

# Trajectory of administrative reorganization in North Bengal: From partition to present day

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India gained independence on 15<sup>th</sup> August in 1947 but at a huge cost of the partition on religious line. Dr. Joya Chatterji described that this partition was seminal event of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Sekhar Bandhopadhyay observed that the partition of India in 1947 was a fait accompli.<sup>2</sup> However this partition was a tragic incident in Indian history. The British government demarcated the boundary line of the new country and decision was taken after the demarcation. The Government decided that the West Punjab and East Bengal would be go to Pakistan and the rest would remain in India. In 1947 two boundary Commissions both under Sir Cyril Radcliffe was appointment by Mountbatten, the Governor of India. He was given a very short time for the demarcation.<sup>3</sup> Radcliff Award not only recommended partition of India but it divided the North Bengal also.<sup>4</sup> The Partition was the curse to some people. On the other hand some peoples and some leaders of India supported the partition of India. The focus of the present paper is to highlight the impact of partition on the people and society of North Bengal. The last date line of the topic is selected up to 6<sup>th</sup> June in 2015, because after the long time movement (about seven decade) the enclave problems have ended with the signing of Land Boundary Agreement between India and Bangladesh.

During the peak time of the reign of Kamrup the rough boundary of Kamrup kingdom was Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, plain area of Darjeeling(Terai), Rangpur(Now in Bangladesh), Dinajpur(Old),Goalpara and Dhubri(now in Assam).The original ethnic group of people of this area was Rajbansi.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Buchanan wrote in first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, "Kamrup is the said to have been divided into four Piths or portion, which may naturally be expected to have appellations suitable to its name and tutelary deity, they are accordingly called Kampith, Yonipith, Monipith and Rotnopith." But with the course of time or with the change of political power this region gradually changes her shape even now being changing.

In modern time the undivided North Bengal had consisted of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Malda area. But the cultural and social features of the peoples of Coochbehar state were similar North Bengal. Not only that, the area like Purnia of Bihar and Goalpara of Assam belonged to same cultural zone. The Rajbansi community, ethnic group of people, was the majority inhabitant in this area. Except this the Rajbansi people were living in the Terai of Nepal. But the area with the change of the political power and gradual change of the administrative system, the area (i.e. the land of Rajbansi) was fragmented. So after the administrative re-organization the greater North Bengal became shrunked North Bengal. Now only the society of Northern-North Bengal is called Rajbansi society.<sup>6</sup> Before independence Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpure and Malda area was under the Rajshahi Division. Just before the Independence i.e. in early 1947 a movement for separate state was organized. The slogan of 'Rajasthan' to create a separate Rajbansi Kshatriya land under Coochbehar state was raised.<sup>7</sup> So the separatist movement was started which created uncertainty, anxiety and tensions in the minds of the people.

**Coochbehar State inclusion within India:** After Independence the first boundary re-organisation or administrative re-organisation was made by the signing of an Agreement between Governor General of India and the Maharaja of Coochbehar on 28<sup>th</sup> August in 1949. As a result the Coochbehar State incorporated with Indian Territory.<sup>8</sup> After the inclusion with India the Coochbehar State turns into a Union Territory. The partition and inclusion of the state

the North Bengal was facing another new problem of migration and this problem created trouble /disturbance in this area. As a result some where the communal riot was started.<sup>9</sup>

After the merger of Coochbehar state with India as a Union territory the Indian Government took initiative to merge this state with West Bengal as a district. But some peoples demanded to merge the Coochbehar territory with Assam. On 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1949 Dr.Charu Sanyal, the eminent scholar and freedom fighter collected mass signature on application in favour of merger of Coochbehar with West Bengal. Congress Committee of Coochbehar tried to convince the government of India that Coochbehar must be merged with West Bengal. On 24<sup>th</sup> June in 1949, the Coochbehar Peoples Association took decision to merge Coochbehar with West Bengal. On the Other hand the Congress party of Assam and Hitsadhane Sabha of Coochbehar argued that the culture and language of Coochbehar was almost similar/connection with Assam, so this state would be merging with Assam.<sup>10</sup> Nehurjee also emphasized on the wish of the people on the merger question of Coochbehar.<sup>11</sup>

