

## **Public Associations in North Bengal from the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to Independence**

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### **Abstract**

*Societies and associations were the harbingers of the new awakening in Bengal among urban middle class. Bengal or India had not known any such societies organised for collective thinking and discussion until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The journey of public Associations in Undivided Bengal began with the foundation of Atmiya Sabha, Brahma Samaj led by Raja Rammohan Roy the 'Father of Modern India'. The northern part of colonial Bengal also did not lag behind much in this field. A large number of socio – cultural, religious, political Associations grew up under the patronage of urban middle class, Jotedars, merchants, tea planters and the members of royal family Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri. Professional historians appear to be reluctant to come forward to undertake this task in a concerted and coordinated manner. This is the vacuum that this article seeks to fill in.*

### **Keywords**

*Associations, Jotedars, Tea Planters, Europeans, Royal family of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri, Educational Institutions, partition of India.*

### **Introduction**

The middle - class nationalist consciousness was strengthened in the sixties and seventies, and its associational base was broadened from the Atmiya Sabha of 1815, through the Bengal British India Society of 1843 and the British Indian Association of 1851 to the Indian Association of 1876. It was flowing through other channels also like the Patriot's Association (1865), the Hindu Mela (1867) and the Students' Association (1875). The Brahma Samaj movement became a potent and living force in this period,

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of History, Baneswar Sarathibala Mahavidyala, Cooch Behar

under the dynamic leadership of Keshab Chandra Sen<sup>1</sup>. Professor Binay Sarkar rightly remarks that “these societies and associations were the harbingers of the new awakening in Bengal among urban middle class, because Bengal or India had not known any such societies organised for collective thinking and discussion until the 19<sup>th</sup> century”. Alexander Duff has remarked that “new societies started up with the utmost rapidity in every part of the native city. There was not an evening in the week or which one, two or more of these were not held and each individual was generally enrolled a member of several”<sup>2</sup>.

In regard to the history of associations in colonial Bengal, Rajat Sanyal’s ‘Voluntary Associations and The Urban Public Life in Bengal’, Professor Nishith Ranjan Ray (ed.) ‘Public Associations in India From The Early Years of The 19<sup>th</sup> Century To Independence’, Dr. Arun Kumar Chattarjee’s ‘*Unabinsha Shatabdir Sabha Samiti o Bangla Sahitya*’, Manindra Nath Bandhapadhyay and Santosh Kumar Dey’s ‘*Unabinsha Shatabdir Sabha Samiti*’ are need to be cited. The discussion of these books is mainly related with those associations which came up in Calcutta and its adjacent areas. Unfortunately, no serious study as yet has been made regarding the associations of North Bengal during the period of our study. Professional historians appear to be reluctant to come forward to undertake this task in a concerted and coordinated manner. This is the vacuum that this article seeks to fill in. We shall discuss the growth and development of Sabha – Samitis of undivided North Bengal in different dimensions like socio – cultural, economic, religious and communal or politico.

### **Socio – cultural Associations**

The first Association of colonial North Bengal was the *Desha Hitaishani Sabha* Cooch Behar established in 1859 under the tutelage of Cooch Behar royal family. Eventually in 1864 it took the shape as Cooch Behar Hitaishani Sabha. A few British High Officials such as Colonel J.C. Haughton, H. Beveridge contributed a large behind its establishment. Its members were asked to repay their social debt by participating in welfare activities on behalf of the Cooch Behar royal state<sup>3</sup>.

The Rajshahi Association was established on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1872. The fundamental objective was (a) to provide education, (b) to promote the cultivation of arts and science,

(c) to assist in the development of healthy public opinion, (d) to promote sanitation and public health and some other objects of an altruistic nature. The president was Raja Pratiba Nath Ray of Dighapatia and the Secretary was Babu Saral Kumar Ghosh, M.A.<sup>4</sup>.

The *Samaj Sanskarini Sabha* was established in 1875 under the encouragement of both Nepali and Bengali intellectuals of contemporary Darjeeling hill<sup>5</sup>. The *Nabya Ekta Sabha* and the *Himadri Harisabha* both came up in Darjeeling hill in 1876 to unite the Bengali people and uplift the cause of social welfare<sup>6</sup>.

The *Dinajpur Bhatpara Unnati Sadhani Sabha* established in 1878 contributed much on education and scholarships were offered to needy students. '*Suhriday*', a yearly magazine written in Bengali was the mouthpiece of the organisation<sup>7</sup>. In the same year, Maharaja Girijanath Ray laid down a literary Association *Pancha Ratna*. The real spirit behind it was Pandit Mahesh Chandra Tarka Churamani. The *Nitya Dharma Badhani Sabha* came up in Dinajpur district in 1860 under the leadership of Babu Girish Chandra Chakrabarty M.A. and Pandit Amarnath Bhattacharya<sup>8</sup>. This was undertaken by a number of individuals like Zaminder Radha Govinda Ray and Maharaja Girijanath Ray. The *Bidhayani Sabha* of Calcutta opened its branch in Dinajpur district in 1904 with the aim of promoting science and technical education. Maharaja Girijanath Ray was its first President. The former established in 1913 the *Dinajpur Natya Samiti*. All the leading personalities of this cultural Association were Brahmins like Nishikanta Ray Chaudhuri, Girija Mahan Niyogi, Kshitish Chandra Ray Chaudhuri. The Bengali Poet Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay and Tarashankar Bandopadhyay made regular visit there. Later it took the shape of Raiganj Institute in 1934<sup>9</sup>.

