vested interest group. What is more curious is that even the participants, who are now aged, is conspicuously keep mum themselves on the most hot-bed issue of the yesteryears. With such hurdles and constraints I am trying my best to portray a pen-picture on the rise and decline of the Hitasadhani Sabha in the historical perspectives.

### II

To understand the social origin of the Hitasadhani Sabha, we must study the demographic composition of the princely State of Cooch Behar. Demography encompassed here the religious

composition, ethno-linguistic identity issue and the historical heritage of the princely State. All these were different from the so-called mainstream Bengal. Unless, we understand these differences, we cannot understand the pulse of the 'Cooch Behari people'. Before entering into the discussion on it, it would be better to provide the definition of the 'Cooch Behari people'. This was the key issue of the problem. Though in differently dressed, the connotation of the identity question of today and the Cooch Behari identity issue of the Hitasadhani Sabha phase is by and large remaining the same with little differences. In fact, the underlying spirit is same but the manifestation is different. In addition to these differences, the question of power-politics were also a critical factor behind the emergence of the Hitasadhani Sabha. Truly speaking, in the high noon phase of the Hitasadhani Sabha, the sharing of political power was becoming the most priority issue in their struggle. This issue is very much interesting. In the election of 1946, the Hitasadhani Sabha got sweeping majority. This resulted the massive association of the newly elected members of the Hitasadhani Sabha in the Executive and Administrative structure of the State. For the first time, they got the taste of political and administrative power. This share of political and administrative power had whetted their political lull on the eve of the Merger Agreement. It is against these historical backdrops, we shall discuss here the ethno-linguistic canvas of the princely State of Cooch Behar.

### III

The people of the princely State of Cooch Behar were sharply divided in two broad categories – the Cooch Beharis and the non-Cooch Beharis. Cooch Beharis means the local Rajbanshi Hindus, the local Rajbanshi Muslims known as Nasya Sheikh, the Kumrupia Brahmins i.e. the Maithili Brahmins who had been settled Cooch Behar since the time of the beginning of the Hinduisation and some other non-caste Hindus such as the Sahas, Jogis and a few tribal's. The ethnic feature, the Language, the culture even the food habits of both the Hindu and Muslim Rajbanshis are almost identical. The Rajbanshi Nasya Sheikh Muslims, even in the beginning of the twentieth century, were only the believers of Islam, but actually a practising Hindu Rajbanshi. Both D. E. Sanders and Milligans - the two top-ranking British officials have corroborated this fact. For example the local Muslims of Cooch Behar State have generally followed the Hindu Law of Inheritance, instead of the Islamic Law in regard to determine their property rights. This was an unique case of history of the Hindu-Muslim relations in the princely State of India. Two factors were responsible for such an unique situation. Firstly, the Maharajas of the Cooch Behar State could not adopt any discriminatory policy towards the minority subjects of his State. This gesture of the Maharajas would have to be found in the Holiday lists of the Cooch Behar State. The modern model of the secular State had been practiced in Cooch Behar long before its implantation in the other princely states of India. Secondly, due to the lack of the rapid communication and transport system, the Islamic preachers could not succeed in introducing the ritualistic part of the Islam. In addition to this, the Pirs and the Darbesh's were the chief exponent of Islam in this region who always advocated the idea of assimilation and amalgamation rather than forcible conversion. It is also to be noted that the numbers of the Aashraf Muslims i.e. Sayyid, Sheikh, Mughal and Pathan were insignificant. According to the Census of 1891, the total Muslim population of the State was 170, 746 out of which 1146 were the outsiders Muslims i.e. Aashraf. Naturally, a kind of ethno-linguistic consolidation rather than the religious consolidation was taken place amongst the Hindu and Muslim Cooch Beharis.

The third category of the Cooch Beharis were the Maithili Brahmins who were locally

called the Kamrupiya Brahmins. The Maithili Brahmins had a good understanding with the Rajbanshi Hindu community. In fact, the social customs and the religious rituals of the Rajbanshis was largely the product of the Maithili customs. It is to be noted here that the South Bengal or the Radh Bengal had followed customs of Kalinga and northern North Bengal the customs of Mithila. However, in all occasions, the Kamrupiya Brahmins had extended their moral, intellectual and physical support to the Rajbanshi community's cause. In this connection, I would like to draw the attention of the esteemed readers to the another interesting point. The point is that the Kamrupiya Brahmins was despised by the Radhi, Barendra and Vaidik Brahmins of the rest of Bengal. There was no social and intellectual communication between the Kamrupiya Brahmins and the Brahmins of the rest of Bengal.

