

A History of Sabha - Samiti in 19th and 20th Centuries North Bengal: A Review

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The middle - class nationalist consciousness was strengthened in the sixties and seventies, and its associational base was broadened from the Atmiya Sabha of 1815, through the Bengal British India Society of 1843 and the British Indian Association of 1851 to the Indian Association of 1876. It was flowing through other channels also like the Patriot's Association (1865), the Hindu Mela (1867) and the Students' Association (1875). The Brahmo Samaj movement became a potent and living force in this period, under the dynamic leadership of Keshab Chandra Sen¹. Professor Binay Sarkar rightly remarks that "these societies and associations were the harbingers of the new awakening in Bengal among urban middle class, because Bengal or India had not known any such societies organised for collective thinking and discussion until the 19th century"². It is true that the growth and development of various socio – cultural, literary, political and religious associations of colonial Bengal were confined within the urban centres only but since the middle of the nineteenth century it put its long strides even to the rural areas also. The English educated so – called Bengali people were truly the harbinger of these associations in nineteenth century colonial Bengal. Baring the educated Bengalis, the native landlords (Zamindars, Jotedars) also played a vital role behind their growth and development in a comprehensive way. Reverend Lal Behari Dey opined that "Debating societies were multiplied, in which bigotry, high handed tyranny, superstition and Hindu orthodoxy was denounced in no measured terms". Alexander Duff draws a very interesting picture in regard to the rapid growth and development of associations in colonial Bengal. He remarked that "new societies started up with the utmost rapidity in every part of the native city. There was not an evening in the week or which one, two or more of these were not held and each individual was generally enrolled a member of several"³.

In regard to the history of various associations in colonial Bengal large number of books, articles both in English and Bengali language have been published such as Rajat Sanyal's 'Voluntary Associations and The Urban Public Life in Bengal', Professor Nishith Ranjan Ray (ed.) 'Public Associations in India from the early years of the 19th Century to Independence', Dr. Arun Kumar Chattarjee's '*Unabinsha Shatabdir Sabha Samiti o Bangla Sahitya*', Manindra Nath Bandhapadhyay and Santosh Kumar Dey's '*Unabinsha Shatabdir Sabha Samiti*'. The discussion of these books is mainly related with those associations which came up in Calcutta and its adjacent areas. Unfortunately, no serious study as yet has been made in regard to the history of socio – economic – cultural – religious and political associations of colonial North Bengal. Hence an attempt has been made here to discuss the origin, growth and development of various associations' times without number in colonial North Bengal during the period of our study. The study, as we believe, will go far away to fill up the gap.

The first and foremost association of colonial North Bengal came into existence was *Desha Hitashani Sabha* in Cooch Behar state. It was established in the year 1859 under the tutelage of Cooch Behar royal family. Later in 1864 it came to be known as *Cooch Behar Hitashani Sabha*. A few British High Officials such as Colonel J.C. Haughton, H. Beveridge contributed a large behind its establishment. Its members were asked to repay their social debt by participating in welfare activities on behalf of the Cooch Behar royal state⁴.

The hill station Darjeeling was considered not only in terms of the social history of the British but of the Indians as well. Apart from the massive influx of labourers, the first Indians appeared in Darjeeling hill were the Princes. Drawn by the prestige and political might associated with the stations, a number of wealthy princes began to take up seasonal residence in the early twentieth century. The princes, however, were not the only Indians to enter the hill station. A growing number of elites put their feet there in the late nineteenth and twentieth century⁵. In this context it is important to mention here that Kurseong and Kalimpong acquired a complete different demographic and ethnic shape in comparison with the

characteristics of the Darjeeling hill. Instead of remaining small and isolated from the sway of Britishers', Kurseong became a bustling centre of administration education commerce and service. Kalimpong was the hub to provide labourers times without number in plantation sector and for vital work to other states like Manipur. Kalimpong was also the militant camp of British army from where they kept an eye over China and to settle border disputes⁶. This two types of Indians like the members of royal family and educated youths served the British administration soon realised the importance of social reformation and this paved the way in setting up *Samaj Sanskarini Sabha* in Darjeeling hill⁷.