The Debating Club of Darjeeling established in the year 1884 was a popular cultural association of Darjeeling hill. At initial stage its members were stands only in fifty. The members of the royal families of Cooch Behar and Burdwan were its chief patroniser. Through the munificence of tea industrialist Bipra Das Pal Chaudhury and the then Maharajadhiraja of Burdwan it got its own building. It had primarily two fundamental objectives – (a) To improve the social, national and moral condition of the people; (b) To cultivate the power of speech and reason among its members. To promote a bond of cohesion among the local Bengalis, the association organizes festivals like

Durga Puja, Saraswati Puja, *Paela Baisakh* (Bengali Hindu New Year's Day) and dramatic, musical performances at its own auditorium<sup>10</sup>.

The Cooch Behar Students Improvement Association came up in 1886 with the initiative of the students of Jenkins School. Its main aim was to resurrect the cultural consciousness and nationalism among the youth society of Cooch Behar State. Dewan Kalika Das Dutta Ray Bahadur, Head Pandit Mukunda Dayal Basu had a massive contribution behind its prosperity.

The *Suniti Sancharini Sabha* established on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1895 was a landmark in the women history of Cooch Behar State. This day was observed as the death anniversary of Keshab Chandra Sen by the Cooch Behar Nababidhan Brahma Samaj. However, all the members of the '*Suniti Sancharini Sabha*' were Brahmas and their main aim was to improve the living condition of women<sup>11</sup>.

The *Gurkha Samiti* established in 1906 was a welfare organisation of contemporary Darjeeling hill. It worked as a cultural and literary forum to promote the socio – economic and cultural interests of local Nepali people<sup>12</sup>.

The birth of *Rangpur Sahitya Parishad* in 1906 ushered an era of golden age in the cultural history of undivided North Bengal. Under its corroboration the *Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammelan* (North Bengal Literary Conference) was organised in Rangpur in 1908. Most of its members were prominent literary personages of contemporary North Bengal such as Raja Jagadindra Deb Raikat, pleader Umagati Ray, Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma. It did not last long and continued for twenty years only. It is worthwhile mentioning here that the foundation of *Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti* was the immediate effect of literary pursuits of *Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammelan*. Its chief objective was to explore the unexcavated facts of regional history of contemporary North Bengal<sup>13</sup>.

The *Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti*, founded in 1910, looked only to government patronage for the upliftment of social status of their castes. It also sought to mobilize the masses. The Kshatriyas were only eligible for membership of the Association. In its fourth annual conference in 1913, it was decided that *Mandali Samitis* would be set up in every village to reach the common people. By 1918 a highly developed network of

village organizations was operating under the *Kshatriya Samiti*. These Samitis were supposed to function as village governments and courts of arbitration, they would spread education and preach ritual reforms and also function as co – operative societies for the economic improvement of the Rajbansi villagers<sup>14</sup>. The *Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti* offered scholarships for the education of the poor Rajbansi students. With these students, a Kshatriya Chhatra Samiti was formed and its members were asked to repay their social debt by participating in welfare activities to help the poor members of the community<sup>15</sup>.

The National Education Council of Malda was founded in 1907. The prime object was to spread National Education like other districts of Undivided Bengal. The most notable reformers attached with the Association were Prankrishna Bhaduri, Bipin Behari Ghosh, Radesh Chandra Seth, Md. Nur Baksh, Rajendra Narayan Chaudhuri and Professor Binay Sarkar of Calcutta University. It worked as a cultural and literary forum by organizing popular lectures, symposia, seminars and tried their best to foster the spirit of female education. It also published periodicals for the new – literates<sup>16</sup>.

The Bengali Association of Darjeeling hill was established in 1908 on land leased out by the Maharaja of Burdwan at Dowhill Road. The Bengali tea planters extended their hands to other Bengali intellectuals in setting up this cultural institution probably to pursue their cultural interests and social interactions. Through the munificence of S.B. Dey the Association got its building in 1930. The latter was named Raj Rajeswari Hall after the name of the wife of S.B. Dey. With the same object the Bengali Association of Darjeeling came up in Darjeeling hill in 1930<sup>17</sup>.

The *Cooch Behar Sahitya Sabha* came up in 1915 (B.S. 1322) indubitably ushered an era of golden age in the history of literary pursuits of Cooch Behar district. Maharaja Jitendra Narayan, Princess Indira Devi, Prince Victor Nityendra Narayan and Amanatullah Ahmed played an important role behind its consolidation. It was the brainchild of *Varendra* Research Association which fundamental goal was to promote the research activity pertaining to the unexcavated history, anthropology of the North East region with special reference to Cooch Behar. The mouth piece of the Association ‘Paricharika’ was published under the literary patronage of Nirupama Devi, wife of

Victor Nityendra Narayan. The writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Akshay Kumar Moitra, Mrinalini Devi, Promoth Chaudhury, Suniti Devi were its main attraction<sup>18</sup>.