The question of the inclusion of the Saha's, a traditional Bengali merchant community and the Jogi's, a non-cast Bengali community in the category of the Cooch Behari's was not above suspicion. Because, they were not the indigenous people or son of the soil. Was it an expression of their anger against the higher caste Bengali Brahmins, Baidyas and Kayasthas ? Or was it an exhibition of the Anti-caste consolidation ? Now will discuss the definition and arena of the term Non-Cooch Beharis.

The vocabulary non-Cooch Beharis has come naturally as a counterpart of the Cooch Beharis. There is a plain meaning of the vocabulary i.e. they were not the people of Cooch Behar. They were called by the local people as outsiders i.e. Bahiragata or Bairer Loke. They were also addressed by the local people as the Bhatias i.e. the people who have come from the Bhatir Desh (in terms of the rivers course). The Bhatia people meant those who have come from the East, South and West Bengal. Surprisingly, the Marwaris and the other Non-Bengalis were not called Bhatias. The outsiders or the Bhatias on the other hand called the local people as the Deshi Manush and in some cases as the Bahe. Though Bahe is an affectionate address in the local society but it was used derogatively by the outsiders or the Bhatias. So, a ground was prepared for social and political conflagration in the princely State of Cooch Behar.

#### IV

Another outstanding area of confrontation between the Cooch Beharis and the Non-Cooch Beharis was the question of Kshatriyahood claimed by the Rajbanshis. The Rajbanishis claim of the Kshatriyahood was an anathema to the caste system of the Bengali Hindus. We do not find any existence of the Kshatriya caste in pre-colonial and the early colonial phase. It was only after the Census of 1891, we found that the different castes of Bengal organized movements for the Kshatriya status. It was an all-India phenomenon. In Bengal, we found the birth of the Ugra Kshatriya, Barga Kshatriya Paundra Kshatriya and Rajabanshi Kshatriya movements. This resulted the birth of a serious social tensions in Bengal. In Northern Bengal, the movement took a new shape. Because, the upper caste Hindus of lower Bengal who have settled in the Princely State of Cooch Behar and the British Bengal districts of the Rajshahi Division, could not reconcile with the claim of the Rajbanshis as the Kshatriyas. Because, conventionally, the Bengali society was composed by Brahmanas, Baidyas, Kayasthas and Sudras. Harendra Narayan Chaudhury, a noted Administrative Officials of the Cooch Behar Raj has nicely depicted the picture. He observed that this caste hierarchical beliefs have created a psychological hiatus between the local Rajbanshis and the migrant Bengali caste Hindus. It is also to be noted here that the Hindus of upper and lower Bengal residing in Cooch Behar did not drink water touched

by a Rajbanshi.

In this connection, a pertinent question has been raised by the post-modern sub-altern scholars of the region. Their question is that theoretically, the Baidyas and the Kayasthas were included in the Sudra caste. But in Bengal, the Baidyas and the Kayasthas had demanded a higher caste status and they enjoyed it without social and Sastras sanction. This unsanctioned social position of the Baidyas and the Kayasthas was not criticized by the social historians. But the same group of historians were very critical about the Kashatriyahood claims of the Rajbnashis.

It seems to us that the Colonial Bengal's so-called upper caste Hindus could not recognize the Kshathiyhood of the Rajbanshis, in the post-colonial phase the Bhadrалоке Bengali Historians are not showing their impartiality with regard to the Kshatriya status. So, a psychological cold war was growing in the princely State of Cooch Behar and the surrounding districts of the British Bengal. This cold caste war had converted into an open caste war when the Rajbanshi Kahatriyas had submitted a memorandum to the Government for the inclusion of the Rajbanshis in the scheduled class category status. A serious social conflict as well as rupture was taken all over the Northern portion of Bengal on this issue. It was really a contradictory situation. Whatever the arguments were placed by the eminent social reformer Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma and his followers, it was definitely a debatable issue. The Kshatriyahood and the Scheduled Caste status could not be enjoyed simultaneously. Obviously, it also became an issue of social dispute between the Cooch Beharis and the Non-Cooch Beharis of the Cooch Behar State and the neighbouring and surrounding areas.

Another small area of conflict was the language question (Not linguistic identity). The language spoken by the Cooch Beharis was different from the chaste Bengali of Krishnanagar – Nadia of Central Bengal. This Krishna Nagarik chaste Bengali was recognized by the Bengali speaking people of Bengal as the standard Bengali for teaching, study and writing. It is true that the today's linguistic question was not raised by the Cooch Beharis. However, the linguistic homogeneity amongst the Rajbanshi Hindus, Rajbanshi Muslims, Kamrupiya Brahmins and the other sub-castes have strengthened the foundation of the linguistic consolidation (not identity).