In the year 1876, another socio – cultural association came up in Darjeeling hill was *Nabya Ekta Sabha*. Its chief objective was to unite the Bengali people and uplift the cause of social welfare. The *Himadri Harisabha* was established in Darjeeling hill in the same year⁸. The '*Dinajpur Bhatpara Unnati Sadhani Sabha*' established in the year 1878 in Dinajpur district of undivided Bengal was a welfare association. Their first emphasis, of course, was on education and for this purpose scholarships were offered to needy students⁹.

The Brahma Samaj had to set up its off springs throughout the whole North Bengal. It established its branches in Maldah in 1861, Cooch Behar in 1864, Dinajpur in 1867 and Jalpaiguri in 1869. The *Darjeeling Brahma Samaj* was founded on 3 January 1879 on land procured from British Government by late Radhanath Ray. In 1878 a prayer hall was constructed¹⁰. The Darjeeling Branch of the All India Arya Samaj was established in 1883. Its radical aim was to popularise the philosophy of *Vedantic* Hinduism and to promote Nepalese language and culture. It also published a monthly magazine namely '*Janadoot*'¹¹. The '*Darjeeling Debating Club*' established in the year 1884 was a popular cultural association of Darjeeling hill. At initial stage its members were stands only in fifty. The members of the royal families of Cooch Behar and Burdwan were its chief patroniser. Through the munificence of tea industrialist Bipra Das Pal Chaudhury and the then Maharajadhiraja of Burdwan it got its own building. It had primarily two fundamental objectives – (a) To improve the social, national and moral condition of the people; (b) To cultivate the power of speech and reason among its members. To promote a bond of cohesion among the local Bengalis, the association organizes festivals like Durga Puja, Saraswati Puja, Pahela Baisakh (Bengali Hindu New Year's Day) and dramatic, musical performances at its own auditorium¹².

The Malda Muhamadan Association came up under the encouragement elite Muslim society of contemporary Malda town in the year 1890 was fully a religiously based association. Its chief founder was Abdul Aziz Khan who was a native opulent Zamindar and a staunch propagator of pan - Islamic ideology. In the year 1895, Mr. Price the then District Magistrate and Zamindar Chaudhury Mohayedur Rahaman became its honourable President and working president respectively. Their appeal to the British Government was to appoint only Muslim members in the District Education Department to a large degree¹³. In the same year 1890, the Dinajpur Sabha owes its origin. The lion shares of its members were belonged to the Hindu community and their prime objective was to safeguard the interests of the same community¹⁴.

The Muhamadan Association came up in Jalpaiguri town in the year 1894 under the leadership of Jotedar Eknuddin Ahmad and tea industrialist Khan Bahadur Rahim Baksh. It strived to develop the notion of pan – Islamic ideology and spirit of education among the Muslim community of the town. This association had a profound relation with the National Muhamadan Association founded by Sayyed Amir Ali in Aligarh.

The *Anjuman – e – Islamia* of Jalpaiguri town was founded in the year 1892 by the Muslim residents of the town with the object of improving the intellectual, moral, social and material condition of the Muslims in accordance with the teachings of Islam. Maulavi Mehrajuddin Ahmad was its founder and tea industrialist Khan Bahadur Rahim Baksh was its first president¹⁵. It is worthwhile mentioning here that the first branch of *Anjuman – e – Islamia* of undivided North Bengal came into existence in Darjeeling hill in the year 1860 by the Muslim residents who had come from the plains¹⁶.

Another Muslim dominated political association of contemporary period was Anjuman Makhaerul Islam which established its bedrock in Malda town in the year 1900. Hasimuddin Mian, the native Zamindar of Bargharia village was its chief founder. Its main aim was to propagate the morality of Islam and disdain the Hinduism as possible¹⁷.

The 'Cooch Behar Students Improvement Association' came up in 1886 with the initiative of the students of Jenkins School. Its main aim was to resurrect the cultural consciousness and nationalism among the youth society of Cooch Behar State. Dewan Kalika Das Dutta Ray Bahadur, Head Pandit Mukunda Dayal Basu had a massive contribution behind its prosperity.

