

Sub-Regional Movements in Post Colonial North Bengal

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The sub-regional movement is based on sub-regionalism. It is a conscious and deliberate effort to achieve a definite political goal. The goal is to attain equal right with the majority community or political autonomy within the frame work of the state. The people are mobilized, organized and put pressure on the authority to achieve their and they adopt a comprehensive programme to ventilate their grievances and to demonstrate their strength.¹ The movement has different phases and different forms. It may be peace or violent. It has both positive and negative aspects. In the post colonial Bengal many movements were raised, and also continued for their separate identities in the north Bengal. In this articles to be highlighted the two movements in north Bengal viz Gorkhaland and Greater Cooch Behar Movement.

The demand for separate statehood for Darjeeling is not new. But in case of post colonial period the demand separation of Darjeeling from West Bengal did not stop. On 6th April 1947, the Darjeeling District Committee of the undivided communist party submitted a memorandum to the constituent Assembly demanding establishment of a free Gorkhasthan comprising Darjeeling District, southern Sikkim and Nepal. To take the opinion of the hill people, on the basis of the adult suffrage “Most probably the communist party raised the demand for Gorkhasthan only to oppose the British plan for creating North Eastern Province with Darjeeling Dooars and Assam.”²

Dr. B.C Roy the chief minister of west Bengal submitted a memorandum before the state re-organizing committee opposing the separation of Darjeeling from West Bengal of formation of North Eastern province. In 1961, West Bengal Language Act was passed which approved Nepali as second official language for Darjeeling.³ In 1981, Darjeeling Pranta Parishad demanded for the full fledged statehood ship of Darjeeling.⁴ In the year 1981, the West Bengal legislative Assembly passed a resolution for regional autonomy for Darjeeling and also requested the central government to take appropriate measure for instituting an autonomous council in Darjeeling within the frame work of West Bengal.⁵ It is also worthy to mention that from 1980, a section of the congress parliamentary party particularly Arjun Singh in order to de-stabilized the left front government, indirectly invited Gorkha National Liberation Front for demand of Gorkhaland.⁶ In 30th July 1980, Gorkha National Liberation Front was formed but massive violent movement for Gorkhaland began to spread from the year 1986 and continued for two years.

Subhas Ghising, president of the G.N.L.F Party gave up the demand for separate state and in 1988 Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council was formed. Subhas Ghising became its President. But D.G.H.C failed to satisfy their aspiration of the hill people. Ultimately on 6th Dec 2005, after tripartite meeting among the chairman of the hill council Govt. of West Bengal and Government of India Darjeeling District was included in the sixth schedule. Two more moujaas sevak forest was included with the hill council.⁷ Sixth schedule Agreement the fate of the separate Gorkhaland State. Even the Hindu Ghorkas were dissatisfied force homogenizing there with the tribal Ghorkas.⁸

The hill people being deprived and deceived virtually revolted against the autocratic rules of Subhash Ghising who became a stooge of the Government of West Bengal. An organization named Ghorkha Jana Mukti Morcha was formed under the leadership of Bimal Gurung on October, 2007. With the formation of G.J.M.M. the age old movements for the establishment of Gorkhaland assumed a new dimension. G.J.M.M. also succeeded in uniting the veteran army persons in support of the Gorkhaland movement. The hill G.J.M.M. has successfully established relation with the other sub-regional parties of North Bengal like Kamtapur people's party, Greater Coochbehar Movement Committee. Even on 7th May 2008, G.J.M.M. had successfully organized a meeting jointly with Kamtapur people's party and Greater Coochbehar party at Indira Gandhi Maidan, Siliguri.⁹ G.J.M.M. had become successfully in bringing a section of the tribal workers of tea gardens of Terai- Dooars in favour of Gorkha land movement. Though the Adivasi Bikash Parisad was in favour of inclusion of the Indian Constitution. But Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Bikash Parisad organized the merging of Terai-duars with proposed Gorkhaland state. Even the organization was demanding the exclusion Panighata and Lohagara which were dominated area from the D.G.H.C.¹⁰

In spite of A.B.V.P's opposition to the inclusion of Terai-Doors in proposed Gorkhaland, a large section of Adivasi population had formed a new organization named Progressive People Party, which was in favour of inclusion Terai-Doors within Ghorkaland with some reservation. P.P.S. President Mr. Kalindi said "with a view to develop our areas and betterment of the people belonging to our community. Still we go with the G.J.M.M. keeping in mind if the interim set-up conserves the purpose. But, we do not support their demand for separate Gorkhaland and we do not allow them to claim our land as Gorkhaland."¹¹ He was successful to win the Kalchini Assembly seat in the last Bidhan Sabha Election.

Greater Cooch Behar Movement

Another Sub- regional movement was started in the post Colonial North Bengal which is considered as Greater Cooch Behar movement. The origin of the movement dated back to the merger of Cooch Behar under the Indian Territory in 1949. In the Cooch Behar , the Annexation Act.1949 there was statement on behalf of the Indian government that Cooch Behar should be treated as a 'C' category state and special provision also to be included in the Indian constitution for the government of Cooch Behar. But in practice after independence nothing was done for the overall development of the Cooch Behar and its people.¹² So many reasons are there such as caste discrimination, economic backwardness, land reform policy of 1977 and cultural alienation and so one.