The 'Jalpaiguri District Association' came up under the initiative of tea industrialist Tarini Prasad Ray. A lion share of its members was pleaders. The fundamental aim of this association was to safeguard the interests of its members and assist the financially to fight with their European counterparts<sup>19</sup>.

The Debating Club was established at Jalpaiguri town by the tea industrialists Jogesh Chandra Ghosh and Jogodindra Deb Raikot in the year 1917. Its chief aim was to arrange literary discussion and cultural debate on heterogeneous subjects. Primarily it was held at the residence of Jogodindra Raikot where Jogesh Chandra Ghosh discussed on numerous themes in regard to the literary World of the then Calcutta<sup>20</sup>.

The Hillmen's Association was established in Darjeeling hill in the year 1917. Its main objective was the educational and economical improvement of the hill people, creation of the spirit of co – operation and brotherhood and the protection of their civil rights. R.N. Sinha was the President and Rai Bahadur C. Tendupla, J.S. Lama were the Vice – Presidents. Mr. J.B. Thapa was the Secretary. Swami Bisuddhananada had a close relation with this association<sup>21</sup>.

In 1920 another association with similar objective came up namely Hill people's Social Union. Bahadur Rai, a renowned social reformer of contemporary Darjeeling hill was its founder. The Sherpa Buddhist Association came up in Darjeeling hill in the year 1924. Its prime motto was to foster the religious fraternity among the hill men<sup>22</sup>. In 1924, the educated Nepali people of Darjeeling hill took the initiative for setting up an association in order to growth and development of Nepali culture. This ceaseless effort was finally culminated in the formation of a cultural association namely the *Nepali Sahitya Sammelan* in 1924<sup>23</sup>.

In 1924, the All Bengal student's Union established its first branch at Jalpaiguri town. A good number of brilliant students of contemporary Jalpaiguri town played an important role behind its birth. It is important to be cited here that this union was the revised version of the Student's Union of Jalpaiguri town namely College and Ex –

Students Association which was actually came up in 1915. In contrast, the Muslim students of Jalpaiguri town established an imitate association namely the ‘Muhamadden Student’s Association’. Its radical aim was to provide financial support to the needy brilliant Muslim students and simultaneously foster the spirit of religious fraternity among the Muslim community. ‘Nawjawan’ was the mouthpiece of this association<sup>24</sup>.

The birth of the *Jalpaiguri Sahitya Samiti* in 1928 was a consecutive attempt of the contemporary intellectual personages of Jalpaiguri town like Umapada Banarjee, Mohini Mohan Ghosh, Jitendra Nath Majumder, Priti Nidhan Ray, Promoth Nath Basu. All members were Bengali Hindus. Its main aim was to propagate Bengali culture among the dwellers of the town. In contrast with this, the elite Muslims of contemporary Jalpaiguri town established their own association namely *Muslim Sahitya Samiti* in 1931. Tajmal Hossain, the renowned educationist of Jalpaiguri town was its president and Maulavi Md. Shukrulla was its Secretary<sup>25</sup>.

The Young Men’s Association of Jalpaiguri town was established in 1940 to promote sports and culture. In 1954 it became the District Sports Association. Late it came to be known as ‘Jogesh Chandra Memorial Sports Association’ under the patronage of the tea industrialist Birendra Chandra Ghosh.

The *Gorkha Dukha Nivarak Sammelan* was established in Darjeeling hill in 1932 with the limited initial object of disposing of unclaimed dead bodies of indigent people. With the passage of time and increase in the popularity of the organisation, its activities have extended considerably. It has now several branches throughout the district and runs an orphanage, a first aid centre, a gymnasium, a public library and so on. The organisation also undertakes relief activities during natural calamities. An analogous association came up in Darjeeling hill namely NEBULA (Nepali Bhutia Lepcha Association) in 1934. The *Dukha Nivarak Sammelan* was founded at Kalimpong in 1933<sup>26</sup>.

During the same decade of the twentieth century, the Marwari Sangha was founded at Jalpaiguri town in 1931 to safeguard the interests of the Marwari people of the district both economically and educationally<sup>27</sup>.

The Alipurduar Sahitya Parishad established in 1941 was the first literary organisation of the Alipurduar sub - division. Tea industrialist Ray Bahadur Bidhu Bhushan Samaddar was the chief patroniser of this association<sup>28</sup>.

The Pallimangal Sammelan came up at Jalpaiguri town in the year 1943. Its chief founder and patroniser was Prasanna Deb Raikat. The fundamental aim of this association was to uplift the standard of living of rural people<sup>29</sup>.

The Mahila Samiti of Jalpaiguri town established in 1928 was the first female organisation all over North Bengal. Their goal was not limited to female emancipation only; they also attempted to enrich the literary atmosphere as well. The setting up of *Mahila Pathagar* (female library) in 1945 was indeed a landmark in this direction<sup>30</sup>. Later the members of *Jalpaiguri Mahila Samiti* formed the *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* (Women Self – defence Association) which played an important role during the *Tebhaga* Movement in 1946. The *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* of Darjeeling district was established under the leadership of comrade Mira Chattarje. Later it had to set up its branch at Siliguri town in 1950s<sup>31</sup>.