The '*Suniti Sancharini Sabha*' established on 8th January 1895 was a landmark in women history of Cooch Behar State. This day was observed as the death anniversary of Keshab Chandra Sen by the Cooch Behar Nababidhan Brahma Samaj. However, all the members of the '*Suniti Sancharini Sabha*' were Brahmas and their main aim was to improve the living condition of women. The '*Cooch Behar Parthana Samaj*' was established in 1895 (B.S. 1302) and its main initiator was Umanath Gupta. It worked for the social reformation and women emancipation of the state. The '*Arya Nari Samaj*' came up in Cooch Behar town in the year 1894 for the welfare of female society of the State. It was established in the household of Brahma Harinarayan Chattapadhyaya¹⁸.

Now we discuss the history of other association which came up in twentieth century contemporary North Bengal. The 'Malda District Association' established under the leadership of pleader cum Congress Party leader Radesh Chandra Seth in the year 1906 was fully a welfare organisation. Its main aim was to resurrect the political consciousness of common people against the British Raj. The National Education Council of Malda District was established in 1907 under the initiative of Professor Binay Sarkar of Calcutta University who was the renowned educationist of contemporary Malda town. It worked as a cultural and literary forum by organizing popular lectures, symposia, seminars and tried their best to foster the spirit of female education. It also published periodicals for the new – literates¹⁹. The '*Gurkha Samiti*' established in 1906 was a welfare organisation of contemporary Darjeeling hill. It worked as a cultural and literary forum to promote the socio – economic and cultural interests of local Nepali people²⁰.

In the meantime the '*Nitya Dharma Badhani Sabha*' came up in Dinajpur district of undivided Bengal under the jargon leadership of Babu Girish Chandra Chakrabarty. He completed his post – graduate degree from the Rajshahi University and was the first Master Degree holder of the then Dinajpur district²¹. The '*Bidhayani Sabha*' of Calcutta had to extend its off spring in Dinajpur district in 1904 with the aim of promoting science and technical education. Maharaja Girija Nath Ray was its first President²². In the same year the '*Dinajpur Mussalman Sabha*' came up with the aim to promote the socio – cultural and political condition of Muslim community²³.

The birth of '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad*' in 1906 ushered an era of golden age in the cultural history of undivided North Bengal. Under its corroboration the '*Uttarabanga Sahitya Sammelan*' (North Bengal Literary Conference) was organised in Rangpur in 1908. Most of its members were prominent literary personages of contemporary North Bengal such as Raja Jagadindra Deb Raikat, pleader Umagati Ray, Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma. It did not last long and continued for twenty years only. It is worthwhile mentioning here that the foundation of '*Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti*' was the immediate effect of literary pursuits of '*Uttarabanga Sahitya Sammelan*'. Its chief objective was to explore the unexcavated facts of regional history of contemporary North Bengal²⁴.

The '*Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti*', founded in 1910, looked only to government patronage for the upliftment of social status of their castes. It also sought to mobilize the masses. In its fourth annual conference in 1913, it was decided that '*Mandali Samitis*' would be set up in every village to reach the common people. By 1918 a highly developed network of village organizations was operating under the '*Kshatriya Samiti*'. These Samitis were supposed to function as village governments and courts of arbitration, they would spread education and preach ritual reforms and also function as co – operative

societies for the economic improvement of the Rajbansi villagers²⁵. The *Rajbansi Kshatriya Samiti* offered scholarships for the education of the poor Rajbansi students. With these students, a Kshatriya Chhatra Samiti was formed and its members were asked to repay their social debt by participating in welfare activities to help the poor members of the community²⁶.

The “Bengali Association” of Darjeeling hill was established in 1908 on land leased out by the Maharaja of Burdwan at Dowhill Road. The Bengali tea planters extended their hands to other Bengali intellectuals in setting up this cultural institution probably to pursue their cultural interests and social interactions. Through the munificence of S.B. Dey the association got its building in 1930. The latter was named Raj Rajeswari Hall after the name of the wife of S.B. Dey²⁷. With the same object the “Bengali Association of Darjeeling” came up in Darjeeling hill in 1930. However, as a pioneer Bengali organisation in Darjeeling hill, it performs over the years a major role to further the cause of education and culture as yet. It runs a primary and a junior high School through the Bengali medium besides organising Durga Puja and other festivals²⁸.