## V

This ethno-caste-linguistic antagonism was further aggragrivated by the economic and educational disparities. The test-book historians are giving much emphasis upon the ethno-caste-linguistic identity issue rather than the economic disparities and deprivation of opportunities. Let us try to unfolding the issue of educational inequalities.

It is true that the Maharaja's of the Cooch Behar State particularly the Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur was a pioneer of introducing western and modern education in Cooch Behar. Many Primary, Secondary Schools both for Boys and Girls were established. Maharaja also established a College in the name of Queen Victoria in 1887 for remembering the Golden Jubilee celebration of her coronation. It was the first Degree College of the then North East India. It is to be noted that the Cotton College of Guwahati was established after 12 years of the Cooch Behar Victoria College. The primary objective of the Maharaja was to spread higher education among his subjects. But it appears from the Administrative Reports of the State that the lion's portion of the opportunity of higher education was availed by the outsiders. The Administrative Reports of 1931 shows that forty-seven candidates appeared in the examination of whom only eleven were Cooch Beharis. Out of eleven, seven were Hindus and four were

Muslims.

In 1940, forty-three students appeared in the Calcutta University Examination of 1940. Out of forty-three, forty-one students were Hindus and two Muslims. But the most important thing was that out of the total students appeared in the examination, only seven were Cooch Beharis. Not only this, even the higher posts of all the educational institutions were occupied by the Non-Cooch Beharis. Frankly speaking, all the Head Master's, Head Mistress's, teachers of the Jenkins School and the Sunity Academy including the Principal of the Victoria College were the Non-Cooch Beharis. This disparity had created a feeling of discontent in the rising middle class community of the Cooch Beharis. It is true that they were in an embryonic form, still their influence over the Cooch Behari masses was overwhelming.

Like the sphere of education, the administrative officials particularly the higher officials were also occupied by the Non-Cooch Beharis. The process of domination of the outsiders i.e. Bhatias i.e. the Bhadrалоке Bengalis over the administration of the State had begun with the advent of the Company's full control in the administrative affairs of Cooch Behar. This resulted the dominance of the outsiders over the State Administration.

The already boiled situation took a new turn in the question of land. There was a massive change in the ownership of land. For enhancing the income of the state, the Government have adopted various measures to develop the agriculture of the state. So, the barren, fallow and Jungle land was distributed to the cultivators of the outside Cooch Behar. In order to attract the cultivators of outside the Government had announced various measures. This resulted a radical change in the Land-man ratio as well as the ownership of the land of the Cooch Behar State. This new land scenario was reflected in the land settlement Report of Mr. Becket, a high-statured Settlement officer of the Cooch Behar State. He wrote in 1872, "From calculation made, I found that out of about 1,50,000 Bighas of revenue paying lands included in 185 taluks, about 81,000 Bighas are held by foreigners, of the remaining 69,000 Bighas, less than a third is held by cultivating jotedars, and the remainder by resident jotedars, who do not actually cultivated lands but live on profits derived from Chukanidars (Middle men)". This process of change of land-man ratio and ownership was a continuous process of Cooch Behar. In other words we can say that even to-day this process of change is very much visible. As a result, the fronts of the conflict between the Cooch Beharis and the Non-Cooch Beharis has been extended day by day. The emergence of the Hitasadhani Sabha was the direct outcome of this divergence types of conflicts. It was not a passing phase of History. On the contrary, it was the culmination of the long-standing conflicts between the Cooch Beharis and the Non-Cooch Beharis. It was waiting for the time. Finally, the time came on the eve of the merger of the Cooch Behar State with the Union of India. So, we can say that the stage was set for the birth of the Hitasadhani Sabha. Now, we will trace the birth of the Hitasadhani Sabha.

## VI

The origin of the Hitasadhani Sabha is shrouded in obscurity. The exact date of its foundation is debatable. Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal, an eminent political personality and editor of the Janamat patrika, (a well-circulated Bengali weekly), Jalpaiguri, has mentioned in one issue of the Patrika that the Hitasadhani Sabha was founded on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1947. On the other hand Sree Parbananda Das, retired Head master and a member of the Hitasadhani Sabha has stated that the Hitasadhani Sabha was founded on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1946. The statement of Parbananda Das is

more authentic one. Barring, there were certain other events which helped us to believe that the Hitasadhani Sabha was founded in 1946. The first concrete historical evidence is the Election of 1946 of the Cooch Behar State. The second and last election was held at 1949 despite the criticism of the Indian National Congress leaders of Jalpaiguri and the Cooch Behar State Congress leaders. The Hitasadhani Sabha had participated in both the elections and got thumping majority in the Legislative Council of the Cooch Behar State. The second historical evidence is a song composed by an anonymous Cooch Behari poet. It was distributed among the visitors and the pilgrimages of the Ras Mela (Fair) in 1946. The contents of the song is very interesting. It was composed in the names of the leaders of the Hitasadhani Sabha. The song also indicated the grievances of the Cooch Behari people against the outsiders i.e. Bhatias. The song is presented here in English scripts with Bengali words.

