

Changing Pattern of Regional Movement in North Bengal Between 1947 to 1990: A Case Study of Separate Kamtapur State Movement

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In the post independence India regional movement is common phenomenal in the history of regionalism. Several ethno-linguistic communities of the Indian subcontinent have demanded their separate politico-cultural identity since independence. It is a multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural nation. There are scores of regional languages, various strains of culture and different loyalties, single as well as multiple. Amidst the amazing diversities, it is natural that regional feelings, regional parties, regional institutions and similar other organizations meant for voicing the aspirations of local people and providing forums for them, should emerge. Indeed, with the passage of years, the multi-faceted aspirations, which together may be described as regionalism, have gained strength. It is not a new phenomenon. The growth of this trend can be traced back to the fast unto death by Potty Srivamulu over the demand for the creation of Andhra Pradesh which set in motion the reorganization of State along linguistic lines in 1956. One such regional movement in Northern part of North Bengal is Rajbanshi Kamtapur separate statehood movement. Northern part of West Bengal is called North Bengal, is no exception from regional feelings or better to say regionalism. It may be explaining, present North Bengal comprising with seven districts namely Cooch Behar, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda. Before partition of India including North Bengal the scene has not been same as we see today specially population ratio of this region. The majority of the people belong to Rajbanshi community; in reality they are the original inhabitant of this region along with other minor aborigines; Mech, Rabha, Limbu and Toto. But the total scenario was changed when massive influx of refugees had come from Eastern Pakistan (present Bangladesh) to North Bengal in search of security and shelter.

To understand the changing patterns of Rajbanshi Kamtapur movement in North Bengal we should have to look into the history of the Rajbanshi Kshtriya movement before 1947, unless and otherwise the changing pattern of Kamtapur movement from its very inception would have been remained incomplete to the readers. In a very nut shell the present writer is delineating the history of Kshatriya Samiti. In the Census Report of 1891 the Rajbanshi community was shown as 'Koch' which sparked the protest movement. Haramohan Khanjachi was the leader of the movement and his associates were Raj Chandra Sirkar, Nabin Chandra Sirkar etc. It was their combined effort that initiated the Kshtriya movement. When Rajbanshi the same as 'Koches' was written in the census report of 1901, protest was arose. It is worth mentioning that in the Census Report, Buchanon Suggested 'All Rajbanshis are not Koches but most of them are'. Under Panchanan Barma's leadership the Kshtriya Samiti was formed on 1st May 1920 in the Natya Mandir of Rangpur (Sen-26). The Kshtriya movement grew into mass movement under his leadership in consequence of which the Rajbanshi community received the identity of 'Rajbanshi Kshtriya' status permanently. It is clear from above mentioning passage that Rajbanshi Kshtriya samiti was able to develop a ethnic feelings along with self respect among the Rajbanshis (Sen-29). Naturally the Samiti had developed ethnic solidarity among the Rajbanshis of North Bengal.

Now it is very much clear from the above discussion that Rajbangsi's ethnic feeling and social status had already been prepared by the hands of Thakur Panchanan Barma. It is noted here that before partition, the majority of populations have comprised by Rajbanshi community, they are the indigenous people of North Bengal. But as a tragic result of partition outnumbered of refugees have come from East Pakistan, the social condition of the Rajbanshi community rather worsened to adversely affect them seriously, culturally and ethnically; all these have affected the very survival of the indigenous people in spite of their past heritage and continuing contributions to India (Das-28). Such conditions accumulating over decades gave rise to impatience and agitations and finally to the Rajbanshi Kamtapur regional movement. It is interesting to note that the rise and changing patterns of Rajbanshi Kamtapur regional movement in North Bengal after 1947 is the result of various socio-economic conditions which have factored into successive stages of the movement. Mention may be made in this regards that land alienation and economic exploitation by the migrants of the outsider, merger of Cooch Behar states as a district of west Bengal, neglect of Rajbanshi ethnicity ,language and culture. Identity crisis ,linguistic factor, cultural and historical phenomenon ,social economic and political factors have all equally contributed to the rise of Rajbanshi Kamtapur regional movement in North Bengal. Due to aforesaid reasons now they are marginalized, the Rajbanshi have come forward to restore their power and position in politics and society they begun to organise various politico-social organization to uplift their lost positions such as Kshatriya Samiti, Hita Sadhoni Sabha, Uttar Khanda Dal, UTJAS, Kamtapur Peoples Party, Greater Cooch Behar (Barman-51).