By the first half of the twentieth century, a large number of militant organisations came up in various districts of contemporary North Bengal. These associations were collaborate known as ‘*Uttarbanga Dal*’ and worked as an off spring of *Anushilan Samiti*, Calcutta. This militant group *Uttarbanga Dal*’ was really a sore in the eye of the British Raj. Hence it came to be known as ‘Indian Liberating League’ in official papers of the British Government.

By the second half of the twentieth century, the ‘North Bengal Landlord Association’ came up in 1909 at Rangpur. This association was comprised with the native Zamindars of Malda, Dinajpur, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri districts of undivided North Bengal. It got its recognition from the British Government in the year 1917. The chief aim of this association was to safeguard the interests of its members and strive to attract the British Government for the sake of their comprehensive upliftment²⁹.

The ‘All India Association of Young Men Naba Bidhan’ came up on 11th December 1914 in Calcutta under the initiative of Princess Suniti Devi. Its fundamental aim was to bring about a new all – round revival and to recognise the various lines of work (social, educational, philanthropic and devotional)³⁰.

As we know that the ‘Divide and Rule Policy’ of the British Raj always endeavoured to frustrate the Indian planters. Thus the Indian planters suffered a long way and at least, their undaunted will force surpassed the articulated hindrance and got them united with national consolidation. It resulted in the formation of various Associations owned by the Indian planters only during the British – Raj. The “Indian Tea Planters’ Association” (ITPA) took birth at Jalpaiguri town in 1915 under the earnest patronage of several renowned Indian tea planters like Tarini Prasad Ray, Jyotish Chandra Sanyal, Aminur Rahaman, Jogesh Chandra Ghosh, Rai Jay Govinda Guha Bahadur, Rai Bahadur Joy Chandra Saha and several others. In this context, however, it is important to mention here that Sir Rajendra Nath Mukharjee, Kt., Senior Partner of Messrs. Martin, Burn Ltd. Calcutta was the brainchild behind the formation of this Association. Indian Tea Planters’ Association (ITPA) was an organisation of Indian section for the growers of tea in North – East India. With the establishment of ITPA as a trade umbrella the Indian planters received a formidable momentum both in terms of bargaining power, group cohesion on the one hand and growth of the Indianised tea industry with rapidity on the other³¹.

The upsurge of the Bengali renaissance which engulfed Calcutta in the nineteenth and twentieth century also took long strides and reached Jalpaiguri town in no time. It is true that the nineteenth century Calcutta could boast of many luminaries and in this respect the Jalpaiguri town did not lack behind as a large number of social reformers, keen educationalists and education stalwarts accounted for a large section of population of the Jalpaiguri town. Being a tea industry centred town, Jalpaiguri attracted some great names of Bengali literature in various times. Such recurrent visits, literary to say, by literary experts did not happened in the case of other towns of North Bengal. It is important to mention that in Jalpaiguri town literature mainly flourished in the nineteenth century due to some individual efforts which ultimately

produced a limited variety of literature. But by the end of the nineteenth century a concerted effort in the direction of literary practice could be perceived. The first and foremost contribution of the Bengali entrepreneurs in literary field of the Jalpaiguri town began with the creation of 'Debating Club'. The foundation of this cultural association laid under the auspicious leadership of two noble Bengali tea planter Jogesh Chandra Ghosh and Jogodindra Deb Raikot in the year 1917. Being a brilliant student of the renowned Presidency College Calcutta, Jogesh Chandra Ghosh tied the knot with copious illuminate personalities as well as cultural associations. This impetus actually drew him to set up a likewise association in his own town. In this literary process he got the literary assistance from Jogodindra Deb Raikot. Thus the Debating Club came into existence. Both of them, however, were its President and Secretary respectively. Its chief aim was to arrange literary discussion and cultural debate on heterogeneous subjects. Primarily it was held at the residence of Jogodindra Raikot where Jogesh Chandra Ghosh discussed on numerous themes in regard to the literary World of the then Calcutta ³².