The Darjeeling branch of the All Bengal Women Conference was established in Darjeeling town in 1930 commonly known as Saraj Nalini Dutta Memorial Association. The Sandhani Mahila Samiti of Kurseong was established in Kurseong for the benefit of local women of all communities. It had a prolonged relation with Brahma Samaj of Kurseong<sup>32</sup>. The Darjeeling branch of the All India Women Conference was established in Darjeeling town in 1947 for the welfare of women, children and destitute. It distributes medicines and nourishing diet to the poor and needy patients, participates in community cooking, feeding the Harijans and entertaining children on occasions of national importance. During the Chinese aggression, the organisation donated woollen garments, magazines, food and first aid to the Jawans. The Bangiya Mahila Samiti was established in Darjeeling town on 23 June 1956. Its membership was restricted to Bengali women only. The Pulungdung Basti Mahila Samiti of Sukhiapokhri was established in 1965. It holds a literary class daily and imparts training in clay – modelling, sewing and knitting besides organizing games for the members and staging cultural functions every year<sup>33</sup>.

The Gorkha Ex – Servicemen’s Association was established Darjeeling hill in 1953 to promote and safeguard the socio – cultural, economic and educational interests of retired Gorkha personnel of the Indian Armed Forces. It had two branches at Kalimpong and Siliguri town. They had a strong feeling towards the demand for Gorkhaland<sup>34</sup>.

The Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Pariganit Jati Sangha (All India Nepali Schedule Castes Association) of Kalimpong started functioning in 1959 to improve the condition of Nepali Schedule caste people in general with special emphasis on their education, employment and economic amelioration.

The Nepali Sahitya Adhayayana Samiti, Kalimpong was established in 1964 with the aim of promoting the cultivation of Nepalese language and literature. The *Nepali Sahitya Parishad*, Darjeeling was also established with the same objective<sup>35</sup>.

### **Economic Associations**

The year 1877 was a landmark in the tea industry of Darjeeling district. The Indian Tea Association first established its branch in Darjeeling hill namely Darjeeling Planters’ Association to protect the interests of the European tea planters and to raise funds to carry on the business. All superintendents, managers, divisional managers and assistant employed on gardens were its members. Its first President was K. Devenport, Singtom Tea Estate and Vice - President was M.M. Betten, Tukver Tea Estate. All questions relating to the production of tea in Darjeeling hill, employment of labourer were discussed there. Similarly, the Terai Planters’ Association (P.O. Bengdubi) was established to protect the rights and watch the interests of the European tea planters in Terai. Managers and tea planters were only eligible to be a member of the Association. Mr. A. Robertson, Gayaganga Tea Estate was the Chairman cum Secretary and Mr. W.M. Sangster, Simulbari Tea Estate was the Vice – Chairman.

The European Association (Darjeeling Branch) was established on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1913 to protect the interests and promote the welfare of the Europeans of Darjeeling hill. All Europeans of whatever nationality were eligible for membership. The Association was governed by a Council had its office in Calcutta and of members numbering in all not less than 18 and more than 25. The chairman and Secretary was Mr. C.W. Hodgson and the

Vice – Chairman was Col. G.A. Webb, Takdah Tea Estate. The Association discussed all matters affecting European interests<sup>36</sup>.

The Duars Planters' Association (DPA) was set up to safeguard the interests of the European tea planters and to take up all matters connected with the tea industry of the region. Mr. A. Johnson, Baradighi Tea Estate was the President and Mr. E.W. Hughes New Glenco Tea Estate was the Vice – President of the Association<sup>37</sup>. Since 1954 Indianisation in a regular way has proceeded. Ratan Lal Dasgupta in 1969 became the first Indian chairman and though there were one or two European Chairmen after him for several past years the Chairman have been all Indians. The Duars Planter's Association thereupon dissolved itself and became the Dooars Branch Indian Tea Association in 1950. In short the greatest change was the replacement of British planters by Indians<sup>38</sup>.

As we know that the Divide and Rule Policy of the British Raj always endeavoured to frustrate the Indian planters. Thus the Indian planters suffered a long way and at least, their undaunted will force surpassed the articulated hindrance and got them united with national consolidation. It resulted in the formation of various Associations owned by the Indian planters only during the British – Raj. The Indian Tea Planters' Association (ITPA) took birth at Jalpaiguri town in 1915 under the earnest patronage of several renowned Indian tea planters like Tarini Prasad Ray, Jyotish Chandra Sanyal, Aminur Rahaman, Jogesh Chandra Ghosh, Rai Jay Govinda Guha Bahadur, Rai Bahadur Joy Chandra Saha and several others. In this context, however, it is important to mention here that Sir Rajendra Nath Mukharjee, Kt., Senior Partner of Messrs. Martin, Burn Ltd. Calcutta was the brainchild behind the formation of this Association. Indian Tea Planters' Association (ITPA) was an organisation of Indian section for the growers of tea in North – East India. With the establishment of ITPA as a trade umbrella the Indian planters received a formidable momentum both in terms of bargaining power, group cohesion on the one hand and growth of the Indianised tea industry with rapidity on the other<sup>39</sup>.

