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**Editor**

**Arun K.Jana**

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*From Editor's Desk.....*

## **FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK**

As the editor of the 'Journal of POLITICAL STUDIES' it is a matter of great pleasure to me to place before the readers the seventh issue of the journal which is published annually by the Department of Political Science, University of North Bengal. Contribution for the volume was invited through advertisements in the 'Economic and Political Weekly' and the 'Mainstream'. All together 33 articles were received in response to the advertisements out of which 7 articles were selected for publication in the current (March 2013) issue of the Journal and 6 for the October 2013 issue. It has been resolved by the Department Committee to make the journal a biannual one, from the financial year 2013-2014. Hence the next issue Volume 7 that will be published shortly will be the October 2013 issue.

This issue contains a commentary and 6 research articles. There are no book reviews in the issue. The articles in the volume are the most interesting one and form the bulk of the reading. The articles are on diverse issues like Ethno-Regional Movements at the Sub-State Level, Caste Marginalization and Resistance, the socio economic profile of a depressed Community in Darjeeling Hills, the emerging leadership of Rural Women In new Panchayats, Liberal State and Multiculturalism, Development, Induced Displacement and rehabilitation etc. Most of the articles come from young Indian scholars. It is also a pleasure to state that out of the seven articles that are being published in the issue four belong to research scholars of the Department. In future I am sure that the scholars will contribute more. I am sure that given the quality of the articles the volume will provide some interesting and thoughtful reading.

**Arun K. Jana**

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# **Ethno-Regional Movements At Sub-State Level The Bodoland And Kamtapur Movements**

Abhirupa Majumder

***ABSTRACT:** The linchpin of the present paper is an endeavor to comprehend the nature of the ethno-regional movements in India. Henceforward, the present paper attempts a comparative analysis of both the Bodoland and Kamtapur movements, on the basis of some resemble traits, in terms of their historical context. Besides the issue of political process and development of both the states i.e. Assam and West Bengal, which obliged both the aboriginal communities to assert their voice against their centuries old political system and the respective governments and thus claim for a separate state, has also taken into consideration which in turn constitutes the crux of the present paper.*

**Key words: Ethno-Regional movement; Bodoland Movement; Kamtapur Movement; Movements at Sub-state Level and Movements for separate statehood.**

## **1. Introduction**

The present paper, basically an exploratory work, strives to illuminate the innate nature of the ethno-regional movement in India by comparing the demands of two such movements i.e. the Bodoland demand in Assam and the demand for the Kamtapur state in West Bengal. The ethno-regional movements, in a plural country like India consisting of numerous cultural-linguistic communities, have nowadays become one of the most sensitive and burning issues. Perplexedly, in this era of globalization, on the one hand when we are consciously moving towards the concept of global village which is characterized by economic and cultural homogeneity by eroding the national barriers, on the other hand the various cultural-linguistic local communities have become much more assertive and thus endeavour to revitalize their distinct cultural-linguistic identities than before. Moreover, it seems that the main objective of every local

community is now to have a distinct territorial identity on the basis of their distinct cultural-linguistic identities. Their relentless struggle is not against the concept of globalization rather they are against the cultural-linguistic homogenous arrangement, by the Centre, at the cost of their heterogeneous cultural-linguistic features. Thereby, the perceptible fact is that the more we are moving towards the homogenous universal identity the more we are finding ourselves restrained by the barrier of heterogeneous indigenous local culture than before.

Henceforth, the term 'ethno-regionalism', on the basis of its cultural and territorial aspects, is believed to have expressed and served the very purpose of such movements led by the local communities. The suffix 'regional' helps to distinguish these movements from the so called national movements which are characterized by the demand of sovereignty. Ethno-regional movements seek to create a separate state within the federal structure of a country. According to Iqbal Narain it is difficult to distinguish the regional territorial identity from the cultural-ethnic identity, because of their overlapping features, in a country like India. He further contends that in this country besides territory other factors like linguistic identity, caste, historical past, administrative history and economic interest are also playing a significant role as a source of regionalism which is basically a psychological sentimental issue. Thereby, to Narain here exists a very thin line of difference between the ethnicity and nationalism and the regionalism as well (Halder, 1999, p.31). In India, these movements operate both at the sub-state as well as the multi-state level. As a result of which scholars have time and again felt the need to uphold the issue and thereby work on the multiple dimensions of this issue in myriad ways. Likewise, the present paper is just an attempt to make a comparison between these two movements as it is believed that such comparative study facilitates to have better comprehension of the nature of such ethno-regional movements respectively. Both these movements possess some common elements, for instance, both the regions belong to plain areas in the foothills of Himalayas and adjacent to each other. Economically, both the regions are being figured out as the most backward and deprived one. Culturally and linguistically, both the Bodos and the Kamtapuris are dominated by the Assamese and the Bengali upper caste people. From the persisting contemporary situation in various states of India, it appears nowadays that the regional movement has become equipment

in the hands of the deprived, peripheral communities in their endeavour to correct all the injustices done to them, by the centre, particularly at the cost of cultural-linguistic heterogeneity.

## **2. Bodoland Movement:**

### **2.1. The Bodos and Their Demand:**

The Bodoland movement of Assam considerably remains confined among the schedule tribes of plains of Assam. They mainly reside in the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra comprising of Dhubri, Kokrajhar and Goalpara district in the west and Dhemaji sub-division of Lakhimpur district in the east (Baishya, 2009, p.13). Bodo, the once predominant major group turned into a minority after the incursion of the non-tribal people in Assam. It can be stated in this context that "The problem faced by the Bodo people is in essence the problem of all less developed community when they are living with comparatively advanced group of people under a common political system" (Prabhakar, 1974, p.2097). After being dominated and exploited in the hands of the sanskritised Assamese upper caste people, in 1967 the plain tribes of Assam for the first time raised their voice for a separate state "It was time for the tribals and aboriginals to seek freedom from the illegal occupation of Assam by the so-called Assamese" (Baruah, 1999, p.173). But the demand of the Bodos and other tribal people was articulated politically after the emergence of the Plain Tribal Council of Assam, in 1967, which placed their demand for an Autonomous Region to the then President of India Zakir Hussain, by putting forward a memorandum considering the issues of alienation, unemployment, exploitation and preservation of tribal language, culture, customs and traditions (Datta, 1994, pp. 41- 44). Later on, in 1973 the demand for an Autonomous Region by the PTCA was replaced by the demand for a Union Territory. In 1979 the split group of PTCA i.e. the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (Progressive) came into being. And thus, gradually, the tribal as well as the Bodo movement in Assam began to lose its relevance due to the clash between the split groups i.e. the PTCA and PTCA (P). However, thereafter the later split group PTCA (P) was dissolved in the convention at Harisinga of Darrang district in Assam (Baishya, 2009, p.64). Meanwhile, the United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) was formed under the chairmanship of Binoy Kungur. The UTNLF submitted its memorandum of a separate Union Territory twice in the years of 1984 and in 1985, to the then

consecutive Prime Ministers of India Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. But unfortunately, later on the party also had split into two groups, one was the UTNLF and the other was the UBRLF (Baishya, 2009, p.64).

More importantly, once again the demand for a separate state 'Bodoland', with a slogan "divide Assam fifty-fifty" (Hussain, 2000, p.4521), was elevated by the All Bodo Students' Union during the rule of the Assam Gana Parishad in 1986. The ABSU under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma had decided to achieve a separate state by 1990s. It is needless to mention here that during this phase the demand for a Union Territory was replaced by the demand for a full-fledged statehood namely 'Bodoland' in the conference at Bashbari of Dhubri district of lower Assam in 1988 (Baishya, 2009, pp. 66-67). In 1989 the negotiation between the ABSU and the state and central government was considered significant because of the decision, which was taken in the extended session of 8<sup>th</sup> round tripartite talk, by the government. "The government of India is deeply concerned about the problem of the Bodos and other plain tribals of Assam and it is committed to their proposed that three member committee of experts may be set up to determine the areas of Bodos and other plains tribal of Assam to the north of Brahmaputra river and make recommendation as to the autonomy, legislative, administrative and financial powers that may be given to them. The committee will consult all groups concerned and submit its report in five days to the government of India" (Mosahary, 1992, p.11). The recommendation of a three member expert committee, appointed by the then Ministry of Home Affairs in 1991, for more autonomy was ultimately rejected by the ABSU.

Thus after a long period of struggle, some success came their way with the formation of the Bodo Autonomous Council in 1993. Accordingly, Rajesh Pilot the then Union Minister of the state for Home signed the memorandum of settlement on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1993 with the aim of resolving the long persisting problem of the Bodoland movement in Assam (BAC, 2003). The BAC was formed with an intention of providing maximum autonomy to the Bodos in all spheres like social, cultural and economic etc. (BAC, UCDP: The Bodoland Autonomous Council Act,1993, 2014). But the problem was that the BAC was formed without any demarcated

boundary and more importantly, comprised of mainly the non-Bodo population like Asomiya Hindus, Asomiya Muslims, Rabhas, Na-Asomiya Muslims, Bengali Hindus, Santhals and Nepalese etc. In order to remove the malady relating to the non-Bodo population, ethnic cleansing process was adopted to resolve the problem but the Bodo people kept themselves completely aloof from that process. Thus the desire of establishing an autonomous council, for providing maximum autonomy, remained in the papers only. More importantly, no such initiative was taken on the part of the government, in a true sense of term, to implement the Bodo Accord in accordance with the MOS (Baishya, 2009, p.71). However, the BAC, due to various reasons, was unable to fulfil the expectation of the Bodo people and thus consequently reinvigorated the demand for a separate statehood (BAC, 2003).

On 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1996 the All Bodo Students' Union under the leadership of President Swambla Basumatary submitted a memorandum to the then Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao for accomplishing the task of creating a separate state for fulfilling their own purpose (ABSU, 1991, p. 27). And as a result, for one more time, the memorandum of settlement was signed on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2003 in the tripartite talks between the Government of India, Government of Assam and the Bodo Liberation Tigers regarding the formation of an Autonomous self-governing body namely Bodoland Territorial Council within the state of Assam and thus the Bodoland Territorial Council came into being under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution in the year of 2003 (Baishya, 2009, p. 73). The BTC was provided the Constitutional protection under the Sixth Schedule for developing the economic, educational condition of the Bodos and preserving their distinct linguistic and ethnic identity. But like the BAC, the BTC was also unable to transfer the prevailing discontent condition of the Bodos.

Hence, the inability of the two consecutive autonomous councils had made the ALL BODO STUDENTS' UNION, the BODO PEOPLES' PARTY and the BODO LIBERATION TIGER to reiterate their earlier demand for a separate state within the federal structure of India. But interestingly, the NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF BODOLAND (NDFB) had rejected

the second Bodo Accord and at the same time demanded for a sovereign state instead of any separate state (Baishya, 2009, p. 86).

## **2.2. Government Response:**

So far as the attitude of the Assam government was concerned, it was apprehended by the Plain Tribes that the behavior of the Assam government, towards them, was basically rigid as well as arbitrary in nature. They resisted the Assam government mainly for its anti-tribal and chauvinistic mode of behavior as well (Baishya, 2009, p.98). This has been exemplified from the fact that the government had never taken any initiative on its own in order to redress their grievances instead there had always been a tendency on the part of the government to suppress the rising dissenting voices of the agitators even in some cases by using force (Baishya, 2009, p.99). However, once the government tried to resolve the perpetual problem by forming the autonomous self-governing bodies like the BAC and BTC with an aim of providing maximum autonomy to the plain tribes in every aspect of their lives respectively. But ultimately it failed to serve the very purpose. Hence, the inability of the Assam government to provide maximum autonomy as an alternative to the separate statehood demand in turn helps in perpetuating the later demand in Assam i.e. the demand for separate statehood.

## **2.3. Linguistic-cultural and Economic Issues and Causes of the Bodo Demand:**

The cultural-linguistic domination by the upper caste, chauvinistic Assamese people has always been perceived as a main reason behind their resentment and affront. The Bodos are generally acknowledged as a distinct ethno-linguistic community with a language and culture of their own. They are believed to be the part of the Indo-Mongoloid group of a Tibeto-Burman language family (Baishya, 2009, p.13). But the Assam government, according to the Bodos, instead of making any attempt to protect their language and culture, always strove to impose the Assamese

language and culture upon them. Thus the Bodos gradually became antagonistic and developed an anti-Assamese feeling (ABSU, 1991, pp.15-25).

In other words, The Bodo people always considered the Assamese people as well as the Assam government, due to their apathetic and indifferent attitude, responsible for their deteriorated and miserable condition (ABSU, 1991, p.15). On the other hand, the language policy of the Assam government was another major cause of animosity among the Bodos. Inevitably, it is believed that Assam had never been a state of the Assamese people alone. Since the eleventh century onwards Assam began to be known as a highly multi-lingual state consisting of the Bodo, Assamese, Bengali and other tribal and ethno-linguistic communities. The heavy influx of Muslim immigrants from the neighbouring country, over the time, had increased the number of the Assamese speaking people. The Muslim immigrants had adopted the Assamese language and thereby began to declare themselves as Assamese respectively. Accordingly with time, the total number of the Assamese speaking people gradually crossed over 50 per cent considerably, as per the census report of 1951 (Nath, 2014). And on the basis of numerical strength of the Assamese speaking people, the Assam government declared the Assamese language as an Official Language in 1961 which was strongly opposed by the Bodos (Roy, 1995, p.52-53). Later on, as a mark of protest they abandoned the Assamese script and demanded for a Roman script. In 1974-75 the Bodo people under the leadership of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha led the movement for a Roman script. After having confronted some initial obstructions, finally the Assam government since 1988 began to accept the use of the Roman language for the purpose of an officially sponsored publication (Prabhakar, 1974, pp. 2097-2100).

Economically, they are also known as the most vulnerable section of the society. Majority of the Bodos, approximately 78 per cent of the Bodos as per the census report of 2001, live below the poverty line (Baishya, 2009, p.42). There are many reasons behind their miserable economic condition as well as the exploitation. For instance, the arrival of the Kaiyahs, Barpetiahs and the Marwari traders was no less responsible behind their present economic status. The Bodos of Udalguri, Darrang and the northern foot hill areas were completely depended on the forest products for their livelihood and also used to trade those forest products, trees and timbers in a

small quantity. But the entire trade of these areas was transferred into the hands of the Kaiyahs and Barpetiahs after their arrival. And consequently, the Bodo community as a whole in these areas turned into wage labourer. "With little cash and less enterprise the Bodos were now facing extreme economic hardship" (Roy, 1995, pp. 26-27).

The role of the village Mahajans and businessmen was detrimental indeed, in this regard. The unscrupulous village Mahajans and business men exploited the plain tribes economically by taking an advantage of their ignorant and backward condition (Bordoloi, 1986, p. 23).

The money lenders used to exploit the plain tribes through their ambiguous money lending policy. The poor needy tribal people used to borrow money from the village Mahajans and businessmen. There was no question of interest but the only condition was that the money should be repaid in kind. Ultimately the borrower had no other option but to relinquish their land to the Mahajans as they were unable to repay the due amount (Bordoloi, 1986, p.24).

Chronic indebtedness was another most considerable cause behind the deteriorating economic condition of the plain tribes which acted as a major hindrance in the way of their development. Mainly the low per capita land holding and the practice of brewing rice beer were responsible behind their indebted condition. "Indian villagers are born in debt, live in debt and die in debt" (Bordoloi, 1986, p.106).

Along with the above stated reasons, various rituals and socio-cultural traditions and religious practices were also considered to be as responsible as the other mentioned factors behind their wretched economic condition. For instance, the habit of drinking Zou (national beverage) had made them economically exhausted (Bordoloi,1986, pp. 21-23).

Unemployment was another significant reason behind their economic depression. In effect, the newly emerging educated Bodo youths were not getting an adequate government job according to their ability irrespective of the fact of an existing Constitutional provision for providing job reservation to the tribal people. The provision, however, was not implemented in case of the

plain tribes in Assam was concerned. Regarding the prevailing government policy on employment, the ABSU took a firm stand by raising a question that "Are the Bodos and other plain tribal people so inferior that they are not fit even for Grade two and four jobs?" (Bordoloi, 1986, pp. 22-23)

But amongst all, the foremost reasons behind such degenerate and contemptible condition were the land alienation as well as the immigration which had an adverse effect on the lives of the Bodos. "Land Alienation is one of the major problems among the tribes of Assam and in fact it is the primary cause of deteriorating economic condition of the tribals" (Bordoloi, 1986, pp. 101). To the Bodos, land is considered to be the mainstay for maintaining their livelihood. More than 98 per cent of the Bodo people used to live in the villages and thus amongst them 90 per cent of the Bodos were completely depended upon agriculture for their sustenance. But the irony was that this 90 per cent Bodos were basically landless labourers (Bordoloi, 1986, p.28). Suffice, the problem of land alienation, howsoever, had implicated the lives of the Plain tribes in a major way (Bordoloi, 1986, pp. 20-22). The heavy influx of refugees from the neighbouring states and countries like Bihar, Nepal and Bangladesh caused large scale land alienation. In order to protect the land, tribal belts and blocks were created but still the land alienation continued to take place both inside as well as outside the belts and blocks. But the government of India, in effect, did not enact any law to protect the tribal lands from the large scale alienation. As a result of which the tribal population, inhabited in the tribal belts and blocks, apprehended the sense of being deprived by the Assam government. In 1947, the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act, which was known as the Assam Act xv of 1947, was enacted to protect the land but howsoever, it was unable to fulfill the need as it was meant for serving the purpose of some specific classes (Baishya, 2009, pp.46-47). Consequently, large scale alienation continued to occur without any hindrances even after the adoption of the above mentioned arrangements by the government (Bordoloi, 1986, pp.101-104).

Apart from this, the vulnerability of the immigration process should also be taken into account in this regard. Heavy influx of refugees from Bihar, Nepal and Bangladesh proved to be conducive in causing the large scale land alienation. The plain tribes, as a consequence, were being isolated

from their indigenous lands and thus reduced to a minority group which has been manifested from Mr. Lord's Census Report of 1921 "In 1911, few cultivators from Eastern Bengal had gone Goalpara.....In the last decade (1911-21), the movement had extended for up the valley, and the colonists now form an appreciable element in population of all the four lower and central districts..... In Goalpara nearly 20% of the population is made up of these settlers. The next favorite district is Nowgong where they form about 14% of the whole population. In Kamrup, waste lands are being taken up rapidly, especially in the Barpeta Sub-division. In Darrang exploration and settlement by the colonists are in an earlier stage. They have not yet penetrated far from the bank of the Brahmaputra..... Almost every train and steamers brings parties of these settlers, and it seems likely that their march will extend further up the B. Valley and always from the river before long"(Bordoloi, 1986, pp. 28-29).

In addition, an initiative on the part of Sir Syed Sadulla, during his rule, of motivating the landed hungry Muslim peasants, in the name of the policy of 'grow more crop', to enter this part of India freely, without having any hurdles, from the East Bengal ultimately proved to be detrimental also far as the economic condition of the plain tribes was concerned (Baishya, 2009, p. 51). Such large scale immigration can be comprehended by the fact that "the population of the Brahmaputra Valley rose from just 9% in 1881 to 23% in 1941. In Barpeta sub-division (now a separate district), which hardly had any Assamese Muslim population and had a very large presence of Muslims to total population was just 0.1% in 1911 and the same rose to as high as 49% in 1941, a 490 fold increase in just 30 years!"(Roy, 1995, PP. 32).The then Viceroy of India Lord Wavell's statement "Sadullah's 'Grow more food' campaign was really a 'Grow more Muslim's campaign" explicitly represents Sadullah's intention of helping the Muslim peasants of East Bengal in migrating to India and thus settling in the Bodo inhabited lower Assam districts, in the name of the campaign of 'Grow more food' which actually was initiated in accordance with the instruction of the Government of India for producing more food in 1942 when the Japanese troops entered the eastern frontier of Assam (Roy, 1995, PP. 32). Later on, the Assam government, due to public demand, had introduced the 'Line System' under which an imaginary line was drawn in the districts with an intention of distinguishing the tribal indigenous people from the non-tribal population (Baishya, 2009, p. 47). And thereby all the villages were

being divided into main three categories - a) open villages; b) closed villages; and c) mixed villages. Open villages were actually meant for the immigrants whereas the closed villages were mainly for the real inhabitants in order to protect their interests. But as far as the mixed villages were concerned, both the foreigners as well as the aboriginals were allowed to co-exist by maintaining the territorial demarcation which was made to keep them separate. But it is inevitable to mention here that ultimately such arrangement was unable to yield any positive result mainly due to the administrative inefficiency. And for the very obvious reason the poor insolvent tribal peasants had no other way to sustain but move towards the further north along the northern foot hills (Roy, 1995, pp. 33-34). Similarly in the field of education, they also had to confront many impediments since 1963 when they introduced the Bodo language at the primary level till the year of 1995 at the time of opening of the diploma and the P.G course as well in Bodo language in the Guwahati University (Bashya, 2009, pp. 91-93).

#### **2.4. Discriminatory Sixth Schedule:**

The discussion of the Bodoland movement would remain incomplete without mentioning the feeling of perceived discrimination among the Bodos mainly regarding the Constitutional arrangement of district councils under the Sixth Schedule which is applicable only to the hill areas (tribes) of North East India (Baishya, 2009, p. 81). The well-known fact is that an initiative had been taken by the founding fathers of the Constitution of India to provide some safeguards to the tribal population of India through the Fifth and Sixth Schedule under the Art 244 of the Part X of the Indian Constitution. But the plain tribes of Assam, who constituted a significant segment of the Assamese population and thus a substantial portion of the entire tribal population of the country, were not being considered within the scope of the Constitutional safeguard. Though under the Sixth Schedule, the Constitutional safeguards had been provided to the hill tribes only, excluding the plain tribes. Top of all, an anti-tribal attitude of the Assamese people as well as the Assamese government towards the Bodo tribes was no less responsible behind their hostility. The Bodos have now sought freedom from the Assamese sub-national formation after being exploited and deprived all the way for so many years and thus being treated as an enemy by the Assamese people who have denied them their distinct identity on the basis of their

distinct features. Apparently, it can be stated that nothing can stop them but only a separate state (Baruah, 1999, p. 173).

### **3. KAMTAPUR MOVEMENT:**

#### **3.1. Rajbanshis of North Bengal:**

Another movement, which the present paper deals with, is the Kamtapur movement of West Bengal. The Kamtapuris in general and the Rajbanshis in particular have exalted their demand for a separate Kamtapur State comprising of mainly the six districts of Darjeeling, Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Malda, North and South Dinajpur in North Bengal (Haldar, 2000, p. 35). Amongst the six districts, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar, which are being regarded as a cradle place, have become very significant considerably. Besides, the Rajbanshis constitute a substantial portion of the total population in Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar districts. The SC and ST population, according to the records of Directorate of Census Operations 2001, accounts for more than 60% of the total population of the district (Jana, 2008, pp.100-101). In addition, the dominant demographic status, once enjoyed by the Rajbanshi community in North Bengal, is also apparent from Charu Chandra Sanyal's writing "the area excluding forest and tea estates and the hills of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri is an open country where the Rajbanshis live..."(Jana, 2008, p.108). Like the Bodos, the Rajbanshis also once constituted a significant segment of the population in this region, with a distinct cultural-linguistic identity. But gradually with time they were reduced to a minority and began to be alienated from their own land mainly after an illegal intrusion of the non-Rajbanshi people. Apart from the demographic changes, the present status of the Rajbanshis was the consequence of two other factors. Firstly, they had to lose the possession of their land to the state because of their inability to pay the required taxes. And secondly, the manipulative money-lenders like Marwaris, up-countrymen, Kabulis, greedy merchants and the middle class Bengali immigrants had alienated them from their own land. Moreover, after 1947, the heavy influx of refugees from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, to West Bengal had made the Rajbanshis meager numerically. On the other hand, the Rajbangsh is turned into the sharecroppers and agricultural labourers particularly after the decline of their stable economic

condition. In addition to this, tea gardens or plantation, Teesta Barrage Project and the process of urbanization inevitably contributed to the phenomenon of the loss of land by the Rajbangshis.

### **3.2. Identity Problem (Kshatriyaization to Kamtapuri Identity):**

Besides, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Rajbangshi community suffered from the chronic problem of an identity crisis (Mukhopadhyay, 1999, pp.137-138). They were regarded as Sudras and even till the present day they belong to the schedule caste community respectively. But the lower social status was not acceptable to them and therefore asked for a Kshatriya status under the leadership of Thakur Panchanan Barma in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is known as the Kshatriyaisation process, a form of Sanskritisation for the purpose of elevating the lower social status of the Rajbangshis (Mukhopadhyay, 1999, p.136). It is inevitable to mention here that since the late 16<sup>th</sup> century the tribal descendants of the Koch-Rajbangshis began to cast off their tribal rituals, practices and adopted the Hindu rituals, habits and manners. Thus they attained an identity of royal lineage and began to be acknowledged as Rajbangshi. After having realized the lower social status, the Rajbangshis with the help of the Kshatriya Samity, a caste-based organization, demanded for an upward social and caste mobility. Their main objective was to attain a Kshatriya status and accordingly led the Suddhi movement, in other word a reform movement in order to attain some brahminical values indeed. And accordingly, they began to consider themselves as bratyakshatriya. “As a step towards Hinduization, they also declared themselves as bratyakshatriya (fallen kshatriya), while from 1911 they began to boast of a pure Kshatriya origin. Interesting enough, they constantly changed their identity and for that matter asked for different names in different Census : from Koch to Rajbansi (1872), Rajbansi to Bratya Kshatriya (1891), Bratya Kshatriya to Kshatriya Rajbansi (1911. 1921) and Kshatriya Rajbansi to only Kshatriya (1931).” (Mukhopadhyay, 1999, p.133).

Gradually with time, the leaders of the Kshatriya samity realized that the social reform movement in terms of assuming sacred thread and brahminical values would not help them any

more in achieving the desired upper social status due to their stereo type age old backward economic condition. Therefore, with the hope of ameliorating the backward economic condition they finally accepted an institutional arrangement of 'protective discrimination' under which they are now receiving 'preferential treatment' mainly in the spheres of education, legislature and employment etc (Mukhopadhyay, 1999, pp.134-135). Thereby, the Rajbangshis at the same time agreed to accept the schedule caste status for themselves mainly for elevating their overall condition economically (Mukhopadhyay R. , 1999, pp. 347-357). What is noteworthy, is the Koch Rajbanshis amazedly, in Assam, do not belong to the schedule caste category respectively. Rather in Assam, in the year of 1967, they claimed for the Schedule Tribe status in lieu of the Schedule Caste and OBC status through the proceeding namely 'retribalization' which the Assam government could not refuse to grant at all (Mukhopadhyay, 1999, p. 138). Furthermore, an international forum of the Koch-Rajbangshi demanded for uniform legal Schedule Tribe status in India as well as the adjoining country like Nepal.