The 'Hill Men's Association' was established in Darjeeling hill in the year 1917. Its main purpose was to improve the condition of the hill people. Swami Bisuddhananada had a close relation with this association ³³. In 1920 another association with similar objective came up namely 'Hill people's Social Union'. Bahadur Rai, a renowned social reformer of contemporary Darjeeling hill was its founder. The 'Sherpa Buddhist Association' came up in Darjeeling hill in the year 1924. Its prime motto was to foster the religious fraternity among the hill men ³⁴. In 1924, the educated Nepali people of Darjeeling hill took the initiative for setting up an association in order to growth and development of Nepali culture. This ceaseless effort was finally culminated in the formation of a cultural association namely the '*Nepali Sahitya Sammelan*' in 1924 ³⁵.

The '*Cooch Behar Sahitya Sabha*' came up in 1915 (B.S. 1322) indubitably ushered an era of golden age in the history of literary pursuits of Cooch Behar district. Maharaja Jitendra Narayan, Princess Indira Devi and Prince Victor Nityendra Narayan played an important role behind its consolidation. It was the brainchild of *Varendra* Research Association which fundamental goal was to promote the research activity pertaining to the unexcavated history, anthropology of the North East region ³⁶.

By the second half of the twentieth century, a large number of socio – cultural and political associations came up in Jalpaiguri town. The 'Jalpaiguri District Association' was the first one which was primarily established under the initiative of pleader cum tea industrialist Tarini Prasad Ray. A lion share of its members was pleaders. The fundamental aim of this association was to safeguard the interests of its members and assist the financially to fight with their European counterparts ³⁷.

In the meantime, the 'Jotedar's Association of Jalpaiguri district' established its bedrock under the initiative of Jagadindradev Raikat in the year 1923. All the native Jotedar's both Hindu and Muslim came under one umbrella and the primary object of this association was to fulfil the interests of its members. The off spring of this association also came up in Cooch Behar district with similar goal namely 'Cooch Behar District Jotedar's Association' in the year 1931 ³⁸.

In 1924, the All Bengal student's Union established its first branch throughout the North Bengal at Jalpaiguri town. A good number of brilliant students of contemporary Jalpaiguri town played an important role behind its birth. It is worth while important to mention here that this union was the revised version of a Student's Union of Jalpaiguri town namely College and Ex – Students Association which was actually came up in 1915 ³⁹.

In the year 1928, the Muslim students of contemporary Jalpaiguri town also established an imitate association namely the 'Muhamadan Student's Association'. Its radical aim was to provide financial support to the needy brilliant Muslim students and simultaneously foster the spirit of religious fraternity among the whole Muslim community of Jalpaiguri town. 'Nawjawan', a fully communal biased newspaper was the mouthpiece of this association. In the year 1927, the *Ahmadiya Association* first came up in

Jalpaiguri town throughout whole North Bengal. Its main aim was to sow the seed of Islamism among the Hindus as possible⁴⁰.

The birth of the '*Jalpaiguri Sahitya Samiti*' in 1928 was a consecutive attempt of the contemporary intellectual personages of Jalpaiguri town. All its members were fundamentally Bengali Hindus. Its main aim was to propagate Bengali culture among the dwellers of the town. In contrast with this, the elite Muslims of contemporary Jalpaiguri town established their own association namely '*Muslim Sahitya Samiti*' in 1931. Tajmal Hossain, the renowned educationist of Jalpaiguri town was its president and Maulavi Md. Shukrulla was its Secretary⁴¹.

By the third decade of the twentieth century the next purely Indian Association to be established in the tea districts was the "Terai Indian Planters' Association" (TIPA). The birth of the Association was not altogether happy, since it was partly the result of friction between the Indian members and one or more persons prominent in the management of the old Terai Planters' association. Therefore, Bijoy Basanta Bose, Tarapada Banarjee (T.P. Banarjee), Saradindu Bose, Jitendra Mohan Dutta, Abdul Bari Khandakar, Ila Pal Choudhury and Kusum Dutta started an association at first with only eight gardens (Thanjhora T.E., Bijoynagar T.E., Fulbari T.E., Naxalbari T.E., Atal T.E., Ashapur T.E., Domohoni T.E., Chandmoni T.E.) as its members in the year 1928, but more and more Indian managers joined the Association. T.P. Banarjee was its second chairman since its inception until 1949. Its first chairman was Bijoy Basanta Bose, manager of Thanjhora Tea Estate. It was essentially an Association of Tea Garden Managers. The patrons of the Association were Ila Pal Chaudhury of Mohorgaong Gulma T.E., Biren Chandra Ghosh popularly known as B.C. Ghosh, Hon'ble Member of Indian Tea Association (London). The first participating planters of the association were Bijoy Basanta Bose of Thanjhora T.E., Gopal Lal Sanyal of Bijoynagar T.E., Braja Gopal Sinha of Fulbari T.E., Abdul Bari Khandakar of Naxalbari T.E., Jitendra Mohan Dutta of Atal T.E., Aswini Lahiri of Ashapur T.E., Saradhindhu Bose of Domohoni T.E., Sarat Chandra Bose of Chandmoni T.E.) They had their problems also. Responsibilities were thrust on them but they lacked resources of all descriptions. They were determined, however, to overcome all the difficulties and to march ahead side by side with British tea planters⁴².