The Terai Indian Planters' Association (TIPA) was established in 1928. It was the result of friction between the Indian members and the old Terai Planters' Association. Therefore, Bijoy Basanta Bose, Tarapada Banarjee (T.P. Banarjee), Saradindu Bose, Jitendra Mohan Dutta, Abdul Bari Khandakar, Ila Pal Choudhury and Kusum Dutta

started an association at first with only eight gardens (Thanjhora T.E., Bijohnagar T.E., Fulbari T.E., Naxalbari T.E., Atal T.E., Ashapur T.E., Domohoni T.E., Chandmoni T.E.) as its members in the year 1928. Its first chairman was Bijoy Basanta Bose, manager of Thanjhora Tea Estate and Vice – Chairman was Mr. K.A. Bari, Nuxalbari Tea Estate. Mr. A.T. Bose of Thanjhora Tea Estate was the Secretary. It was essentially an Association of Tea Garden Managers. They were determined, however, to overcome all the difficulties and to march ahead side by side with British tea planters<sup>40</sup>.

The Dinajpur Landholders' Association was established in the year 1905. The main objective of this association (a) was to establish good feeling among landholders and between the landholders and tenants (b) to lay before Government suggestions regarding relations of landholders and tenants (c) improvement of agriculture. Any person, who has attained the age of 21 years and pays land revenue of at least Rs. 1,000 a year direct to the Government, may be a member of the Association. Its first president was Maharaja Jagadish Nath Ray of Dinajpur, vice – Presidents were Saradindu Narayan Ray, M.A. and Kshitish Chandra Ray Chaudhury. The Secretaries were Babu Krishna Nath Sen and Babu Gopal Chandra Banarjee.

The North Bengal Zamindars' Association (formerly known as Rangpur Zamindars' Association') came up in 1907 at Rangpur. This Association was comprised with the native Zamindars of Malda, Dinajpur, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri districts of undivided North Bengal. It got its recognition from the British Government in the year 1917. The first President was the Nafar Chandra Pal Chaudhury, the renowned indigo planter and tea industrialist during the British Raj. The Association aims at protecting the legitimate interests of Zamindars and ameliorating the condition of the tenant, compiling annual registers of the produce and exports of food grains, publishing book and periodicals about the management of Zamindari proprietors, placing before the Government the wants of the Zamindars and the tenants and so on. Any Zamindar who pays revenue of at least Rs. 250 annually to the Collectorate, may become a member of the Association. Its first president was Raja Gopal Lal Ray Bahadur of Tajhat and vice – Presidents were Rai Radha Raman Majumdar Bahadur of Dewanbari, Babu Shiba Das

Ray Choudhury and Babu Bhawani Prasanna Lahiri of Naldanga. The Secretary was Babu Surendra Chandra Ray Chaudhury<sup>41</sup>.

The Jotedar's Association of Jalpaiguri District established its bedrock under the initiative of Jagadindradev Raikat in the year 1923. All the native Jotedar's both Hindu and Muslim came under one umbrella and the primary object of this association was to fulfil the interests of its members. The off spring of this association also came up at Cooch Behar town with similar goal namely Cooch Behar District Jotedar's Association in the year 1931<sup>42</sup>.

The Dinajpur Merchants' Association was established in 1910 to promote trade in Dinajpur and establish unity among the merchants. Everyone of mercantile profession was eligible for membership. The first President was Seth Giridhari Lal Mundra, vice – President was Babu Tilak Chand Chopra and the Secretary was R.K. Agarwal<sup>43</sup>.

### **Religious Associations**

The Brahma Samaj founded in Calcutta had to set up its off springs all over North Bengal. The Darjeeling Brahma Samaj was founded on 3 January 1879 on land procured from British Government by Radhanath Ray. In 1878 a prayer hall was constructed<sup>44</sup>. The Brahma Samaj of Cooch Behar was established in 1864 under the encouragement of Ray Bahadur Kalikadas Dutta, Babu Nandalal Madak, Babu Rajani Kanta Ray, Babu Banamali Mitra and so on. When Keshab Chandra Sen arranged the marriage of his minor daughter Suniti Devi with Nripendra Narayan the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, his followers parted the company and formed the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. Both the Naba Bidhan (New Dispension) and the Sadharan Brahma Samaj laid their foundation in Cooch Behar and received patronage from Maharaja Nripendra Narayan. However, the Brahma Samaj emerged as a major religious movement of the middle – class educated Bengalis in Cooch Behar based on the principal of monotheism. The Brahma Samaj of Jalpaiguri was established in 1869 under the tutelage of Chandi Charan Sen who had a close relation with Bipin Chandra Pal. He visited the Jalpaiguri town in 1879. The Brahma temple of Jalpaiguri town was constructed in the year 1901. The Brahma Samaj had a major contribution to foster the socio – cultural spirit of Jalpaiguri town. The Brahma Samaj was founded in Dinajpur under the encouragement of Pandit Bhuban

Mahan Kar in 1867. He brought in some account of radicalism into the movement by attacking caste system, by focusing on widow remarriage and women's rights. The Brahma Samaj established its branch in Maldah town in 1861<sup>45</sup>.