Like any other regional movement the Rajbanshi Kamtapur movement has been changing its patterns from time to time. It is needless to say that the changing pattern of the Rajbanshi Kamtapur movement in North Bengal is always being concentrated its focus on separate state for the Rajbanshi people as 'Separate Kamtapur State' within Indian Territory. Now it is time to unveil the dynamic changes of Rajbanshi Kamtapur movement in proposed research article. It also includes here that Rajbanshi Kamtapur movement may be divided into three transitory phases (Das-123) namely the first phase 1891-1947, the second phase 1947-1990 and the third phase 1990 to present day. The present proposed article only concentrate on phase two, that is 1947-1990, with very consciously because 1947 is the land mark both in Indian history in a broad scene as well as political tension and regional movements in North Bengal received its final figure from this particular period of time, on the other hand in 1990 Uttar Khanda Dal, a regional political party supported by Rajbanshi educated leader begun to non-existence in the political canvas of North Bengal Region. Thus the present researcher is very consciously selected the period of time for discussion.

As stated earlier that Rajbanshi Kshatriya movement was the caste identity movement among the Rajbanshi of North Bengal as they were gradually marginalised and pushed to low place in the caste structure. To achieve the kshatriya status for Rajbanshi, the leaders of Kshatriya Samiti begun to initiate their movement. Initial stage of Kshatriya movement the leader came from the Zamindari and Jotedari class of the Rajbanshi community. The elite section of the Rajbanshi begun to arise the caste feelings of the Rajbanshi under a common platform. Under the leadership of Hara Mohan Khajanchi, a Rajbanshi Jamindar of Rangpur

founded the “Rajbanshi Zamindar Kshtriya Unnati Bidhayani Sabha” in 1891. In this connection it is to be connected that Thakur Panchanan Barma, Narendranath Barma, Jugal Kishor, Upendranath Barman, Narendranath Adhikari, Satish Singha, Monibhusan Roy had come to take the helm of ‘Kshtriya Samiti’ successively from landed gentry class with the educated Rajbanshi leaders. The Rajbanshi educated leader wanted to get Kshtriya status in society (Barman-53).

The Hitasadhani Sabha was the first political organization by the educated Rajbanshi leader, supported by Cooch Behar State on 1946. Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmed was its president and Jaladhar Saha was secretary. The central aim of the Hitasadhani Sabha, before partition, was welfare and socio-economic development of the indigenous people of North Bengal, specially in Cooch Behar. But a radical change was seen immediate before partition was that ‘A Separate state’ demanded for the Rajbanshi Kshtriya people. On 4th May 1947 the Rajbanshi leaders of Sabha demanded for a separate ‘Rajasthan State’ of the Rajbanshi. Besides the leaders of ‘Rajasthan State’, Maharaja of Cooch Behar Jagaddipendra Narayan also supported the separate Rajasthan State (Rajbanshi State) for the Rajbanshi (Ahmed -116). After independence of India Sabha demanded ‘Uttar Khand Pradesh’. The demand for the separate Uttar Khand Pradesh was raised before the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1952. Thus it is evident from above small discussion that the Rajbanshi people demanded Kshtriya status for themselves and later on the Hitasadhani Sabha which aims at its initial stage was socio-economic development of the Rajbanshi people but later on demanded a separate state for Rajbanshi people of the region.

Another Rajbanshi political party was come up immediate after independence which was Uttar Khanda Dal on 31st May 1969, under the leadership of Sri Kalindra Nath Barman, Sri Panchanan Mallic, Rukmini Kanta Roy and other educated Rajbanshi of the region. It is surprising fact that Uttar Khanda Dal was bourgeoned within the Kshtriya Samiti led by the educated Rajbanshi leaders (Debnath-191) agitated against the Calcutta based leaders of Kshtriya Samiti mainly because of constant exploitation and deprivation of the Rajbanshi of North Bengal.

Not only that the Uttar Khanda Dal was free from all types of Kshatriya samiti’s ideology and objectives but was totally different in its nature and objectives. The leader of UKD given much emphasis upon immigration to North Bengal from East Pakistan and Assam, because large number of refugees was resulted in their economic misery and hardship owing to massive flow of Bengali refugees from East Pakistan (B.Ghosh,p-51). The resentment of the Rajbanshi community was further aggravated at the time of abolition of Zamindari system in 1953. The Rajbanshi community has been solely dependent upon land. Naturally abolition of Zamindari system given fuel to the Rajbanshi Kamtapur movement in post independent North Bengal (Bagchi-69). It is also a hard fact that the presence of the millions of the refugees had precipitated the passing of Zamindari Abolition Act, 1953. However, in many villages anti Refugees disturbances had taken place (Pandit-10). The UKD raised the Bhatia-khedao slogan. The UKD successfully organized mass rally in Alipurduar, Tufanganj, Siliguri and Cooch Behar (Barman-130). It is important to note that the Uttar Khanda Dal strongly raised the demand of the Rajbanshi related to their all round

development and a separate state. Thus, the UKD had formulated the movement strategy of separate state and their other common demands of the earlier Rajbanshi Kshtriya parties.

In conclusion we may say that the Rajbanshi organization in North Bengal before partition era was initiated and conglomerated for caste upliftment and socio-economic development of the Rajbanshi people. But after 1947 Rajbanshi Kamtapur movement only concentrate on separate statehood demand for the Rajbanshi people and changes it pattern from time to time.

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