The '*Gorkha Dukha Nivarak Sammelan*' was started in Darjeeling hill in 1932 with the limited initial object of disposing of unclaimed dead bodies of indigent people. With the passage of time and increase in the popularity of the organisation, its activities have extended considerably. It has now several branches throughout the district and runs an orphanage, a first aid centre, a gymnasium, a public library and so on. The organisation also undertakes relief activities during natural calamities. An analogous association came up in Darjeeling hill namely NEBULA (Nepali Bhutia Lepcha Association) in 1934. It was vulgarly a socio – political association. In the contemporary period, several other associations were also came up in Darjeeling hill such as the Indian Christian Association, Bengal Buddhist Association, Young Men' s Buddhist Association. All of them worked with the aim to promote the condition of their each religion respectively⁴³.

During the same decade of the twentieth century, the foundation of Marwari Sangha in Jalpaiguri district was a landmark in the social history of non - Bengali people in North Bengal. It was actually established in the year 1931. As we know that the Jalpaiguri district in the contemporary period ranked first for its Marwari dwellers in comparison with other districts of North Bengal. Furthermore, the Marwari people of Jalpaiguri district were much economically advanced and educationally superior to the other Marwari people dwelling districts of North Bengal. This social background actually made the platform behind the establishment of first Marwari association in North Bengal⁴⁴.

Now we discuss the birth history of such association which were actually came up in Calcutta but bore the name of other region. As we know that a large number of people from various part of India went to Calcutta for the sake of employment, better education and better life. Many of them permanently settled there. In spite of spending majestic life in Calcutta they could not forgot the connection with their birth land. This emotion actually drew them to set up their own association and these were commonly known

with the name of their birth land. The *Tripura Hitasadhani Sabha*, *Sri Hatta Sammelani* is few examples in this regard. The people of North Bengal lived in Calcutta did not lag behind much in this respect and many of them established association bore the name of their birth land. The *Malda Samiti* established by renowned Professor Binoy Sarkar of Calcutta University in 1933, the *Jalpaiguri Samiti* by the then Minister Khagendra Nath Dasgupta and the *Dinajpur Samiti* are indeed deserved to be mentioned. It is worth while important to mention here that the style of giving name the association with the name of their mother land did not confine in Calcutta only. This style was practised in other districts of undivided Bengal also. The *Rangpur Samiti*, *Manikganj Sammelani*, *Barishal Sammelani* of Jalpaiguri district are needed to be cited here⁴⁵.

In 1940s various socio – political associations came up at Jalpaiguri town. Among them the *Alipurduar Sahitya Parishad*, the *Pallimangal Sammelan* and the *Mahamadan Association* are worthy to be mentioned. The *Alipurduar Sahitya Parishad* established in 1941 was the first literary organisation of the Alipurduar sub - division. Tea industrialist Ray Bahadur Bidhu Bhushan Samaddar was the chief patroniser of this association⁴⁶.

The *Pallimangal Sammelan* came up at Jalpaiguri town in the year 1943. Its chief founder and patroniser was Prasanna Deb Raikat, an opulent and benevolent jotedar of the contemporary Jalpaiguri town. The fundamental aim of this association was to uplift the standard of living of rural people⁴⁷.