Othore Native Bhai, Jagore  
Native,  
Tarao Bhatia Sab,  
Gorgi Uthilla Satish Singh  
Tuli Hunkar Rab,  
Eso Deshpran Jaladhar Eso  
Satish Sange Kore,  
Dharanir Sathe Eso Ansar  
Kari Gala Dharadhari,  
Kothay Majir, Majila Edeshue,  
Gelo Bhatiar Hate,  
Gel Khata Bir Purnendu Eso  
Khan Choudhrir Sathe.

So, on the basis of the above historical and oral evidences, we can say without reservation that the Hitasadhani Sabha was founded on 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1946.

However, we have already tried to locate the underlying causes of the emergence of the Hitasadhani Sabha. Now we will try to find out the immediate factors which precipitated the birth of the Hitasadhani Sabha. Though it is a very complex task, still we can't overlook the issue. Because, the whole problem was very much problematic. Grievance is one thing and organized action against the grievance is another thing. There is a long distance between grievance and organized action against grievance. The basic question is that who was or were the instrumental behind the formation of the Hitasadhani Sabha ? Before searching the answer of the question, it would be better to study the composition of the Hitasadhani Sabha. The following was the composition of the Hitasadhani Sabha.

**President :** Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed  
**Vice-President :** Dharani Shankar Bhattacharya,  
Satish Chandra Singha Roy Sarkar

**Secretary :** Jaladhar Saha

**Assistant Secretary :** Majir Uddin Ahmed, Kumar Purnendu Narayan,  
Satish Chandra Roy

The first constitutional question came to our mind is that why the Raja was not the president of the Hitasadhani Sabha ? According to the convention and practice of the princely State, the King or Queen or the scion of the Raj Family will be the Head or President of every organization or Association. This was happened at the time of the formation of the Praja Hitaishana Sabha, 1859. The Raja or King, by virtue of his position, became the President of the Praja Hitaishana Sabha. But in the case of the Hitasadhani Sabha, we found a non-conventional practice. Secondly, without the consent or approval of the King or the Royal Administration, no organization or Association was allowed to function in the princely State ? If we believe in this practice, then we can say that at the blessings or connivance of the King, the Hitasadhani Sabha was formed ? This hypothesis has been supported by the writings of the some Hitasadhani leaders or by the onlookers or participants oral interviews. Abbas Uddin Abmed, a leader of the Hitasadhani Sabha and a prominent folk singer, writes in his memoirs that the Maharaja was sympathetic to the cause of the Hitasadhani Sabha. In many occasions, the Maharaja had addressed the meetings of the Hitasadhani Sabha. Indrajitendra Narayan, a scion of the Royal Family had also delivered a speech in the meeting of the Hitasadhani Sabha at Mekhliganj. Naturally, we can say that in the formation of Hitasadhani Sabha, the role of the Royal Family including the Maharaja was not above suspicion.

In regard to this discussion, another pertinent question came to our mind. The question is that the same Royal Administration or the predecessors of the last Maharaja before the Merger did not allow to open up the branch of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti in the princely State of Cooch Behar. Even the propaganda of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti was also prohibited in the Cooch Behar State. Why the Maharaja nay the Royal Administration did not allow the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti to function in the Cooch Behar State ? The question is unanswered even to day. However, some Cooch Behari writers have tried to prove that not the Maharajas, but the outsiders who were holding the high post in the administration of the State; were responsible for it. Their hypothesis was not supported by any historical evidences of the times. The issue requires serious historical study. Because, it is a deep historical problem. However, we found a separate Kshatriya Samiti at Cooch Behar known as the Cooch Behar Kshatriya Society. It was founded in 1941 in Cooch Behar after the passing of thirty years of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Society. Why a separate Kshatriya Society was founded in the Cooch Behar State ? Separate society was wanted by the Royal Family vis-à-vis Cooch Beharis ? It is to be noted that the Cooch Behari identity was more emotional and powerful than the Rajbanshi identity. The Cooch Beharis of the pre-merger period never called themselves as Rajbanshis. The Cooch Beharis also called the Rajbanshis of Rangpur as Rangpuriya. All these questions are to be studied in the historical perspectives unless or otherwise the dichotomies of the Rajbanshi Society of the colonial phase will not be understood. Because, the same kind of problem was also prevailed in the Western Assam, the another center of the Rajbanshi community. The Rajbanshi community leaders of the Western Assam (lower Assam i.e. Namoni Assam) could not welcome the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Society's movement for the Kshatriyahood. Another interesting point is that before the advent of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Society, another Society was founded in 1909. It was known as the Adhikari Society (or Samiti). Uptil now we do not get any information on the Adhikari Samiti barring a photograph of the