The Young Men's Theistic Association established at Cooch Behar State in 1906 under the initiative of Prince Gajendra Narayan who was the chief propagator of Naba Bidhan Brahma Samaj in Cooch Behar. Its main aim was to improve the condition of the down trodden people of the society. Prince Gajendra Narayan is also famous in the history of Cooch Behar for the establishment of 'Sura Nibarani Sabha' in 1911<sup>46</sup>.

The Darjeeling Branch of the All India Arya Samaj was established in 1883. Its radical aim was to popularise the philosophy of *Vedantic* Hinduism and to promote Nepalese language and culture. It also published a monthly magazine namely '*Janadoot*'<sup>47</sup>. The Arya Samaj opened its branch at Siliguri in 1965 under the leadership of a group of traders like Jawarlal Arya, Ratiram Sharma, Niranjan Lal Arya and Talaram Gid<sup>48</sup>.

The *Cooch Behar Parthana Samaj* was established in 1895 (B.S. 1302) and its main initiator was Umanath Gupta. It worked for the social reformation and women emancipation of the state. The *Arya Nari Samaj* came up in Cooch Behar town in the year 1894 for the welfare of female society of the State. It was established in the household of Brahma Harinarayan Chattapadhyaya<sup>49</sup>. The All India Association of Young Men Naba Bidhan came up on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1914 in Calcutta under the initiative of Princess Suniti Devi. Its fundamental aim was to bring about a new all – round revival and to recognise the various lines of work (social, educational, philanthropic and devotional)<sup>50</sup>.

The Sherpa Buddhist Association was established in Darjeeling hill in 1924 with the object of prospering the socio – economic condition of the Sherpa Buddhists. In the meantime the Indian Christian Association was formed. Their prime end was to provide social security to the Nepali Christians of the town. Theosophical Society had to set up its first off spring in Kalimpong town under the initiative of Hirendranath Dutta, the then notable pleader and social reformer of Darjeeling hill. A number of educated Nepali people were its member. Among them Matichand Pradhan is deserve to be mentioned. He became the first Sub – Divisional Officer (SDO) throughout the whole Nepali community

of Bengal. The Theosophical Society had no prolonged impact at Siliguri town but it had an immense impact in the civilised society of Jalpaiguri town. This society had its own building there and it was commonly known as *Tatva Bidya Bhawan*. In the year 1928, the conference of All Bengal Theosophical Society was held at Jalpaiguri town<sup>51</sup>. The Indian Christian Association, Bengal Buddhist Association, Young Men' s Buddhist Association - all worked with the aim to promote the condition of their each religion respectively<sup>52</sup>.

In 1930s the branches of Ramkrishna Mission (Belurmath) began to set up in various part of North Bengal such as Jalpaiguri, Malda, Kalimpong and Dinajpur. In the year 1923 the Ramkrishna Vedanta Ashram established in Darjeeling hill under the guidance of Swami Abhedananda. In the year 1935 the Gauriya Math also came up in Darjeeling hill. In the meantime the impact of Buddhism grew up rapidly in Darjeeling hill and the birth of Himalayan Buddhist Society was the result of this impact. In the year 1946, the Tsechu Offering Association was established in Kalimpong town with Buddhists from all races as its members. It was an en rapport with the Red sect of Buddhists who follow the Mahayanist philosophy of Tantrism preached by Mahaguru Padma – Sambhava. With this objective, they established a monastery with an attached language school in June 1968 which came to be known as Zang Dog Palri Institute of Tibetology at Kalimpong. However, it was the main meditation centre of all the Buddhist people of Darjeeling hill<sup>53</sup>.

### **Political Associations**

The Muhamadden Association Rajshahi was established in 1884 under the patronage of Zaminder Ershad Ali Khan Chaudhuri with the aim of (a) promoting education and co – operation among the Muhamadden of the district, (b) to bring the wants and grievances of the Muhamadden community to the notice of the British Government and the overall advancement of the community. Any adult Muhamadden gentleman was eligible to become a member of the Association. Most of its members were Zaminders, Talukdars, pleaders, Mukhters, Jotedars, Pirs (religious heads), merchants and traders. The President was Maulavi Muhammad Haidar Ali, M.A. and the Secretary was Maulavi Muhammad Yakut. The building of the Association was first constructed in 1891 by Mirza Yusuf Ali which was later emerged as the Rajshahi Girls' School. The Anjuman Hemayat Islam of

Rajshahi (1891) by Maulavi Hasan Ali and 'Nur - Ul - Iman' of Rajshahi were established with the object to promote education among the Muhamadden community<sup>54</sup>.

The *Rajshahi Boyalia Dharma Sabha* was an orthodox Association of the Brahmin Hindus. It staunchly condemned the Widow Remarriage Movement of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and published a book 'Bidhaba Bedan Nishedhak' in 1867 against this social reformation. The 'Hindu Ranjika' was the mouthpiece of the Association. The Rajshahi Dharma Sabha was set up in the year 1888. The advancement of Hindu religion and the creation of brotherhood among the Hindus of the district were its objectives<sup>55</sup>. The 'Rampur Boyalia Dharma Sabha' of Malda town was founded as a branch of the Rampur Boyalia Dharma Sabha of Rajshahi district. The main spirit behind its foundation was Radesh Chandra Seth.