At present the educated Rajbangshi elites use to call themselves as Rajbangshi and not as Kshatriya. In other words, they assert their territorial identity respectively, instead of an upper-caste identity. Thus emerges a new identity namely the "Kamtapuri identity" which upholds the quest of the Rajbanshis for consolidating a distinct identity outside the cultural-linguistic spheres of the Bengalese. The Rajbangshis have now considered themselves as a part of the Hindu society whereas some poor Rajbangshis still like to retain their original tribal rituals and practices. But till today the Bengali Hindu society is unable to accept whole heartedly the Rajbangshis as Kshatriya. As a consequence, a tussle of ego still persists between the Bengali Hindu society and the Rajbangshis. And both the communities use to address each other by some derogatory names. For instance, the upper-caste Bengalese use to call the Rajbangshis by the name of 'Bahe'; and the Rajbangshis use to reckon the Bengalese with the name of 'Bhatias' (Haldar, 2000, pp. 61-62).

In a word, so far as the nature of the Kamtapur movement is concerned, it has been described as an ethno-regional movement by the present paper because of its emphasis on two types of

identities one is ethnic and the other is the regional which is related to the concept of territory. In spite of being one of the most backward regions, here the demand for a separate state has been articulated on the basis of cultural-linguistic mobilization in lieu of economic consideration. The leaders of the movement after having abandoned the Kshatriyaization process began to embark upon a new identity i.e. the Kamtapur identity, a kind of territorial identity in order to mobilize the Kamtapuri people on an ethnic line. Worthwhile to mention here that besides the Rajbanshis, the Kamtapur identity embraces all other tribes like Bodos, Meches, Koibartiyas, Totos, the lower castes and local Muslims of North Bengal (Haldar, 2000, p. 61). In other words, basically the inhabitants of North Bengal who can speak the local Rajbanshi dialect as well as share common local culture and practices are generally considered as Kamtapuri. Accordingly, since long back myriad political parties particularly the Uttarakhand Dal, the Kamtapur People's Party and the All Kamtapur Students' Union sought to mobilize the Kamtapuri people and thus to articulate their political demand on the basis of their cultural-linguistic identity. In addition, it is competent to say that the KPP was, in effect, craving for amalgamating the ethnic-cultural identity with the territorial identity (Haldar, 2000, p. 61).

Besides, Kamtapur was the kingdom ruled by Khan and Koch kings in Northern part of Bengal and Western part of Assam. And the capital of Kamtapur was located in the present Cochin district. The kingdom was destroyed by the Muslims but revived once again during 15<sup>th</sup> –16<sup>th</sup> centuries (Haldar, 2000, p.82). The educated Rajbanshis, however, strive to identify themselves with the glorious kingdom. Thereafter, it can be contended, without any hesitation, that the Kamtapur movement is basically a political movement where the leaders seek to achieve their goal of a separate Kamtapur state on the basis of their cultural-linguistic identity. Besides, the Kamtapur movement, on this basis, can also be considered as an ethno-regional movement where the transformation from the cultural-linguistic identity to the process of achieving the cultural-territorial identity has taken place and the process continues till date.

### **3.3. History and Growth of the Kamtapur Movement:**

Initially the demand for the separate state was upheld by Jogendra Nath Mondal on 4<sup>th</sup> May, 1947 in a public meeting at Khoribari in the district of Darjeeling (Ghosh, 1997, p. 1). He was the leader of the East Bengal Schedule Caste Community. In his proposal he demanded for a separate state namely 'Rajasthan' comprising of Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Purnea district of Bihar, Goalpara district of Assam and also certain portion of Rangpur and Darjeeling district but bewilderingly he excluded the Cochbehar district from his proposal. It is essential to uphold the fact that Cochbehar, at that time, was a Princely state and a substantial portion of Rajbangshi people used to reside there. Besides, a dilemma arose regarding an indecisive issue of including Goal Para and Rangpur district of the present Bangladesh and the Purnia district of Bihar within the proposed Kamtapur state. The historical context of both these regions where the traces of using Rajbangshi language could be found and the fact of the present parts of Assam, Bangladesh and Bihar, which initially were under the Khan and Koch kings of the medieval kingdom of Kamtapur with Cochbehar as its capital, was justified enough for including both the districts in the proposed Kamtapur state. In the post-independence era, a new problem arose before the princely state of Cochbehar whether to merge with India or Pakistan. Some people opined that Cochbehar should merge with Pakistan but the king Jogaddipendra Narayan personally preferred India more than Pakistan. After a long discussion, an agreement was signed between the governments of India and the princely state of Cochbehar on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1949 and finally Cochbehar merged with India.

But the accession of Cochbehar to India could not suppress the desire of the people of having a separate state. Again the question was raised regarding the status of Coochbehar whether to remain isolated as a separate state or to merge with some other state. According to some people, the princely state of Cochbehar should have a distinct identity and henceforth opposed the accession of Coochbehar to the West Bengal on the basis of their cultural-linguistic differences. Accordingly, Sardar Ballavbhai Patel, after having seen the long standing public demand of a separate status for the princely state Coochbehar, once stated "On the handing over of Coochbehar to control administration, I sent to its people my best wishes and assurance on behalf of the government of India that so far, their interest and welfare will claim our close and intimate attention, I am fully aware of the many problems, political and economically which affect the

state and I am confident that with their cooperation we would have success in solving them in the best interest of the state and country of their happiness and prosperity” (Das, 1973, p.553).

It is interesting to know that the aboriginal inhabitants were never in favor of merging the princely state of Cochbehar with West Bengal rather they resisted since the very beginning. After having observed and heard the public opinion for the princely state Coochbehar Sardar Patel in 1948 sent the then Governor of Assam A. Hyder to investigate the matter over there and accordingly in June, 1948 he submitted the report where he upheld the fact that the people of Coochbehar was strongly against the merger of Cochbehar with West Bengal (Halдар, 2000, pp. 42-43). In addition, in the context of increasing opposition to the merging of the culturally as well as linguistically distinct Cochbehar with the state of West Bengal, the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru contended that “the question of merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal would be decided according to the wishes of the people” (Das, 1973, p. 413). Nehru further advocated for a fresh plebiscite as a device for resolving the issue with the aim of redressing the grievances of the local inhabitants. The Cochbehar Hitasadhani Sabha, a small and local organization, demanded for a separate state and later on wanted Cochbehar to be declared as a centrally administered territory. After that they believed that Cochbehar should be assimilated with Assam and not with West Bengal. The people of Dooars wanted to assimilate with Cochbehar by forming a new state namely Greater Cochbehar and in order to achieve the goal once they decided to launch a movement namely National Movement in this regard (Halдар, 1999, p.44).

But ultimately in 1950, by pouring water on all expectations of the people, the princely state of Cochbehar merged with West Bengal (Das,1973, p. 547). Once again the asserted demand for a separate Uttarakhand state by the West Bengal leaders as well as the claim of the state of Bihar over Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar districts were being terminated by the States Reorganization Commission when in 1953 it was being given the task of considering the question of redistributing the states and the demand for a separate state comprising of North

Bengal districts, Western part of Assam and some parts of Bihar as well. However, Coochbehar remained within the state of West Bengal (Chakraborty, 1984, pp. 24-26).

Later on with the formation of the Uttarakhand Dal in 1969, the separate statehood demand got a concrete shape. It is necessary to mention here the name of the Uttarakhand Dal for its attempt to mobilise the Rajbanshis on an ethnic and regional line on the basis of their distinct identity. In the words of Mukhopadhyay, the movement led by the Uttarakhand Dal can also be regarded as a social movement (Jana, 2008, p. 115). The movement for a separate state got a complete new dimension with the formation of the Kamtapur People's Party in 1995. Its main purpose was to protect and promote the interests of the Kamtapuri people and to mobilise them on an ethnic line. Besides, the KPP sought to revitalize the Kamtapuri language and culture. In other words, "the language issue has, in fact, been the single biggest factor behind the Kamtapur movement." (Mukhopadhyay, 2005, p. 261) According to Mukhyopadhyay "like many other ethnic movements, Kamtapur movement also sees cultural self-determination as a prerequisite to the attainment of the desired political freedom and distributive justice" (Mukhopadhyay, 2005, p. 260). Remarkably, the KPP in its struggle for a separate state received full support from the political parties like CPIML (Santosh Rana Faction), UKD (Uttarakhand Dal), and UJSS (Uttarbanga Jharkhand Sangram Samity) in its welfare programme (Mukhopadhyay, 2005, p. 261).

Besides, few other important organizations, which are remembered as well as mentioned here for mainly their significant contribution in different phases of the movement, are the UTTAR BANGA TAPASHELEE JATI-O-ADIVASI SANGATHAN (1979), the ALL KAMTAPUR STUDENTS' UNION (1994) and the UTTAR BANGA UNNAYAN SANGRAM (1996). The UTJAS, a caste based organization started its journey since 1979 with the aim of fighting against and thus reducing various political, cultural and socio-economic discriminations (Halder, 2000, p. 49). The purpose of the AKSU, an educational front of the KPP formed in 1994, was to improve the educational status and to protect the interest of the students in North Bengal. In addition to this, the AKSU expressed its concern in terms of protecting the rich heritage of

composite culture and distinct language of the Rajbanshi community from the adverse effects of alien Bengali culture and language “..... Otherwise, the rich cultural heritage of the Rajbanshis will ultimately face extinction because of the onslaught by the alien Bengali culture” (Mukhopadhyay, 2005, p. 261). Besides, the developmental organization UUSM ,which came into being in 1996, advocated for an ‘autonomous development council’ and the formation and implementation of a separate socio-economic plan for the betterment of the condition of North Bengal (Halдар, 2000, p. 55).

At present few changes have taken place so far as the movement is concerned for instance, the KPP has been divided into two separate groups because of the split that has occurred within the party. And one of the split groups is known as the Kamtapur Progressive Party which, under the leadership of Atul Roy, has taken over the responsibility of perpetuating the movement in order to achieve the goal of a separate state. The other group is led by Nikhil Roy (Jana, 2008, p.122). Meanwhile, a new organization, namely, New Cooch Behar Association, which is basically a developmental organization, came into being and its main objective was to form a separate state comprising of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and parts of Assam (Jana, 2008, p.122). The Kamtapuri Progressive Party has joined hands with the other two political parties namely Greater Cochbehar Democratic Party and the All Koch Rajbanshi Students’ Union to carry forward their separate statehood demand and thus to protect the interest of the Kamtapuri people.

In addition, it is also believed that the KPP has some linkages with the Kamtapur Liberation Organization. The KLO, which came into being in the year of 1995, is basically a militant organization. But in terms of demands, the KLO differs from that of the KPP. The KLO seeks to attain a separate state outside the federal set up of India and thereby has adopted violent method to achieve the goal of a separate country consisting of parts of North Bengal and Assam whereas the KPP seeks to create a separate Kamtapur state within the federal structure of the country of India (Mitra, 2001). It is also heard that the KPP has at present extended its support to the party like Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha.

It seems indispensable to mention here the various demands of the Kamtapur movement in this context considerably. The Kamtapur People's Party presented a long list of myriad demands which is known as the 'Eleven Point Demands' (Haldar, 2000, p.64). The demands by the KPP are believed to have constituted an integral part of the separate statehood movement significantly. The demands are as follows:

- i. Creation of a separate state namely 'Kamtapur' within the federal set up of the country, comprising mainly the whole North Bengal and the adjoining Kamtapur populated areas in India in accordance with the Art (3) of the Constitution of India;
- ii. Inclusion of the Kamtapuri language in the 8<sup>th</sup> schedule of the Constitution of India;
- iii. Expulsion of the illegal foreigners from the Kamtapuri dominated areas of North Bengal;
- iv. Imposition of the Inner Permit Line in order to curb the illegal influx of immigrants in North Bengal and the adjacent Kamtapur dominated areas;
- v. Erection of the 'Berbed Wire' on the borderlines of India and Bangladesh with a view to restraining the intrusion of the illegal foreigners;
- vi. Inauguration of the Fulbari Doordarshan sub-station centre for telecasting various cultural programs of Kamtapurians;
- vii. Declaration of the Teesta Irrigation Project as a National project for the all-round development of North Bengal;
- viii. Broadcasting different types of cultural programmes of the Kamtapurians through 'All India Radio, Siliguri' at par with the daily programmes of the Nepalese in 'All India Radio, Kurseong';

- ix. Establishment of a Central University namely 'Roy Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma University' in the district of Cochbehar;
- x. Exchange of the enclaves between India and Pakistan without any delay;
- xi. Publication of a 'White Paper' regarding the economic status, culture, population and an ethnical identity of the aboriginal people of North Bengal. (Haldar, 2000, PP. 64-65):

### **3.4. Cultural-linguistic and Economic Issues:**

It is believed that the cultural-linguistic domination by the upper caste Bengal hegemony as well as the Bengali community has given a thrust to the demand for a separate state. Like the Bodos, the Kamtapuris also claim to have their own culture and language which are completely different from that of the Bengalese. But what is really noticeable is that the distinct Kamtapuri culture and language have always been underestimated by the Bengali hegemony. Besides, the status of the Rajbanshi language remains a matter of controversy for its indecisive character of whether it is a dialect or a language. The Kamtapur language is believed to have been reduced to a status of dialect of the Bengali language. According to the language specialists Sunity Kumar Chatterjee and Sukumar Sen "the spoken language of North-East Bengal is Kamrupi dialect of Coochbehar, which at present describe as Rajbanshi or Kamtapuri, which is a local dialect of Bengali original language" (Haldar, 2000, p. 94). Most significantly, Thakur Panchanan Barma, who wrote many books and articles in Bengali language, had regarded the Kamtapuri as a dialect of the Bengali language (Haldar, 2000, p. 97). But on the contrary, the Kamtapuri people consider the Kamtapuri as a language and not a dialect and as evidence they provide many literatures written in a Kamtapuri language. Therefore the task of an educated Rajbangshis appears to restore the past glory of the Kamtapuri language. According to Art 29 and 30 under the part three of the Constitution of India every ethno-linguistic community has a right to protect and preserve their own culture and language (Bhattacharya and Roy, 1999, p. 77). From this perspective, it can be stated that the Kamtapuri people are being deprived of enjoying the fundamental right by the West Bengal hegemony.

On the other hand, economically, the region of North Bengal is generally regarded as a less developed one. The economy of this region is agro-based in nature. Agriculture in this region is believed to have constituted the backbone of economy. Besides, industrially also the region is unable to leave any sign of development and besides the lack of sufficient industry is in turn responsible for such an excessive dependence of the region upon agriculture. In North Bengal during the period of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century most of the landlords belonged to the Rajbangshi community. But gradually due to various reasons like lack of sufficient irrigational facilities, flood control measures and mainly the lack of any initiatives on the part of the government, the monopoly of the Rajbangshi community, in the field of agriculture, began to decline. Thus gradually the once dominant agricultural status of the Rajbangshi is turned into a landless wage labourer.

Besides, an unwanted intrusion of the immigrants was, in major way, responsible for transforming the once affluent Rajbangshi jotedars into an insolvent poor peasant. The miserable condition of the peasants under the semi-feudal jotedari system also provided a blow to the agricultural system as a whole. The degenerate condition of the peasants in Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar districts even after independence has been analysed by V. Xaxa "The adhi system (share-cropping) was still firmly entrenched and in 1960, 46 percent of cultivated area (39% of total plots) was under the share-cropping arrangements.... In contrast, only 27% of cultivated area was under family farm system of cultivation, although it covered as many as 43% of the total plots. More spectacular was the growth of the class of agricultural labourers, which was hitherto numerically insignificant in the district. In 1960, 33% of the land and 18% of the plots in the district were being cultivated with the help of hired labourers" (Jana, 2008, p.103):

It is worthwhile to mention here that the agricultural labourers at present constitute one-third of the total working population in North Bengal. Accordingly it would not be exaggerated to contend that both the factors like chronic economic backwardness as well as the lack of an adequate developmental measure have in turn generated the separate statehood demand.

Moreover, though North Bengal is an outwardly agro-based in terms of its economy but ironically the deficient irrigation facility acts as a major hindrance in the way of economic well-being of the region. And consequently, Teesta Barrage project could not be completed. Besides, the region confronts major difficulties due to its insufficient flood-control measures (Mitra, 2001). To Human Development Report, 2004 North Bengal still remains backward and placed at bottom in the hierarchical order of human development. For instance, on the basis of this report Malda district ranked at 17<sup>th</sup> out of 17 districts; Dinajpur is at 16<sup>th</sup>; Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar respectively are at 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> position. Comparatively, Darjeeling achieved the 4<sup>th</sup> position and therefore comparatively is in a better position. The above stated ranking and the position of the districts uphold the present status of this region in terms of its education, income and health considerably (Jana, 2008, p.105).

### **3.5. Effect of Government Policies:**

In addition, the Left Front government's much publicized two policies were considerably responsible behind their degenerate condition. One of them was the land reform and the other was the decentralization policy. The main notions of the land reform policy were – a) ensuring the tenancy rights to the sharecroppers through the tool of 'operation barga'; b) distribution of the government lands, obtained by the abolition of the class of intermediaries and the land ceiling; c) reducing the power of the big land-owners i.e. jotedars in the rural society which in turn had adversely effected the Rajbangshi jotedars in North Bengal (Jana, 2008, pp. 101-102). The declining power of the jotedars also proved to be vulnerable for the cultivators working under them whereas the refugees who were working as a sharecropper under the landowners were benefited and accordingly gained the permanent tenancy right. Moreover, the land distribution policy of the Left Front government also proved to be beneficial for the refugees and immigrants as well. The refugees and the immigrants thus attained a fertile piece of land as a consequence of the land distribution policy. On the contrary, the Rajbangshis were being alienated from their own land. Consequentially, according to the West Bengal Human Development Report, the policy of 'operation barga' began to lose its relevance since the end of 1980's. The Panchayat, on the other hand, through the decentralization policy has become an instrument in the hands of the Left Front party leaders for fulfilling their vested interests and implementing the party policies instead of serving the purpose of the Kamtapuri people.

Moreover, due to over-politicization and criminalization the rural people are completely reluctant to attend the meetings of the Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha. According to the West Bengal Human development Report ".....average attendance at Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha meeting has been relatively low and declining in recent years."(Jana, 2008, p.106)

The spheres of education and employment have also been monopolized by the educated, modernized immigrant refugees in general and the upper caste Bengalese in particular. The above stated grievances together have pursued the Kamtapuri people to such an extent that they insist upon a demand for a separate Kamtapuri state particularly on the basis of their distinct cultural-linguistic identity.

4. After having compared these movements i.e. the Bodoland movement in Assam and the Kamtapur movement in West Bengal, it can be stated without any doubt that both the movements possess some similarities in terms of region, culture, language and financial status. Both the movements have considerably been regarded as an ethno-regional movement for their emphasis on carving out a separate state, on the basis of their distinct cultural-linguistic elements, within the federal structure of India. In both cases, there are some common factors which are believed to have coerced both the communities to express their resentment and thus to raise their voice. Both the communities, the plain tribes in Assam and the Kamtapuris in North Bengal confront the cultural-linguistic domination and economic exploitation in the hands of the upper caste Assamese and the Bengalese respectively. Both the aboriginal communities have been alienated from their own land due to an unwanted illegal land alienation as well as immigration process and thus turned into a landless and economically insolvent section of the society. And as a result, even after so many years of independence both the communities are still considered to be one of the most backward sections in the following states of Assam and West Bengal. Besides, the spheres of employment and education have also been monopolized as well as blocked by the upper castes communities. Moreover, the use of various kinds of repressive measures on the part of both the Assam as well the West Bengal hegemony toward these indigenous communities have added a fuel to their long drawn movement. As a consequence the condition of these both communities have been deteriorated to such an extent that has compelled them to utter and

uphold the demand for a separate state as a only means to appease them and to ameliorate their condition as well.

From the above stated depiction an inference can be drawn that these both movements i.e. the Bodoland movement of Assam and the Kamtapur movement of West Bengal should be considered as a political rather than a social or cultural movement. As in both cases political power has been perceived as a main reason behind the persisting age old grievances and resentments among these both backward indigenous communities. Political power is generally considered as an apparatus to protect and promote the distinct cultural-linguistic identity along with the assurance of securing the employment as well as economic facilities for the aboriginal people. But in both cases it has been seen that the political power, as a means of an overall development, is entirely regulated by some different cultural-linguistic communities who are being perceived as aliens by these both aboriginal communities. And top of all, according to both the plain tribes and Kamtapuris, these extraterrestrial communities are completely apathetic and indifferent to their miserable socio-economic condition. Consequently, both the Bodos and the Kamtapuris struggle relentlessly since long back in order to grab the political power which alone can ensure better development and amelioration. Henceforth, it can be deduced that the state power, which is believed to be the only key for the condition of overall development and modernization, is a major originating cause behind such ethno-regional movements. At last it seems relevant to refer here that very recently the long drawn demand of a separate Telengana state, another ethno-regional movement, after an incessant struggle has been able to achieve the central government's approval to fulfil the need. However, such central government's assent to the formation of the Telengana state once again helps in regenerating and thus in the persistence of such separate statehood demand by other communities and two of them have already been discussed and dealt by the present paper i.e. the Bodoland Movement of Assam and the demand for the Kamtapur state in West Bengal.

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# **Balmiki Community in Darjeeling Hills: Socio- Economic Profile**

Lekhraj Balmiki

## **Abstract**

*The present attempt tries to explore the socio-economic profile of the Balmiki community which has been engaged with their traditionally assigned occupation as scavengers and sweepers/ Safai Karmcharis<sup>1</sup> in the Darjeeling hills. Being a subaltern community, the Balmikis represent a strange case of community yet to come out of the traditional fold.*

**Key Words: Balmiki, Scheduled Caste, Subaltern Community, Socio-Economic, Municipality**

## **1. Introduction**

“Balmiki<sup>2</sup>” and not “Valmiki” is the often preferred way of spelling by people from the Darjeeling. The *Balmiki* Community (also known as “*Bhangi*”<sup>3</sup>) in Darjeeling Hills, migrated from Rajasthan, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh etc.<sup>4</sup> The characteristics of *Balmiki* community include rigid, hereditary membership in the caste into which one is born; the practice of marrying only members of the same caste (endogamy); restrictions on the choice of occupation and on personal contact with members of other castes; and the acceptance by each individual of a fixed place in society.<sup>5</sup> The *Balmikis*’ has been perpetuated by the Hindu ideas of *Samsara* (reincarnation) and *Karma* (quality of action). According to their religious beliefs, all people are reincarnated on earth, at which time they have a chance to be born into another, higher caste, but only if they have been obedient to the rules of their caste in their previous life on earth. In this way *karma* has discouraged the *Balmiki* people from attempting to rise to a higher caste or to cross caste lines for social relations of any kind.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.1 Brief History of Balmikis in Darjeeling

The '*Balmiki*', a Dalit community numbering 6,300<sup>7</sup> is one of the socially stigmatized groups in three sub-divisions of Darjeeling district and totaling 529,000<sup>8</sup> in the state of West Bengal. The history of the *Balmiki* in Darjeeling is as old as the establishment of the Hill station. During the colonial period they were brought from Alwar<sup>9</sup> (Rajasthan) to remove human excrement and clean the town of Darjeeling. Thus the migration of the *Balmiki* from their native villages to the hill station of Darjeeling overlaps with the growth of the Municipal body post 1850s.<sup>10</sup>

With the establishment of Darjeeling Hills, the Balmikis were brought by the Britishers from western India to work as manual scavengers. During the post independence period, Balmikis as, scavengers carried night soil on their heads for their livelihood. Thus the migration of the *Balmiki* from their native villages to the hill station of Darjeeling overlaps with the growth of the Municipal body post 1850s.<sup>11</sup> They were employed as sweepers in the Darjeeling Municipality, as daily wage earners. A separate locality was created especially for the Balmikis near the dumping ground known as '*Harijan Barrick*' which is properly known as '*Jamadar Line*'. They were provided houses with single room and a kitchen with no toilet facility, by the Municipality. With larger families it has been very difficult to stay in such single houses. Moreover, the municipal authority hardly takes any initiative for repairing or maintenance of these municipal quarters. Due to this, workers are suffering from various illnesses, including respiratory diseases, urinary tract infections and a range of skin diseases, eye disorders, gastrointestinal ailments, and even lung cancer. Furthermore, these workers had no access to basic amenities such as adequate housing, drinking water or electricity.<sup>12</sup> Over the years they have become an urban community in Darjeeling and represent a substantial number of the migrant non-native Nepali speaking communities.

## 1.2 Social Structure of the Balmikis

The Balmikis are divided into various sub-castes and exogamous lineages. They recognize themselves as *Sudras*.<sup>13</sup> The community has retained its social practices as carried out by their forefathers, similar to their original homeland in the north western parts of India. The community adheres to the strict norms of the caste ridden society and has retained the *Chaudhury system*<sup>14</sup> of caste organization even in contemporary times. These *Chaudhuries* are administrators and are elected areas wise, and is also hereditary in nature. After the death of the *Chaudhury* the eldest son inherits the position of his father. As such the other members from the community could not get the opportunity to become the *Chaudhury* of the community. Being at the apex of the community the *Chaudhuries* assert themselves to represent the collective determination of the community. The *Chaudhuries* have controlled the community and have been carrying out customary practices of pre-independence days. Child marriages (especially in case of female), restrictions on widows remarrying and arranged marriage practices are still followed widely within the community.

The notion of *Izzat*<sup>15</sup> has been greatly developed by the *Chaudhuries*. From the very early age the children are discouraged for inter-caste marriage. Accidentally, if such cases occur the performer (offender) will be socially excluded from the community. The community *Chaudhuries* declares *hukka pani bandh*<sup>16</sup> for such a member with the entire family. As such the member with his/her's entire family is socially boycotted by the entire community. Again, for inclusion the member has to pay the penalty known as *Daand*<sup>17</sup> to the *Chaudhury Sanstha* including the whole of the community members both in cash and kind, along with the onetime meal and drinks to the members. There have been certain cases when the member from

community going for inter-caste marriage has been socially boycotted and was made to pay *Daand* for his inclusion in the community.

