

Introduction

The present study is an attempt to explain critically the origin, growth and decline of the Uttarkhanda Dal, a regional political party formed in July 1969 by a section of Rajbanshi people, an important and major ethnic group of people of northern part of West Bengal of India. It was no doubt a great phenomenon from political point of view for it was for the first time such a political organization was formed by a section of major ethnic group of people in the post independence West Bengal. Another important area of the present dissertation which has also been viewed critically is that though the U.K.D. initially advocated for the all round developments of the people of North Bengal irrespective of castes and creeds and at the same time it had contested in various Assembly elections of West Bengal as well as the parliamentary election of India with those above mentioned issues but gradually it had turned radically not only its aims and objectives to a new direction but even changed its modus operandi. Thus it was found that the Dal making a complete volte-face raised the demand for a separate state of 'Kamotapur' (the leaders of the Uttarkhanda Dal had used this term, but the prevalent term is Kamatapur) from the 80s of the 20th century comprising the then five districts (now 7 districts) of North Bengal and thereby added a new dimension and tension to the political scenario of post independence West Bengal. This demand, it has been found that it was the first of its kind in the history of the plains of North Bengal nay West Bengal barring the hill region of Darjeeling.

An attempt has been made in the present dissertation to analyse chronologically and very critically the reasons behind the formation of such a regional political party (especially by a section of aforesaid ethnic group of people). It has also been viewed that why the Uttarkhanda Dal raised the statehood demand just after one decade of its formation. Again an analytical discussion has been made on its failure to earn public support even from among the Rajbanshi community itself. Finally, the present study has also made an effort to analyse critically the reasons for the split and thereby the decline of this regional political party within a short span of time. An important aspect of the legacy of the Dal i.e. a separatist tendency which it left in the minds of some people of

Rajbanshi community which later gave birth to another such regional political party in the 90s of the last century has been explained minutely.

It is very interesting to note that the U.K.D. was emerged with socialistic ideology, vividly mentioned in the party resolution and later in printed party constitution. It has been explored that it was due to the socialistic background of some of the founder leaders of the party. But the same was given up at the later phase of its activities.

Apart from the above facts which have been explained so far in the present study, it has also been noticed that the factors namely the influx of millions of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan into North Bengal especially into its northern part i.e. Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, and plains of Darjeeling district as a result of the partition of Bengal in 1947; the adverse impact of West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1953 and the land Reform Act of 1955 on the *Jotedars* especially on the Rajbanshi *jotedars* of the northern plains of North Bengal ; the beginning of the Naxalite movement of 1967 in the *tarai* of Darjeeling and later its horrible activities in other districts of North Bengal led to the creation of a new social, economic, political and demographic situation in North Bengal of West Bengal especially in its northern part. In this new situation the formation of an ethnic based regional political party (U.K.D.) in the late 60s of the 20th century by a section of autochthon of the region signifies an important phenomenal political development in the history of post independence West Bengal.

Thus it is observed in the present work that the periodic changing features of the policy and objectivity of the U.K.D. vis-a-vis the indifferent attitude of the then State Govt. to its initial demands for the all round development of the people of North Bengal and the statehood demand raised by other regional political parties of India especially from the 80s of the 20th century like Jharkhand Mukti Morcha , G.N.L.F. etc. and their impact on the U.K.D. led to a situation of tremendous socio-political tension in the region under review since 1980 when the U.K.D. raised the demand for a separate state of Kamotapur. Considering the historical significance of our study a very careful and systematic investigation has been made in the present work.

It is to be noted that so far as my knowledge goes, this will be the first comprehensive research work on the Uttarkhanda Dal, the first ethnic based political organization of post independence North Bengal. In this connection, the question of statehood movement appeared in the discussion fora. Therefore, the thrusting area of our studies is various aspects of the U.K.D. In this regard, it is to be mentioned that without knowing the ins and outs of the policy, programmes and activities of the U.K.D., it is very difficult to analyse the *Kamotapur* movement.

With regards to the time frame of the study it is to be mentioned that the choice of the year 1969 is a natural one because the U.K.D. was formed in that year. The terminal year is chosen 1987 because of the fact that the U.K.D. formally got split in that year and followed by its immediate decline afterwards.

The locale of the proposed study is the northern part of West Bengal of India, popularly known as North Bengal or *Uttarbanga* comprising with 7 districts (formally 5 districts) viz., Malda, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and newly created Alipurduar. The northern plain of North Bengal in our study consists of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and the plains of Darjeeling district. Our study has not covered the geographical area of Darjeeling hill. The reason behind selecting the above geographical area is that the vicissitude of the U.K.D. and its activities were limited to this region of West Bengal.