The Bogra National Muhamadden Association was established in 1884 with the aim to safeguard the interests and spread of education among the Muhamadden population of the district. The founder president of the Association was Sayyed Shobhan Chaudhury and the Secretary was Md. Abdul karim.

The Muhamadden Association Rangpur was established in 1887 under the aegis of Central National Muhamadden Association Calcutta. It advocated special measure to spread education, expressed loyalty to the British Raj. The founder President of the Association was Abdul Majid Chaudhuri Zaminder of Mahipur. He also laid the foundation of Islam Mission in the district. The Association financially assisted the Rangpur Madrashah to establish the Students' Hostel<sup>56</sup>.

The Muhamadden Association Malda was founded by a group of elite Muslims of Malda town in 1890. It was the branch of Central National Muhamadden Association, Calcutta. The fundamental object was to improve the social, political and educational condition of the Muhamadden community. Membership was open to all educated Muhamadden. Most of the members were leading pleaders, Mukhtears, landowners, tradesmen and physicians. Business was transacted by an elected committee of 30, mostly resident of English Bazar. Maulavi Muhammad Ismail Chaudhuri was the president and Abdul Aziz Khan was the secretary of the Association. Both were a staunch propagator of pan - Islamic ideology. In the year 1895, Mr. Price the then District Magistrate and

Zamindar Chaudhury Mohayedur Rahaman became its honourable President and working president respectively. Their appeal to the British Government was to appoint only Muslim members in the District Education Department to a large degree. This Association raised the demands for introducing Islamised Bengali language rather than Musalmani Bengali language. The major response of their demand was the formation of 'All Bengal Muslim Literary Association' at Malda town in 1899<sup>57</sup>.

The Malda Association was established in 1887 with the aim to improve the condition of the people of the district in every direction. Membership was open to all adult educated residents of the district. All the office – bearers were Hindus and the association did not represent Muhamadden. Most of the members belonged to the legal profession; others were Zaminders, merchants, physicians and pleaders. Babu Jadu Nandan Chaudhuri, Babu Radhika Lal Satiar was the leading personages of the Association<sup>58</sup>.

The Muhamadden Association Dinajpur was founded in 1904 with the aim to promote the socio – cultural and political condition of Muslim community. Its founder president was Zaminder Eknuddin Ahmed. Most of its members were pleaders and land - holders. During the visit of the British Official Ramfiled Fuller the Association welcomed him with great joy. At initial stage, they supported the Congress and actively participated in Swadeshi Movement. In 1940s the Association was inclined with Muslim League and raised their voices for separate Muslim country<sup>59</sup>.

The Dinajpur Sabha was established in 1886 as a protest against the high revenue demands of the British Government. All the founders in the new Association were the supporters of Indian National Congress. Rakhil Das Sen, Madhab Chandra Chattapadhyay, Parameswar Da, Gopal Chakrabarty, Tarini Sen, Ambika Charan Basu, Jadunath Ray and so on are need to be cited here . They followed the approaches of the 'Bharat Sabha' established by 'Rashtra Guru' Surendra Nath Banarjee. The Dinajpur Sabha later took the shape of Dinajpur Zilla Congress Party in 1890<sup>60</sup>.

The *Anjuman – i – Islamia* of Darjeeling was established on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1860 and was composed with 225 Muslim residents who had come from the plains. It was the first branch of *Anjuman – i – Islamia* in undivided North Bengal. Advancement of

education, socio - religious regenerations among the Muhamadden of the district and insist loyal sentiments in the youths of the community were some of its radical aims. Its first President was S. Sujauddin and Vice – Presidents were H. Karim Baksh and M. Alam. The first Secretary was Aziz Ahmed<sup>61</sup>.

The Muhamadan Association Jalpaiguri came up in 1894 under the leadership of Jotedar Eknuddin Ahmad and tea industrialist Khan Bahadur Rahim Baksh. It strived to develop the notion of pan – Islamic ideology and spirit of education among the Muslim community of the town<sup>62</sup>. This association had a profound relation with the National Muhamadden Association founded by Sayyed Amir Ali in Aligarh. They had a profound relation with the local Rajbanshi Muslims which grew up under the initiative of Sonaula Saheb<sup>63</sup>.

The *Anjuman – i – Islamia* of Rajshahi was founded in the year 1891. Its fundamental aim was the promotion of loyalty towards the British government and the promotion and protection of the social, political, educational and other rights and interests of the Muhamadden community. The Association was composed of selected members of the Muhamadden community residing in the town and the interior of the district, with an Executive Committee consisting of President, a Secretary, a Joint Secretary, an Assistant Secretary, a Treasurer and Members<sup>64</sup>. The *Anjuman – i – Islamia* of Jalpaiguri was founded in the year 1892. Respectability was the qualification required for a membership of the Anjuman; the majority of members belonged to the landholding class. Maulavi Mehrajuddin Ahmad was its founder. Tea industrialist Khan Bahadur Musharruf Hossain was the first President and Maulavi Kazi Abdul Khaleque was the Secretary. The *Ahmadiya Association* came up at Jalpaiguri town in 1927. Its main aim was to sow the seed of Islamism among the Hindus as possible<sup>65</sup>.