But on 1<sup>st</sup> January, in 1950 the Coochbehar State become a District and merged with West Bengal.<sup>12</sup> Finally on 4<sup>th</sup> March in 1963 Jalpaiguri became a division then the Coochbehar district was included in Jalpaiguri Division.<sup>13</sup> But the work of inclusion of Coochbehar was not smoothly completed. Some people of Coochbehar, even King of Coochbehar did not agree to inclusion with West Bengal. Not only that some writers or persons told that the king was in confusion whether the Coochbehar State would be joined with India or Pakistan. Here famous folk Singer Abbas Uddin Ahmad told that the king Jagaddipendra Narayan once a time met with Soharawardi, the Prime Minister of East Pakistan i.e. Bangladesh and asked him whether Coochbehar join with Pakistan or India.<sup>14</sup> Here he again mentions that Gaytri Debi, Daughter of Coochbehar king did not support this attitude of the King.<sup>15</sup> But some peoples of Coochbehar State like, Bidhubhushan Karji, Tarinikanta Roy, Gopal Chandra Roy, Tarakeswar Basunia, Md.Abdudhobahan and King also wanted that the Coochbehar remain as a State of India.<sup>16</sup> But here it may be mentioned that those princely states did not agree to merge with India Ballavbhai Patel, Chief Architect of integration of India, and Mr.V.P. Menon described those states opposed to merger with new nation as antiquated or Obsolete state.<sup>17</sup>

However the root causes of the political, social and cultural problem of this area was the partition of India. The area that constituted of Rangpur, Goalpara, Princely state of Coochbehar, Purnia of Bihar, Dinajpur and present North Bengal was culturally, socially, economically a single region which might be called the land of Rajbansi which was divided in 1947. After the partition of the land of Rajbansi, the major group of people of this region, has been marginalized sometimes linguistically, sometimes in number of population and sometimes politically and culturally. As a result grievances arose among the peoples specially Rajbansi peoples and they began to organize the different types of movement which created many problems and disturbance the peace of this area. Here Prof. A.G. Ghosh discusses about some movement like, ethno-linguistic State Movement, Re-united Movement of Rajbangsi and Koch of Assam and West Bengal, De-merger Movement in the erstwhile princely state of Coochbehar, Autonomy Movement in North Bengal and Independent state Movement etc.<sup>18</sup> Another critical or big problem is that after partition huge number of immigrant people migrated from East Bengal<sup>19</sup> and Assam and permanently settle in this area. Different community like Varna Hindu peoples, Rajbansis, Muslims etc. have come in this area. As a result the demographic scenario was changed, socio-economic problems arose, and inequalities originated. So, one event originated lot of problems. So, all above problems which were originated from the partition were a great destruction/ oppositions of the peoples of North Bengal.

Not among the Varna Hindus or Muslims but little division has been seen among the Rajbansi peoples. Some Rajbansi peoples came from East Bengal and permanently settled in this area. But surprisingly the local Rajbansi peoples called them 'Rangpuria Rajbansi' (Who came from Rangpur). So there is little social division among the Rajbansi people which is made by the local Rajbansi people of North Bengal.

**Enclave Problems-** other problems that related with administrative re-organization was the exchange of enclaves. The enclave problems of Bangladesh and India which they have got as a hereditary right/by way of inheritance when Bangladesh had received these enclaves from land boundary from India and India got it from British. In the Indian enclaves in Bangladesh the census operations was made in 1951. But the result of this initiative did not affected on the exchange of enclave. In 1958, a treaty was signed between Jaharlal Neheru, Prime Minister of India and Firoz Kha Nun, President of Pakistan. This treaty was known as Neheru-Nun Treaty. It was the remarkable initiative to solve the enclave problem among both the country. The Article no. 3 of the treaty denotes or described about Berubari (one of the enclave of India in Bangladesh) and the Article no. 10 of the treaty described about exchange of enclaves of North Bengal. The decision was taken about the enclave of Berubari was that the enclave would be divided into two part. One part would be going to Pakistan and other parts remain in India. In article 10 described that, "Exchange of old Cooch Behar enclaves in Pakistan and Pakistan enclaves in India without claim to compensation for extra area going to Pakistan is agree to." But a movement was organized by the peoples of India of this area and they went to Supreme Court and the Supreme Court told that Berubari is the part of India and without the amendment of act these agreement was illegal.<sup>20</sup> So the problems remain unsolved.