In 2006 the *Chaudhury Sanstha* made an announcement saying that, those who have married other caste are supposed to pay a *Daand*, by the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 2006.<sup>18</sup> And as a concession the amount of cash paid as *Daand* was kept Rs. 1100 and from 01<sup>st</sup> of January, 2007 it would be converted into Rs. 11000. As a result of the announcement the members those who had went for inter-caste marriages, started to pay the *Daand* as soon as possible within the due date. This was the time when maximum assortment was done by the *Chaudhury Sanstha* for their personal desires and the members of the community were exploited within the community itself. Hence, the headmen (*Chaudhuries*) of the community misused their powers and positions, for the sake of the guiding and restricting the community from losing its identity and *Izzat* in an alien territory.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the *Chaudhury Sanstha* has auxiliary subjugated the entire Balmiki population with its reciprocal reimbursement caucus and policy. The complexities of the system have constituted a serious obstacle to Balmikis civil progress in Darjeeling.

Balmiki women are considered equal in family matter, participate in social and religious matters on an equal footing and contribute to the family income.<sup>20</sup> But in social sphere womenfolk have no high respect in the Balmiki Community. The family is patriarchal in its character and women could not enjoy enough liberty. Male child is given more importance. There has been no such instance when girls could mix freely with young men, which is treated as shameless or a sin. Married women cannot take equal part in the religious performance. Moreover, the married women are kept '*ghunghat/ghoonghat*'<sup>21</sup>. *Ghoonghat* is compulsion for the women section and has been used defensible aphorism, which is a mark of respect to the elder's male section. The

stumpy grade of women in Balmiki community can be traced to a number of interrelated economic, legal, cultural, political, and institutional factors. Women's poverty is exacerbated by caste and ethnicity-based discrimination, as the caste system defines access to resources and opportunities, leaving women more disadvantaged than men at every level. Women have unequal access to food, education and health care, limited opportunities to earn incomes, restricted access to and control over productive resources, and few effective legal rights. They are further disadvantaged by a lack of awareness of their legal rights and opportunities. Constant such kind of practices against the women within the Balmiki community has led to the exclusion by other section of people in hills, where the women benefit from maximum civil liberties and emancipation, and to a great extent verbal in political spheres.<sup>22</sup> They are kept private in the domestic works of the households. Male section has prohibited women from taking education in order to continue male domination in the community. In this context Hindu religious text has given a number of concessions to men but has imposed severe restrictions on women. Subcastes endogamy and lineage exogamy are the marriage rules. Adult marriage and monogamy are prevalent and most marriages are negotiated. Vermilion, finger-rings, toe-rings and nose pins are the marriage symbols for the women. Divorce is not allowed. Families are most often nuclear in nature. Property passes from father to sons and the eldest son inherits the office and titles that were held by his father. Women have specific roles in economic, social and ritual spheres and in mundane, marriage and death. Birth pollution is observed. The marriage rituals are performed at the bride's place and her parents host the marriage feast. The marriage is consummated at the groom's residence. They cremate their dead and dispose of the mortal remains in holy waters. Death pollution is observed.<sup>23</sup> As such women have been left behind with the limited role to play both in social and economic spheres.

A major problem among the Balmiki is debt. A common saying of the Bhangi is that they are born in debt, live in debt and will die in debt. Social customs has been restrained and is given more significance within the community. Moncha is a ritual which is performed after the death of the family head (father/grandfather). The Mocha has to be decided by the *Chaudhuries of the Community, declaring it as Naw-beda-aar-paar*,<sup>24</sup> where all the members of the community participate for *Pagdi* <sup>25</sup> from all over Darjeeling district. This has resulted in being good customers and easy victims/preys for the moneylenders<sup>26</sup> and the economically stronger groups who charge them with high rate of interest.

There has been little effort to prevent such creamy social customs, exclusion and to reintegrate those who have become excluded through unemployment. In addition, immediate attention needs to be provided to ascertain these kinds of practices, and to maximize awareness orientation programmes so that they can sustain in monetary and societal spheres.<sup>27</sup>

The condition of scavenging community is miserable. Since most of the people from the community are uneducated, social evils are prevalent in the community. Poverty gives birth to different things including alcoholism, wife beating, gambling. Most of the children cannot go to school. The girl children become part of the profession.<sup>28</sup> Dropout cases from schools can also be noticed. At a very early stage the children start helping their parents in profession.

In case of education they hardly get best schools and colleges, because of economic problems. Moreover, the mental setup of carrying out the occupation of parents has made them least interested in higher education. This has resulted in virtual isolation of community from the rest of the society and in continuous grip of superstition and backwardness. The children continue to suffer as parents found little time to spend with them and their caste and geographical isolation led to further marginalization in the schools. The fact of the matter is even when publicly

untouchability has been eliminated yet caste system is very much prevalent and nobody would deny it. The other fact is that everybody knows about Dom, Mehtar, Bhangis and Helas and such terms, denigrating they may look for a civilized society yet continue in practice. Children, inherit, these terms from their parents and in turn these communities face racial prejudices from every one. It is therefore, not ironical that names of their localities seal their fate as areas are always mentioned with the community names hence names like *Harijan Bustee*. They remind us how crude our system was vis-à-vis the untouchables. The very foundation of the discrimination in India is caste system, which denigrate Dalits and hurt the very dignity and pride of an individual, which are essentials for his growth and development.

A literacy rate among the Balmikis is low because they cannot afford it, though they view education favorably. Balmikis favour formal education for their boys and girls who study up to graduate and postgraduate levels depending upon the individual aptitude and circumstantial constraints. In maximum cases it can be seen that female child education is given less importance as they are treated *Paraya Dhan*.<sup>29</sup> Arrangements for the study of the girls are conspicuous by its absence. However, in recent years, especially in urban areas of Darjeeling town, girls are being educated at primary level.

They are further disadvantaged by a lack of awareness of their legal rights and opportunities. Constant such kind of practices against the women within the Balmiki community has led to the exclusion by other section of people in hills, where the women benefit from maximum civil liberties and emancipation, and to a great extent verbal in political spheres.<sup>30</sup> The complexities of the system have constituted a serious obstacle to Balmikis civil progress in Darjeeling. The trend today is toward the dissolution of the artificial barriers between the castes. The severity of the caste structure of the Hindus was broken to a great extent during the epoch of British rule in

India.<sup>31</sup> But the obligation of the son to follow the calling of his father is still binding; men being from low caste have not risen to high ranks and positions of power; and excommunication, however, loss of caste, is another serious problem as it might formerly have been. In addition, the caste system was from time to time burst from within by ecclesiastical schisms, most notably the rise of Buddhism, itself a reaction from, and protest against, the intolerable bondage of the caste system.<sup>32</sup> The governance has not really got itself rid of the caste system though it may claim to have demolished the untouchability at least on the papers. Therefore, it is essential for the government to make its plan in a comprehensive way and not respond to a situation on purely technical way.<sup>33</sup>

### **1.3 Economic Life of the Balmikis**

Over the years Balmikis have become an urban community in Darjeeling and represent a substantial number of the migrant non-native Nepali speaking communities. With the introduction of septic latrines, the practice of carrying buckets of excrement on their heads is gone but they still work to clear blockages in sewers where they are half submerged in filth. The stigma remains. They are still identified with the work and considered untouchable and stereotyped as the “*Jamadar*”.<sup>34</sup> In other words the community is stereotyped to belong and represent the category of sweepers, *safai karamcharis*, *Jamadar* or sanitary workers. Given that experience they have always been marginalized and treated as outcasts socially, economically and culturally.

With the development of Darjeeling Township, they were employed by the municipality to work as the sweepers/safai karmachris in the Conservancy Department. But with the creation of septic latrines, the practice of carrying buckets of excrement on their heads is gone but they still work to clear blockages in sewers where they are half submerged in filth. They have a relatively

high, steady salary<sup>35</sup>, retirement benefits, and so forth.<sup>36</sup> But still for this stable remuneration (permanent job) they have to pay inducement<sup>37</sup> to the Officer In Charge in the municipality of Conservancy Department. Thus, the tendency of corruption and exploitation of the Balmikis is very high in the Darjeeling Municipality. Besides, this they have been regular victims by the section supervisor, who are paid *Bhanja*<sup>38</sup> both in cash and kind. Still, this kind of practices has never been reported by the victims neither to the authority in the municipality nor to the police. But even though their relative well-being is a source of envy, and their job is almost hereditary. Now a good number of them serve as sweepers in public and private sector establishments. They have shifted from serving some households on contract basis to being in regular service. Moreover, they have also been found in some unorganized sectors such as sweeping the upper caste houses and cleaning toilets which they term as *tekhas*,<sup>39</sup> and in spite of positive action programmes, their participation in the public sphere is low. More than 80% of the Balmiki population<sup>40</sup> is dependent on the municipality for their livelihood. Though they have a regular source of income but their living standards has not been uplifted because of their social and cultural practices where huge amount of money is squander. In some cases they even have to sustain their families in their native homeland thus, their economic condition at stake.

The bias against them is as such that even if some of the people belonging to Balmiki community who want to leave the work find it nearly impossible to get an alternative job. It also reflects that there is virtually no entry of this community in the government sector as well as other labour work. It clearly means that while in the sanitation work of the municipalities there is a one hundred percent reservation for them, there is virtually no effort to delink them from this tradition and rehabilitate them elsewhere. And by merely proclaiming that government has banned toilets will not bring out of the chaos that the social system has inflicted upon them. One

is that there is still scavenging and other grave fact is that absentee Safai Karmcharis is growing. That means because of relatively better salaries and contract system, those with connections in the higher ups get the job while the issue of cleaning and going down the drainage and sewage line. In-spite of the fact that this is most ill-treated and inhuman work that any human could do, the women continue to do it because of financial crisis. We all know that this does not really fetch them any money. The tragedy is that even the schemes for poor do not reach them. <sup>41</sup>

Those who are well educated, and their number is very limited, do not get job according to their education. The scheme of the government has further marginalized them because the issue is addressed from an economic viewpoint and not a socio-cultural problem without giving enough thought to their rehabilitation. In this profession, a majority of workers are women. They leave to work in early hours of the morning without even having the tea and return late in the afternoon. During that crucial period, nobody is at home to take care of their children. They have to fetch themselves resulting in their inability to go school.<sup>42</sup>

#### **1.4 The Political Position of the Community with Special Reference to Political Participation.**

The *Balmiki* community under the auspices of *Balmiki Harijan Sangh*<sup>43</sup> is mobilizing the disposition of progress to protect their rights and raise their concerns. The Sangh has been taking the initiative for the upliftment of the community. Though migrated but they have projected themselves and who claim to be a gorkhey(gorkha), are now active in awareness and upliftment of the community though the pace is low. Looking back to the history of this gorkhey Balmikis, they are now the part of Darjeeling hills like other communities (gorkhey Marwari, Gorkhey Bhutias, and others). Almost three generation of Balmikis live in Darjeeling and they participate in every festival of the Darjeeling hills. The Balmikis have witnessed both the complex

transitions comparing the First Wave (1980s under Subhash Ghising) and Second Wave (Post 2007 under Bimal Gurung) in the Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling Hills. In the first wave of the Gorkhaland movement however, the Balmikis were either politically unaware or socially not in a position to identify themselves within the majority of the hill people. They didn't have any awareness of education or alternative employment, because of which they were ignored by the majority Gorkhey. But, in the Second Wave of Gorkhaland Movement (Post 2007) under Bimal Gurung, the Balmikis got an opportunity to show their majority and participate in the movement. Over the past 20 years, an emerging Balmikis identity and social consciousness has created a new political consciousness among them. Their consciousness is by no means limited to the SCs. It has begun to symbolize a much broader sector of the oppressed and hitherto excluded social strata. It is based on an attempted, though by no means realized solidarity and discriminated Balmiki people. Their consciousness has made a political assertion though slow in nature. Thus, the oppressed Balmikis have begun to realize their power. This new spirit of independence among the Balmikis is not confined only to the socio-economic but also political phenomenon in Darjeeling hills. This together with the logic of fresh realignment of political party Gorkha Jan Mukti Morch (GJMM) has made the Balmikis the new pivotal players in Hills politics. The Balmikis and the other marginalized communities hold immense political potential, if only they can be brought together as a powerful force, this is the case when Mr. Bimal Gurung welcomed the marginalized community for a common cause of Gorkhaland. The impact of the Balmiki Participation in Gorkhaland Movement on the Community itself is twofold. First, material and political gains in the aftermath of the Gorkhaland movement. The hope of allocation of benefits to the community derived by way of the arrangements post movement; and that their political participation would enable them to be more politically conscious with potential leadership skills

so as to be capable of forming, performing and marketing their own claims and conditions in future politics. Secondly, the negative impact is largely a perceived threat of being further marginalized in future by the dominant identities in control of power and allocation of resources.<sup>44</sup>

Though they are traditionally Manual Scavengers and the only exception is the post of a sweeper. But by supporting the movement they have proved that being a son or a daughter of safai karmchari, they don't want that it should be restricted, that he/she should have equal opportunity to dream well and to be in high positions. Accepting better future for the coming generation of the Balmikis this dissenting voice might led for better governance.<sup>45</sup>

### **1.5 Conclusion Observation**

In recent years considerable strides toward eradicating unjust social and economic aspects of the caste system as practiced in India have been made through educational and reform movements.<sup>46</sup> Despite several official attempts to improve the status of members of the lowest caste, the Dalits remain '*oppressed people*'.<sup>47</sup> The *Balmikis* as Dalits thus remain the '*lowest of the low*', in the hierarchical ordering of social positions in the Hindu Caste order. By taking up the jobs that nobody else will do, the *Balmiki* provide the most crucial service to the society and therefore help our civic system survive. Yet the society seldom takes notice of them. In fact, instead of giving them the dignity of labour that they deserve, the society treats them as filthy and polluting. And the only time that *Balmiki* are in news, is when the community is attacked/ostracized by the '*higher*' castes. Other times the community is practically invisible and unheard.<sup>48</sup> Balmikis, who are pushed towards margin systematically from the past in the name of religious/cultural practice, and social order, are still victimized in the society. Despite the legal

provision of equality too, the society is not completely free from the influence of long run practice of caste based discrimination. Protecting the rights of marginalized and vulnerable people is probably the most overlooked and disregarded area of human rights in India.

Sanitizing scavengers' work environment does not always guarantee liberation from the stigma that has been attached to the community for so long. The government of India needs to review the schemes to ensure that they successfully benefit the target group in a sustainable manner. Moreover, it should not be ignored that it is crucial to mobilize scavengers so as to attain higher-education and employment opportunities other than sweeping.<sup>49</sup>

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#### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> Scavenger means and includes a Safai Karamchari wholly or partially employed for manual handling of human excreta and includes his dependents. Safai Karamchari means a person engaged in, or employed for any sanitation work and includes his dependents. [http://www.stscodisha.gov.in/pdf/scheme\\_sc\\_st\\_NSKFDC.pdf](http://www.stscodisha.gov.in/pdf/scheme_sc_st_NSKFDC.pdf) Accessed on 12.12.2012 3:30 hrs.

<sup>2</sup> The title of Balmiki (or valmiki) was affected by Balmikis (or Valmikis) to distance themselves from the manner in which they had been constructed, historically, as the lowest caste strata of the untouchables; as the sweepers, or scavengers (for an overview of the manner in which this initially occurred, see: Mahar, P.M. 1960, *Changing Religious Practices Of An Untouchable Caste*, Economic Development And Cultural Change. Vol. 8, no.3, pp. 279-287).

<sup>3</sup> “*Bhangi*”, is another widely used Hindi term to denote the ‘*Balmiki*’ meaning ‘one addicted to drinking *bhang*’ (a drink made from marijuana leaves). See, Lekhraj Balmiki. (2011). “*The Balmiki Community In Darjeeling: Caste Consciousness.*” in Terence Mukhia (Ed.). *A Multi-Disciplinary Perusal*. Darjeeling: Kalpa Griha Publications. Also see. Sharma, Rama. (1995). *Bhangi, Scavenger In Indian Society: Marginality, Identity, and Politicization of the Community*. New Delhi: M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd.

<sup>4</sup> C.f. Lekhraj Balmiki. (2011). *Ibid*. Also see. Sharma, Rama. (1995). *Ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> Shyamlal. (1992). *The Bhangi: A Sweeper Caste, Its Socio-Economic Portraits: With Special Reference to Jodhpur City*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan. C.f. Lekhraj Balmiki. (2011). “*The Balmiki Community In Darjeeling: Caste Consciousness.*” in Terence Mukhia (Ed.). *A Multi-Disciplinary Perusal*. Darjeeling: Kalpa Griha Publications. Also see. Sharma, Rama. (1995). *Bhangi, Scavenger In Indian Society: Marginality, Identity, and Politicization of the Community*. New Delhi: M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd.

<sup>6</sup> Sachidananda. (2002). *People At The Bottom: A Portrait Of The Scavengers*. Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

<sup>7</sup> People-In-India Profile. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/south-asia-districts.php?rog5=IN2801> Accessed: 31.08.2012 20:30hrs

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<sup>8</sup> People-In-IndiaProfile.<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopleprofile.php?peo3=16399&rog3=IN>  
Accessed: 31. 08.2012 20:31hrs

<sup>9</sup> Gurung, Madan Kr. “*Darjeeling Municipality: Then And Now*” in Gurung, Madan Kr., & Bhutia Passang. (Ed.). (2000). Souvenir: *Darjeeling Municipality 1850-2000*. Darjeeling: Darjeeling Municipality. Pp.29.

<sup>10</sup> Lekhraj Balmiki. (2012). ‘*The Second Wave of Gorkhaland Movement and the Marginalized: A case study of Balmiki Community in their Diaspora*’, paper presented at UGC sponsored National Seminar: Regional Movements: Identity Question And National Integration: Contextualizing India’s Growing Regional Assertions. SAP (DRS Phase-II) University of North Bengal 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> March, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Lekhraj Balmiki. (2012). ‘*The Second Wave of Gorkhaland Movement and the Marginalized: A case study of Balmiki Community in their Diaspora*’, paper presented at UGC sponsored National Seminar: Regional Movements: Identity Question And National Integration: Contextualizing India’s Growing Regional Assertions. SAP (DRS Phase-II) University of North Bengal 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> March, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Asian Human Rights Corresponding School: Asian Human Rights Commission . Lesson 2: *An Examination of the situation faced by Dalit communities working as manual scavengers and manhole workers as well as the plight of Dalit women*.  
<http://www.hrschool.org/doc/mainfile.php/lesson65/231/> Accessed: 25.02.2013 21:35 hrs.

<sup>13</sup> Shudra, also spelled Sudra, Sanskrit Śūdra, the fourth and lowest of the traditional *varnas*, or social classes, of India, traditionally artisans and labourers. The term does not appear in the earliest Vedic literature. Unlike the members of the three *dvija* (“twice-born”) *varnas*—Brahmans (priests and teachers), Kshatriya (nobles and warriors), and Vaishya (merchants)—Shudras are not permitted to perform the *upanayana*, the initiatory rite into the study of the Vedas (earliest sacred literature of India). The Shudra *varna* includes a wide spectrum of endogamous status groups with dominant, landowning groups at one end of the scale and near-untouchables at the other. These variations derive from the belief that certain behaviour patterns and occupations are polluting, a concept that gave rise to a distinction between “clean” and “unclean” Shudra groups; for example, washers, tanners, shoemakers, sweepers, and scavengers were once relegated to the status of untouchable. As evidence of group mobility in the caste system, some observers have pointed out that many castes claiming Kshatriya and Vaishya status gradually emerged from the Shudra class. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/571589/Shudra> Accessed: 28. 09.2013 12:23hrs

<sup>14</sup> Chaudhury are elected areas wise, in Darjeeling they follow nine biras(meaning areas) at present there are nine chaudhury in 32 wards of Darjeeing Municipality area. See Lekhraj Balmiki. (2011). “*The Balmiki Community In Darjeeling: Caste Consciousness*.” in Terence Mukhia (Ed.). *A Multi-Disciplinary Perusal*. Darjeeling: Kalpa Griha Publications.

<sup>15</sup> The honour or good reputation of a person, family, or group of people.  
<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/izzat> Accessed on 28.12.2012 17:30 hrs.

<sup>16</sup> In case if the inter-caste marriage takes place the member is not allowed to enter the other community members house. Moreover, he/she with the entire family is not invited or not allowed to participate in any ceremony of the community. As such the member/family is isolated or excluded within the community. The community members are not allowed to have any kind of relations with that family.

<sup>17</sup> Daand is a penalty paid by the member to *Chaudhury Sanstha* including whole community both in cash and kind, and proper meal with drinks has to be offered and also has to apologies in front of the community members. The Chaudhuries has to be informed regarding the payment of the Daand, and accordingly they finalize the date and day for the payment. Within the given date the person has to invite the entire community member for Daand. The person

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has to pay a certain amount of cash to the Chaudhury Sanstha (till 2006, the cash was 1100 rupees) along with proper meal, such pork, roti and rice, and drinks are also offered to the Chaudhuries and community members.

<sup>18</sup> This part has been interview with Shri Kailesh Ram Balmiki, a person who was compelled to pay the *Daand* because he married a female from other caste.

Personal interview with Shri Kailesh Ram Balmiki, who paid the Daand because he had married an outcaste; during the given year (2006) the Chaudhuries has given concession, supposed to pay Rs 1100 with proper food and drinks were offered to the whole Community.

<sup>19</sup> Lekhraj Balmiki. (2013). '*Darjeeling Municipality And The Case Of The Balmikis*', paper presented at ICSSR sponsored National Conference: Scavenger Communities: Problem, Dynamics And Way Forward. Organised by Centre For Study Of Social Exclusion And Inclusive Policies, Tata Institute Of Social Sciences, Mumbai. 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Singh, K.S. (2010). *The Scheduled Castes*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Pp. 235-243.

<sup>21</sup> The Sari grew in length with one end used to cover the bosom, the head and the face. This allowed women to work in the fields beside men or even ride a horse like men. Traditionally, in some parts of India, women are supposed to have a Ghoonghat in front of the family elders and men, except husbands and close family members.

<sup>22</sup> Lekhraj Balmiki. (2012). '*The Second Wave of Gorkhaland Movement and the Marginalized: A case study of Balmiki Community in their Diaspora*', paper presented at UGC sponsored National Seminar: Regional Movements: Identity Question And National Integration: Contextualizing India's Growing Regional Assertions. SAP (DRS Phase-II) University of North Bengal 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> March, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Singh, K.S. (2010). *The Scheduled Castes*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Pp. 105-112.

<sup>24</sup> This phrase is used to call upon all the members of the community along with entire family and relatives, its some kind of open invitation.

<sup>25</sup> Pagdi is a turbon which has to be put on by the Chaudharies and relatives to the next head in the family specially in case of elder son who takes the charge of the family.

<sup>26</sup> In most cases these moneylenders belong to the Upper Caste. However, money lending business cuts across the caste association in the sub-continent wherein the moneyed class continues to control the business of lending and earning interest on the principle amount. The Afnahis for instance have been traditionally a ready source of liquid cash for the cash trapped individuals.

<sup>27</sup> Lekhraj Balmiki. (2013). '*Darjeeling Municipality And The Case Of The Balmikis*', paper presented at ICSSR sponsored National Conference: Scavenger Communities: Problem, Dynamics And Way Forward. Organised by Centre For Study Of Social Exclusion And Inclusive Policies, Tata Institute Of Social Sciences, Mumbai. 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Swachchakar Dignity: Manual Scavenging in Uttar-Pradesh Status of manual scavengers in Gorakhpur, Uttar-Pradesh By Vidya Bhushan Rawat, Social Development Foundation, Delhi,Ram Bhuvan, Jan Kalyan Sansthan, Chauri Chaura, Kirti Singh, Social Development Foundation, Delhi Thursday, February 22, 2007 <http://swachchakar.blogspot.in/2007/02/manual-scavenging-in-uttar-pradesh.html>. Accessed: 25.02.2013 20:29 hrs

<sup>29</sup> As per Indian Tradition, a girl is wedded out to a boy who is her Pati (husband). The parents brought up the girl child to her adulthood to wed out to her in laws in a different home. Though she was given birth by a couple, she

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will be living her valued period of rest of the life with her husband not with her parents. It seems that she has been given birth and brought up to handed over to another party. So, a girl is called Paraya Dhan.(The girls are considered Laxmi, the Goddess of Money).

<sup>30</sup> Lekhraj Balmiki. (2012). *'The Second Wave of Gorkhaland Movement and the Marginalized: A case study of Balmiki Community in their Diaspora'*, paper presented at UGC sponsored National Seminar: Regional Movements: Identity Question And National Integration: Contextualizing India's Growing Regional Assertions. SAP (DRS Phase-II) University of North Bengal 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> March, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Mathew Atmore Sherring, *Hindu Tribes And Castes as Represented in Benaras, 3vols.* Calcutta: 1872-1881. *The Tribes and Castes of the Madras Presidency.* London:1909.

<sup>32</sup> Jaideva, Paramanshi. (2002). *Dalits In Early Buddhism.* Delhi: Kalpaz Publications. Also see, Ambedkar, Dr. B.R. *"Buddhism and Communism"*, National Seminar on Marx, Ambedkar and Polarization of Oppressed and Exploited Classes in India. New Delhi: Sanjivayya Institute of Socio-Economic Studies, 1991. Also see, Ambedkar, Dr. B.R. (1957). *The Buddha And His Dhamma.* Bombay: Siddharth College Publications.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> According to Oxford Dictionaries Jamadar is a person who sweeps homes or offices as job. <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/jamadar> Accessed on 12.12.2012 at 1: 10 am. See, Sharma, Balchandra. (1962). *Nepali Shabda Kosh. Royal Nepal Acedamy.* Pp. 366. Also see Ralph Lilley Turner, (1931). *A Comparative And Etymological, Dictionary Of The Nepali Language.* London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trybner & Co., Ltd..Pp 209, 'where Jamadar has been defined as the lowest Commissioned Gurkha or Indian rank in the Indian Army'. Also see Rai, R.B. *"Jiten Mitra: Sab Bhandra Youge Purano Commissioner"*, in Gurung, Madan Kr., & Bhutia, Passang. (Ed.). (2000). *Souvenir. Darjeeling Municipality 1850-2000.* Darjeeling: Darjeeling Municipality. Pp.41. also see Lekhraj Balmiki. (2011). *"The Balmiki Community In Darjeeling: Caste Consciousness."* in Terence Mukhia (Ed.). *A Multi-Disciplinary Perusal.* Darjeeling: Kalpa Griha Publications.