With regard to the chapters first of all it is to be mentioned that in the first chapter entitled 'Geo-Ethnic Background of the Region' the geographical region of the study under review and its historical background and at the same time the ethnic identity of the people of the said geographical area have been discussed vividly. It has been attempted in this chapter to discuss the geographical area of North Bengal since the pre independence period i.e. from ancient time for the better understanding of the present day socio-economic, political, cultural and demographic status of North Bengal. In this connection, the significance of this geographical area as a strategic place from ancient time has been explained comprehensively. It is known to the scholars that this particular geographical area of Eastern India is a gateway to the North- Eastern part of

India and at the same time still it has a special strategic importance for its geographical proximity with three foreign countries viz., Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. In other words it is to say, this geographical region of India is one of the greatest migration route of the people of different races since time immemorial. Therefore, almost all the races of people viz., Dravidian, Austric, Alpine, Mongoloid, Tibeto-Burma etc. assimilated and intermingled and had developed a mixed culture. As a result of the ethnic diversity of the concerned region especially its northern part (Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Alipurduar) has no match with that of the rest of West Bengal and the local historians like to call it rightly the 'mini-edition' of India. Regarding historical background of the concerned area has been discussed dividing into two different glorious zones of imperial kingdoms of Pragjyotishpur-Kamrup-Kamata-Koch kingdoms in the northern part of North Bengal and the Pundra-Gauda kingdom in the southern part of it. The vicissitudes of political power or shifting of political power from one dynasty to other and ultimately to the colonial ruler till independence has been dealt with.

Again the ethnic identity of the Rajbanshis which was well connected with the Uttarkhanda Dal along with other ethnic groups of people of the region under study has been viewed critically.

In the second chapter, the socio-economic and political background of the origin of the Uttarkhanda Dal has been explained thoroughly. As all three had not taken shape at the same point of time, so they are discussed under three different parts. In the first part, the foundation canvas of the Uttarkhanda Dal has been discussed on the basis of social background of the *Kshatriya Samiti*, the first one that exposed the cause of the *Kshatriya* identity of the Rajbanshi and since then the Rajbanshi as a community (in general) started uniting socially. In addition to this, it has been explained in this part of our discussion that how the social activities of the *Kshatriya Samiti* was transformed into a political one after 1920s when Bengal Legislative Council was introduced by the colonial govt. It has also been shown that how after the demise of Panchanan Barma, most of the front line *Kshatriya Samiti* leaders gradually switched over their allegiance

to different national political parties leaving aside the importance of the *Kshatriya Samiti* which ultimately gave birth grievances in the mind of the educated youth of the *Samiti* against those leaders particularly in the post-independence era and that led them ultimately to form a regional political party of their own.

In the part of economic background, the economic profile of the Rajbanshi people in colonial and post colonial period has been dealt with and thereby explained the economic grievances and condition of the major ethnic community which caused directly or indirectly the formation of the Uttarkhanda Dal. The too much dependent of the community on the land and their apathy towards other economic professions and its adverse effects on the community have been thoroughly discussed. At the same time the land alienation problem from the hands of the Rajbanshi community to other communities especially to the Bengali caste Hindus and Namasudra cultivators have been explained along with the adverse effect of the Zamindari Acquisition Act of 1953 and the West Bengal Land Reforms Act of 1955 on the local Rajbanshi *Jotedars*.

With regard to the political background, the changing activities of the *Kshatriya Samiti* till the post independence period and the gradual loss of its earlier vigour have been critically discussed. It has also been discussed in this part that how the Cooch Behari identity question of the *Hitasadhani Sobha* had encompassed all the Rajbanshi in one point with indirect impact was on the formation of the U.K.D.

In the third chapter, the foundation and the organization of the Uttarkhanda Dal has been discussed historically taking into consideration the socio-economic background of its origin. The immediate background of the formation of a political organization by a majority section of the *Kshatriya Samiti* members has been discussed thoroughly. In addition to this the final emergence of the party, its various committees and party programmes have been explained. A discussion on the Draft and the final printed Constitution of the Dal has been made chapter wise and article wise.

The fourth chapter has dealt with an important aspect of the Uttarkhanda Dal i.e. its organizational activities and the response of the people of the region. However, the

organizational activities have been discussed in two phases and two different chapters. In this chapter, the first phase has been discussed. The first phase covers from its very foundation to 31st May 1980. It has been shown that till then the Dal did not raise the demand for a separate state. The activities of the Dal were limited to only strengthening its organizational structure and extending its public relation in different part of North Bengal during this phase. Apart from this, the reaction of the indigenous people to the appeal of the Uttarkhanda Dal along with the response of other National political parties existed in North Bengal have been discussed very critically. In brief, it has been shown in this chapter that the activities of the U.K.D. in its first phase mainly directed towards a search for a separate political identity i.e. a political party of the autochthons of North Bengal but not a search for a separate state which has been discussed in chapter-6.