Another important initiative was taken in 1974 by the Government of India and Bangladesh. On 19<sup>th</sup> May, in 1974 a treaty was signed between Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India and Muzibar Rahaman, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. But the problems remain unsolved, because there were constitutional problems from Indian side. But Bangladesh was ready to exchange the enclave.

Tinbigha Corridor problem was another event which created agitation in this enclave area. In 1982 Tibigha Lease Treaty was signed between Bangladesh and India. But the peoples protested against this Treaty. At last on 26 June in 1992 Tinbigha Corridor was opened for the peoples of Bangladesh and Dahagram (enclave of Bangladesh in India). The Tinbigha area is the part of India which exists in Kuchilibari and Mekhliganj area.

In 1996, another initiative was taken from both the Government to solve the enclave problems. In this year a team under the mastership of J.R.Pitter, the Director of Indian Land Records (Indian side) and under the Leadership of Mahammad Safiuddin, the Director General of Bangladesh (Bangladesh side) started negotiation.<sup>21</sup> But no satisfactory decision had come from this negotiation.

But since 1947 the peoples of the enclaves was suffering from many distressed because there were many problems. There were political, social, economic and cultural problems which were the cause of people's misery or troubles. Some problems is given bellow which was the cause of the people's unhappy:-

- a) There was no Government office in enclave area,
- b) There was no administrative control over the enclave,( According to Pranab Mukharjee, Foreign Minister of India,<sup>22</sup>
- c) Lack of clear identity of the peoples of respective enclaves,

- d) There was no Voting right of the peoples,
- e) In connection with this there were no Voter card and Ration card of the inhabitants,
- f) They are residents of no man's land
- g) Educational problems,
- h) Health problems,
- i) Religious problems,
- j) Some criminal or wicked persons committed wicked act on Indian enclave in Bangladesh. For example, on December, in 2010 in Banskhata(no.119) of Indian enclave in Bangladesh about 300 person of B.N.P. and Jamat-i-Islamic member raided on Balram Barman's house.<sup>23</sup>
- k) There was racial conflict in enclave area.
- l) People lived without residential identity,
- m) Communication problem,
- n) Economic problems etc.

As a result since Independence the peoples of the enclaves of both the country had organized movement or prayed to their own government to exchange the enclaves. But the government could not take any suitable step to solve these problems. So the people started movement for their liberation. The peoples of the enclaves of both the country had organized committee to conduct the movement. They formed a Co-ordination Committee in both the country. Diptiman Sengupta was selected the Secretary of Bharat-Bangladesh Samnwaya(Co-ordination) Committee in Indian enclave, on the other hand the peoples of Bangladesh enclave form a committee named Bangladesh Chhitmohal Binimay Committee under the President ship of Altaf Husain.

So simultaneously the leaders of both the country had launched movement to exchange the enclaves and to solve the problems of the peoples. For example 15<sup>th</sup> February in 2011 in Rangpur the Bangladesh Chhitmohal Binimay Committee organized a great rally in favour of the exchange of the enclaves. In this meeting Mr. Ershad, ex-president of Bangladesh argued or cross examine firmly in favour to exchange. The people of enclave of Bangladesh called the meeting as new revolution.<sup>24</sup> Another significance event was that in Legislative Election of West Bengal of 2011 Maymana Bibi, a lady of enclave of Bangladesh in India, decided to contest as a candidate.

During the time of Assembly election of West Bengal the peoples of the enclaves of Bangladesh show the black flag to the election officers. Their grievances were that the Indian Government did not provide them electricity, drinking water, irrigation, rats of communications etc. It was their protest against the Government. The peoples of the enclaves decided to form a Superintendent Government in enclave area themselves. They again decided to form different sub-committee under this Government. After the exchange of the enclaves this Superintendent Government and all others sub-committee would be dissolved. Another interesting matter and also critical problem that some peoples of Nekipara village of enclave of South Barubari(Mainuddin Pramanik) said that they were the voter of both the country(Bangladesh and India). They again said that they received all facility from both the country.