<sup>35</sup> Regular monthly Basic pay ranges from Rs 9000-Rs 12000, only if the employ is permanent in Darjeeling Municipality. Source: Staff Statistic Report Of Darjeeling Municipality As On 01.04.2012

<sup>36</sup> Deliege,Robert. (2001). *The Untouchables of India.* New York: oxford International Publishers Ltd. (Translated from French by Nora Scott).

<sup>37</sup> In 1998, the people those who were given permanent (made permanent) posts according to the Municipality Order, were asked to may Rs. 2000 individually, this part has been interviewed on the field survey with the Balmiki Harijan Sangh member. One of the employ named Lila Dev was withheld as she refused to pay the bribe for her permanent post. Similarly, in the year 2006, the amount was increased to Rs. 10000- 30000 depending on the capacity of the employ for being permanent.

<sup>38</sup> Bhanja is bribe paid to the supervisor of a particular section by the Safai Karamchari.

<sup>39</sup> Tekhas are unorganized sectors where the community men/women members work as sweepers and earn his/her family livelihood. They are paid very low wages and sometimes both in cash wage and kinds during festivals.

<sup>40</sup> See, Staff Statistic Report Of Darjeeling Municipality As On 01.04.2012.

<sup>41</sup> Swachchakar Dignity: Manual Scavenging in Uttar-Pradesh Status of manual scavengers in Gorakhpur, Uttar-Pradesh By Vidya Bhushan Rawat, Social Development Foundation, Delhi,Ram Bhuvan, Jan Kalyan Sansthan, Chauri Chaura, Kirti Singh, Social Development Foundation, Delhi Thursday, February 22, 2007 <http://swachchakar.blogspot.in/2007/02/manual-scavenging-in-uttar-pradesh.html>.Accessed: 25.02.2013 20:29 hrs

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<sup>42</sup> Swachchakar Dignity: A Cry for Change (Documentry) *Badlav Ki Chah* . Sunday, September 24, 2006. <http://swachchakar.blogspot.in/2006/09/cry-for-change.html>. Accessed 25.02.2013 20:40 hrs

<sup>43</sup> Balmiki Harijan Sangh was established in 1948, Registration No.:- 3/38713.

<sup>44</sup> Lekhraj Balmiki. (2013). “*Dissenting Voices, Transformation and People’s Assertions in East and North East India Unheard Voice: Balmiki Community in Darjeeling.*” in Pradip Kumar Sengupta and Manas Chakrabarty (Ed.). (2013). *Dissenting Voices, Collective Actions and Politics of Assertions: A Pan- Indian Perspective*. Kolkata: Levant Books.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Rajawat, Mamta. (2006). *Dalits: Role of Education*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd. Also see, Wilfred, Felix. (2000). *Dalit Empowerment*. Bangalore: NBCLC.

<sup>47</sup> Ambaikar, B.M. “*Contribution of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to Evolution of Jural Postulates in India.*”, in K.N. Kadam (Ed.). (1993). *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: The Emancipator Of The Oppressed*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

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# The Emerging Leadership of Rural Women in New Panchayats

Mona Kaushal

## **Abstract**

*The history of local governance as a catalyst for socio, economic, cultural and political transformation is as old as Indian civilization itself. Realizing the potential of the Panchayati Raj system, the Government of India made a landmark Amendment to the Constitution designed to democratise and empower local political bodies. The central aim of this paper is to share the enriching and variable experiences of Rural Women in the system of rural local self-government for rural development after the 73rd Amendment, which has become a watershed in deepening democracy and evolution of a third tier of constitutionally guaranteed stratum of government in India. The paper captures their experience and explores the participation, performance, constraints, aspirations, supports of various social institutions and their performance.*

**Keywords:** rural development, 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment, rural women, panchayats, empowerment.

## **1. Introduction and Evolution of Women's Representation in Panchayats.**

The 73rd amendment has mandated representation of at least one-third women through elections instead of the earlier token one or two women nominated by government or co-opted by the predominantly influential, powerful male membership/leadership of these panchayats. The reservation is of at least one-third membership and chairpersons' positions in panchayats at all the three levels. Further, this reservation is not only in the total membership but also within those reserved for the SC/ST thus providing for women's reservation across castes and class. Thus, now all Panchayats at every level will have at least one-third women members, (they can contest for other seats too), and at least one-third of Panchayats at each level - district to village- will be headed by women chairpersons. This mandated minimum one-third reservation has thus legitimated entry of women in a critical mass in mainstream politics at the grass root level in the whole country and has created political space for women across caste and class (Bhargava and Subha, 1994). It is a major step for inclusive politics and addressing as it does their continued political marginality. It is hoped that a new paradigm of political participation would emerge and the new situation would witness a drastic change in the distributive systems of benefits (Buch, 1998).

Given the above background, the paper discusses the impact of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which not only gave a new lease of life to the panchayat system of India but also ensured at least 33 per cent of the total

seats at the three tiers of local governments—both rural and urban areas for women.

It is the contention of the paper that the 73rd Amendment has led to:

1. **Empowerment** of Women both in the panchayats as well as in the rural areas of India. Empowerment has been defined here as change of self-perception through knowledge.
2. Tremendous **mobilization** of women in the countryside changing the numerical configuration of local government.

## **2. Research Methodology**

For the proposed study both the primary and secondary data sources were used. The primary data was collected through questionnaire and interview method to study the emerging leadership of rural women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in the state of Haryana. The district of Ambala was chosen for the purpose of study. As per 2011 census, 55.62 % population of Ambala districts lives in rural areas of villages. The total Ambala district population living in rural areas is 632,243 of which males and females are 334,564 and 297,679 respectively. In rural areas of Ambala district, sex ratio is 890 females per 1000 males. From the Ambala district, out of 7 blocks, 1 block on the basis of population was randomly selected namely Ambala Rural-I. Further out of this block the study covered 4 villages and the sample consisted of 30 respondents drawn from each village which comes to a total 120. Questionnaire was personally administered to the respondents and Interviews were conducted.

The secondary data was collected through the review of literature, books, magazines, periodicals and journals. The collected data was analysed. The findings were tabulated and interpreted.

## **3. Assessing the Impact**

Has the formal change brought by the institutional intervention of reservations adequately addressed women's marginality or has it only led to their numerically expanded presence? Has the numerical presence transformed these structures, made them more receptive to women's needs and concerns or has patriarchy already succeeded in defeating the intentions of the amendment? The study looks at women's experience in their new political role, the processes of change, the earlier transition phase for women's political presence, problems of participation, potential, support of families, communities and other social collectives, and whether this new presence and experience have impact and empowering effect? Are rural women in India beginning to break their silence, to question, to gain confidence, to gain access and control over material and knowledge resources, altering self- image after entering the newly re-elected panchayats? The results were encouraging. A number of myths about these

women were exploded. Initially when the constitutional change took place, there was wide-spread skepticism; however, two decades of experience have shattered all the myths. The key areas on which the study focused and their corresponding results have been summarized in the following paragraphs:

### 3.1 Women's Awareness and Knowledge about Panchayat Related Matters:

There have been continued perceptions of women's lack of awareness and knowledge about panchayat related matters. The study explored this aspect and looked at their knowledge about reservations, Panchayats powers and responsibilities, Panchayat meetings, attendance of elected representatives, resources of Panchayats, their views about raising resources and also about the level of success of development schemes. The results tabulated below (Table 1) clearly show that a majority of women have good awareness level about Panchayat related matters. Expectedly, the chairpersons have higher level of awareness and knowledge than the members.

**Table 1: Performance of the women representatives as leaders in PRIs**

Responses	Ranks	Aware of their powers and duties	Aware of development issues	Aware of problems faced by people	Proxy candidate
Gender	Male	12(20%)	8(13.3%)	28(46.6%)	12(20%)
	Female	20(33.3)	8(13.3%)	24(40%)	8(13%)
Education Qualifications	Below Graduate	24(40%)	12(20%)	8(13.3%)	16(26.6%)
	Graduate and above	16(26.6%)	8(13.3%)	28(46.6%)	8(13.3%)

### 3.2 Level of Participation in Panchayats:

Elected representatives are expected to work for their constituents. Mandated reservation is only the beginning of their presence. Their effective participation would require not only attendance in meetings but also articulation, joining discussion, taking up issues and solving problems brought to them. The study looked at women's participation in panchayats in terms of attendance in meetings, time spent in panchayat work, efforts made for carrying their view point in the panchayat meetings, petitions/problems received by them and efforts made to over come difficulties. The common perception that almost all of them or at least the majority do not attend panchayat meetings and the doubts about the extent to which women can or really care to participate in panchayats was found to be false since majority of respondents(60%) felt that they participated effectively; the responses have been summarized in the following Table:

**Table 2: Participation of women representatives in PRIs**

Responses	Ranks	Participate actively	Unable to spare time to participate	Lack of self confidence	Passive spectators in PR meetings
Gender	Male Female	32(53.3%) 36(60%)	8(13.3%) 12(20%)	12(20%) 4(6.6%)	8(13.3%) 8(13.3%)
Education Qualifications	Below Graduate Graduate and above	20(33.3%) 36(60%)	12(20%) 8(13.3%)	12(20%) 8(13.3%)	16(26.6%) 8(13.3%)

**3.3 Performance of the Women Representatives:**

The general myth about women being mere spectators in the functioning of these institutions and being *de-jure* heads stands exploded. The results of the study clearly demonstrate that women not only take up issues relating to basic needs like drinking water, sanitation, availability of doctors and teachers etc in the villages, which is dear to them, but also general developmental activities in the area concerned. (Table 3)

**Table 3: The performance of women representatives in PRIs due to:**

Responses	Ranks	To prove as leaders of PRIs	Full cooperation from male representatives and officials	Aware of local development issues	Act as proxy
Gender	Male Female	20(33.3%) 20(33.3%)	12(20%) 12(20%)	24(40%) 16(26.6%)	4(6.6%) 12(20%)
Education Qualifications	Below Graduate Graduate and above	24(40%) 20(33.3%)	4(6.6%) 12(20%)	12(20%) 20(33.3%)	20(33.3%) 8(13.3%)

**3.4 Community Perceptions about Panchayat Women's Performance:**

The community's perceptions about women's new role and performance should also give valuable insights into the processes of change, the transformative index and the sign posts of this long journey towards women's empowerment and contribution to deeper democratic process. More than 50% of the community members have positive view about women representatives and hope that under their leadership corruption and favoritism will be reduced. Others, of course have negative opinion that they are incapable, non-cooperative, do not seek cooperation of higher level politicians and development functionaries, do not get any cooperation of other members, and they are illiterate, etc. Their responses

indicate that more than half of them feel that the panchayats functioning with the new elections and women's entry is satisfactory. They receive cooperation, there is understanding among themselves and that they are honest (Table 4,5)

**Table 4: Effectiveness of women leadership in PRIs**

Responses	Ranks	Effective	Ineffective	Socially acceptable	Socially unacceptable
Gender	Male	32(53.3%)	4(6.6%)	24(13.3%)	0
	Female	32(53.3%)	12(20%)	12(20%)	4(6.6%)
Education Qualifications	Below Graduate	20(33.3%)	12(33.3%)	24(40%)	4(6.6%)
	Graduate and above	36(60%)	8(46.6%)	16(26.6%)	0

**Table5: Satisfaction with leadership of women representation in PRIs**

Responses	Ranks	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all	Can't say
Gender	Male	4(6.6%)	44(73.3%)	0	12(20%)
	Female	16(26.6%)	24(40%)	4(6.6%)	16(26.6%)
Education Qualifications	Below Graduate	4(6.6%)	24(40%)	0	32(53.3%)
	Graduate and above	16(26.6%)	32(53.3%)	4(6.6%)	8(13.3%)

### 3.5 The Issue of Proxy Women:

It is often alleged that since many of the women are first-timers and are illiterate, they depend on their men folk for conducting the panchayat activities. In other words, the women follow their men folk without understanding the implications. Hence, they are termed as proxy women. The study tried to explore this issue and the results were encouraging. It was found that the proxy women are seen as proxies only in the first one or two years of their tenure, gradually they become independent and come to know about many modern institutions like courts, block development, agriculture and other offices, the existence of various officials. Nonetheless, women in panchayats weave many dreams and their self-perception changes when they realize the immense potential of the public sphere. Evidence shows that the villagers also recognize their potential (Table 6, 7, 8) Even if women chiefs depend on their husbands, the power relation between husband and wife has already changed because of reservations, particularly because the husband gets a chance to come to the public sphere because of the wife; the patriarchy is no longer monolithic and in many cases the husband even supports the wife and helps her in her domestic work also.

**Table6: Increase in the leadership qualities among women representatives in the PRIs**

Responses	Ranks	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all	Can't say
Gender	Male	24(40%)	28(46.6%)	4(6.6%)	4(6.6%)
	Female	16(26.6%)	28(40%)	0	16(26.6%)
Education Qualifications	Below Graduate	12(20%)	32(53.3%)	0	16(26.6%)
	Graduate and above	20(33.3%)	32(53.3%)	0	8(13.3%)

**Table 7: Frequency of visits to their areas**

Responses	Ranks	Very frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Gender	Male	20(33.3%)	28(46.6%)	8(13.3%)	4(6.6%)
	Female	8(26.6%)	24(40%)	20(33.3%)	0
Education Qualifications	Below Graduate	0	20(33.3%)	36(60%)	4(6.6%)
	Graduate and above	20(33.3%)	28(46.6%)	12(20%)	0

**Table 8: Behaviour of women leaders while interacting with people**

Responses	Ranks	Behave confidently	Lack of confidence and shy	Show lack of interest in people's problems	Great concern for people's problems
Gender	Male	32(53.3%)	4(6.6%)	8(13.3%)	16(26.6%)
	Female	24(40%)	16(26.6%)	4(6.6%)	16(26.6%)
Education Qualifications	Below Graduate	12(20%)	36(60%)	12(20%)	0
	Graduate and above	32(53.3%)	8(13.3%)	4(6.6%)	16(26.6%)

### 3.6 Constraints

The constraints are many. In many places the women are not immune to systemic corruption, though as beginners they are more cautious. Coming into politics is still considered as dirty and spurned. The community leaders of the village try to choose candidates who are non-performers. The women themselves don't come forward. It is always the family members or party leaders who push them to contest. The selection of seats for reservations, which are done on a lottery basis and only for one term, doesn't provide much scope for nurturing a constituency. Even if the women perform during the first term, they are not allowed by the men to contest from the same seat again. Some of them get frustrated and become depressed. As mentioned before, the panchayat

institutions are used as an implementing agency so the bureaucrats feel that they are the boss and the first-timer female elected representatives are there to obey them. Violence against women has increased. The responses received have been tabulated in Table 9:

**Table 9: Main constrains in the way of women leaders in the PRIs**

Responses	Ranks	Lack of awareness of powers	Male representatives and officials do not trust their competence	Unable to spare time	Face gender discrimination
Gender	Male	24(40%)	12(20%)	16(26.6%)	8(13.3%)
	Female	8(13.3%)	24(40%)	8(13.3%)	20(33.3%)
Education Qualifications	Below Graduate	12(20%)	4(6.6%)	20(33.3%)	24(40%)
	Graduate and above	16(26.6%)	16(26.6%)	12(20%)	16(26.6%)

#### 4. Findings and Conclusions:

The present study is an effort to comprehend the empowerment of women at the grass root level of governance in Ambala. The various aspect of women empowerment have been **examined and analysed**; and can be finally **summarised** as:

1. The reservation for women in the PRIs was considered as a welcome step and had been accepted by the citizens.
2. The main advantage of reservation for women representatives had been the advancement in their social prestige and self-confidence.
3. Reservation has provided an opportunity to women representatives to prove their leadership qualities.
4. Through participation in PRIs, women representatives had an opportunity to express their views.
5. Reservation for women in PRIs had given them an opportunity to participate in local affairs and had brought forward women leaders who were much aware of the development issues of their area.
6. The viewpoint that being a woman was a handicap in the way of electing the leaders had been rejected.
7. Women representatives were responding to the local problems have been agreed by the citizens.
8. Another significant inference drawn from the data was that women representatives had a strong desire to remain politically active.
9. The citizens had approved the provision of reservation for women and had taken it as a welcome step.

10. The citizens were strongly agreed that women representatives were aware of the development issues of their area.
11. The officials were of the opinion that lack of awareness of powers and duties was the biggest problem faced by women leaders.
12. The officials were of the view that success of the PRIs depended on the coordination between the male representatives and women representatives and their working together was essential for the development.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment has thus, created an opportunity for large number of rural women to take part in the public institutions. Democracy has become more participatory in the process of implementing it. In many places, women have been functioning well and have engendered the development process, although in a limited sense. We see rural women's new leadership emerging in these grass roots institutions. Data on their perceptions, recognition, respect, enhanced status, confidence levels, increased political aspirations and community's perceptions clearly shows this change taking place. The family has accepted the new role and even the relationship between husband and wife has been altered. Many myths get disproved, according to the study. The husband-wife relationship has become relatively more egalitarian. This has led to a mobilization of rural women to a great extent. The elected women prove to be the role model for the village women. Thus we find that the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment has an empowering impact on the women and the entry of women into politics in such a big way is in itself a radical change. Despite the constraints, they are playing an extremely important role, which needs to be recognized and a clear beginning has been made in this direction. Women of today are no longer content to remain peripheral actors and want to play their rightful role in all sphere of life. There is no doubt that elections to PRIs has brought local women to the fore, who are showing enough maturity to closely align themselves with the political power structure, however, yet women's participation is not entirely visible and effective as their contributions are often undermined. The dire need is to remove disparity between women's formal political equality and their meaningful exercise of political power. Achieving the goal of equal participation of men and women in decision making will provide a balance that that would more accurately reflect in the composition of the society. It will expand the range of human resources available to meet the needs of society. At present the increasing participation of women in political arena will be a source, as well as signal for social change.

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# Caste Marginalization and Resistance: Case of Rajbanshis in North Bengal

Nandini Basistha

## **Abstract**

*Literally the term 'Rajbanshi' means the lineage of the king. But, in reality, the Rajbanshis have been placed in the bottom of the caste hierarchy and have often been victims of discrimination. Starting with a movement for regaining the lost social status of the Rajbanshi community in Hindu society of Bengal, how their activism gradually developed into a more hard-core or confrontational political movement aiming at separate statehood has been discussed in this paper. In addition, the paper discusses in detail how the demands raised, and the modes of agitation, changed over time.*

**Key Words - Casteism, Discrimination, Identity, Separatism**

## **1. Introduction**

Recently a debate started amongst intelligentsia on the importance of caste in electoral process of West Bengal. Praskanva Sinharay has argued that caste has never been influential category in the electoral politics in West Bengal and that the situation has now changed with the dramatic entry of the lower caste Matuas as a major vote conglomerate.<sup>1</sup> Their success has surfaced the fact that West Bengal is not devoid of politics of caste. From colonial period, we see active participation of casteist groups in democratic politics. Various 'Namasudra' or lower caste groups had unified on caste lines and started politics for power. Other than, Matuas, for example, one can refer to political grouping of Rajbanshis on casteist line. But, before Matuas, the hegemonic domination of the urban-educate upper-caste gentry over the public life of Bengal never succumbed to the lower caste struggle. Now, the success of Matuas is no doubt working as impetus to other caste groupings and we can speculate about more politicization of caste in the democratic arena of West Bengal.

Democracy always gives space for divisional discontents. Cleavages got created on the basis of different parameters and different political parties formed to pursue problems of public. As caste remains one of the main reasons behind many kinds of difficulties, we see politicization of castes in many pockets of India. Caste domination and differentiation was present in Bengal also but got back-footed by the eruption of class politics instead of caste. However, some caste groups remained active in maintaining their separate identity in political space. Amongst them, one of the groups is Rajbanshi.

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<sup>1</sup> Sinharay, Praskanva (August 25, 2012), A New Politics of Caste, Economic & Political Weekly, Vol XLVII, no 34, pp 26

Rajbanshis are the indigenous people residing in the entire region of the erstwhile Kamrup, i.e. all the districts of North Bengal, the districts of Western Assam and the northern districts of Bangladesh. Researchers have debates on the origin of the Rajbanshis. Porter says, “Rajbanshis are the Hinduized Koches of Rangpur and Goalpara.”<sup>2</sup> According to G. A. Grierson, “Those Koches, who are now Hindus, are principally known under the name of Rajbanshi. The Rajbanshi dialect bears many close points of resemblance to the dialect of East Bengal”.<sup>3</sup> Gait describes the Rajbanshis of North Bengal, “as a synonym of Koch, this represents a real caste and in this sense only it may be entered in the schedule”.<sup>4</sup> S. K. Chatterjee argues, “The masses of North Bengal areas are very largely of Bodo origin, or mixed Austric Dravidian-Mongoloid...or semi-Hinduized Bodo’s who have abandoned their original Tibeto-Burman speech and have adopted the northern dialect of Bengali. They are proud to call themselves as Rajbanshis and to claim to be called Kshatriyas.”<sup>5</sup> So, it is generally regarded that, the Rajbanshis were a purified group of the Koch (a semi-aboriginal tribe) who had undergone Sanskritisation and adopted Hindu manners and customs by abandoning some of their traditional cultural practices. But, after enduring neglect of being lower caste, Rajbanshis started movement for social upliftment and identity formation.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously identity formation is not a one day event. Often it got ‘imagined’ or ‘invented’ highlighting some identity marker.<sup>7</sup> In the case of Rajbanshis, ‘caste’ became an identity marker. Here catalyst was modern political and social developments under British colonialism.<sup>8</sup> The British Indian State has been twisted and mutilated caste in innumerable ways and it has also recognized

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<sup>2</sup> Porter, A. E (1933), *Census of India, 1931, Vol-V, Part-I*, Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, p 473

<sup>3</sup> Grierson, G. A (1969), *Linguistic Survey of India, Vol-III, Part-II*, (reprinted edn.), Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, p 95

<sup>4</sup> Gait, E. A (1901), *Census Report of Bengal, 1901, Part-I, Appendix-I*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, p xxxviii

<sup>5</sup> Chatterjee, S. K (1998), *Kirata Jana Kirti, The Indo-Mongoloids: Their Contribution to the History and Culture of India*, (reprinted edn.), Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, p 60

<sup>6</sup> Ghosh Bhattacharyya, Moumita (July-December 2009), *Rajbanshis: The Deprived People of North Bengal (In the State of West Bengal)*, *International Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 2 No.2, ISSN 0974 – 2514, p 243

<sup>7</sup> For details see Anderson, Benedict (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso; and Leslie, Julia and Mary McGee (ed.) (2000), *Invented Identities: The Interplay of Gender, Religion and Politics in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press

<sup>8</sup> For details see Bayly, Susan (1999), *Caste, Society and Politics in India from Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Dirks, Nicholas, B. (2003), *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Delhi: Permanent Black

significance of the caste system by way of accepting caste as the basis of socio-cultural and economic standing of people as higher and lower. Gradually the existence of disjunction between status (ritual rank) and power became the hallmark of caste.<sup>9</sup> Thus caste as a system has been endangered as well as shaped and perpetuated by the colonial rulers.

Previously, caste was a dynamic, diverse and multidimensional reality of Indian society.<sup>10</sup> The origin of caste is hidden at the Varna system of Hindu religion. Chatur Varna – consisting Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra – is a neat logical construct and the position of each Varna is fixed for all time. Every caste is liable to fit into this Varna model, but in which strata it should be fitted is not always rigid. Therefore, every caste tries to fit into this model in a way that can improve its ritual ranking, thereby making it its frame of reference for upward social mobility. But with the breakdown of the closed village economy and the rise of democratic politics, the competitive element embedded in caste has come to the fore. This has resulted in the collapse of the caste system but also in the rise of caste identities.<sup>11</sup>

‘Identity’ always tries to segregate ‘I’ from ‘other’. Formation of caste identities followed the same path. System of caste enrollment in administrative set up was started by the Census. In the 1881 Census, profiles of over 400 ‘races’, ‘tribes’ and ‘stereotypes’ were presented in the context of caste. The 1901 Census ranked all castes in terms of specific Varna context. ‘Ritual distance’ was the main criterion of caste ranking in 1901 Census, and the “functions” performed by the caste system was accorded primacy in the 1931 Census.<sup>12</sup> Rajbanshis were included in the ‘Tribal’ or low-caste strata in the first Census report of 1872, 1891, 1901 and 1911. This downgraded their status officially. Therefore Rajbanshis had started Kshatriyaisation movement to elevate their caste rankings by enrolling themselves into the Kshatriya or higher strata of the Census.

## **2. Initiation of Caste Conglomeration due to Social Marginalization**

Apparently this movement can be called as an effect of the social marginalization of the Rajbanshis both by Bengalis and British. After becoming conscious of their low position in the local caste hierarchy in the changing social

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<sup>9</sup> For details see Dumont, Louis (1970), *Homo Hierarchicus*, London: Wiedenfield and Nicolson

<sup>10</sup> For details see Sharma, K.L. (1974), *The Changing Rural Stratification System*, New Delhi: Orient Longman

<sup>11</sup> For details see Gupta, Dipankar (2005), *Caste and Politics: Identity over System*, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 34

<sup>12</sup> For details see *Census of India: 1881, Vol. I; Census of India: 1901, Vol. I, Part I; and Census of India: 1931, Vol. I, Part III*

milieu of this region, a section of the affluent and educated Rajbanshi intelligentsia including Haramahan Khajanchi and Harikishore Barma had started Kshatriyaisation movement in the beginning of the twentieth century. Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma (or 'Thakur Panchanan') institutionalized this movement by establishing Kshatriya Samiti at Rangpur (Bangladesh) in 1910. Very soon it acquired the status of a Central Association of the whole Rajbanshi community and Kshatriyaisation movement eventually acted as the base of the various ethno-political movements in North Bengal.<sup>13</sup>

Here one can ask about the silence of the real raja (King) of Rajbanshis and reason for leadership by Panchanan Barma. According to local historians, with the marriage of King Nripendra Narayan with Suniti Devi (the daughter of Brahma Samaj-leader Keshab Chandra Sen), the Koch royal family drifted gradually away from the caste rigidity and caste-based identity. Moreover, they felt pride in introducing themselves as Koch.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, highly educated Panchanan Barma failed to secure any suitable job in his homeland, Cooch Behar, for the dominance of non-Rajbanshi people. So, being treated ignominiously, he jumped into the Kshatriyaisation movement already begun by predecessors, like Haramahan Khajanchi and Harikishore Barma.