The Anjuman – i – Islamia of Dinajpur was established in the year 1894 and was composed with 103 Muslim residents of the district. Its main objective was to promote the well – being of the Muhamadden of the Dinajpur district and to ameliorate their educational, social and religious status. Its first President was Maulavi Muhammad Kader Baksh, vice – Presidents were Muhammad Isa, Khorasad Ali Chaudhuri, Maulavi Ainuddin Ahmed. The first Secretary was Maulavi Hasan Ali Ahmed<sup>66</sup>.

The Anjuman – i – Islamia of Malda was founded in 1909 by Abdul Aziz Khan. He was chairman of English Bazar Municipality (1900 – 1912). Its chief ends were to promote the well – being of the Muhamadden of the district. The Anjuman Makhaerul Islam of Malda town was set up in 1900. Hasimuddin Mian, the native Zamindar of Bargharia village was its chief founder. Its main aim was to propagate the morality of Islam and disdain the Hinduism as possible<sup>67</sup>.

The Malda District Association was established in 1906 to resurrect the political consciousness of common people against the British Raj. At initial stage, it was comprised with 55 members and interestingly all were Hindus. The founder President was Radesh Chandra Seth, a pleader cum Congress Party worker. The former had a good relation with the historian Akshay Kumar Maitra.

The Malda District Muslim Youth Association was established in 1925. The chief patroniser was Mubarak Ali Khan, the Constable of Araidanga Police Station. The founder president was Munshi Yaqub Ali, Head Teacher of Araidanga High School and the Secretary was Ahmed Ali Khan. This Association alienated the Muslim youths from mainstream nationalism<sup>68</sup>. In contrast, The ‘Malda District Hindu Youth Association’ was established in 1927. The chief patroniser was Sarju Prasad Behani, the District President of Malda Congress<sup>69</sup>.

The Hitasadhani Sabha established on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1946 mainly worked to safeguard the interests of the Rajbanshi Hindu – Muslim Jotedars. The important members of the Association were Amanat Ulla Khan Chaudhuri (Dewan of Cooch Behar State), Gajendra Narayan Basuniya, Hefaj Uddin Mian, Hari Barman. Most of the members were Muslims and therefore supported the Muslim league. They protested against the unification of Cooch Behar with independent West Bengal and appealed to merge with East Pakistan. They observed the ‘Direct Action Day’ through *hartal*, protest meetings and demonstrations to explain the meaning of Pakistan<sup>70</sup>.

The Praja Mandal Party was consisted with the Rajbanshi and non – Rajbanshi elite Hindus and generally worked for the welfare of peasant society. The Cooch Behar People’s Association was set up in Calcutta under the leadership of Sudhangshu Bakshi. The leading members of the Association were Ashok Dasgupta, Ramesh Banarjee,

Tarapada Chakrabarty and Pulakesh Dey Sarkar. It raised voices to merge Cooch Behar State with independent West Bengal<sup>71</sup>.

By the first half of the twentieth century, a large number of militant organisations came up in various districts of contemporary North Bengal. These associations were known as *Uttarbanga Dal* and worked as an off spring of *Anushilan Samiti*, Calcutta. This militant group *Uttarbanga Dal* was really a sore in the eye of the British Raj. Hence it came to be known as 'Indian Liberating League' in official papers of the British Government.

### **Other Associations**

A large number of people from various part of India went to Calcutta for the sake of employment, better education and better life. Many of them permanently settled there. Despite their stay in Calcutta they could not forgot their birth land. This emotion actually drew them to set up their own association and these were commonly known with the name of their birth land. The *Tripura Hitasadhani Sabha*, *Sri Hatta Sammelani* is few examples in this field. The people of North Bengal lived in Calcutta too established similar Associations. The *Malda Samiti* established by Professor Binoy Sarkar of Calcutta University in 1933, the *Jalpaiguri Samiti* by the then Minister Khagendra Nath Dasgupta and the Dinajpur Samiti are indeed deserved to be mentioned. It is worth while important to mention here that the style of giving name the association with the name of their mother land did not confine in Calcutta only. This style was practised in other districts of undivided Bengal also. The *Rangpur Samiti*, *Manikganj Sammelani*, *Barishal Sammelani* of Jalpaiguri district are need to be cited here<sup>72</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

What need to be focused here through the above discussion is that the Associations of nineteenth and twentieth century's North Bengal gives us a complete picture regarding the socio – cultural, economic, religious and political condition of contemporary period under review. Most of the Associations established by respective communities had the aim to promote their own culture and identity. These associations were remained confined to a small elite group (the so called *bhadralok*) who were the economic and

cultural beneficiaries of colonial rule. Socially, they were Hindus and consolidated their position as landholders, pleaders, physicians. Around the first half of twentieth century, almost all major towns in North Bengal had local *Anjumans* and Central National Muhamadden Association (CNMA) had branches in the districts. A close collaboration between the educated Muslims and the Mullahs was a distinctive feature of these *mofussil Anjumans*. Even a few associations played a key role behind the emergence of communal conflict and finally led to India's partition.

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