

## **Book Review**

**Sukhbilas Barma(Ed.):*Socio-Political Movements in North Bengal (A Sub-Himalayan Tract)*, Vol.-1, (Delhi:Global Publishing House, 2007, ISBN-81-8220-218-3, xv-xxvi+182,Price:1200/p INR)**

Reviewed by

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North Bengal i.e. the northern part of West Bengal consisting the districts of Cooch Behar, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, North and South Dinajpur , and Malda has been going through various troubles for the last few decades. In the recent period North Bengal has drawn attention of the scholars, politicians, researchers and administrators. In this region there is the habitat of various races, castes, classes and social groups in addition to the so called higher caste people with different types of language spoken. Though the Rajbanshis were the dominant group in this said tract. Charu Chandra Sanyal in his great work entitled “*The Rajbanshis of North Bengal (1965)*” had thrown enough light on the views of the scholars relating to the origin and identity of the Rajbanshis. Various types of movements, socio- economic and political have troubled the region very much. The basic reasons behind such movements may not be known to the people out side because they are mostly from outside the region.

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The present volume represents the socio-cultural and economic profile of the Rajbanshi community and their efforts towards Kshatriyaisation and the legitimisation of their social-political rights which eventually acted as the base of various ethno-political movements in North Bengal. All such movements have acted both as the cause and effects of the emotional outburst of the so called 'sons of the soil' i.e. people belonging to the Rajbanshi culture.

There are in all eight essays on wide range of themes by eminent scholars, presenting their theme from the different strands of movements that developed in the region with simple language.

The article *on North Bengal and its People* gives an early historical description of North Bengal deals with the history of Kamrup. The major ethnic group of this part of the country is the Rajbanshis. It also describes the history of the Khen Dynasty, the Koch-Rajbanshi Dynasty respectively. The article mentions political, economic and social development of the Koch people with a view to achieve higher social status. The Rajbanshis take pride in claiming their status in the hierarchical society immediately below the Brahmins and as such they have been striving for establishing their status as Bratya Kshatriya. The article covers the Rajbanshi- Kshatriya movements initiated in 1910 and the life and activities of Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma and Madhusudan Ray, the leader of the movement in details. The article also describes the role of the Hitasadhani Sabha and social tension due to dominance of migrants and role of the Kshatriya movement for the overall development of the Rajbanshi community.

The article *A Journey from Hitasadhani to Greater Kuch Bihar* describes importance of Cooch Behar state under the leadership of Naranarayana and his brother Chila Rai with its geographical important to its merger with Dominion of India. The article has given a full picture of Kshatriya movement under the leadership of Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma and its weakening. It also mentions a clear picture of Hitasadhani Sabha- an organisation of all the indigenous people i.e. Rajbanshis and other indigenous groups and their mental shock when independent Cooch Behar State merged into Dominion of India. It also gives a summary of the issues and problems facing the indigenous people of North Bengal. The article has finished with a demand of separate Cooch Behar State under the Greater Cooch Behar movement with a distinction amongst the residents of a same region Deshi and Bhatia people.

The article *Hitasadhani Movement* deals with the history of Hitasadhani movement, its impact on the Rajbanshis. The movement gained extraordinary momentum and created unbelievable impact on the socio-political scenario of North Bengal within a very short period. But it lost its ground also within a very short time. The movement left a kind of permanent effect on the psychological domain of the indigenous people.

The article *The Hitasadhani Sabha –Power Struggle by the 'Cooch Beharis'* gives a clear cut picture of the emergence of the Hitasadhani Sabha, an ethno-linguistic based

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political group or association. The article explains how it is emerged, its role in shaping the fate of the lonely princely state of Northern part of Bengal, its aims and objectives and also rise and decline of the Sabha. It also describes question of power politics, division of the people of the princely state of Cooch Behar, conflict between the Deshi and the Bhatias, ethno caste linguistic antagonism, domination of the outsiders, question of land –man ratio and ownership.

The article *The Genesis of Uttar Khanda Movement* covers the problems facing the indigenous people; particularly their land owing class, the attitude of Kolkata based politicians, the activities of the proponents of the movement. It also mentions aims, objectives and demands of the party, its role in the general election and explains the causes of demand for the separate statehood for the Rajbanshi people of North Bengal.

The article *Uttar Banga Tapasili Jati O Adibashi Sangathan (UTJAS): A Dalit Student Movement* highlights unemployment condition of the people of North Bengal, peoples' dependence over agriculture and land related works, farmers socio-economic condition, population pressure due to migration in this region and miserable condition of the indigenous people; the main issues of student movements, the arrogant attitude of the political leaders towards the UTJAS activities, demands of implementation of the govt. policy of reservation of SC and STs and in the process the agitators looked into the interests of the indigenous people in general.

The article *Naxalbari Peasant Uprising, 1967* highlights small description of Naxalbari village, peasants socio-economic condition and peasants revolts due to exploitation of the landlords and the mahajans. The article also mentions aim of this uprising was to overthrow imperialism and feudalism, and establish a new democratic society; formation of CPI(ML) and its shortcomings; the demand of the Kamtapuris and the weakness of the Naxalbari movement and recommends some principles for building up a powerful movement and advanced the cause of social progress.

The article *The Naxalite Movement: An Ethnic Divide* deals with the small description of the region, basically recognised as a backward area, predominant by the Rajbanshis with lack of social awareness of the intertwining of ethnicity and class, failure of class integration, their educational and economic backwardness and violent movements against the outsiders. It also describes Jotedars i .e. land owning class of the Rajbanshi community, their lands being forcibly taken away by the followers of the movement. Naxalite movement subsequently became a global phenomenon. It should, however, be of interest how this movement affected the economic and psychological domains of North Bengal itself, the place where- from it originated.

The book is written with very simple language that every reader can understand the theme very easily. The readers can obtain an idea from the study of the articles the ethno – political aspirations emerge in recent years in North Bengal. The book makes the people

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properly informed about the issues involved in the movements one after another organised mainly by the indigenous people of North Bengal region. One has been replaced by other just by including some newer issues or excluding some of the existing strands.

The book also presents us the basic issue of the psychological feeling of the indigenous people of being neglected, exploited, sidetracked and oppressed by the so called outsiders. The book gives us available information which is necessary to the students, scholars, researchers and the common people for understanding the current issues of North Bengal. The writers are all the son of the soil, so they present the theme in a scholarly way, used the sources both primary and secondary very well. The cover page of the book is very nice to see. The foreword written by Amalendu De, Former President, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, presents a clear picture of the socio-economic and political condition of North Bengal. The preface is well versed, content is very nice. The column 'about the contributors' make me pleasure to know the contributors very well. The references are well equipped; help the reader for further reading.

Last but not the least, Sukhbilas Barma, editor of the book is to be warmly congratulated for this important contribution to the studies on North Bengal. This is an important text which can set new trends among the younger generation of scholars who will work for the North Bengal region.