To achieve their declared objectives, Kshatriya Samiti took three-fold activities. With the help of the relevant clues from the Vedic Shastras and support of Brahmin Pandits from Kashi, Nabadwip, Methila, Kamrup etc., Thakur Panchanan cited different code of laws which reinforced their Kshatriya origin and legitimized the elevation of their ritual status into Kshatriya.<sup>15</sup> With the help of local histories, he showed that after establishing Koch kingdom, the Koch ruler Biswa Sinha with his people had 'apostatized to Hinduism took the title 'Rajbanshi'.<sup>16</sup> Astute Brahmins christened him as 'Biswas Singha' and ascribed to him the Kshatriya status.<sup>17</sup> In fact, before the British rule, the warrior-ruler model of the Kshatriya remained the most popular and practicable model for social mobility and cultural assimilation for ambitious people of lower castes and tribal. So Kshatriyaisation was initiated in the tribal areas in order to strengthen their legitimization as Hindu rajas in their own society and to broaden the basis of their economic and political power. In other words, it was a

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<sup>13</sup> Barma, Sukhbilas (ed.) (2007), *Socio-Political Movements in North Bengal: A Sub-Himalayan Tract*, New Delhi: Global Vision, p xii

<sup>14</sup> Debnath, Sailen (ed.) (2007), *Social and Political Tensions in North Bengal (Since 1947)*, Siliguri: N. L. Publishers, p 44

<sup>15</sup> For details see Barman, Upendranath (1979), *Thakur Panchanan Barmaner Jiban Charita (Bengali)*, Jalpaiguri

<sup>16</sup> Debnath, Sailen (2008), *Essays on Cultural History of North Bengal*, Assam: N. L. Publishers, p 42

<sup>17</sup> Dalton, Edward Tuite (1960), *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Kolkata, p 89

calculated move on the part of the tribal mobility to further their material interests strong Kshatriyaisation. However, in this process, affluent sections of the Koches later on, particularly in the late sixteenth century, started abandoning their impure tribal practices radically and adopted the manners and customs of the Hindus and assumed the name 'Rajbanshi' to distinguish themselves from their more plebeian brethren. They, thus, wanted to be regarded as a separate caste and socially superior to the Koches. While in 1891, through 'Rangpur Vratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Vidhayani Sabha', the Rajbanshis described themselves as 'Vratya Kshatriya', from 1911 they began to claim pure Kshatriya status.

To intensify their demand, Kshatriya Samiti incorporated Brahmanical values and practices for a purified social image, which was legitimized by priests, genealogists and pundits.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in order to gratify their ritual rank aspiration, they began to imitate the values, practices and cultural styles of "twice born" castes that formed a part of Hindu great tradition. Since 1912, a number of Milan Kshetras (mass thread wearing ceremonies) were organized in different Rajbanshi-dominated districts.

They also brought out a monthly journal called 'Kshatriya', in which many provocative writings were published against the Bengali upper-caste hegemony and advised the community members to sever all socio-political ties with these castes. Even the intellectual sections henceforth discontinued their association with the literary organizations of Bengalis.

Thus, according to I. Sarkar such social uplift movement organized by the Kshatriya Samiti not only consolidated caste solidarity among the common Rajbanshis but also created consciousness of a separate identity among the educated youth of the community in particular.<sup>19</sup> But, Rajatsubhra Mukhopadhyay thinks that, the movement got confined into a particular section of the Rajbanshis, who were mainly land-owners, jotedars and autochthonic population.<sup>20</sup> The leaders of the Kshatriya movement were equal to other caste Hindu Bhadrals in matters of education, profession, dress and manners. So, the rural poor, who constituted the bulk of the Rajbanshi peasantry, were unable to identify themselves fully with those people of their community who belong to the high strata of the society. Thus the class solidarity of the Samiti got fractured

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<sup>18</sup> op. cit. Ghosh Bhattacharyya, Moumita, p 246

<sup>19</sup> For details see Sarkar, I. (2006), *The Kamtapur Movement: Towards a Separate State in North Bengal*, Govind Chandra Rath (ed.), *Tribal Development in India: The Contemporary Debate*, New Delhi: Sage

<sup>20</sup> Mukhopadhyay, Rajatsubhra (2009), *Social Formation of the Rajbanshis and the Emergence of the Kamtapuri Identity*, N. K. Das & V. R. Rao (eds.), *Identity, Cultural Pluralism and State: South Asia in Perspective*, Anthropological Survey of India, p 484

under the weight of class contradictions, and ultimately the Samiti failed to crystallize a distinct 'social identity' for the Rajbanshis.

The leaders of the Samiti, however, later realized that just adoption of the sacred thread and upper-caste practices could not help in raising the social status of the Rajbanshi masses whose economic condition was extremely bad. Then they started looking for being accommodated in the government-approved institutional arrangement of 'protective discrimination', especially in matters of education and employment. To avail this, they were ultimately granted 'Scheduled Caste' status in Bengal. Therefore, the social movement of the Rajbanshis, which initially began for achieving a superior status in the caste hierarchy, was ultimately reduced to a mere real politic.

### **3. Politicization of Caste**

In the meantime, with the initiation of the representative democratic politics in India, local leaders turned politicians started to mobilize caste groupings in order to organize their power.<sup>21</sup> In making politics their sphere of activity, caste groups on the other hand get a chance to assert their identity and to strive for positions. So, since 1920, castes have organized themselves to obtain representation in the provincial legislatures and this had resulted in 'horizontal stretch' of caste.<sup>22</sup>

Rajbanshi intelligentsia also did not delay. Though the Kshatriya Samiti started its way mainly as a social organization, but from the second decade of the twentieth century, it began to partake in national politics. The Samiti gave candidates in all the four elections held in Bengal Legislative Council from 1920 to 1929 under 1919 Act and achieved striking electoral success. The elected candidates formed the 'Independent Scheduled Caste Party' in 1938 along with Scheduled Caste representatives of East Bengal. The Samiti placed their candidates against the all-India party candidates because they considered the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) as associations of the upper-caste Hindus. The candidates of the Kshatriya Samiti won in the Assembly election of 1937 and 1946 against the candidates of the Congress and Communists. From the election results, it got proved that Kshatriyaisation movement had considerable influence on the political life of Jalpaiguri and its neighbouring districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur. But, against the background of the constitutional negotiations continuing since the appointment of the Simon Commission, the Kshatriyaisation movement became involved in the issue of political and economic reforms and improvement of

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<sup>21</sup> Kothari, Rajni (ed.) (1970), *Caste in Indian Politics*, New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd.

<sup>22</sup> Srinivas M. N. (Feb. 1-7, 2003), *An Obituary on Caste as a System*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 38, No. 5, pp. 455-459

ritual and social status was given the back seat. Later on this movement dried up with the death of Panchanan Barma in 1935 and merger of its leaders with Congress and mainstream politics.

With changing scenario of politics, Rajbanshi King of Cooch Behar also forced to make a people-representative party to assemble 'his' people in 'his' favour. In 1942, Cooch Behar Legislative Council was formed in response to the persistent clamour for responsible government in the princely states throughout the country. According to local historians, King's administration was so long run by the educated, non-Rajbanshi, upper-caste Hindus and there was no Rajbanshis although the king himself was belonged to their caste.<sup>23</sup> But, after contesting election primarily on the issue of awareness and rights of the Rajbanshi people and winning all the seats, aspirations of the Rajbanshi elected members got a big fillip. The participation in administration through this democratic medium raised hope amongst the commoners that deshi (indigenous) people can be able to capture the power of administration at last and they can achieve the ultimate goal of being administered by themselves. So they started movement against the Bhatias (outsiders) under the banner of Hitasadhani Sabha.

According to some historians, Hitasadhani Sabha was established in 1918 for the Hita (welfare) of the deshi (indigenous) people of Cooch Behar.<sup>24</sup> But this student-oriented party was banned by Prince Nityendra Narayan in 1921. Again its presence was felt in a historic meeting of 19th May 1946 in Cooch Behar. According to local historians, in a princely state of around five lakh people, this meeting was attended by around two lakh public.<sup>25</sup> The communications were not so developed at that period. Still the people came by bullock's carts or on buffaloes, by bicycles and on foot. Rajbanshi Hindu and Muslim elites and jotedars - like Satish Chandra Singha Roy, Khan Chaudhury Amanatulla, Gajendra Narayan Basunia narrated the aim of the party as the Hita (welfare) of deshi (indigenous) people. However, in 26th July, 1948, Radhakanta Sarkar wrote about Hitasadhani Sabha that - '...a most reactionary group has been formed, formulated and patronized by the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, to serve his own personal purpose of dominating and ruling the people for his own exploitation to the detriment of the interest'. So, how much 'Hita' was done - cannot be determined. But, this Sabha was carried on their demand for

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<sup>23</sup> Dakua, Dinesh Chandra (2007) in Barma, Sukhbilas (ed.), *Socio-Political Movements in North Bengal: A Sub-Himalayan Tract*, New Delhi: Global Vision, p 54

<sup>24</sup> Varman, Lalit Chandra (2008), *Rajyar Dabite Uttarbange Andolon* (in Bengali), Assam: N. L., p 85

<sup>25</sup> Barman, Prasenjit (2007) in Barma, Sukhbilas (ed.) *Socio-Political Movements in North Bengal: A Sub-Himalayan Tract*, New Delhi: Global Vision, p 73

democratic representation by local representatives and all-round development of Cooch Behar.

Without going to the debate on the 'real' purpose of these groups like Kshatriya Samiti or Hitasadhani Sabha, it can be clearly said that Rajbanshis got identity-conscious to some extent by socio-political marginalization of the upper-caste Hindus and forced to unify themselves on casteist lines and this 'mass' get politicized soon. Starting from a pure social demand of upliftment in caste strata, the Rajbanshis ultimately demanded a separate state for themselves in post colonial period.

#### **4. Politics for Separate State**

At the dawn of independence when all were in dilemma about the political future of Cooch Behar kingdom, Hitasadhani Sabha along with Independent Scheduled Caste Party raised the first demand of a separate homeland for Rajbanshi community, 'Rajar-sthan' (abode of king), comprised of Siliguri, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur districts of Bengal, Purnia district of Bihar, Goalpara district of Assam, certain portions of Rangpur and Darjeeling, and Cooch Behar kingdom.<sup>26</sup> This demand was popularized by the-then Central Minister Jogendra Nath Mandal in the mass meeting in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur in 4th, 6th and 7th May, 1947. After India's independence in 15th August 1947, Hitasadhani Sabha took the name of Cooch Behar State Praja Congress and demanded for the proclamation of 'Cooch Behar' as a separate state or keeping it under the Central Government of Indian Dominion. But neglecting all this public demands, ultimately Government of India decided to merge Cooch Behar with West Bengal as a mere 'district'. Other Rajbanshi-dominated areas assimilated with Pakistan (later Bangladesh) and Indian states like West Bengal and Assam.

In immediate protest of this assimilation, the representatives of Cooch Behar State Praja Congress - along with Jalpaiguri Gorkha League, Darjeeling Gorkha League, and Sikkim Praja Sammelon - assembled at Darjeeling on 30th October 1949 and called for a separate state, Uttarakhand Pradesh Sangha. But their demand was again looked down by both Centre and State Government and the movement gradually dried up.

Under Bengali-hegemonic rule of West Bengal Government, marginalization of the Rajbanshis continues. Social status of the Rajbanshi's was challenged with the influx of a large number of caste-Hindu immigrants with a strong awareness to casteism. In spite of all efforts, Rajbanshi's failed to alleviate in caste strata.

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<sup>26</sup> For details see Ghosh, Ananda Gopal, Uttarakhand Movement: A Historical Perspective, (abstract), North Bengal University, Department of History

They faced humiliation and objectionable identification by the caste Hindus, who started interacting with the indigenous Rajbanshis in differential terms. For example, Nagendranath Basu mentioned ‘Rajbanshis’ as Mlechha (barbarians) in ‘Vishwakosh’ (World Encyclopedia) and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in Bongo Darshan moots that the Koch identity cannot be synonymous with Bengali Hindu identity. Rajbanshis were even denied entry into the temple of Jagannath Puri by a Government Act in 1911 and separate student hostels were established to board and lodge the Rajbanshi students.

Partition of India in 1947 and Pakistan in 1971 led more population influx in Rajbanshi-dominated areas. Actually the population of this area became double within a very short period. Out of total population of 10, 19, 806 of Cooch Behar in 1961 Census, 2, 98, 000 were born outside the district, of which 2, 52, 000 born in East Pakistan. Similarly, out of population of 13, 59, 292 of Jalpaiguri in 1961 Census, 4, 54, 177 were born outside the district of which 2, 18, 341 were born in East Pakistan.<sup>27</sup> According to official statistical data, in 1971, total 1, 159, 000 migrants settled in North Bengal. Except this official statistics, there remains innumerable number of Bangladeshis, who crossed the border and permanently settled in these areas. After 1971, a fresh wave of displaced persons came to North Bengal due to the turmoil in new-born Bangladesh. According to the Census of 1981, 14.4 lakh displaced persons came in between 1971 – 1981 and 6, 75, 195 permanently settled in West Bengal (See Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of Migrant Population in North Bengal by District

District	Number of Migrants from East Bengal
1. Darjeeling	48,000
2. Jalpaiguri	2,49,000
3. Cooch Behar	4,42,000
4. West Dinajpur	2,92,500
5. Malda	1,27,500
Total in North Bengal	1,159,000

Source: Census of India 1971

In the colonial period, Rajbanshis were in majority in the area. This helped in strengthening their power in democratic politics. During the 1951 – 1981, in spite of the steady decline in their proportion of the total population, they remained dominant group in North Bengal. In 1951, out of total 3, 689, 109 persons of North Bengal, Rajbanshis constituted 14.32 percent (total 5, 28, 456

<sup>27</sup> Das, Naren (2007), in Barma, Sukhbilas (ed.), Socio-Political Movements in North Bengal: A Sub-Himalayan Tract, New Delhi: Global Vision, p 138

persons). In 1981, although the ratio of Rajbanshis to the total population increased from 14.32 percent to 18.46 percent, their proportion to total Scheduled Caste population was decreased from 67 percent in 1951 to 62 percent. From 1951 – 1981, the largest concentration of Rajbanshis found in two districts of North Bengal, i. e. Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. In 1981, these two districts share 70.45 percent of the total Rajbanshi population of North Bengal. About 21 percent of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal were the inhabitants of West Dinajpur district. In the remaining two districts, viz. Malda and Darjeeling, the corresponding share was 4 - 5 percent. In spite of the lesser increase of the number of the Rajbanshis, the colossal increase of the total population the North Bengal clearly proves the overflow of migration. This ushers marginality of the Rajbanshis, and ultimately paves way for collective mobilization (See Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of Rajbangshi (R) Population in North Bengal

Area	1951				1981			
	Total Population	Total Rajbangshis (R)	% of the R to the Total Population	% of the R to the Total R Population	Total Population	Total Rajbangshis	% of the R to the Total Population	% of the R to the Total R Population
1. Cooch Behar	671158	252069	40.15	47.70	1771643	714221	40.31	40.96
2. Jalpaiguri	914538	172710	25.71	2.68	2214871	514177	23.21	29.49
3. West Dinajpur	720573	67489	9.37	12.78	2404947	369015	15.34	21.16
4. Malda	937580	20294	2.16	3.84	201871	83462	4.10	4.79
5. Darjeeling	445260	15894	3.57	3.00	1024269	62770	6.12	3.60
North Bengal	3689109	528456	14.32	100.00	9447601	1743645	18.46	100.00

Source: Mukhopadhyay, Rajatubhra (1997), The Rajbangshis of North Bengal: A Demographic Profile, 1951-81, North Bengal University Review (Humanities and Social Sciences), p. 26

The greatest threat of migration on the Rajbanshis is land alienation. Since the Rajbanshis were early settler in the region, it is this community that actually

owned and tilled the land. A good number of them were jotedars (landowners) or some other form of sub tenants, and the remaining were adhiars. Studies show that till the end of the nineteenth century, Rajbanshi families controlled about 53 percent of jotes (land), and thereby remained a powerful force among the rural elites. But inability of proper understanding of the Izaradari system in British rule and due to their failure to pay revenue, many medium and small jotedars lost their jotes to the state after 1932. In 1932, Regency Council identified 5000 to 6000 jotes of Cooch Behar in the list of revenue defaulters, and later declared their land as khas land (ownership vested in the government). This led to the pauperization of many old jotedars. In post-independence period, due to population influx, the pressure on land increased. In the absence of 'alternative' avenues of work, the immigrants had swollen the ranks of share croppers. Gradually, land passed from the Rajbanshis into the hands of merchants and moneylenders like the Marwaris, up-countrymen, Kabulis and many middle-class Bengali migrants. According to one source, land was acquired cheap, at the rate of Rs. 80 or Rs. 100 a bigha (a unit of land). This is one of the major sources of resentment among the landed Rajbanshis. But, successive governments of West Bengal paid more attention to the settlement of the refugees rather to the question of land alienation of Rajbanshis. Implementation of Ceiling Act rigorously, growth of the urban centers and projects like the Teesta Barrage (which is still under construction) had left a large chunk of the Rajbanshis landless and transformed them from land owning peasants to wage labour proletariats.

Along with land alienation, Rajbanshis faced cultural hegemony of Bengalis. Most importantly, indigenous language of Rajbanshis, Kamtapuri got neglected with the gradual Bengalisation of the area. So, in every manifesto of Rajbanshi groups, we find demand for recognition of their language. In fact, language is not only an ingredient of cultural identity, but also a gate pass in the commercial career. As Bengali is the official language of West Bengal, it is compulsory in educational and governmental institutions. So, the mother tongue of Rajbanshis, Kamtapuri got neglected even in the land of its people. The West Bengal Government and the majority of the Bengali linguistics are not even ready to accept this language as a separate language. But, Kamtapuri is not definitely a dialect of Bengali; rather, it historically preceded the Bengali language. Kamtapuri is a dialect of Kamrup and Kamata kingdom. It was referred in different ancient literatures in different names - like Rajbanshi, Kamrupi, Kamtabihari and Kamtapuri. We can find its reference in the 'Linguistic Survey of India' (1967: 153), "When we cross the river (Brahmaputra) coming from Dacca, we meet a well marked form of speech in Rangpur and the districts to its north and east. It is called Rajbanshi, and while undoubtedly belonging to the eastern branch has still points of difference which lead us to class it as a separate dialect." We can found different kinds of literature on Kamtapuri language - like

‘Kamteswar Kulkarika’, written by Rup Narayan Shrutidhar; ‘Uttor Banglar Lok Sahitya O Bhasa’, written by Dharmanarayan Sarkar; and ‘Kamta Jana Jiban Katha’, written by Arun Maitra. As a distinct language, Kamtapuri developed on independent line with own alphabets and grammar. But, in spite of that it is always neglected as a separate language. So, for its preservation and popularization, one of the most important demands of the Rajbanshi activists is the recognition of Kamtapuri language as a medium at educational and governmental institutions and inclusion of this language in the Eighth Schedule of Indian Constitution.

The socio-economic and cultural marginalization of the Rajbanshis aggravates with the relative deprivation of their region, North Bengal. Although there we can see extreme variation in terms of economic as well as human development, everybody - including existing government - acknowledge basic backwardness of North Bengal.<sup>28</sup> In the first Human Development Report, it was clearly written that - a major aspect of lack of development of this area is inadequate infrastructure development – which includes transport, communications, energy, and buildings for health and educational institutions.<sup>29</sup>

The marginalization and pauperization of the indigenous Rajbanshis coupled with the indifferent attitude of the State Government in over-all development of their area had phoenix-rise of Uttar Khand movement. According to some sources, on 31st May 1969, a group of educated youth members of the then Kshatriya Samiti proposed first to build Uttar Khand Dal to deal with the overall development of North Bengal.<sup>30</sup> So, on 5th July 1969, the successors of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti – viz. Panchanan Mallick, Harimohan Barman, Kalidranath Barman, Wazuddin Ahmed, Soma Oraon, Sitanath Roy and Jogendranath Bhattacharya - formed this Dal (Party) to convince the government in taking proper steps for the socio-economic and infrastructural development of North Bengal and maintenance of the linguistic and cultural solidarity of the Scheduled Caste and Tribes (The Charter of Demands of the Uttar Khand Dal: 1969). To pursue their demands in a democratic way, Uttar Khand Dal contested elections in different legislative seats of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. But, in spite of assiduous efforts, they got defeated in electoral politics mainly due to lack of funds and steady dwindling in number.

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<sup>28</sup> Singh Roy, Debal K.(2004), Peasant Movements in Post Colonial India: Dynamics of Mobilization and Identity, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p 227

<sup>29</sup> Human Development Report, Development and Planning Department, Government of West Bengal 2004, p 198

<sup>30</sup> Ray, Haripada (2007) in Barma, Sukhbilas (ed.) Socio-Political Movements in North Bengal: A Sub-Himalayan Tract, New Delhi: Global Vision, p 112

Finding no relief for the grievances of the people of the North Bengal given by Kolkata-based state leadership, the Uttar Khand Dal ultimately gave a general call on 22nd June 1980 for a separate state, Kamtapur, comprising five districts of West Bengal – viz. Malda, Dakshin Dinajpur, Uttar Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar. This time their demands aimed at socio-economic upliftment and cultural solidarity of the ‘sons of the soil’ (The Charter of Demands of the Uttar Khand Dal: 1989).

But state government termed all burgeoning demands for separate statehood as ‘secessionist’ activity and took repressive measures instead of dialogue or development. While commenting on the repressive attitude of the state government, Atul Roy (President of Kamtapur Progressive Party) remarked –

‘Atrocity is the weapon of Left Front... CPI (M) opposed most of the mobilizations organized by KPP... Even their placards, posters, microphones etc. are forcefully snatched away by the police and CPI (M) workers... The police had launched a terror campaign against the Kamtapuris and more than two thousands of KPP supporters had faced police harassment since 1996... The police were wrongly identifying them as terrorists... The KPP workers and even innocent Rajbanshis were being humiliated and tortured by the police... The armed forces had shot dead many of its leaders in fake encounters ... the state government would be committing a mistake if it would try to tackle the movement as law and order problem... Their coercive measures cannot stop the movement....’ (Excerpt of an interview with the author).

But according to Kamtapuris, ‘Kamtapur’, with an area of 8, 384 square kilometers would be much greater than many Union Territories of India from the point of view of area, population and natural resources. In justification of their movement, they exemplified the creation of several states – like Maharashtra, Gujrat, Nagaland, Haryana, Meghalaya and Andhra Pradesh – according to language and culture. Moreover, demand of a new state in a democratic way is legal and legitimate as a new state can be created constitutionally under Article 3 of the Indian Constitution.

But, never Rajbanshi candidates of Rajbanshi-led groups succeed to get victory in assembly or parliamentary elections. That’s why they seldom comes in the news headlines of the mainstream media or succeed to pressurize the democratic government. Internal cleavages amongst Rajbanshis also weakened their movement. For example, on 21st Oct 1986, Uttar Khand Dal renamed as Kamtapur Gana Parishad under the leadership of Panchanan Mallick. Again on 7th January 1996, two members of Kamtapur Gana Parishad, Atul Roy and Nikhil Roy, formed Kamtapur People’s Party ‘to agitate peacefully in

democratic way for the creation of the Kamtapur state'.<sup>31</sup> Again in 2003 Kamtapur People's Party got bifurcate by Atul Roy to form another party, Kamtapur Progressive Party. Many Frontal organizations formed - like All Kamtapur Students Union (formed in August 1994), Kamtapur Vasha Sahitya Parishad (formed in 1997) and Kamtapur Women's Rights Forum (formed in 1998). Armed group, Kamtapur Liberation Organisation was set up in 1993.<sup>32</sup> On 9th September 1998, Greater Cooch Behar People's Association (GCPA) formed and, in 26th December 2000, it spearheaded demand of a separate state, Greater Cooch Behar, comprising areas of preset 'Cooch Behar' along with the parts of South and North Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Assam (As shown in the Map of Greater Cooch Behar at their party spokesman, Taroyal).

## 5. Conclusion

Thus politicization of caste ended with politics for separatism. Intention of social upliftment turned into economic and cultural claims. Economic upliftment and cultural solidarity prevails in the minds of the party leaders of the Rajbanshi communities and the caste question itself got marginalized. However, we can call it a social movement as it had three distinct features – collective mobilization, ideology, and orientation to change. It is difficult to ascertain how far it appealed to the people whom they sought to mobilize, and how successful the movement was, but the defeat of different Rajbanshi-led party candidates in the democratic elections by a great margin indicates that the movement failed to evoke a strong response from the so-called 'sons of the soil' in the region. Language and culture did not appeal to all the member of the Rajbanshi communities. It is now known that in their prime, the activities of the movement were fluid, and were restricted to mobilization through rallies and a large number of group meetings in villages and towns of North Bengal.

[ This article is a revised version of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter (Origin & Development of the Movements of the Rajbangshis) of my D. Phil. thesis (Politics of Separatism in North Bengal : A Fight for Justice), written under supervision of Prof. Mohd. Aslam, Department of Political Science, Allahabad University.]

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# **Development induced displacement and rehabilitation with reference to three states – Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal**

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*“If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country.”*

*--Jawaharlal Nehru*

## **Abstract**

*The essay contends that the economic liberalization in India is virtually depriving the tribal and other agricultural dependent people of their traditional means of livelihood by promoting all sorts of ‘so called’ developmental projects. Such development serves the interests of the elites while it impoverishes the tribal and poor people who are dependent on the life sustaining resources of the ecosystems in which they live. The very nature of the present development paradigm does not provide for the absorption of these poor people by either developing their skills or by providing them with technical education. In light of the above statement, to understand the problem of development-induced displacement and rehabilitation in India due to several developmental projects, a study of three states has been made.*

**Key words:** development, displacement, resettlement, rehabilitation, compensation.

## **1. Introduction**

Change is an inherent characteristic of any development process. Every change involves friction, a friction of ideas, values and sentiments. Since independence, a large number of people in India have been displaced by several development projects such as irrigation dams, heavy and large scale industries, power plants etc. Displacement and rehabilitation have drawn the attention of people all over India in recent times. This is due to the concern shown by the environmental activists, academicians, the social concern of the organizations which aid the projects, and finally by the government. This is a recurring problem all over the world and it is more so with the developing countries like India. This is because of rapid expansion of industries after independence to meet the socio-economic requirements of the huge population of a country like ours. Every year, many heavy industries, irrigation dams and plants are established. Every developmental activity involves displacement of people.

Consequently, the shifting of population from their original place to other places is bound to happen.