In the initial phase the demand for K.P.P was started. K.P.P was set up in January 1996 by Atul Roy who ironically heads a break away (minority) faction presently (2005). Nikhil Roy is the President of the Kamtapur people's Party. Both the faction share with the more militant outfit KLO, the demand for a separate Kamtapur is the region, to be covered out of North Bengal, comprising essentially its five districts, and some areas of the contiguous Assam. This demand of late (Since 2001 or so) has taken the shape of Greater Cooch Behar (GCB) Spearhead by the Greater Cooch Behar people's Association (GCBPA).¹³

The demands of constituting new states were primarily based on allegedly unequal distribution of development. The tensions between migrants and the sons of soil are also one of the reasons for demanding a state. Because of the uneven process of development that people of Kamtapur region have experienced over a period of time some ethnic groups move ahead

becoming advanced and privileged than others in same region. Mostly indigenous population of the area expressed their anguish against the immigrants and is compelled to put their claim to local resources and benefits.¹⁴

The G.C.B.P.A. is fighting for a Rajbanshi state comprising areas that belonging to Kochbihar before its merger with Indian in 1950. In addition the underground Kamtapur liberation organization (K.L.O) wants an independent Rajbanshi state. Today Rajbanshis are spread over Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Nepal and northern Bangladesh.¹⁵ A simmering statehood movement has erupted in a sea of violence when police and greater Cooch Behar people's Association cadres clashed repeatedly for a fresh demand o their state.¹⁶

The Rajbanshis want a greater Cooch Behar comprising Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Uttar Dinajpur and Assam's Goalpara districts. All these districts have majority of Rajbanshi Cooch population. G.C.B.A Chief Bانشibadan Barman states, "a separate state is our birth right".¹⁷ G.C.B.P.A had carried out a strike on 20th Sept. 2005. in Cooch Behar which resulted in mob-Violence and the death of five persons including an Additional Superintendent of police and two constables. Approximately 30,000 people are known to have participated in the agitation. The agitation was a protest prior to the visit of the West Bengal chief Minister on 24th September, 2005. Incident prediction is thus easy and is related to events which are lively to come up. In this case it appears that the police were aware of the likelihood of violence hence additional superintendent of Police from Kalimpong who was lynched and a large member of policemen were present during the agitation. West Bengal chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee vehemently denied that Greater Cooch Behar and Gorkhaland will never be made into states while addressing a rally in Siliguri on 15th Sept.2005.¹⁸

The agitation were demanding just before the 2006 West Bengal legislative Assembly elections that were should be no election in Cooch Behar since the status of Cooch Behar was not clear and it sought a clarification of the territorial status of Cooch Behar. The organization demanded the formation of an interim caretaker government by the centre.¹⁹ The GCPA boycotted the Assembly election in 2006, there are indications that it tacitly supported Atul Roy's Kamtapur Progressive party. The GCDP however contested the Loksabha elections of 2009; its candidate Bانشibadan Barman, contested as an independent candidate and secured 37,226 votes.²⁰

Even though it is clear that it is the Rajbanshi another ethnic minorities who form this back bone of the movement and the leadership is drawn from these communities since the demands for a separate state there is a possibility that in the future it may able to draw the support of others like the middle class and petty bourgeois section of the Bengalis in Cooch Behar Considering that it is a district which is poor, under developed and left urbanized. Even former left front leaders like Kamal Guha, belonging to the All India forward Block, had admitted that the region including Cooch Behar suffer from the problem of under development; according to him, this was one of the reasons for the political and social unrest in the region. Given this background of the district, the formation of a separate state may appear to all (including Bengalis) a panacea to the prevailing ills of the district.²¹

The left front used two different strategies in order to counter the movement for a separate state of Greater Cooch Behar. It has used strong arm tactics, which took two forms. It also claimed to be using development of the region to counter the movement. Second point is concerned, it is ambiguous in the sense that in the beginning it claimed that North Bengal is not

a deprived region at all but later with the ascence of the movement it have hinted at greater funds for the region, thus accepting that The North Bengal region remains under developed the first stages included the use of police force in order to counter the mobilization by the GCPA and the second involved using counter mobilization in the region The CPI(M) had argued that there was no demand for a separate state of Cooch Behar during the time of the State Reorganization commission in 1956.²²

Future will tell whether G.J.M.M and Greater Coochbehar Movement will successful in achieving a separate state or not. G.J.M.M's main achievement is that it has been successful to bring the Terai-Doors in the context of the Gorkhaland movement and at the same time G .J.M.M. has shown its ability to unify the indigenous Indo-Mongoloid people and a section of the tribal workers of tea gardens in favour of Gorkhaland movement. But in case of Greater Cooch Behar Movement the indigenous Rajbanshi peoples want to achieve their goal by mass movement and they ultimately established their own identity and culture in the six district of north Bengal. They want to ignore the culture of Kolkata base and unequal development of this regions. It is a challenge of future whether they successfully established their own land or not.

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