The *Mahamadan Association* of Jalpaiguri town established in the same year was a typical political organ of Muslim society. It strived to develop the notion of pan – Islamic ideology and spirit of education among the Muslim community of the town. They had a profound relation with the local Rajbanshi Muslims which grew up under the initiative of Sonaula Saheb⁴⁸.

In the first half of the twentieth century a number of religious associations came up in various parts of North Bengal. The ‘Young Men’s Theistic Association’ established in Cooch Behar State in the year 1906 under the initiative of Prince Gajendra Narayan who was the chief propagator of Naba Bidhan Brahma Samaj in Cooch Behar. Its main aim was to improve the condition of the down trodden people of the society. Prince Gajendra Narayan is also famous in the history of Cooch Behar for the establishment of ‘Sura Nibarani Sabha’ in 1911⁴⁹.

The Theosophical Society had to set up its first off spring in Kalimpong town under the initiative of Hirenranath Dutta, the then notable pleader and social reformer of Darjeeling hill. A number of educated Nepali people were its member. Among them Matichand pradhan is deserve to be mentioned. He became the first Sub – Divisional Officer (SDO) throughout the whole Nepali community of Bengal as a whole. The Theosophical Society had no prolonged impact at Siliguri town but it had an immense impact in the civilised society of Jalpaiguri town. This society had its own building there and it was commonly known as ‘Tatva Bidya Bhawan’. In the year 1928, the conference of All Bengal Theosophical Society was held at Jalpaiguri town⁵⁰.

In 1930s the branches of Ramkrishna Mission (Belurmath) began to set up in various part of North Bengal such as Jalpaiguri, Malda, Kalimpong and Dinajpur. In the year 1923 the Ramkrishna Vedanta Ashram established in Darjeeling hill under the guidance of Swami Abhedananda. In the year 1935 the Gauriya Math also came up in Darjeeling hill. In the meantime the impact of Buddhism grew up rapidly in Darjeeling hill and the birth of Himalayan Buddhist Society was the result of this impact. In the year 1946, the ‘*Tsechu Offering Association*’ was established in Kalimpong town with Buddhists from all races as its members. It was an en rapport with the Red sect of Buddhists who follow the Mahayanist philosophy of Tantrism preached by Mahaguru Padma – Sambhava. With this objective, they established a monastery with an attached language school in June 1968 which came to be known as Zang Dog Palri Institute of Tibetology at Kalimpong. However, it was the main meditation centre of all the Buddhist people of Darjeeling hill⁵¹.

Baring the ceaseless effort of Brahma Samaj to promote the condition of female society in contemporary North Bengal, similar other Association were also came up with the same objective. The Mahila Samiti of Jalpaiguri town established in the year 1928 was the first female emancipation organisation throughout the whole North Bengal. Their goal was not limited to female emancipation only; they also attempted to enrich the literary atmosphere as well. The setting up of *Mahila Pathagar* (female library) in 1945 was indeed a landmark in this direction⁵². Later the members of *Jalpaiguri Mahila Samiti* formed the *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* (Women Self– defence Association) which played an important role during the *Tebhaga* Movement in 1946. The *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* of Darjeeling district was established under the leadership of comrade Mira Chattarje. Later it had to set up its branch at Siliguri town in 1950s⁵³.

The Darjeeling branch of the All Bengal Women Conference was established in Darjeeling town in 1930 commonly known as *Saraj Nalini Dutta Memorial Association*. The *Sandhani Mahila Samiti* of Kurseong was established in Kurseong for the benefit of local women of all communities. It had a prolonged relation with Brahma Samaj of Kurseong⁵⁴. The Darjeeling branch of the All India Women Conference was established in Darjeeling town in 1947 for the welfare of women, children and destitute. It distributes medicines and nourishing diet to the poor and needy patients, participates in community cooking, feeding the Harijans and entertaining children on occasions of national importance. During the Chinese aggression, the organisation donated woollen garments, magazines, food and first aid to the Jawans. The *Bangiya Mahila Samiti* was established in Darjeeling town on 23 June 1956. Its membership was restricted to Bengali women only. The *Pulungdung Basti Mahila Samiti* of Sukhiapokhri was established in 1965. It holds a literary class daily and imparts training in clay – modelling, sewing and knitting besides organizing games for the members and staging cultural functions every year⁵⁵.