Land is one of the prominent features, and alteration of any dimension in this regard affects people socially, economically and culturally, to a high degree. It is evident that most of the land oustees are tribal and rural people and most among them belong to SCs, STs, and BCs. The problem of land acquisition and those of the people shifted seem to be similar, but they vary according to various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. In India, informal estimates of involuntary resettlement are estimated to be around 50 million people over the last five decades, and three-fourths of those displaced still face an uncertain future. There is evidence of development-induced displacement already from the era of the Gupta's from the 3rd to the 6th century A.D. It seems to have continued to some extent in the Mughal Age and picked up momentum under the British. The post-independence measures have resulted in much more displacement than in the colonial times with the difference that now it is in the name of national development (Satyanarayana, 1999).

## **2.1 Displacement: Emerging Issues and Debates**

While discussing the concept of displacement we can note the following things which are stated as under:

- Displacement is seen as the result of a model of development that enforces certain technical and economic choices without giving any serious consideration to those options that would involve the least social and environmental costs.
- Most displacement has been involuntary. There has been very little meaningful participation of affected people in the planning and implementation of the dam project, including the resettlement and rehabilitation aspects.
- There have been instances of the submergence of land and other property, and of displacement without prior and sufficient warning. The displacement literature bears testimony to traumatic forced and delayed relocation, and to the denial of development opportunity for years and often decades due to a long and uncoordinated displacement and resettlement process.
- The numbers of both directly and indirectly affected people have frequently been underestimated, and there has been an inadequate understanding of the exact nature and extent of the negative effects involved. The State and other project proponents, largely viewing displacement from the standpoint of its causes, consistently maintain that displacement is

justified in the larger national interest. It is argued that while some displacement may be inevitable in large development projects, the long term good these projects will bring merits the sacrifice of a few in favour of the larger good (Bartolome et. al, 2000).

The notion of displacement as 'sacrifice' has influenced thinking on displacement considerably. It has stripped displacement of its political content, i.e., the fact that displacement involves the loss of people's rights to land and resources. This has also led to a perception of resettlement and rehabilitation as a "reward" for the sacrifice rather than as a basic right or entitlement.

The meaning of displacement has come to be more or less taken for granted, particularly in most academic literature. It is very important to understand that displacement is a multidimensional phenomenon of which physical relocation is only one of the most significant outcomes. The question of displacement is very often reduced to one of effective relocation. At best the displaced are viewed as a group of people who are in need of rehabilitation, not empowerment, for there is no recognition of their disenfranchisement.

The displaced people's movement have challenged this view of displacement with physical relocation at its centre and instead has as its core the historical experience of millions of displaced people. This understanding of displacement highlights (i) the alienation of the individual and community legal and customary rights and dislocation of the social and economic organization, and (ii) the politics of legal and policy instruments that sanctions such disenfranchisement. The focus is thus on the experience as well as the structures of displacement. In this context displacement refers not only to those who are forced to physically relocate in order to make way for the project and its related aspects but also includes those who are displaced from their resource base and livelihoods. When people are induced to move—that is, when they are displaced—even if it is by development schemes, then what is occurring can be termed forced migration, using Nicholas Van Hear's definition of forced migration in reference to *"individuals or communities compelled, obliged, or induced to move when otherwise they would choose to stay put; the force involved may be direct, overt and focused, or indirect, covert, and diffuse."* (Robinson, 2003: 5)

The World Bank Environment Department defined development-induced displacement as *"the forcing of communities and individuals out of their homes, often also their homelands, for the purposes of economic development."* (Dhru, 2010: 12)

Several issues have emerged out of the conflicts and policy deliberations regarding development induced displacement, most important of which among others have been discussed as under:

### **2.2.1 Issues Related to Displacement: Compensation**

When people get displaced due to developmental projects the question of compensation of the displaced people forms an integral part of it, but one's entitlement to compensation has varied from place to place and from project to project. Therefore, in the following lines an attempt has been made to understand the same.

- Compensation has largely been understood to refer to specific measures intended to make good the losses suffered by people displaced and/or negatively affected by the dam.
- The losses incurred by people affected by the creation of infrastructure such as project offices and township, canals, transmission lines, and other activities are not usually properly accounted for and so these losses have not been adequately compensated.
- Compensation is most often awarded only to persons in possession of undisputed legal title. Tenants, sharecroppers, wage-labourers, artisans and encroachers are rarely considered eligible for compensation, whereas they are paradoxically the most vulnerable and in need of support.
- Community assets and common resources like grazing grounds and forests, which again may be critical for the livelihood of the poorest, are not compensated for under the acquisition process.
- The limited provisions in law to challenge the rate of compensation are, in practice, inaccessible to the negatively affected persons, because they may not be aware of the legal nuances or else cannot afford the expensive remedy of courts.
- Many studies have recorded how cash compensation is depleted by negatively affected persons in short periods, by fraud, for repayment of old debts, in liquor and conspicuous consumption. A lifetime of livelihood security or shelter is squandered in months, sometimes weeks, condemning displaced persons to assured and irrevocable destitution. Compensation has primarily addressed the loss of assets and property and not rights. The basis of compensation has thus been (i) legal ownership and (ii) individual claim. The general practice is to pay compensation for lost fixed assets like agricultural land at the prevailing market rate, calculated as an average of registered sales prices of land of similar quality and location in the recent past. It is value in exchange rather than value of replacement that is the basis of compensation (Bartolome et. al, 2000).

### **2.2.2 Resettlement and Rehabilitation**

Resettlement programmes have predominantly focused on the process of physical relocation rather than on the economic and social development of the displaced and other negatively affected people. This has severely eroded the development effectiveness of resettlement and rehabilitation programmes and heightened the impoverishment risk of the resettlers. According to Cernea (1998) risks to adversely affected people are not a component of conventional project analysis. The key economic risks to affected people are from the loss of livelihood and income sources such as arable land, CPRs such as forests, grazing land, and surface water, fisheries, etc and changed access to and control of productive resources. The loss of economic power with the breakdown of complex livelihood systems results in temporary or permanent, often irreversible, decline in living standards leading to marginalization. Higher risks and uncertainties are introduced when diversified livelihood sources are lost. Loss of livelihood and disruption of agricultural activity can adversely affect household food security, leading to under-nourishment. Higher incidence of diseases associated with deteriorating water quality can result in increased morbidity and mortality. As Cernea notes (1998), forced displacement tears apart the existing social fabric, leading to socio-cultural disarticulation.

- Most projects have long planning horizons and the actual physical relocation comes a long time after the initial notifications. The interim period is one full of uncertainties and enormous psycho-social anxieties for the to-be-relocated communities.
- The costs of the resettlement programme have invariably been underestimated and under-financed.
- Institutional weaknesses, marked by confusions between various departments and the lack of capacity as well as continuity, have been major problems in ensuring effective resettlement.
- In the absence of policy and legal instruments and an effective mechanism to monitor compliance, even well-structured institutions with trained staff have failed in consistent implementation of effective resettlement.
- Generally, participation of the affected people has been superficial or treated as unimportant by those responsible for the project.
- Resettlement sites are invariably selected without reference to availability of livelihood opportunities, or the preferences of displaced persons themselves.

- The question of livelihoods is a major issue in resettlement and rehabilitation policy. There is reluctance on the part of governments and lending agencies to adopt and make operational policies requiring that the loss of agricultural land be compensated with alternative land, especially in the face of increasing pressure on land and the limited availability of arable land as well as its high price.
- Forced relocation usually results in people being transplanted from a social ecology in which they were primary actors to one in which they are aliens; they are not only very vulnerable but also end up in most cases as an underclass in their new socio-cultural milieu.
- Resettlement sites have been under-prepared in terms of basic amenities and essential infrastructure such as health, schooling, and credit.
- Generally, displacement as a result of acquisition is legally sanctioned while, with few exceptions, there is no legal framework that governs the process of displacement itself.
- Both in the case of national laws and international agency policies, there has been a wide gap between the laws and policies and their actual implementation. Cases include the Sardar Sarovar Project and the Three Gorges Project in China (Bartolome et. al, 2000).

In many cases the focus of resettlement programmes is simply to get people to move “out of the way” to the resettlement sites as quickly and smoothly as possible. A number of submissions and cases in the WCD’s review highlighted the exercise of intimidation, violence, and even murder to compel communities to move. Once people are relocated/shifted out the resettlement programme usually fizzles out/loses momentum, with the displaced people now at their most vulnerable. The resettled people are most vulnerable to be forgotten once the physical relocation is complete, referred to as “developer’s fatigue” (Argentina Report, 1999).

Resettlement of displaced people is thus a process that is acknowledged as entailing several risks. Cernea identifies the risks as landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalisation, increased morbidity and mortality, food insecurity, loss of access to common property and services, and social disarticulation. These risks render resettlement inherently problematic, and indeed impoverishment and disempowerment have been the rule than the exception with respect to resettled people around the world. Simply restoring the status quo ante in terms of material assets will thus leave people worse off than before. Therefore the main objective of a resettlement programme must be to improve the standard of living and not just restoration of pre-relocation standards of living.

### **2.2.3 Rehabilitation and Development**

Rehabilitation can be envisioned as a process that would reverse the risks of resettlement. M.M. Cernea suggests a risk and reconstruction model of rehabilitation that would be marked by a series of transitions from:

- Landlessness to land-based resettlement;
- Joblessness to re-employment;
- Food insecurity to safe nutrition;
- Homelessness to house reconstruction;
- Increased morbidity and mortality to improved health and well being, and
- Social disarticulation and deprivation of common property resources to community reconstruction and social inclusion (Cernea, 1998).

“Rehabilitation is only possible where development takes place. Thus resettlement must be planned as an integral part of the comprehensive development project”. In this sense rehabilitation is really an outcome of resettlement that is conceived not as physical relocation or mere restoration of incomes but as development. This brings us to the question of development in the context of resettlement and rehabilitation.

One useful way of understanding development in the context of resettlement and rehabilitation of negatively affected people is, “in terms of the real freedoms that the citizens enjoy, to pursue the objectives they have reason to value, and in this sense the expansion of human capability can be, broadly, seen as the central feature of the process of development” (Dreze, & Sen, 1996: 10).

A resettlement programme in order to qualify as development must therefore centre around: (i) enhancement of capabilities; and (ii) expansion of social opportunities by addressing the social and personal constraints that restrict peoples choices. This would mean that resettlement with development entails questions of resources and rights that would affect the quality of life of the people. “The success of development programmes cannot be judged merely in terms of their effects on incomes and outputs, and must, at a basic level, focus on the lives that people can lead” (ibid: 13). This would mean (i) tangible benefits like lower morbidity and mortality, an increasing level of education, increasing incomes through opportunities for employment and livelihood; and (ii) empowering the displaced people through building capacities by their participation in the entire decision-making process of the development project and resettlement.

One overarching issue is the need to move from a context where “forced evictions” or ‘involuntary resettlement’ is assumed to be the norm, to one where displacement becomes voluntary and takes place on the basis of negotiated agreements between developers and affected people.

### **3.1 Development-Induced Displacement in India: Land Acquisition Act of India**

Highlighting the lacunae of Land Acquisition Act of India, Fernandes says: “Land oustees do not own individual land but depend upon Common Property Resources (CPRs) for their survival. The legal system, on the contrary, recognizes only individual property. The Land Acquisition Act, 1984 makes provision only for landowners. Its criteria for compensation are market value. These criteria are irrelevant to communities depending on CPRs and other whose livelihood depends on services rendered to the village as a community....A study of the Land Acquisition Act and the rest of the existing legislation show that the present legal system favours the state and the industrialists, and ignores the livelihood of the people who depend on the CPRs. Hence, the DPs of these regions are unable to begin a new life from the little compensation they get for it. ” (Verma, 2004: 41)

Mridul Singh et al says: “In the absence of a Central Act on Displacement and Rehabilitation, the whole process of dealing with the issue of displacement remains ad-hoc and piecemeal, even today.” (ibid: 40) Debashish Mukherji adds to this: “The Land Acquisition Act, 1894 is the single piece of legislation that governs the takeover of land for projects. Activists opined that this law remains heavily biased in favour of the state, allowing it to acquire land anywhere and everywhere, ‘in the public interest’ providing only cash compensation. The compensation amounts to just the white money! It is impossible to purchase alternative land elsewhere with the meager sum they get. With Nehru’s emphasis on factories and dams, those who question the need to acquire land, of the extent of compensation given, were made to feel that they were traitors. The attitude of policy makers is that since the project is in the interest of the nation, those affected should be willing to sacrifice. Since the law provides for only cash compensation, the project affected people should be grateful for whatever they are given in addition!” (ibid: 45)

However, recently, a new Land Acquisition law entitled The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill was introduced in 2012 and passed in 2013, thereby replacing the existing Land Acquisition Act 1894.

The proposed land acquisition law defines the public purpose so as to prevent arbitrary acquisition of land. Social impact assessment and establishment of public purpose has been

made mandatory through participatory processes. Banning of excessive land being acquired for public purpose. The compensation for the acquired lands is proposed to be four times the prevailing market rate in rural areas and two times in urban areas. However, the model of development followed by India, particularly after 1991 has led to several debates among the scholars. One of the important debates following the policy in the recent time is one between the celebrated scholars like Amartya Sen and Jagdish Bhagwati. The insipid have called it the 'redistribution vs growth' debate or worse, a debate between the "economic ideologies" of Rahul Gandhi and Narendra Modi. Sen is accused of favouring "redistribution" over growth, of being anti-market, and thus endorsing a food security bill that is statist, fiscally responsible and apparently does little to meet its objective. Bhagwati, on the other hand, is condemned (or celebrated?) for falling for the Modi- mania, and being neo-liberal 'market fundamentalist' (for details see, Amartya Sen vs Jagdish Bhagwati debate).

In order to understand the problem of development-induced displacement in India and related resettlement and rehabilitation policy, I have discussed three case studies which will not only give us insight to the meaning and nature of development, displacement and rehabilitation but also give us an idea for the need of better resettlement and rehabilitation policies and acts safeguarding the interest of the people displaced.

### **3.2.1 Jharkhand**

The tribal states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh on the Chotanagpur plateau region have been affected by the globalized market forces that threaten the livelihood of the tribal peoples and poor peasants who are dependent on subsistence agriculture. On 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2001, the tribal people of Topkara in Jharkhand demanded the scrapping of the Koel Karo hydro-electric project. The project would have displaced thousands of tribal families. The police resorted to an unprovoked shooting, killing 10 tribals and injuring many more. Such police brutality against minorities in the name of which the new state had been formed, sparked off anger not only in Jharkhand, but all over the country (Bhatia, 2001).

The tribal people displaced by the coal mines of Jharkhand have been subjected to livelihood insecurity notwithstanding adequate cash compensation and provision of one job to each of the displaced family members in the mines operated by Coal India Limited (CIL) in the region. The sleepy hamlets around Punkhri-Barwadih in Jharkhand have witnessed violent resistance to the prospect of losing their fertile farmland to an industrial venture. The NTPC, the largest power utility in the country, had a joint venture agreement with CIL, one of the world's largest coals producing company. Apart from the loss of over 10,000 acres of well-

irrigated farmland and dense forests, NTPC's planned opencast coalmine will obliterate, or at the very least damage irreparably, Punkhri-Barwadih's megaliths. Punkhri-Barwadih project at a total cost of Rs 40,000 million was scheduled to commence operations in December 2007. The project would displace some 14,000 families. In November 2006, a mob of thousands of farmers tore down NTPC's project-site office at Barkagaon. The villagers in the remote hamlets reorganized themselves for a stronger assault before the process of land acquisition by the government was stopped. In order to show their resentments against the land acquisition by the project the affected villagers had formed the anti-land acquisition organization Karanpura Bachao Sangharsh Samiti (KBSS) and the Karanpura Bisthapita Morcha (KBM).

The NTPC faced with coal shortages for its power plants expected to mine 15 million tons of coal a year from opencast mine. The government had planned to acquire land under Coal Bearing Area Acquisition and Development Act of 1957, which is exclusive and binding for India's coal-bearing areas. The company had planned to acquire a total of nearly 40,000 acres for the three projects together. In the wake of acquisition, those set to lose their homes, farmlands and forest-based livelihoods have been largely small farmers in the area. Rivulets crisscrossing the agricultural landscape around the villages supply enough water to produce three crops every year, while the forests – consisting mostly of Saal (*Shorea Robusta*) trees – provide ample sustenance with their leaves and myriad fruits. In such a rich ecological base, it is natural and obvious that people would strongly resent this public sector company depriving many of them of the source of their sustainable living and their dispossession from the land. The protesters pledge to die fighting for their land then give it away to NTPC or any other company while alive. Much of the land which is to be acquired falls under the Gair Mazurwa (GM) category. This means that the land is owned by the government but has either been officially granted to some villagers to cultivate or has been in their illegal possession for many decades and is being used for residential or agricultural purposes. In this situation, very few among the tribal people to be displaced would be compensated adequately by the NTPC, although all those affected have been enjoying usufruct rights to the land since time immemorial (Das, 2007).

The many protests and demonstrations of the tribals in Jharkhand reveal that they are completely disillusioned and apprehensive of the present development efforts of the state that encourages growth of mines and industries in the name of developing the income earning capability of the poor tribals and the revenue generating capacity of the government.

### **3.2.2 Chhattisgarh**

Similarly, the tribal people of Chhattisgarh are losing their sustainable means of subsistence due to the opening of mines and setting up of many mineral-based industries in the state. Chhattisgarh has 28 varieties of major minerals. The state has one-fifth of the country's iron ore deposits and one of the best quality iron ore deposits in the world in the Bailadila mines. The state also has the only deposit of tin ore in the country. Like Jharkhand and Orissa, it has huge deposits of coals, bauxite, limestone, dolomite and corundum. Since the government reforms stimulating economic liberalization have been enacted, all doors for private investment are open in Chhattisgarh. The State's Mineral Policy 2001 has facilitated large-scale private sector investment in the mining sector and this has had its fall out effects on the tribal people and other subsistence farmers. In the coal bearing zones of Sarguja, Raigarh and Bilaspur districts, more than 72,000 acres of land have been granted on lease to South Eastern Coal Fields Limited (SECL), a subsidiary of CIL. Similarly, in Bastar and Durg districts more than 20,000 acres of land have been occupied for mining of iron ores in Bailadila and Dalli Rajhara areas of these two districts respectively. Apart from these areas, the state has reportedly given on lease 18,652 acres for various mining purposes and 26,410 acres for the setting up of various industries such as cement, steel, Ferro-alloys, re-rolling mills and rice mills. This means all total 137,062 acres of land have been leased by the state for mining and mineral-based industries (George, 2004). This land could have sustained at least 34,265 families or around 180,000 people with an average distribution of four acres of land per family.

However, in this state there is a low level of literacy among the tribals and the Scheduled Castes categories of the population and the industries and mines with high level of mechanization require technically skilled workers for their operations. As a result, very few among the land-affected families will benefit from such development. The employment level of the nearby giant public sector steel plant at Bhilai in recent years has declined from around 64,000 in 1980s to around 33,000 in 2007 due to increasing automation and mechanization. In a similar manner, the employment opportunities provided by the mines and mineral-based industries in the past have declined considerably. In this context, people displaced by the mines and mineral-based industries are likely to have a very difficult time sustaining themselves in the future, unless they are properly rehabilitated and skilled to earn their living in the non-agriculture based manufacturing and service sector economy of the region.

In August 2008, Mr. Pravin Patel, Director of the Tribal Welfare Society in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh reported that the displaced tribals of HINDALCO's bauxite mines at Samri in

Sarguja district of Chhattisgarh were leading a very pathetic life after losing their land and forest. The livelihoods of thousands of tribals were destroyed by the state to satisfy the greed of private corporations. According to him, HINDALCO by virtue of an agreement signed with the state of Madhya Pradesh in May 1997 had obtained mining leases for bauxite mining in Samri of Sarguja district. Although the entire Sarguja district is a Schedule Five area that supposedly protects the interests of tribal population, not a single village council meeting had been held to consult tribals and other villagers about the opening of mines, the selling of their lands or the granting of mining leases. The land of over 200 farmers most of whom are tribals have been coercively purchased or acquired since 1997. The process is continuing each year with more and more land going for bauxite mining to HINDALCO.

According to Patel over 1,400 workers are presently working in the mines of HINDALCO in Samri. But none has any employment security. They do not get any medical or sick leave, and no paid holidays. Also, they are not provided with any safety gear and equipment in the work place. Those who are working as loaders for the transport contractors have a very miserable life. The average monthly income of such workers is around Rs 500 to Rs 600 only. The rates fixed for loading a truck with nine metric tons of bauxite ore is Rs 200 only and that is shared by a group of six to eight persons. Much of the time, they sit idle and only get half a day's work. When their services are not required, they return home empty handed, as their work is paid on a piece rate basis. So far, the company has done very little for the welfare of the project-affected people. Rather it has thrown the tribals into a state of livelihood uncertainty. And many members of the most vulnerable section of population like widows and old people are living in desperate conditions after losing their land to HINDALCO.

### **3.2.3 West Bengal**

The West Bengal Government offered a highly attractive compensation package to the Singur farmers including both registered and unregistered tenants for 997 acres of farm land to be used by a plant by Tata Motors to manufacture low priced motor cars at Rs 100 thousand. Added to that, the Tata Company promised to offer each displaced family a regular salaried job in its proposed automobile plant. Nonetheless, the agriculture dependent people were apprehensive of the livelihood security of their offspring and future generation in the wake of loss of agricultural land. The fight for a better compensation package for all including the unregistered tenants and other project-affected people went on for quite some time till September 2008. The protesters with the active political support of the Trinamool Congress

Party and its leader Mamata Banerjee finally succeeded in stalling the project mid-way, and the House of Tata finally decided to shift the project from West Bengal to Gujarat.

Similarly, in January 2007, when efforts were made by the Government of West Bengal to acquire 10,000 acres of land for the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Nadigram, violence erupted resulting in the death of four protestors and severe injury of more than 20 persons. The violent clashes in Nandigram reportedly involved members of the local Krishjami Raksha Committee (Save Farmland Committee) and persons linked to the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), which lead West Bengal's Left Front government that was seeking to industrialize the state for rapid economic growth. This was followed by the ransacking of the CPI-M Party Offices at several places and incidents of violence and arson at the residence of several local leaders of the CPI-M. The agitators also damaged many bridges and culverts and dug up several roads as a result of which the movement of vehicles became impossible. This was followed in March 2007, with violent clashes between the armed people of the Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee and others owing allegiance to the ruling Left Front. These clashes resulted in the death of 14 persons shot by the police. All efforts by the police to control the unruly protestors by lobbying tear gas shells and rubber bullets could not bring the situation under control. Here, the state had to yield to the will of the agriculture dependent people by closing the SEZ project (Rediff News, 2007).

#### **4. Conclusion**

After looking at all the cases we can say that, development as a concept should encompass, the progressive improvement in the quality of human life in terms of clothing, food and shelter and the conditions for a healthy living with increasing longevity of life and happiness. However, the Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG) model of development in India reveals the symptoms and effects of widening inequalities between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' and the increasing deprivation of the poor and marginalized sectors of the population. There are very little trickle down effects of the economic growth associated with this model of development as evident in case of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal. Despite India's higher economic growth in recent years, poverty continues to persist almost among one-third of the country's population (Bhaduri, 2005).

In this scenario of development, if mines and mineral-based industries are allowed to proliferate in the mineral rich tribal regions of the country like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal and continue to displace the indigenous people who live in these regions in order to enrich the affluent elites, the inequalities and poverty in these regions will be aggravated

further. The industries and mines using high technology for higher productivity and profits do not provide opportunities for adequate living and employment for the land-dependent people as evident in case of the states discussed above thereby displacing them. If land and other natural resources like water and forests that belong to the state or the local communities are acquired for industrial use or lost to development projects like river dams, the people who depend upon such resources become the direct and immediate victims of these projects. Impoverishment arising from such loss of resources cannot be prevented unless those who are affected are adequately compensated with alternative resources to sustain themselves.

In populous countries like India, development based on high technology that minimizes the employment of human labour and puts a strain on natural resources does not serve the interests of the poor and marginalized sectors of the population as evident in case of Chhattisgarh. It is not necessary for a country like India to promote large capital-intensive iron, steel and alumina plants by exploiting its mineral deposits from the tribal regions and thereby turning the poor tribals into wandering unemployed workers in their traditional homeland. The mineral-based industries have been encouraged for facilitating the investments of MNCs and ICHs by the state government in Jharkhand. But they only benefit the privileged sections of society in terms of jobs, access to new gazettes, consumer durables and the like.

For the development of India's poor and half-starved people it is necessary, to develop health care facilities, skill-based education as well as a sustainable food supply to improve their quality of life. These needs can be fulfilled by pursuing a sustainable development model that ensures 'growth with equity' and provides employment for all though there is high pressure of increasing population on the land and that the surplus labour force is disguisedly employed in the primary sector economy with very marginal and low rate of returns. This surplus labour force needs to be employed in highly productive jobs in other sectors of the economy. Unless the skills and knowledge of these people are developed in the non-farm sector economy with improved living standards, their human development cannot be improved. By using intermediate technology that employs a resource for the future generation and at the same time can ensure an improved standard of living for its poor and marginalized people at the same time. There is no need to invest in mega development projects by displacing poor and marginalized people from their lands and homes. Such development only contributes to the consumerist culture of the India's upper and middle class families who aspire to affluent living like their counterparts in western societies. Moreover, in a country like India, an energy intensive development model that warrants massive burning of fossil fuels generates more greenhouse gases and environmental degradation problems which threaten the survival of

such a large heterogeneous population. Therefore, the present development model needs to be recast to make it all inclusive and consensual in order to bridge the development gap between the rich and poor and end the deprivation of the latter. The development projects should be planned and ensure that the developmental projects obtain the legal mandate and support of the people who are affected and that in return for giving up their land and homes they receive priority if not exclusive rights to the benefits emanating from these projects.

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# Identity Movements and Its Impact on Indian Politics

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## Abstract

*The identity movements a derivation of social movement that came to fore very recently, are of a different nature, these movements are mainly collective actions or efforts for demands- the defence of interests and the promotion of rights of certain groups of individuals who feel discriminated against, the search for symbolic recognition by a significant others. Some see these movements as the main source of hope for democratization and development, while others look at them with suspicion and as a destabilizing threat. Focussing on the nature of identity movement this paper is an attempt to highlight impacts that it has on India politics.*

Key Words: Identity, Social Movements, Collective Actions, Recognition, Democratisation

## **1. Introduction:**

The world history over the years have witnessed many social movements that have brought dramaitical changes in the structures of societies. There have been many failed social movements as well. These movements have varied widely in their ideologies, some have been revolutionary in their aims, some advocate for reforms within the existing system, and there are still others that have been varied in their scope as well, for example, many movements are limited to local policies, while others have been international in

their focus<sup>1</sup>. Despite these differences, scholars have spent a great deal of time trying to understand where they come from, who participates in them, how they succeed, and how they fail.