It is said that the Hitasadhani Sabha was the brainchild of Nawab Khasru Jang, a relative of the Nizam of Hyderabad and also the Personal Assistant of Maharani Indira Devi, the Queen-Dowager of Cooch Behar State. Nawab Khasru Jang's role in the formation of the Hitasadhani Sabha was not above suspicion. In order to understand the issue, we must review the change of political and administrative scenario of the State.

Since the marriage of Prince Jitendra Narayan with Indira Devi, the Princess of Gaikwar State, we found a change in the administration. The Bengali dominance over the administration was begun to reduce due to the attitude of Maharanee Indira Devi. Her Highness was in favour of appointing the high officials of the State from the other parts of India. So, the administrative structure of the State which was reared by Dewan Calica Das Dutta, I.C.S. with consent of His Highness Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bap Bahadur, now reversed. This reversal was revealed in the appointment of high officials which was earlier dominated by the Bengali Bhadrалоке particularly the Brahmo Bengali Bhadrалоке.

A list of names of high officials are presented here :

1. Dr. A. R. Secondy, Chief Medical Officer of the State.
2. Mr. L. B. God, Chief Engineer of the State.
3. Mr. Hanuman Sah Routh, Revenue Secretary of the State.
4. Mr. I. Sekhar, Education Secretary and Publicity officer of the State.
5. Mr. P. K. Kaul, Commandant, Home Guard of the State.
6. Mr. G. C. Fookan, Police Commissioner of the State.
7. Captain R. Grey, Pilot of the State.
8. Mr. K. R. Singh, Minister-in-waiting of the State.

The Bengalisation process of the Cooch Behar State has received a set back and this resulted the birth of a de-Bengalisation process. However, the Cooch Beharis did not welcome this Indianisation of the State administration of Cooch Behar.

It was also alleged that the British Resident at the Durbar (Court) of Cooch Behar patronised the growth of the Hitasadhani Sabha. It was firmly believed by the nationalists and patriots that the British Resident was playing the communal card not on religious line but on ethno-caste-linguistic tone. Apart from this, the British Government had some definite political objective behind the patronisation. The British officials wanted to keep Cooch Behar out of the influence of the Tebhaga Movement (Share Croppers Movement) of the neighbouring districts of Bengal. In addition to this, they also wanted to save the Cooch Behar State from the influence of the Communist Party. However, we do not get hard historical documents in support of this allegation. It is actually the opinion of some local scholars and elderly people of Cooch Behar.

In such a messy situation, it is difficult to reach any conclusion in regard to the formation of the Hitasadhani Sabha. But it is true that there was something rotten in the State of Cooch Behar. And it is also true that the Hitasadhani Sabha was received the support or blessings of all

the above groups or persons of the Cooch Behar State. Their rapid growth and expansion will prove this contention. Without the connivance of the Royal Government Administrative officials, it was not possible on the part of the Hitasadhani to expand their tentacles in the grass-root level within this shortest time (1946-1949).

### VIII

It is very difficult to locate the primary and the secondary objectives of the Hitasadhani Sabha. The think-tank of the Hitasadhani Sabha could not formulate any long-term strategy. They have identified their enemies as well as the problems. But they did not know how to eliminate the enemies and overcome the problems. For example they have launched a crusade against the caste Hindus i.e. the outsiders. They have raised the slogan of 'Bhatia Hatao'. The members and the followers of the Hitasadhani Sabha have launched a crusade against the Bhatias. Abbas Uddin Ahmed has rightly stated that the predominance of the outsiders was the main reason behind the 'Bhatia Hatao' slogan. The meetings of the Hitasadhani Sabha was started with an inaugural song which was fully anti-Bhatia. Few lines of the song were as following :

'O more Cooch Behari Bhai Re

Sabar Ghore Jale Suwraj Bati

Tomar Ghare Ken Andhar Rati ?'