In chapter-5, the electoral politics of the U.K.D. and its results have been dealt with. It has been on the main, shown in this chapter the poor performance of the Dal in various Bidhan Sobha (Assembly) elections of West Bengal so far as its candidates were fielded in various Assembly seats of North Bengal mentioning the percentage of votes it received till its final split in 1987. Similarly its performance in the various Lok

Sobha (Parliamentary) elections held during that period mentioning the percentage of votes has been explained critically. Again the electoral activities of the Dal and its results vis-a-vis the strong presence of the other national political parties especially of C.P.I.M., Indian National congress in the region of our study have been discussed elaborately pointing out the election results in the table.

With regard to chapter-6, the second phase of the activities of the Dal has been discussed thoroughly and critically. This chapter begins with May 31, 1980 when the U.K.D. first raised the demand for a separate state. Since then the agitational and separatist activities of the Dal were started. In this connection, the demand for the recognition of Kamotapuri Language as a part for fulfilling the demand for a separate state has been stated elaborately. Apart from this the oath taking programmes by the *Uttarkhandists* for acquiring the separate state of Kamotapur mentioning the name of some of the oath takers have been discussed. The *Rail Roko* movement, organized by the Dal very desperately to draw the attention of the general people and the Central Govt. has critically been explained. It is to be stated that this is

the chapter where an important aspect of the activities of the Dal i.e. the demand for a separate state has been explained very critically.

Chapter-7 which is the last chapter of the present dissertation deals with the internal feud, began among the fore front leaders of the Dal. It has been explained that how this intra-party conflict along with other external factors led the final split of the Dal and ultimately it was divided into two factions i.e. the U.K.D. and the Kamotapur Gana Parishad. In fact, it sounded the death knell of the Dal and out of its ashes, emerged a new regional political party i.e. Kamotapur Peoples' Party (K.P.P).

It appears from the source materials, used in the present dissertation that the use of archival records is very minimal. The reason for such situation lies in the rules and regulations of the West Bengal State Archives vis-à-vis the National Archives of India. Conventionally, the archives could not open the records unless they cross thirty years since the happening of the event. Apart from this, the records relating to the present thesis are mostly connected with the Home Department, Govt. of West Bengal. Despite thrice visit in the West Bengal State Archives in Calcutta, the Director of State Archives and also its Assistant Director expressed their inability to provide the classified records relating to the regional movements of post Colonial and post Partitioned West Bengal. However, stray records have provided me scattered information about the political activities of the U.K.D. Perhaps, the Dal was not recognized by the Election Commission, that is why, the Home Department could not prepare the classification list on their records. Obviously I have depended much upon Police Records of the Districts, District Magistrate Administrative Records, District Commissioner's Records though not much but helped me a lot to prepare the dissertation. For example, with regard to the *Altagram Rail Blockade* incident I have consulted the Dhupguri Police Station Record. But I have been much benefited from the records of the Uttarkhanda Dal, preserved in the personal collection of the different activists of the Dal. Though many of the founder members of the Dal had departed from the material world but their sons and daughters have preserved almost all the records in their personal collection. But for the period before independence I have collected some records on Bengal Legislative Council from 1921 onwards, Census Reports from 1891 onwards. Apart from

this, some information about the Legislative Proceedings of the West Bengal State Legislative Assembly relating to our dissertation from 1970 onwards have been collected from the M.L.A.s of different Constituencies of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts. In addition to this, Oral History methodology has been used massively for understanding the politics of the U.K.D. I could not forget to have mentioned the folk songs, folk dramas, rhymes, proverbs for understanding the psychology as well as their deprivation from their own perspective. It is also to be noted that many leaflets, pamphlets, proceedings, letters which are written in Rajbanshi language, I have tried to provide a free translation of the contents of the letter documents. I would also like to mention that the concerned area of my study and the content of the study is multi lingual. In order to meet this problem I have consulted some documents, writings, books and newspapers in Nepali, Assamese and Sadri (tribal) languages. At the same time I have corresponded with the *Kshatriya Samiti* of Rangpur, Bangladesh and eminent personalities of Bangladesh particularly of Rangpur.

It is again to be mentioned that for consulting some rare books I have visited National Library (Calcutta), North Bengal University Central Library, Cooch Behar State Library, District Libraries, and also the private Libraries and private collection. I have also evaluated the present theme using private papers as well as sources unearthed hitherto through field studies. I have made considerable use of local materials such as contemporary weeklies and journals, little magazines and daily newspapers published from this region apart from the national dailies. All these collected data have been analysed very elaborately and systematically to reach a logical conclusion of the present study.