Looking back to the history of social movements, the term gained popularity in European language in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (*Shah, 2002*). To the early scholars collective action was inherently oriented towards change. Some of the earliest works on social movements were attempts to understand why people got caught up in collective action or what conditions were necessary to foment social movement. One of the earliest scholar to the study of social movements processes was Herbert Blumer, who identified four stages of social movements life cycle. The four stages he described were: “*social foment*”, “*popular excitement*”, “*formalisation*”, and “*institutionalisation*” (*De La Porta and Diani, 2006*)<sup>2</sup>.

Defining what, exactly, social movement is can be difficult. It is not a political party, nor it is an interest group, which are stable political entities and have regular access to political power and political elites; nor it is a mass fad or trend, which are unorganised and without goals. Instead they are somewhere in between (*Freeman and Johnson, 1999*). Therefore, social movements can be characterized as those, that are “*involved in a conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; are linked by dense informal networks; [and they] share a distinct collective identity*” (*De La Porta and Diani, 2006*). Social movement thus, can be understood as an organised yet informal social entities engaged in extra-constitutional conflict and is oriented toward certain goals or objective, which may be specific or narrow or more broadly aimed at complete change.

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<sup>1</sup> The movements like environmental conservation, women’s movements, etc., comes under the category of social movements which have international objectives and impact, while movements for the recognition of a particular community, for greater share in the political system, special privileges and rights for particular community, and so on, have a limited objective and impacts and are concerned with local issues.

<sup>2</sup> Since from this early works, the scholars of social movement have been replacing and renaming the four stages but the actual themes have remained unchanged. Today these four stages of social movement are known as, - Emergence, Coalescence, Bureaucratisation, and Decline (Blumer, 1969. Mauss, 1975, Tilly 1978).

According to Paul Wilkinson there are two basic elements which are essential for social movement- a minimum degree of organisation and a commitment to change (*Shah, 2002*). Social movements arise when social conditions create dissatisfaction within the existing arrangement. People join movements for infinite variety of reasons - Idealism, compassion, political consideration, neurotic frustration and so on. There are mainly three contending theories which explain the origin of social movements- Relative Deprivation theory, the Strain theory, and the theory of Revitalisation (*Rao, 1978*).

*“Relative Deprivation”* is a concept developed by Staffer (1949) *“It holds that one ‘feels’ deprived according to the gap between expectations and realisations. The person who wants little and has little, feels less deprived than the one who has much but expects still more”*<sup>3</sup>. A point that is coincident by relative deprivation theorist is that a position of relative deprivation alone will not generate a movement. The structural conditions of relative deprivation provide necessary conditions. Sufficient conditions are provided by the perception of a situation and by the estimate of capabilities by the leaders that they can do something to remedy the situation (*Rao, 1978*). *‘The Strain Theory’* of social movement has been propounded by Neil Smelser (1962). This theory considers structural strains as the underlying factor contributing to collective behaviour. Structural strain may occur at different level such as norms, values, mobility etc. Smelser’s analysis of the genesis of social movement is very much within the structural functional framework. He considers strain as something that endanger the relationship among the parts of a system leading to its malfunctioning (*Smelser, 1962*). It places stress on the feeling of deprivation also. The Relative Deprivation and the Strain Theory give us an impression that social movement necessarily arise out of negative conditions such as ‘deprivation’ and ‘strain’. Wallace who championed the theory of Cultural Revitalisation assert *“that social movement develop out of a deliberate, organised and conscious effort on the part*

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in M.S.A. Rao, “Conceptual Problems in the Study of Social Movements. In Rao (ed.) Social Movements in India. Vol. I. 2000.

*of the members of the society to construct a more satisfying culture for themselves*". This theory suggests that adaptive processes are employed to established equilibrium situation. These movements tend to be double edged sword. On the one side, they express dissatisfaction, dissent and protest against existing conditions, and, on the other, they offer a positive programme of action to remedy the situation (*Rao, 1978*)).

The *identity* movements a derivation of social movement that came to fore very recently are of different nature. These movements are mainly collective actions or efforts for demands- the defence of interests and the promotion of rights of certain groups of individuals who feel discriminated against, the search for symbolic recognition by a significant others. This paper will focus on what should be understood by *identity*, define the characteristics of *identity* movements, and discusses the impacts of *identity* movements on Indian states.

## **2. Defining Identity**

The question of '*identity*' that has been able to capture a major attention among the scholar of social sciences and humanities in recent years cannot be defined in a single definition. In Political Science we find the use of the concept at the centre of debates in major sub-fields. In Comparative Politics, '*identity*' plays a central role in works on nationalism and ethnic conflict (*Horowitz, 1985; Smith, 1991; Deng, 1995; Laitin, 1999*). In International Relations, the idea of "*stateidentity*" is at the heart of constructivist critiques of realism and the analyses of state sovereignty (*Wendt, 1992; Wendt, 1999; Katzenstein, 1996; Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996; Biersteker and Weber, 1996*). In Political Theory, the question of '*identity*' marks numerous arguments on gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and culture in relation to liberalism and its alternatives (*Young, 1990; Connoly, 1991; Kymlicka, 1995; Miller, 1995*). Compared to the works in history and humanities, political scientists lagged behind when it comes to the works on identities. Due to influences ranging from Michel Foucault to the debate on multiculturalism, the historical and cultural construction of identities of all sorts has

lately been a preoccupation for both social historians and students of literature and culture (*Brubaker and Cooper 1999*).

Despite this vastly increased and broad-ranging interest in '*identity*', the concept itself remains something of a stigma. Given the intense interest in *identity* across the broad spectrum of discipline, one might initially expect to find simple and clear statements of what people mean when they use these concepts. The dictionary meaning of the term '*identity*' according to the OED (Oxford English Dictionary), "The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances: the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; personality." However this definition of '*identity*' does not easily capture what it seem to mean when we refer to "national *identity*"<sup>4</sup> or "ethnic *identity*"<sup>5</sup>. This means that the dictionary definition of the term '*identity*' does not only fails to capture the meaning but also can mislead the readers when we talk about *identity* in broader usage of the term in context of group or community *identity*, for example, when we talk about national *identity* we are not talking about nation in all types and context and place. The idea of national *identity* rather entails an idea of temporal and spatial continuity of a nation. It is something about the content of the differences (*Fearon, 1999*). Though I have not done extensive research on the concept of '*identity*', here for understanding purpose I have highlighted few definitions as given by different social scientists, scholars and researchers which certainly overlaps the dictionary meaning or the definition of the term *identity*.

- "*Identity is "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others"* (Hogg and Abrams, 1988).

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<sup>4</sup> National identity stands for a person's identity of being a member of one nation irrespective of other things (caste, creed, religion, ethnicity, etc.)

<sup>5</sup> Ethnic identity is the extent to which one identifies with a particular ethnic group(s). Refers to one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership. The ethnic group tends to be one in which the individual claims heritage (Phinney, 1996). Ethnic identity is separate from one's personal identity as an individual, although the two may reciprocally influence each other.

- *“Identity is used in this book to describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture” (Deng, 1995).*
- *Identity “refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities” (Jenkins, 1996).*
- *“National identity describes that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols- have internalised the symbols of the nation...” (Bloom, 1990).*
- *“Identity is any source of action not explicable from biophysical regularities, and to which observers can attribute meaning” (White, 1992).*
- *“Indeed, identity is objectively defined as location in a certain world and can be subjectively appropriated only along with that world. ...[A] coherent identity incorporates within itself all the various internalised roles and attitudes.” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).*
- *“Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space, or an unresolved question in that space between a number of intersecting discourses...[Until recently, we have incorrectly thought that identity is] a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action...the logic of something like a ‘true self.’....[But] Identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the other to oneself” (Hall, 1989).*
- *“By social identity, I mean the desire for group distinction, dignity, and place within historically specific discourses (or frames of understanding) about the character, structure and boundaries of the polity and the economy” (Hertigel, 1993).*
- *“Yet what identity is conceived not as a boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject?” (Clifford, 1988).*

- *Identities are “relatively stable, role specific understanding and expectations about self” (Wendt 1992).*
- *“The term [identity] (by convention) references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other” (Katzenstein, 1996).*
- *“Identities are.....prescriptive representations of political actors themselves and of their relationship to each other”(Kowert and Legro, 1996).*

The range, complexity, and differences among these various definitions are remarkable. The difference to some extent reflects the multiple lineages that ‘*identity*’ has within the academy. Some of these authors intended to stipulate a definition of ‘*identity*’ appropriate or useful for their specific purpose. Despite of range of differences among above given definitions about the nature of *identity*, it is notable that almost all definitions evokes one common theme that is the sense of ‘recognition’.

*Identity* thus may be understood as the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group. *Identity* may be distinguished from identification; the former is a label, whereas the latter refers to the classifying act itself. *Identity* is thus best construed as being both relational and contextual.

However, the formation of one's *identity* occurs through one's identifications with significant others. These others may be of kind such that one aspires to their characteristics, values and beliefs (a process of idealistic-identification), or destructive when one wishes to dissociate from their characteristics (a process of defensive contra-identification) (*Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003*).

### 3. Identity Movements

The *identity* movement that came in to fore in the last third of the twentieth century are of a different nature, because they express two complementary types of collective demands: (a) the defence of interests of individual who feel discriminated against, and (b) the search for symbolic recognition by a significant other. *Identity* movements have three main and very distinctive objectives. First, they denounce injustice towards minorities. Second, they convey the idea that specific culture must be taken into consideration when public policies are elaborated so that they meet the specific needs of minorities. Third, they demand greater control of their institution- a demand that sometimes goes as far as self-government (*Smelser, 2001*).

T. K. Oommen (2011) in his edited volume-‘ Social Movements I – Issues of Identity’, argue that, none of the founding fathers- Durkheim, Weber, and Marx- put forward any neat and tidy theories of social movements or collective actions. And yet, it is evident to the discerning eye that early explanations of collective actions are ingrained in their analysis of society. Their contribution to the analysis of society and social change today is referred to by scholars of social science and humanities as the main source of collective action theory.

Emile Durkheim lived in a European society characterised by disintegrating social life, discontented individuals, and extensive conflicts. His seminal notions of collective conscience and collective representation undergrid the idea of collective action; without the first collective action cannot be initiated and without the second the change brought about cannot be articulated. Durkheim first postulated a theory of collective action and that of social change in his “*The Division of Labour in Society*” (1883). Later in “*Elementary forms of Religious Life*” (1915), Durkheim analysed the kind of solidarity that produced, ritualised, and approved forms of collective actions. Thus he presents a society strained by a continuous struggle between forces of disintegration (rapid differentiation) and forces of integration (new and renewed commitment to shared

beliefs). From this Durkheim derives three different kinds of collective actions- routine, anomic, and restorative (*Oommen, 2011*). Routine collective action takes place when development of shared beliefs is equal to or greater than the stress imposed by differentiation. When differentiation continuously outstrips the extent of shared belief anomic collective action is the expected manifestation. Restorative collective action mediates between routine and anomic collective actions and attempts to rescue society from anomic collective action into which it has slipped into from routine collective action. Durkheim's postulation prompts us to expect anomic and restorative collective actions to rise as differentiation accelerates. It leads us to anticipate and find segments of populations, which are newly emerging and/or displaced by differentiation engaged in collective actions. It predicts a close association among suicide, crime, violence and non-routine collective actions. It is clear that several theories of collective action, which were popular in the twentieth century, embody some version of the Durkheimian argument (*Oommen, 2011*).

Max Weber portrayed collective action as the outgrowth of commitments to certain systems of belief. Weberian, like Durkheimians, tends to propose different explanations for routine and non-routine collective actions. In the non-routine form shared beliefs of the group have a strong direct impact on the groups collective actions. While action routinizes, two changes occur: organisations crystalize to mediate between the beliefs of actors and group interests play a larger and more direct role in collective action. In Weber's view, group commit themselves to collective definitions of the world and of themselves and the definitions, in turn, incorporate goals, entails standards of behaviour and include justifications of power of authorities. Constituted authorities act on behalf of the groups based on their traditional, rational legal or charismatic roles. Which of these bases that group adopts goes on to affect its organisation and its fate? In Weber's account then, the structure and action of the group as a whole spring largely from the initial commitment to a particular kind of belief system, which has its own logic and force (*Oommen, 2011*). According to Weber, religious and ideological leaders are continuously formulating new definitions of the world and of themselves. Only few of them, however, attract followers. In those cases where it happens, the followers commit themselves to the belief system, the charismatic leader and to the objects and rituals consecrated by those

beliefs and the leaders. If more people find the new definition as meaningful they join the existing group of the followers and it expands. Then the group as a whole faces the problem of routinisation of charisma (*Oommen, 2011*). Weber's discussion of routinisation of charisma fits into his general theory of social change. He postulates that traditional authority creates equilibrium of social life if no disruption occurs. But two opposing forces of disruption are perennially present- the authority of rationality and the power of charisma. Bureaucratic rationality can be a revolutionary force against the tradition, it revolutionises through techniques. Charisma works exactly in the opposite way; first transforming the inner life of people and then including people to transform their worlds. Weber thus gives us a dramatic and compelling sense of social change as a product of the eruption of charisma into history and diffusion of rationality through history (*Oommen, 2011*). Weber, like Durkheim, suggests that rapid social change will produce widespread non-routine collective actions. However, Weber changes the course of analysis by suggesting that there are two main categories of collective actions; those oriented to deviant beliefs and those oriented to beliefs, which are routinized and have won general acceptance. Weberian theory also suggests that commitment to a group is an incentive, rather than barrier to participation in collective action, including non-routine action (*Oommen, 2011*).

Karl Marx's analysis of collective action was more systematic, as compared with those of Durkheim and Weber, notwithstanding a century of acute criticism the basic argument he proposed in "*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*" (1852) and "*The Class Struggle in France 1848-50*" (1895) stood the test of time. There are two aspects to the ideas propounded by Marx in this context. Implicitly, he divides the entire population into social classes based on their relationship to the prevailing means of production. Explicitly, Marx identified the major visible actor in politics with their class bases, pronouncing judgements about their basic interests, conscious aspiration, articulated grievances and readiness for collective action. Broadly, the tenor of the argument is that individuals and institutions act on behalf of particular social classes, save the case of

those who run the state who may occasionally act in terms of their political interest ignoring class base (*Oommen, 2011*).

However the founding father of the theory of collective action, Durkheim, neglects the role of mobilisation and the institutionalisation. Similarly Weber also remains silent on the issue of mobilisation- a necessary element of social movements. Marx on the other hand gives more importance to the role of classes based on relations of the means of production as a factor of social movement and gives less importance to generalised tension, momentary impulses and disorganisation. Moreover, Marx over emphasises on collective rationality of political action and ignores collective actions can be sudden and instantaneous (*Oommen, 2011*). *Identity* movement, in its simplest meaning, thus implies collective efforts or actions for the defense of community or group rights by a group of people who feels discriminated, and this group are sometimes mobilised and articulated by the leaders against the existing arrangement of the system. It is to be noted that this collective action can occur suddenly or can be of evolutionary in its nature. Some see these movements as the main source of hope for democratization and development, while others look at them with suspicion and as a destabilizing threat (*Miroso, nd.*). In this context India constitute an interesting case for the study of *identity* movements and its impact on Indian states. Before coming into the impact of *identity* movements on Indian states let us first familiarise ourselves with the nature of Indian states briefly.

#### **4. Impact of Identity Movements on Indian Politics**

The post independent India (1947-48) witnessed the country to get divided into two nations based on religious ground- India and Pakistan. The country after independence was faced with the vital problem of arranging the boundaries of Indian states which are divided on several groups- religious, caste, ethnicities, cultural, regional and linguistic ground. The major task of the newly formed government was to maintain the unity and integrity of a country which was divided into numerous ethno-cultural and linguistic groups. The post independent era the first census in 1951 listed 782 mother tongues and in 1961 it increased to 1,652. The number decreased to 1,019 in 1971, and again

increased to 1,576 in 1991(Oommen, nd. [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)). Under such culturally and linguistically differentiated society the major task of the newly independent India was to alleviate and contain ethno-cultural conflicts and problems. The major objective of a country at that time was to promote rapid and balanced economic growth with equity and justice. In spite of the best effort of the government of India the growth and development of different regions were hardly balanced. This led to the growth, among the different groups or communities a feeling of deprivation which in turn took the form of protests and movements. Today after sixty six years of independence, India finds itself living in a midst of widespread unrest and disturbances. It has faced communal riots and a hardening of religion-based affiliation among some of the minorities like, It has witnessed class/caste based movements for the protection and reservation, to mention other such movements as worker's movements, farmers'/peasants' movement has characterises the present Indian states. The most important of all has been the serious secessionist movement in part of the country. Although the various movements in these states present a complex and diverse picture, in terms of their goals and aims, ideology and methodology, most, if not all, possess one similarity – the recognition of their distinct ethnic identities. These movements are generally for the demand of granting collective rights and privileges for the protection and recognition of group or community based on their distinct *identity* (ethnicity, caste, cultural, linguistic, regional etc.), sometimes through the creation of separate state within Indian union. Considering such range of conflicts and movements within Indian states on ground of religion, caste, region, ethnicity, cultural and linguistic, here are few generally accepted factors that has contributed to the outbreak of a serious conflicts and violence in the Indian states in the form of social movements or more precisely *identity* movements, as these movements basically rests its foundation on their distinct group identity.

- Firstly, fear of cultural assimilation or dilution and non-recognition as an Indian in Indian society<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> The Gorkhaland Movement in the hill areas of Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal, Bodoland Movement in Assam are such movements emerged out of non-recognition as an Indian in Indian Society.

- Secondly, the large scale illegal migration activity in some parts of the country from neighbouring states<sup>7</sup>.
- Thirdly, the unequal economic development of different region has resulted in bringing unrest and dissatisfaction among different ethnic groups<sup>8</sup>.
- Finally, political factors such as the endemic mal-governance, rise of regional political parties and formation of weak coalition governments at the centre may also contribute significantly to the outbreak of ethno-political movements.

All this factors combined together resulted in exploitation of advanced culture over marginalised minority culture, lack of opportunity and threat to the existing group's privileges may engender strong feeling of relative deprivation among the population divided into different ethno cultural group. The feeling of deprivation and cultural strain along with economic backwardness of the community followed by the articulation of the cause by the leadership, are thus responsible for the outbreak of *identity* movements in different parts of the Indian states.

Given the nature of Indian states characterised by the presence of the populations divided into numerous ethno-cultural groups and communities, it is obvious that India after independent is left with huge and a serious task of maintaining and sustaining its unity and integrity. One of the outcomes of such diversity is the rising socio-political movement in different corner of the country. Presence of such movements has its impact on whole of Indian politics ranging from the drafting of the Indian constitution to the rise of regional political parties.

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<sup>7</sup> Telengana movement and Kamtapur movement in contemporary Indian society rests its base on the question of illegal migration into their region.

<sup>8</sup> The unrest in the North East region in India is said to have arise out of the issue of economic underdevelopment.

The foremost impact of such movements on Indian politics after independence is the creation or declaration of federal polity and secular politics, which the founders of Indian constitution considered as the necessary condition for national integration and national development. The idea of a federal polity also had historical roots and —was envisaged as a project to ensure reasonable national agreement across regions and communities to support and develop durable political order (*Dasgupta, 2001*). But at the same time, Indian leaders were mindful of the dangers of federalism in the form of ethnic secession and balkanization of the state. Hence, as Ambedkar stated in the Constituent Assembly, — though India was to be a federation, the federation was not the result of an agreement by the states to join in a federation, and that the federation not being the result of an agreement no State has the right to secede from it (*Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol VII: 43, Dasgupta, 2001*). Indian federation was therefore to be a —division for convenience of administration while the country continued to be one integrated whole (*Dasgupta, 2001*). The main benefit of India's federal design then was to be that it would allow the state to accommodate ethnic plurality and encourage cultural distinctiveness without allowing any one ethnic group to dominate at the national or federal level. It was also anticipated that cultural conflicts within each state would seldom spill over into other states. The Centre could thus compartmentalize and more effectively manage centre-state frictions and contain conflicts within states more easily (*Hardgrave, 1993*).

Along with constitutional provisions, the political party system that evolved in post-independent India was designed to manage ethnic differences and conflict. During the freedom struggle, the main political organization was the Indian National Congress. The Congress was a large democratic 'umbrella' organization that included groups, interests and opinions of various shades, colours and regions. Broadly, it espoused socialist democratic ideology and popular welfare policies. As the vanguard of the nationalist movement, the Congress naturally emerged as the dominant political party after independence. Although India adopted a multi-party system, for the first two decades after independence the Congress' hold over Indian politics was almost total. But from the mid-1960s onwards, India gradually witnessed the growth of regional parties and some

were able to challenge the Congress in state elections by tapping into ethno-linguistic, religious and regional sentiments. The Congress, under Indira Gandhi's leadership, increasingly resorted to undemocratic, illegal and draconian measures to retain its monopoly over political power at the centre and in several states. This creeping authoritarianism, which criminalized the Indian polity, politicized the bureaucracy and security agencies and rode roughshod over opponents of the Congress party, eventually resulted in a suspension of democracy in 1975 with the declaration of the Emergency<sup>9</sup>. Forced by popular pressure to withdraw the Emergency and hold national elections in 1977, the Congress party lost power for the first time at the centre against an opposition consisting of a coalition of smaller national and regional parties. Over the next three decades, the phenomenal rise of regional parties and leaders, the gradual weakening of the Congress both politically and organizationally, the emergence of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the formation of coalition governments at the centre and state as well, is the result of the presence of different ethno-cultural movements in different pockets in various forms within India (*Ganguly,* ).

India's choice of development model after independence was also aimed to contain and mitigate ethnic problems and conflicts. The model was based —upon a system of indicative plans within a mixed economic structure in which both private capital and a state-owned public sector played a major role (*Currie, 1996*). The major objective of the model was to —promote rapid and balanced economic growth with equity and justice (*Dandekar, 1988*). This commitment to social welfare accorded a significant role to the Indian centre in the socio-economic development of ethnic communities and allowed it to directly regulate both politics and economy in India. In practice, however, development of different ethnic groups and regions of the country was hardly balanced, thereby raising feelings of relative deprivation across communities and provinces.

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<sup>9</sup> In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (1) of Article 352 of the Constitution, then President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, by Proclamation declared National Emergency on the ground of internal disturbances on June 25, 1975, thereby suspending democracy and imposing severe restrictions on free speech, dissent and political activities across the country. With the declaration of Emergency, Indira Gandhi allowed herself to rule by decree till 1977. India made great economic strides during the two-year emergency period, but political opposition was heavily suppressed.

In 1950s, in order to strengthen and to accept the demand of ethno-cultural and regional identities the administrative reorganization of the Indian state was resorted. In 1953, State Reorganisation Commission was established, which led to the enactment of the State Reorganisation Act of 1956<sup>10</sup>. The Act created 14 new states and 5 Union Territories. The creation of new states in 1956, could not solve the problem of ethno cultural conflicts, rather, it was followed by numerous movements for separate statehood based on ethno-cultural, regional and linguistic ground. The Indian state was again faced with the threat to the existence of democracy. As a result in 1960, the Bombay Reorganisation Act was passed creating Maharashtra and Gujarat on linguistic ground<sup>11</sup>. In 1962, Nagaland was created out of Assam<sup>12</sup>. In 1966, Haryana was created by dividing Punjab<sup>13</sup>. In North East region three states were created Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura in 1971<sup>14</sup>. However the demand for new state on the basis of their distinct ethnic *identity* could not stop there. There are still movements in different parts of the country demanding separate state based on their distinct *identity*.

The politics of reservation in Indian states that has captured a major attention among the leaders of political parties and the academicians is nothing but the result of *identity* politics. In pursuance of the commitment to social, economic and political justice, as enumerated in the Preamble to the constitution, an intricate system of quotas and reservations in various sectors, especially in educational institutions, government employment, and representation in legislatures, has emerged over the years to promote a more inclusive society. At the first place, the Indian constitution recognises two groups-

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<sup>10</sup> States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) was a body constituted by the Central Government of India in 1953, to recommend the reorganizations of state boundaries. This commission led the foundation of States Reorganisation Act in 1956 creating 14 new state and 5 Union Territories.

<sup>11</sup> This Act provided for the reorganisation of the State of Bombay and matters connected therewith. It was enacted by the Parliament in the 11<sup>th</sup> year of the Republic of India.

<sup>12</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup> year of India's Republic, the union Parliament enacted an act known as The State of Nagaland Act in 1962. This Act provided the formation of the State of Nagaland and the matters therewith.

<sup>13</sup> The Punjab Reorganisation Act of 1966 laid down the formation of new State of Haryana out of Punjab.

<sup>14</sup> The North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act of 1971, created three new State of Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya, along with the formation of Union Territories of Mizoram and Arunachal.

schedule caste and schedule tribe keeping in view that these group of people are historically deprived of their rights and privileges. India since independent has set aside a reserved seats in the parliament for this historically backward people- schedule caste and schedule tribe. The policy of 'positive discrimination' has not only brought a major debate on the reservation issue in India on these historically backwards. But it has also highlighted the idea of OBC (other backward community). Such policies have at times generated political tensions within states, mainly because more group seek entry into categories that confer advantages of positive discrimination.

## 5. Conclusion

In spite of the best efforts of the Indian leaders to create institutions, structures and processes to deal effectively and fairly with ethnic aspirations and demands, ethnic conflicts occurred with regular frequency in India. The administrative reorganization of the Indian state that was carried out in the 1950s strengthened ethno-linguistic and regional identities by accepting the demand for the creation of new states based on broad ethno-linguistic criteria. Such demands had been voiced before independence but never acted upon by the British for the fear of strengthening ethno-nationalist sentiments. To mention few, the people of Darjeeling hill areas are voicing their desire for separate state of Gorkhaland outside West Bengal since very long time, **Kamtapur movement by Rajbonshi of Cooch Behar has a long history, Bodoland movement in Assam, the Telengana movement in Andhra Pradesh, the movement to create Vidharbha in Maharashtra and demand for the creation of Jammu state are the cases that are creating a major threat to the Indian union.** These movements are not only noticed for their insurgency activities but have been able to lobby their cause effectively and are therefore playing an important role in bringing change and influencing the politics of Indian states, both at the regional and national level. However, even though these movements have not affected the Indian pluralism to a substantial extent, they have made their impact felt and to be reckoned with. The provision/provisions as underlined in the indian constitution have made a fair deal to counter the claims of such groups, such as- the Fifth and Sixth Schedule of the constitution stands for spacial administrative structures at district levels,

Article 370 a special arrangement for the state of Jammu and Kashmir by providing separate constitution, Articles like 371A, 371F and 371G, provides for special privillages for the North East states of Nagaland, Sikkim and Mizoram. Apart from these, there are provisions in the constitution for the creation of new states on the ground of distinct group identity within the Indian union.