The Bangladesh Chhitmohal Binimay Committee started hunger strike on 26<sup>th</sup> June, in 2011. But after/within 14 hours DSP of Coochbehar Police (crime) went there and promised to fulfill their demand and advice them to stop the Hunger strike.

In July, 2011 an initiative was taken by the administration to solve the problems of the peoples of enclaves. Following programs was taken: Census operation was started by the officers of the administration. For this the deliberation was started among the administrator of both the country. The peoples of the enclaves were very happy for this news. The discussion matter was about the exchange of enclaves, pillar of the boarder (identification), determination of the boundaries, release of the prisoners etc. The district Magistrate of Coochbehar told that the problem will be sorted out through negotiations.

At last the census operation was started on from 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> July, in 2011(Saturday and Sunday). The 50 teams were formed for the census.<sup>25</sup> The peoples were very happy because they expected that they will get the citizenship of their own country. The members of the each census team in number two: one from India and one from Bangladesh. After the census, the report will be submitted to both the Government. The Subdivision Officer of Dinhatra of Coochbehar district told that the census would be done family wise.

On 20<sup>th</sup> August at Rabindra Bhawan Mancha in Haldibari a conference was organized of migrated peoples. About 500 refugees were present in this conference. They told that they were unhappy because they were facing many problems like looting, highway robbery, setting fire to or arson, murder, raped etc. Though they were disappointed, but they were hopeful that after the visiting of Prime Minister of India and the Chief Minister of West Bengal in Bangladesh the enclaves' problems would be solves.

After the Census (14<sup>th</sup> July to 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2011) the office of foreign ministers of India informed that (to Tariniprasad Roy) the number of enclaves of Bangladesh in India is 51(area 7110 acres) and Indian enclave in Bangladesh is in number 111(area 17160 acres).<sup>26</sup> On the other hand Forward Block Party of Coochbehar demanded that not according to Indra-Muzib treaty, but the enclaves would be exchange on the basis/line of Nehru-Nun treaty of 1958.

In the mean time Dr. Manmohan Sing, the former Prime Minister of India went to Bangladesh and the main discussion issue of his visit was the Teesta Water distribution. After received this news peoples of enclaves hoped that the problems of enclaves would be discussed. But since Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal objected/proteted against Teesta Water Distribution so the treaty was postponed and with that the enclave's problems remain unsolved.<sup>27</sup>

One interesting matter is that the enclaves Panchagar, Dimla, Debiganj, Patgram, Hatibandha, Lalmonirhat, fulbari and Bhurungamari etc (8 enclaves) was under/situated in Koch Kingdom. But after independence the Coochbehar State included with India but above said area remain enclaves of East Pakistan.<sup>28</sup>

On 23 October, 2011 the peoples of enclaves and the Co-ordination Committee of the Exchange of Enclaves organized an agitation to solve the problems. But after 10 days this movement was stopped.

Some time the Ministers from Both the country visited the enclave area and give them assurance to solve the enclave problems. On 19<sup>th</sup> October Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh visited the Tinbigha corridor and Gulam Nabi Azad, the Health Minister of India

welcomes her. On 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2014, Mamata Banerjee visited at the Dakuarhat of Dinhata delivered a lecture in a civil Meting.

In the mean time one problem arise in the enclave's area of India. The problems was that some antisocial and smugglers wanted citizenship of India and they began to collect forged documents from some illegal person/crafty. This information was given by the spy of India.

After long movements at last on 28<sup>th</sup> May in 2015 Land Boundary Exchange Treaty or enclave Bill was signed by Pranab Mukharjee, the President of India. After this consented, Shusma Swaraj, the Foreign Minister of India announced that 3000 crore rupees would be granted for the rehabilitation. Diptiman Sengupta told that the movements of the people of enclave become success. Golam Mustafa, the President of Bangladesh Chhitmohal Binimoy Committee told that it is like Independence. Haripada Mondal, the secretary of Chhitmohal Binimoy Sanggram Committee thanked to the Government.