With this emotional song, the Hitasadhani leaders have successfully channelised the anger of the Cooch Behari people against the non-Cooch Beharis. It is to be noted that the song was composed by Answar Uddin Ahmed, the younger brother of the noted folk singer Abbas Uddin Ahmed. What was more interesting is that the song was sung by Abbas Uddin himself in every meeting of the Hitasadhani Sabha. As a result, a new kind of communalism i.e. ethnic and caste based communalism was developed in this princely State. The circle of the ethnic and caste based division was completed in the State. It was reflected in the Election Result of 1946. The Hitasadhani Sabha got thumping majority in the election. Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Khan, the President and Sree Satish Chandra Singh Roy Sarkar the Vice-president of the Hitasadhani Sabha was elected and appointed as the Revenue Minister and Education Minister respectively. After assuming the Ministryship, they have introduced several communal and repressive measures against the Non-Cooch Beharis in the field of service, educational opportunity and land distribution. Sir Akbar Hyderi, the Governor of Assam and in-charge of the Cooch Behar State, wrote to Sardar Patel that there was a strong anti-Bengali feeling in the State. This communal activities of the Hitasadhani Ministers had vitiated the social atmosphere of the state.

The Hitasadhani Sabha not only confined their activities against the Bhatias but also involved in the anti-Indian activities. Their anti-Indian activities were first published in the 'Janamat Patrika', a weekly Bengali newspaper of Jalpaiguri. Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal, the editor of Janamat was an eminent local Congress leader and physician. No national level newspaper was able to publish any news on the Cooch Behar State. Because, the Hitasadhani Sabha Ministers have imposed a kind of restriction upon the publication of the news on the Cooch Behar State. The only newspaper which have extensively published the events of the Cooch Behar State was the Janamat Patrika of Jalpaiguri. A few excerpts on the News Items of Cooch Behar is cited here for understanding the gravity of the problem.

On 21<sup>st</sup> Bhadra, 1355 B.S. in an editorial Dr. Sanyal had written that "The Revenue Minister of Cooch Behar State, Amanatulla Khan Choudhury, who was a pro-Muslim League political stature and a leader of the Hitasadhani Sabha and his colleague Satish Chandra Singha Roy, the Education Minister of the State, expressed in a meeting held at Mekhliganj that they wanted Cooch Behar to remain independent of the Union of India? They also called for the destruction of the State Congress and accused the State Congress for involved in anti-state activities. Amanatulla Khan Choudhury himself demanded plebiscite to solve the problem of integration of the Cooch Behar State. Another high official of the state Hakim Ahamad Hossain, while serving as a S.D.O. of Mathabhanga, delivered a speech on the occasion of a Muslim Religious festival supporting the cause of merger of Cooch Behar with Pakistan. The Indian National Congress Flag was dishonoured at Mathabhanga. The Cooch Behar State Government had also obstructed the celebration of Independence Day on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947 at Cooch Behar organized by the Civil Liberties Committee. The Independence Day was also celebrated at Tufanganj. But the organizers did only hoist the flag of the Cooch Behar State not the Indian National Flag. The Cooch Behar State Government authorities had arrested and subsequently extended the leader of the celebration from the State. This anti-Indian feeling of the members of the State Council and the Hitasadhani Sabha have complicated the integration problem of the Cooch Behar State. The political environment of the State was further complicated by the indifferent attitude of the Maharaja to this anti-Indian activities of his ministers. It was argued that without his tacit approval, it would not have been possible for his ministers to make such assertive and clear-cut statements. It was also alleged that the Maharaja had become a puppet into the hands of the members of the state council and wanted to maintain the separate identity of the Cooch Behar State.

## IX

The political atmosphere of the Cooch Behar State was rapidly taking a serious turn. Nari Rustamji, Adviser to the Governor of Assam noted that pro-Pakistani elements were very active in the Cooch Behar State. The Governor of West Bengal, K. N. Katju also alleged that a plan was afoot to infiltrate huge number of Muslims into the State of Cooch Behar and thereby strengthening the cause of merger with Pakistan. In a letter to Sardar Patel, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, the Prime Minister of West Bengal, wrote that the obnoxious developments in Cooch Behar State will not only affect the security of West Bengal but also of the Indian Union. Sardar Patel himself informed Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru that the Hitasadhani Sabha had sympathy for Pakistan. Let us examine the background of the anxiety of the high officials as well as the national statured political leaders of the time.

The Hitasadhani Sabha, the center of the problem, was primarily responsible for such serious situation. We have already stated that the Hitasadhani Sabha was essentially, an ethno-caste-linguistic association of the Cooch Beharis irrespective of their religion. But after the birth of Pakistan, the lion's section of the Muslim members of the Hitasadhani Sabha have been deviated from their Cooch Behari identity which was the cornerstone of the Hitasadhani Sabha. Instead of pleading Cooch Behari identity, they have been inclining to the Muslim identity. This change of mind of the major section of the Muslim members of the Hitasadhani Sabha was very much distinct from their speeches and actions. It is true that there was no branch of the Muslim League in the Cooch Behar State. But it was alleged by the nationalists of the Cooch Behar State that the Hitasadhani Sabha's Muslim Members were acted as the counterpart of the Muslim

League in the Cooch Behar State. Even some of the Nationalists compared the activities of the Hitasadhani Sabha with the Rajakars of Hyderabad State.