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## **Liberal State and Multiculturalism: Confrontation or Compromise?**

V. Bijukumar

*Classical liberalism with its genesis from Enlightenment took a negative approach to cultural diversity and minority rights. It does not recognize identities based on ethnicity, gender, cultural, nationality. Modern liberalism's commitment to cultural diversity and minority rights emerged out of criticisms from within and outside. Modern liberalism recognizes and accommodates cultural diversity through institutional and policy mechanisms. However, modern liberal states are not free from tensions and conflicts. The competitive demand for accommodation and recognition by various communities and groups lead to instability in contemporary liberal democracies.*

**Key Words - Liberalism, Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity, Communitarianism, New Social Movements.**

The demand for “recognition” of diverse cultural and ethnic identities constitutes a perennial problem in modern liberal states. This demand arose as a reaction to the western liberal political tradition which for quite some time ignored the issues of minorities and other cultural identities. The liberal political ideology recognized individual as a rational human being and ignored the concerns of multi-ethnic and multicultural society. Accordingly, it was believed that when individuals are rational creatures, recognition of other identities would jeopardize the individual self. Moreover, the classical liberalism makes a distinction between public and private spheres. Liberalism excluded certain groups based on ethnicity, race, sex, age from the public sphere. The private sphere is not considered within the domain of ‘political’. In private sphere, cultures, rights and concerns never find a place in the political activity.

The idea of liberal state emerged as a monolithic political institution based on the majority will of the people. The liberal state which is based on the assumptions of free, rational equal individuals subsequently came under criticism from many quarters for its negative attitude towards cultural identities and groups rights. Various scholars in the classical liberal tradition interpreted state in terms of majoritarian culture and majoritarian rights while ignoring the essence of diversity in culture and rights of the minority. The classical liberal state considered assertion of cultural identity as antithetical to national unity. It viewed that all individuals as

citizens deserve equal respect and equal opportunity for self-realization irrespective of their cultural status.

### **Multiculturalism: A Movement and Ideology**

Multiculturalism, as a movement and ideology, emerged as a reaction to liberal state's negative attitude to recognizing minority cultures and group rights. In academic debate the idea of multiculturalism is described as the process of recognizing the identities of cultural disadvantaged minorities. In a more specific way it recognizes the distinct cultural identities of members of a pluralistic society. As Parekh says that "multiculturalism, then, is about cultural diversity or culturally embedded differences" (Parekh, 2000: 3). It is argued that multiculturalism demands the protection of the rights of minorities and develop extensive notions of citizenship and democracy that include those minorities that are excluded on racial and ethnical criteria (Solomos, 2001: 206). The different cultural identities demanded not simply recognition of their claims to a (just) shared of the social pie, but more important, recognition of their distinct identities as members of particular cultural communities within society (Kukathas, 1998: 686).

The idea of multiculturalism emerged as a response to marginalization of minorities based on cultural discrimination. The dominant cultural groups occupy a predominant role in society denying the same to other groups. The idea of multiculturalism emerged when the liberal state in western society confronted with the challenge of immigrant minority communities. Multiculturalism challenged the basic assumptions of liberal state. According to it, the liberal state in a multicultural society should not be considered as an epithet of majoritarianism. The state should not draw a distinction between individual rights and minority rights.

### **Multiculturalism 'Embedded' in Liberalism**

Broadly, there are two dominant views regarding the relationship between liberal state and multiculturalism. Firstly, multiculturalism 'embedded' in liberalism and secondly, multiculturalism 'counterpoise' to liberalism. The first argument is that liberalism accommodates diversity and tolerates differences. In this view, liberal state is not hostile to divergent cultural groups, on the other hand, recognizes the role of minority groups in democratic politics. As Mahajan puts it, "liberalism celebrates diversity but only at the level of individual. It values

differences of tastes, opinions and life styles but is less accommodative towards differences of culture” (Mahajan, 2002: 32). Kymlicka’s approach to multiculturalism is based on the tenets of liberalism. Liberalism, in its true sense, based on equal values of individual. Kymlicka does not find any incongruity between liberalism and multiculturalism. According to him modern interpretation of liberal state is more prone to recognizing and accommodating cultural differences in society. For instance, Kymlicka argues that minority rights were an important part of liberal theory and practice in the nineteenth century and between world wars (Kymlicka, 1996: 50). For him individual rights can be fulfilled once state recognizes cultural identities and cultural rights.

The assertion of ethnic and cultural minority for the recognition of rights, thus, does not go against the spirit of liberal state and on the other hand strengthens the very foundation of liberalism. The values of liberalism such as human dignity, autonomy, liberty, tolerance are in tandem with the values of multiculturalism. Kymlicka, for instance, says that “accommodating ethnic and national differences is only part of larger struggle to make a more tolerant and inclusive democracy” (Kymlicka, 1996:19). Parekh, an ardent supporter of multiculturalism, develops a liberal theory of multiculturalism that respects all values of liberalism. According to him, “. . . since different cultures embody and realize different values, none of them can be judged superior to the others” (Parekh, 2000: 90). Kukathas views are more or less similar to that of Kymlicka. In his opinion “liberalism is not hostile to difference because its response to the fact of diversity is to recommend toleration of different groups, or cultures, or associations which might be found within society” (Kukathas, 1997: 142).

It is further argued that liberal democratic thought has been traditionally committed to protecting social diversity and this would include ethnicity-based claims for political recognition. At the same time, it has upheld the integrity and sovereignty of nation-states and this has meant that liberal states are often reluctant to give political recognition to communities and groups in the public sphere. The classical liberal state is treating all people as free and equal individuals and all persons as citizens deserve equal respect and equal opportunity for self-realization. In this context, the liberal state is denying group rights and group rights are considered incompatible with liberalism and only individual rights are recognized.

### **Enlightenment Universalism and Rationalism**

The classical liberal states' apathy towards cultural diversity came from the very foundation of Enlightenment. Enlightenment Universalism propagated the idea of some what a 'melting pot' syndrome in which all cultural identities are melted into a common identity. It was even argued that Enlightenment Universalism is blind towards specificity and diversity as it does not recognize identity based on ethnic, gender, cultural or nationality. In this context, multiculturalism is considered as a counter Enlightenment movement. The negative attitude of classical liberal state towards cultural diversity can be seen in the context of the values of Enlightenment like universalism, rationalism, individualism and egalitarianism which are upheld by classical liberalism.

The idea of reason emerges within a particular culture, society and context in which human beings live. Rationality emerges out of certain cultural instinct. The contention of classical liberalism is that since individuals are rational human beings – recognizing identities or diversity is going against the conception of 'rational'. The centrality of individual and his concerns occupied a predominant role in liberalism as reaction to feudalism which seldom gives individual preferences. Liberalism as an ideology gives centrality to individual and his concerns and traditional bonds based on feudal relations are considered as hurdles for individual 'self'. In this view, the objective of liberalism was to recover 'self' from feudalism. Feudalism was based on the collective identity either serf or masters. Liberalism emerged as an ideology of modernity, critical of the values of feudalism and acted as an emancipation of individuals.

Multiculturalism poses a challenge to the Kantian Enlightenment ideas. The proponents of multiculturalism argue that individual and his/her existence in the society is determined by cultural values and recognizing cultural diversity leads to the preservation of their particular cultural identities. The opponents of Universalism, however, raised serious doubt about the idea of a free, equal and rational individual. When wider cleavages exist on the basis of religion, ethnic and gender identity, each identity makes an individual his or her own self. Multiculturalism developed as a critique of the wider conceptions of enlightenment philosophy such as universal reason, values, etc. It emerged as a critique of unicultural stand taken by Enlightenment. It is argued that "multiculturalism tends to accept and build upon the Nietzschean rejection of rationalism. There is no universal truth or justice. Thus, multiculturalism fights for

the rights of women and minorities in a new way: by subverting the truth-claims of all who would exclude them” (Melzer, Weinberger and Zinman, 1998: 3).

Liberalism as an ideology emerged as a result of Enlightenment Universalism. The universal values suggested by liberalism often acquired a colonial content – protecting western interests, ignoring non-western political activity. These universal values are based on the universal rationality of human beings. By affirming its commitment to universalism and rationalism of Enlightenment project, liberalism ignores the distinctiveness of society and assimilates minority cultural identities into the dominant majority, heterogeneous identities assimilated into majority culture and thereby established a homogeneous society. Enlightenment universalism destroyed diversity and it imposes homogenizing values that have the potential to kill the specificity of cultural communities.

The idea of enlightenment universalism and rationalism strengthened the idea of monoculturalism. Enlightenment is talking about certain universal rights to people which were rejected by diverse cultural groups. The enlightenment values of the liberal state were challenged by certain developments in the West. For instance, the US ‘melting-pot’ model was challenged by the civil rights movements of the 1960s. Under the ‘melting-pot model’ all the immigrant cultures are mixed and amalgamated without state intervention. The melting pot implied that each individual immigrant, and each group of immigrants, assimilated into American society at their own pace. The demand was based on the recognition of equal dignity. The early 1970s witnessed the emergence of the multicultural movements at first in Canada and Australia and then in the USA, UK, Germany and elsewhere.

The liberal conception of rationality is the product of time-with the emergence of capitalist free market economy. Rationality is associated with capitalist and market relationship. The liberal conception of reason disconnects people from social traditions and community practices. The philosophical rationalists like Rene Descartes and Baruch Spinoza claimed that reason evolved not through individual sensory. Moreover, Kant’s idea of reason is taking people out of their social setting. Kant in his widely acclaimed article “What is Enlightenment?” proclaims that Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another (Kant, 1784). This definition talks about the isolation of human beings from their settings. Reason is opposite to

morality. Postmodernists claimed that all grand theories and metanarratives emerged out of Enlightenment tend to entail exclusion and coercion, the elimination of diversity and difference. Foucault, for instance, viewed that Enlightenment reason is preaching the domination of one community over others (Foucault, 1979). Moreover, enlightenment rationalism highlights the racial superiority of some groups and considers others as inferior to their culture and identity. This racial superiority strengthened colonialism and euro centrism. Edward Said argues that the eighteenth-century Enlightenment formed the origins of ‘Orientalism’ (Said, 1978). The racial supremacy in Enlightenment reason is ignoring the cultural specificities of non-whites.

### **The Social Contractual Tradition**

The majoritarian orientation of liberalism goes back to the fundamental tenets of the social contract theory. The social contract theory as advocated by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Rousseau proclaims that the liberal state emerged as a result of the contract entered by the majority. The classical liberal state adopted a somewhat neutral approach towards cultural diversity. It gave equal treatment of all people irrespective of their cultural differences. Since it believed in free and equal rational individual, no distinction was made between majority and minority and their cultures. The classical liberal state was reluctant to accept minority rights and it recognized only individual rights. The minority-majority debate developed in the later course when critiques questioned whether minority interests are protected by the majority. They argued for recognizing cultural identity of minority as a precondition for enlarging the scope of freedom. The liberal state was created by a social contract aimed at protecting the ‘individual self’.

### **Liberal –Communitarian Debate**

The intellectual origin of multiculturalism is found in liberal –communitarian debate and the new social movements. Communitarians challenged the basic assumption of classical liberalism based on the atomic individualism. Liberal individualism views individuals as right-bearers outside the social and communal context. Liberals develop some values which are considered to be rational, non-subjective in nature which have universal implications. Liberal universalism is taking people out of their social and temporal contexts. The first criticism against the classical liberal idea of homogeneity came from the communitarians. The liberal-communitarian debate in political theory primarily concentrated on the recognition of cultural diversities.

Communitarians at **the outset** rejected the liberal argument of that recognizing cultural diversity would be a threat to national unity and integration.

Classical liberal state championed the cause of individual rights and innate qualities of individual. Communitarians, on the other hand, criticized the liberal view of individual self. The atomistic view about individuals raises the question of being insensitive to the values of community. The communitarians demand group rights and collective rights along with individual rights guaranteed by the liberal state. The liberal state has to recognize group rights. Identity claims should be viewed as rights in particular needs. Communitarian thinkers like Charles Taylor and Richard Walzer, on the other hand, have been sensitive to the issue of protecting cultural diversity in a society and they have supported multiculturalist policies which would recognize and respect cultural communities and their practices, at least in the sphere of civil society' (Joseph, 1998: 19).

The negative attitude of liberalism towards cultural identities was questioned by communitarians. As Joseph argues that "liberalism emphasizes the irreducible distinctiveness of individuals while communitarians refuse to postulate an individual who can be thought of as prior to his/her social embodiment" (Joseph, 1998: 124). Contesting the liberal argument that recognizing cultural diversity is part of liberalism and communitarians view that liberalism no longer recognizes cultural diversity, it is argued that "the logic of communitarian assertions is to map out communities in their difference and uniqueness and to assume a shared culture for a group. Individual identities then are assumed to emerge from group identities" (Joseph, 1998: 28). The cultural rights of the cultural minorities and groups needs to be protected by the liberal state. The different values and life practices existing in communities needs to be protected by the liberal state.

The communitarians have argued strongly for the needs for political protection of community identities. The vehement criticism came from communitarian thinkers such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel and Charles Taylor. Charles Taylor is critical of liberalism for its indifference towards cultural diversity. According to him, "liberalism is not a possible meeting ground for all cultures, but is the political expression of one range of cultures, and quite incompatible with other ranges" (Taylor, 1994: 62). A modern democratic state demands a 'people' with a strong collective identity (Taylor, 1994: 145). According to this view a common

identity cannot be established by annihilating other identities. The recognition of diversity and minority rights makes liberal democracy more 'inclusive (Taylor, 1994: 145). Iris Young promotes a notion of group solidarity against the individualism of liberalism humanism Young, 1990). It is viewed that liberalism fails to address the nature 'embeddedness' in a particular time, place and culture. Communitarians view that the role of the state is to ensure the health and well-being of the community life. The classical liberalism believed in 'unencumbered self' detached from pre-existing social norms. Communitarians, on the other hand, developed 'situated self' – the self is situated in the context of social roles, practices and situations.

In Charles Taylor's view social recognition is central to the individual's identity and self-worth, and misrecognition can gravely damage both. The liberal conception of autonomous individual was rejected by many critics of liberalism. It seldom discusses the values of community in which the individual belongs. On the contrary, the values of community influence individuals. Charles Taylor says that "the objective of a liberal democratic culture is to respect – not to repress – ethnic identities and to encourage different cultural traditions to develop fully their potential for expression of democratic ideals of freedom and equality" (Taylor, 1989: 89). The advocates of multiculturalism claimed that individual freedom can be fulfilled once state recognizes cultural identities and cultural rights. Taylor viewed that enlightenment ideal of 'disengaged reason' gives an opportunity to individuals to disassociate from the communal settings and communal bonds (Taylor, 1989).

Communitarians are critical of liberal model of the 'self', individual develops their 'self' of their own not related to society and community. They are critical of liberalism's belief in individual capacity to make meaningful choices. The liberal conception of self is derived partly from Immanuel Kant and Enlightenment philosophy. Communitarians rejected the individual self claiming by saying that individual setting cannot exist prior to or outside social settings and communal attachments. The self of an individual is shaped by the subjective values and traditional perceptions of the communities. Communitarians like Mac Intyre views that the role of state is to develop and protect practices that encourage the development of human excellence (Hampton, 1998: 183). Liberal individualism disconnects individuals from community and the state insulates individuals from community practices. According to this view, each individual develops identity, talent and pursuits in the context of a community. As Etzioni argues that "the

social conditions that enable individuals to maintain their psychological integrity, civility and ability to reason” (Etzioni, 1995: 16). Individuals enjoy their rights only within the social set up. As Etzioni says that it is ‘when community (social webs carrying moral values), breaks down, the individual’s psychological integrity is engendered, and a vacuum is generated which invites the state to expand its role and power; when community is properly cultivated, by contrast, the kind of citizen liberals take for granted flourishes’(Etzioni, 1995: 17).

### **New Social Movements**

Like communitarians, other streams of protest against liberal state’s approach towards cultural identity came from New Social Movements. The new social movements like feminist, blacks and Dalit movement in India too questioned the homogenization of cultural diversity. Such level of criticisms came on the pretext of culture’s relation to knowledge and power. The impact of civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s rekindled the debate on multiculturalism in USA. As Pichardo argues that NSM envisages “both macrohistorical and microhistorical elements of social movements. On the macro level, the NSM paradigm concentrates on the relationship between the rise of contemporary social movements and the larger economic structure and on the role of cultural in such movements. On the microlevel, the paradigm is concerned with how issues of identity and personal behavior are bound up in social movements” (Pichardo, 1997: 411).

New Social Movements involve the identity based movements which are trying to protect particular way of life. As Kauffman claims that identity claims are the most distinctive feature of New Social Movements (Kauman, 1990: 69-80). Unlike Old Social Movements which are associated with the problems of industrialization and material benefits, New Social Movements are giving a new twist to the demands. As Pichardo notes that “New Social Movements question the wealth-oriented materialistic goals of industrial societies” (Pichardo, 1997: 414).

### **Modern Liberals and Cultural Diversity**

The modern liberals rectify the mistakes committed by classical liberalism in recognizing cultural diversity. For instance, liberals such as John Rawls, Joseph Raz and Will Kymlicka recognize the importance of cultural diversity by the state. Rawls’s theory of justice deals with the question of moral plurality. It recognizes the depth of moral differences. Rawls intention

was to build a liberal egalitarian society. Although Rawls' political liberalism is limited to the political realm, its moral and cultural reach is extensive. As Parekh argues that "since Rawls is primarily interested in moral diversity, he pays little attention to ethnic, cultural and other forms of diversity, the politics of recognition and difference, and more generally to the nature and importance of culture" (Parekh, 2000: 90). Rawls is attempting to make an arrangement between liberalism and cultural diversity in his theory of justice. Joseph, for instance, sees that Rawls' political liberalism as proving a practical answer to the problem of negotiating cultural differences (Joseph, 1998: 130). The contemporary liberal thinkers like Raz, Kymlicka and Rawls redefined liberalism with an idea of promoting cultural diversity. They argue that recognizing cultural identity is an important element in respecting individual autonomy and even dignity. The autonomy and dignity of individual are promoted by recognizing cultural diversity among the people. Multiculturalism is the core of liberalism, because liberalism encourages the principle of toleration. It reflects liberal pluralism and recognizes diversity of culture – the implications for democracy and democratic governance. Raz views that since cultures are not becoming internally oppressive and, on the contrary, are promoting freedom, identity and well-being, they have to be respected and accepted. Even minority culture, which cherishes liberalism, should be respected (Raz, 1986).

Modern liberals believe that deepening of liberal democracy is not possible without recognizing cultural difference. When the state recognizes diversity liberal democracy is able to reach out to the larger sections of the society. Liberal multiculturalism emerged as emphasising equal recognition of cultural groups. Recognising difference cannot be treated against the universal principles of Enlightenment. The advocates of multiculturalism argue that existence of cultural communities does not go against national identity.

### **How Does Modern Liberal State Recognize Diversity?**

The role of liberal state and its institutions in protecting multicultural society include the opening up of institutions for all. The state institutions should not be dominated by the numerical majority of the society. As Charles Taylor has argued that "governments have an active role to play in recognizing the value of various cultural traditions within the society and in formulating policies – language laws, system of education – that help to preserve and strengthen these

cultures” (Hampton, 1998: 245). Rawls’ first principle, for instance, is talking about the opening up of institutions for all directed towards recognizing cultural diversity.

The liberal state recognizes the difference at the institutional level. Institutional accommodation involves recognizing diversity in institutions – legislature, executive, judiciary and bureaucracy and opening up of political offices to different cultural groups. Thus, institutions recognize plurality is the primary step for accommodation. The policies adopted by state can effectively protect minorities against social exclusion, discrimination and racism. Recognition of cultural diversity means the removal of exploitation and politics of redistribution. The Constitution of India guarantees certain constitutional provisions for protecting multiculturalism. Articles 29 and 30 provide special provision for ensuring the minority rights.

Recognizing minority identity and culture by the state is to ensure distributive justice in a liberal society. Rawls, for instance, considered culture as a primary good. In this context, Rawls theory of justice is going beyond the limits of juridical justice recognizing multi-culturalism. Language policy is another area where the state can interfere and promote multiculturalism. Since language is the medium for communication in deliberative process, the predominance of majority language often prevents the minority cultural identities in participating effectively in deliberative process.

Culture is for a long period of time considered a resource in education. A multicultural state strives to promote the minority language in educational curriculum. The cognitive aspect of culture enables the transmission of practical and theoretical knowledge from one generation to another. Education policy of the state should be oriented towards promoting the values of multiculturalism and accommodating the cultures of minority community. It is argued that the liberal state is promoting multicultural ethos. The State monitors that each cultural group should deserve place in the media or in educational institutions (Bhargava, 1999: 15).

State is inculcating the values of tolerance in a multi-cultural society. J. S. Mill in ‘On Liberty’ suggested that toleration is of fundamental importance to both the individual and society. The role of the state is to inculcate the feeling and assimilate the culture of minorities not to force it. Sen is talking about two basically distinct approaches to multiculturalism, one of which concentrates on the promotion of diversity as a value in itself; the other approach focuses

on the freedom of reasoning and decision-making and celebrates cultural diversity (Sen, 2006: 150).

However, recognizing cultural diversity goes beyond the question of tolerance. As Parekh argues that “while acceptance of differences calls for changes in the legal arrangements of society, respect for them requires changes in its attitudes and ways of thought as well” (Parekh, 2000: 2). The state in multicultural society ensures tolerance. Further, “toleration of diversity is of great importance in a multicultural context. Both state management and individual practice require some level of toleration, once there is knowledge about the differences” (Nye, 2007: 114). It is argued that “successful multiculturalism and cultural engagement requires tolerance on all sides –mutual tolerance” (Nye, 2007: 114).

Recognising national minorities demands certain substantive actions from the state. The constitution makes some provisions for the special rights of the minorities. It has to recognize the fact that minority cultures are often distinct from that of the majority. In other words, it is to promote plural values of the different communities in the society. As Festenstein says that “value pluralism allows that there may be other forms of self development or well-being apart from those which encourage individual autonomy. Indeed, part of what it means to have a socially diverse society is that it should contain associations and groups which are not autonomous in their practices”(Festenstein, 2000: 83).

### **Redefining the Role of Liberal State**

The role of the liberal state in a multicultural society is to prevent conflicts between various cultural identities in society and to ensure successful management of inter-cultural conflict. As Nye argues that, ‘multiculture is not necessarily about preventing such conflict, but rather one of the challenges of multiculturalism is to ensure that any intercultural conflict within society is manageable’ (Nye, 2007: 118). As Parekh argues that ‘in a multicultural society the state belongs to them all, and the fact that some of them are in a minority should make no difference to their claims on it. They should all enjoy their fair share of public support and resources’ (Parekh 2000: 96). The liberal state in a multicultural society is making a balance between national identity and cultural diversity of specific groups.

The growing importance of multicultural society's reconceptualization of citizenship calls for the representation of all sections into mainstream political process. The advocates of multiculturalism question the liberal conception of citizenship. By granting citizenship right to individual, liberal state proved its apathy towards social environment in which the citizenship works. By focusing on the abstract notion of citizenship, liberal state is taking individuals away from social atmosphere. Multiculturalism rejects the goal of assimilation into the political community of the nation-state through citizenship as derogatory to different cultures and also unlikely to be realized without the use of violence (Joseph, 1998: 141). In liberal conception of citizenship, the social citizenship is missing link in the absence of group rights and community rights. As Mahajan put it, "the liberal principle of neutrality as well as the emphasis on universal rights of citizenship has in some contexts, sustained the dominance of the majority community in society" (Mahajan 2002: 23). Multiculturalism recognizes the citizenship rights of minority as a matter of an inclusive society. Multicultural demand forced liberalism to expand the sphere of citizenship. The demand for recognition by various social groups often poses a challenge to traditional liberal conceptions of citizenship.

### **Problems of Multicultural State**

Recognizing diversity does not mean that the liberal state/multicultural state is free from any kind of conflicts and tensions. A liberal state even after the 'recognition' of diversity faces number of challenges. As Hampton points out that "a state in a multicultural society also faces problem when some of its cultures disapprove practices carried on by other cultures in that state or when part of the tradition of a culture has involved the denial of freedom or equality to some of its members" (Hampton, 1998: 246). A multicultural state in the contemporary world is facing lot of problems though formal recognition comes from the Constitution. Liberal democracy provides an opportunity to assert identity. The idea of 'recognition' is a problem for liberal state. The sense of identity creates a sense of 'exclusion' from mainstream. Assertion of one's own identity leads to violence (Sen, 2006). According to Sen, ". . . identity can be a source of richness and warmth as well as of violence and terror, and it would make little sense to treat identity as a general evil" (Sen, 2006: 4).

Brian Barry poses a liberal response to multiculturalism and its criticisms of liberalism. According to him, multiculturalists are denying the equality of basic liberties and fair

opportunities that define equal citizenship. Moreover, multiculturalists undermine the economic claims of the poor by trying to shift political focus away from question of distributive justice to a 'politics of recognition' of different cultural groups (Barry, 2001: 325). Barry is skeptical of the 'rule-and-exemption' approach to religious and other minorities advocated by multiculturalists. Barry cautiously approaches the liberal ideal of equal treatment. In his opinion, multiculturalism is a regressive ideology and it is "anti-egalitarian", if not in intention, then certainly in effect. The privileges it accords to special interests are conducive to politics of 'divide and rule' that can only benefit those who benefit most from the status quo (Barry, 2001: 325).

The emergence of identity politics and the mobilization of new identities politically widened the debate on multiculturalism. The emergence of various kinds of identity politics seems to be a threat to liberal state. In identity politics, people identify themselves with group rather than claiming a broader nationality. In identity politics people define one's political and social identity and interests purely in terms of some group category: race, ethnicity, language, gender, religions etc. The assertion of identities in politics is not merely because of absence of political recognition but because of the lack of access to economic resources. A large number of liberal states in the contemporary world are confronted with the question of recognizing multiple cultural identities in their society. Various cultural groups are demanding their rights from the political authority. Theoretically state extends some kind of recognition by means of constitutional guarantees but particularly far away from it.

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