The *Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Pariganit Jati Sangha* (All India Nepali Schedule castes Association) of Kalimpong started functioning in 1959 to improve the condition of Nepali Schedule caste people in general with special emphasis on their education, employment and economic amelioration.

The *Nepali Sahitya Adhayayana Samiti*, Kalimpong was established in 1964 with the aim of promoting the cultivation of Nepalese language and literature. The *Nepali Sahitya Parishad*, Darjeeling was also established with the same objective⁵⁶.

The political association began to set up in twentieth century North Bengal with the spirit of India's freedom struggle. The first off spring of Indian National Congress was established in Jalpaiguri town throughout whole North Bengal in the year 1892. A large number of tea industrialists and pleaders of Jalpaiguri town such as Tarini Prasad Ray, Gopal Chandra Sanyal, Jogesh Chandra Ghosh, Biraj Kumar Banarjee Makhan Lal Bhowmik, Ananda Charan Sen contributed to a large extent behind the setting up of Indian National Congress⁵⁷. The off spring of Indian National Congress was established in undivided Dinajpur district in the same year 1892. The Indian National Congress of Malda district was set up in the year 1895. The Indian National Congress of Darjeeling district came up in the year 1920 at Kalimpong. However, the Indian National Congress sowed its seed in Cooch Behar district in 1946 after a span of long years from its establishment in North Bengal. Being a royal state, it was not possible to a political party to popularise their political views. Hence the birth of the Indian National Congress in Cooch Behar takes prolonged time than other districts of North Bengal. The Congress Socialist Party first sowed its seed in North Bengal at Dinajpur district in the year 1937. In the next year it was also started at Jalpaiguri district.

The Communist Party of India sowed its first seed in North Bengal at Dinajpur district in the year 1937. In the next year it was started at Jalpaiguri district also. The Forward Block party was established both at Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur district in the same year 1940⁵⁸. We have told earlier that being a royal state, it was not possible to a political party to popularise their political views in Cooch Behar. In spite of this hindrance, the Communist Party of India and Congress Socialist Party secretly started their work in the royal state Cooch Behar. In the meantime, a very small but spontaneous regional party came up in

Darjeeling hill namely the Gorkha League in 1943. Its main objective was to attain separate identity for the hill men. It also worked for the all round development of the Darjeeling hill ⁵⁹.

The Communist Party also came up in Darjeeling hill in the same year 1943. Nevertheless, the branch of Radical Democratic Party was set up in Darjeeling hill in 1943. It had no other branches throughout whole North Bengal. The Communist League of India was set up in Dinajpur district in 1937 with the effort of Soumendranath Tagore. It had no other branches in North Bengal. The Radical Socialist Party (RSP) had to set up in both Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur district in 1940 ⁶⁰. The Krishak Praja Party established its branch at Jalpaiguri town under the leadership of Fazlul Haque. The All India Muslim League came up at Jalpaiguri town in 1943 under the initiative of tea industrialist Khan Bahadur Rahim Baksh. He was a strong supporter of separate land for the Muslim people in India. The *Hindu Mahasabha* came up in both Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur district in 1930s ⁶¹. In the meantime, three other regional parties had to set up in Cooch district such as Hitasadhani Sabha, Praja Mandal and Cooch Behar People's Association. The Hitasadhani Sabha was such an association which radically worked in favour of the Rajbanshi Hindu – Muslim Jotedars of Cooch Behar district ⁶². The Praja Mandal party consists of progressive Rajbanshi and non – Rajbanshi elite Hindus generally worked for the welfare of peasant society. The 'Cooch Behar People's Association' was set up in Calcutta under the leadership of Tarapada Chakrabarty, Pulakesh Dey Sarkar. Its chief aim was to merge Cooch Behar State with independent West Bengal.

Thus we may conclude our discussion that a large number of socio – economic, political, cultural, and religious associations came up in different parts of North Bengal in the 19th and 20th centuries. It gives us a complete picture in regard to the socio – economic and political condition of contemporary North Bengal. Most of the associations established by respective communities had the aim to promote their own culture and identity. Even a few associations played a key role behind the emergence of communal conflict and finally led to India's partition. The history of these associations does not exhibit any remarkable sign of cultural setting.

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