However the activities of the Muslim members of the Hitasadhani Sabha was really alarming. Maulana Abdul Hannid Khan Bhasani's call for 'Greater Bengal' greatly have influenced the minds of the Muslim members of the Hitasadhani Sabha. Khan Choudhury Amanatullah, the President of the Hitasadhani Sabha and the Revenue Minister of the Cooch Behar has encouraged the Muslim immigrants of Rangpur and Mymensingh to settle in the Cooch Behar State. Land-hungry Muslim peasants of the over-populated East Pakistan's district of Rangpur, Mymensing took this advantage and by marrying the girls of the Rajbanshi community begun to settle in Cooch Behar as Cooch Behari. Apart from this, at the invitation of Khan Choudhury Amanatullah, Mojahed Fouz (Army of Liberation, Siragganj, Pabna) leader Assadullah Siraji come to Cooch Behar. His plan was to march to Cooch Behar with his army. By this way the Muslim members of the Hitasadhani Sabha have tried to materialize their dream known as 'turned Cooch Behar into Pakistan'.

Though the Hitasadhani Sabha had successfully sold the Cooch Behari identity, still there were many people who did not subscribe their view. It is true that the researchers and historians are very unkind to them. Any way, the person who have strongly opposed the Hitasadhani Sabha's aims and actions was Umesh Chandra Mandal, a Gandhite Cooch Behari and Rajbanshi pleader of Dinhata town. In order to resist the nefarious design of the Hitasadhani Sabha, Umesh Chandra Mandal had founded the Cooch Behar State Praja Mandal with the help of the progressive minded people. These people were mostly the followers of the Forward Block and the Communist Party. It is to be noted that some Communists and Forward Block activists had been working secretly in Cooch Behar since 1940's. But they had no regular official establishment there. In fact, barring the Hitasadhani Sabha the different political parties have opened up their office in the Cooch Behar State only after 1947.

However, the Praja Mandal was a secular organization. The president of the Praja Mandal was Umesh Chandra Mandal and the Secretary was Ramesh Chandra Roy, a C.P.I. worker. The Praja Mandal leaders and followers have actively supported the cause of merger of Cooch Behar with the Indian union. They cautioned the people about the dangerous communal politics of the Hitasadhani Sabha and tried to remove Cooch Behari – Non-Cooch Behari animosity. The Praja Mandal was very much aware of the anti-Indian activities of the Hitasadhani Sabha. In a memorandum dated July 20, 1948 addressed to Vallabbhai Patel, the Vice-premier of India, the Praja Mandal alleged that the Maharaja and his pro-leagues Muslim Ministers as well as the Ministers who belonged to the Scheduled Caste community were hobnobbing with Pakistan. It has also been said that the Maharaja himself met Suhrawardy, the Prime Minister of Bengal and sought his opinion about the question of merger referring to the fact that his State was surrounded on three sides by the territories of Pakistan.

To draw the attention of the intelligentsia as well as the people of Calcutta nay West Bengal and the Government of West Bengal and India, some people of the Cooch Behar state with the help of the Praja Mandal, formed a new association at Calcutta known as the Cooch Behar Peoples Association. These Associations spokesmen Prof. Chuni Lal Mukherjee, Pulakesh Dey Sarkar, Sree Tarapada Chakravorty and Sailen Roy had prepared a memorandum for the submission to the Prime-Minister of India. This memorandum was signed by Umesh Chandra

Mandal, Prof. Chuni Lal Mukherjee, Ramesh Chandra Roy Mandal, Satis Chandra Pal, Prem Nihar Nandi, Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Rajendra Chandra Chatterjee, Kala Nath Roy Barman, Chura Mohan Bhowmic, Asmat Ali Byapari et.el.

In order to create public opinion upon the problems of Cooch Behar, the Cooch Behar Peoples Association and the Praja Mandal convened a public meeting at Calcutta. The Intellectuals, Writers, Political activists, Journalists, Social activists of Calcutta have published an appeal letter to the people. The signatories of the Appeal letters were Sree Atul Chandra Gupta, Soumendra Nath Tagore, Kalidas Nag, Tarasankar Banerjee, Naresh Chandra Sengupta, Sajani Kanta Das, Sisir Kumar Bhaduri, Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Chapala Kanta Bhattacharya, Radha Binod Pal, Vivekanada Mukherjee et.el.