At last on 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2015 the exchange of enclave of North Bengal became real. Because on that day a historical Land Boundary Agreement(L.B.A.) was signed between Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India and Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh in Dhaka. Indian Foreign Secretary S.Jaishankar and Bangladesh counterpart Shahidul Haque exchanged Protocols an instrument of ratification of the L.A.B. Mr.Modi announced a fresh USD 2 billion line of credit for Bangladesh and promised quick implementation of the earlier line of credit of USD 800 million and full disbursement of USD 200 million.<sup>29</sup>

The hope of the peoples of enclaves of the both the country became real when India and Bangladesh exchanging their enclaves at midnight on 30<sup>th</sup> July in 2015. This event celebrated in the enclaves with fireworks and cultural events which were organized by Bharat-Bangladesh Enclave Exchange Co-ordination Committee.<sup>30</sup>

### **Reorganization within West Bengal or Internal reorganization-**

Except the foreign land boundary agreement there was also internal administrative re-organization in North Bengal. Here internal administrative re-organization indicates the administrative division which is created within West Bengal or within North Bengal. After partition of 1947, the West Dinajpur district was enlarging in 1956 and it was the first internal administrative re-organization which was done after the recommendation of the States Reorganization Act. By this recommendation some part of Bihar was added with West Bengal. Again, it is necessary to say that Dalkhola( now in Uttar Dinajpur District) was originally in the state of Bihar but after 1959, this area included with West Bengal and it was due to language and cultural similarities with West Bengal. Next another administrative unit was created in 1963 when the Jalpaiguri became the Administrative Division of North Bengal. Before that the North Bengal was under Presidency Division. It was done because of gradual demographic scenario was changing fast of North Bengal and on the other hand, it was far distance from the Presidency Division. So the government decided to create this new Administrative Division. Next administrative re-organization was the partition of West Dinajpur District and divided into two districts named North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur on 1<sup>st</sup> April in 1992. It was partitioned because the far distance between the North Dinajpur with Southern Part of the district. Another arrangement was in the year 1994, Siliguri Municipality area awarded Corporation and with that, some part (17 wards) of Jalpaiguri District included with this Corporation. After 1971 huge numbers of refugee comes in Siliguri town and as a result the demographic scenario had

changed and for this it was necessary to convert it into corporation. Reorganization was that, the second decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the 17 wards of Siliguri Corporation area which was under the Jalpaiguri district had brought under the Bhaktinagar Police Station of Siliguri. But the people of Jalpaiguri were not satisfied with this decision and protested against this inclusion. The peoples of Jalpaiguri called strike in several times and raised voice against this inclusion. Another Local self government was formed in Darjeeling District. The Peoples of Darjeeling district demanded separate Gorkhaland state from very long time. At last the government had formed an administrative body called Gorkha Hill Council for Darjeeling Hill area in 1988. But later on this arrangement could not satisfy to the majority peoples of Darjeeling Hill.<sup>31</sup> So on 18<sup>th</sup> July in 2011 the state Government and Central Government formed another administration body called Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA). Another new administrative unit was created in 2014. After long time demand of the peoples of Alipurduar area (a sub-division of Jalpaiguri district), a new district have created, named Alipurduar district on 25 June in 2014. The people of the Alipurduar area demanded from very long time for separate district. Because the Distance between Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri Town about 93.8 KM. So it was difficult to communicate with Jalpaiguri Town. Another arrangement was the creation of newly Sub-division of Malbazar in 1990. The three police stations named Nagrakata, Metiali an Mal Sadar block was the tribal area. For this reason the people demented separate district. But at last Government created a new Sub-Division of Jalpaiguri.

Therefore since 1947 the different movements were organized against the unfavorable or unexpected partition. This administrative re-organization could not satisfy peoples of North Bengal. On the other hand different type of movement was organized or now being organizing for the creation of new administrative unit or new administrative body. At last it may be say that whether the movements are organized before the re-organization or after the administrative re-organization but the basic goal of the movements was more or less same. The basic problems now exist today or remain unsolved. The economic, social, political, and cultural dissatisfactions were the main cause of these problems. The twin issues of poverty and inequality must be addressed as priority government action. Seed of separatist movements only germinates in the favourable condition of poverty and deprivation.

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