## X

What actually was the main objective of the Hitasadhani Sabha ? It was difficult to explain. But one thing was clear. They wanted the cake of the political power. But in what way they will achieve their goal ? They have no clear idea. It is true that their concern was only the Cooch Behar State and the Cooch Behari people. It is also true that in the different stages, they have changed their demands. In the first stage, they demanded a separate state, in the second stage they demanded that Cooch Behar should be a centrally administered territory; in the third stage they demanded that Cooch Behar should be merged with Assam and not with West Bengal. And in this stage the Muslim faction of the Hitasadhani Sabha wanted the merger of the Cooch Behar State with East Pakistan. In fact the Hitasadhani Sabha was desperate for political power. It was reflected in a letter of Mr. Nanjappa, the Chief Commissioner of Cooch Behar to the Joint Secretary, Government of India on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1949. Mr. Nanjappa wrote 'It is interesting to note that the Hitasadhani party is willing to merge Cooch Behar with Gurkha District of Darjeeling or with Assam. Their real intention appears to be to try to maintain their political influence in their area'. However, in order to create a separate state, the representatives of the different parties of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Sikkim and Darjeeling met at Darjeeling on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1949. They demanded the formation of a separate State comprising the above mentioned areas. They have formed a Committee viz Uttara Khanda Pradesh Sangha.

In addition to this, a new kind political climate was developed in the Dooars area of the Jalpaiguri District. A section of the Rajbanshi people of both Hindu and Muslim Community demanded the inclusion of the Western Dooars with the Cooch Behar State. They argued that before the conquest of Bhutan and the British Indian Government, the Western Dooars was a part of the Cooch Behar State. Two leaflets had been published by the people of the Western Dooars ethnically and linguistically belonged to the same stock like the Cooch Beharis. So, it will not be an exaggeration, if we say that an ethno-linguistic consolidation has been started also in the Dooars portion of Jalpaiguri. Perhaps they have been dreamt for the establishment of a State where their ethno-linguistic predominance will be preserved. It was a dream only. And the dream of the Dooars people, not the Cooch Beharis or the Hitasadhani Shbha. Because, the Hitasadhani Sabha was concerned only about the Cooch Beharis and the Cooch Behar state, not the Dooars.

Whatever may be the objectives of the Hitasadhani Sabha, its aims and activities had inspired the ethno-caste-linguistic group of people of the Western Dooars. But what was the response of the Rajbanshis of the Western Assam i.e. Goalpara and Kamrup Districts ? Because, the seventy percent people of these two districts belonged to the Rajbanshi Community. The

Assamese Rajbanshi leaders Sree Sarat Chandra Singha, (Later the Chief Minister of Assam) and Sree Purnendu Naryan Sinha wanted the merger of the Cooch Behar State with Assam. But this was not supported by the Rajbanshi leader Sree Upendra Nath Barman of Jalpaiguri (formerly Cooch Behari) and others. He fervently advocated the merger of the Cooch Behar State with West Bengal. Thus in this way, the Cooch Behari identity question of the Hitasadhani Sabha had encompassed all the Rajbanshi in one point. It was not objective of the Hitasadhani Sabha, it was actually a by-product of the Hitasadhani Sabha's movement. But the Rajbanshi leaders could not understand the writings of the wall.

## XI

The immatured political behaviour and the Anti-Indian activities of the Muslim members of the Hitasadhani Sabha had precipitated the merger of the Cooch Behar state with West Bengal. Nehru and Patel had a kind of sympathy to the demand of the Cooch Behari people. It was reflected in the announcement of Pandit Nehru in a public meeting at Calcutta in 1949. He announced that a plebiscite will be arranged to honour the opinion of the people of the State. But the speeches, activities and behaviour of the Hitasadhani members have damaged their own cause. The Central Government was very much perturbed to see the development of Cooch Behar. So, the Government was in a hurry to solve the problem of the Cooch Behar State. The solution was the merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal as a District. The Hitasadhani Sabha was disbanded. Khan Choudhuri Amantullah was externed from Cooch Behar within 24 hours. However, Satish Chandra Singh Roy Sarkar joined in the Cabinet of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy as a Deputy Minister for Transport and Communication. On the other hand, the leader of the Praja Mandal Sree Umesh Chandra Mandal was also inducted by Dr. Bidhan Chandra in his Cabinet as a Minister. Thus the power struggle of the Hitasadhani Sabha, the stormy-petrol of the Cooch Behari identity as well as power politics was ended. But with the remnants of the Hitasadhani Sabha, a new kind of politics was started, though in different way. The basic issue was revised and enlarged i.e. from the Cooch Behari Identity to the Rajbanshi Identity. It was not a prototype of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samity Movement, though in many respects its objectives are identical. However, that is a different story.

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