

Book Review-3

Dr Nirmal Chandra Roy, *The Saga of Uttarakhand Dal: Kamtapuri Identity (1969-1987)*, Readers Service, Kolkata, 2021

The title of Dr. Roy's book has beautifully depicted the inception, growth and importance of the Uttarakhand Dal in the post-independent politics of Bengal. In the first chapter entitled 'Geo-Ethnic Background of the Region', the geographical and historical background of the region and the ethnic identity of the people have been discussed. An attempt has been made to discuss the geographical area of North Bengal from immemorial times to the present day. This geographical region of India has been one of the greatest migration routes for people of different races since time immemorial. Therefore, almost all the races of people viz., Dravidian, Austric, Alpine, Mongoloid, Tibeto-Burma etc. assimilated and intermingled and developed a mixed culture. As a result, the ethnic diversity of the concerned region especially its northern part (Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Alipurduar) has no match with that of the rest of West Bengal. Again the ethnic identity of the Rajbanshis which was well connected with the Uttarkhanda Dal along with other ethnic groups of people of the region under study has been viewed critically.

In the second chapter, the growth and development of the Uttarkhanda Dal have been explained in depth in three different parts. In the first part, the foundation canvas of the Uttarkhanda Dal has been discussed based on the social background of the Kshatriya Samiti, the first one that exposed the cause of the Kshatriya identity of the Rajbanshi and since then the Rajbanshi as a community (in general) started uniting socially. In addition to this, it has been explained in this part of our discussion how the social activities of the Kshatriya Samiti were transformed into a political one after the 1920s when the Bengal Legislative Council was introduced by the colonial govt. It has also been shown that how after the demise of PanchananBarma, most of the front-line Kshatriya Samiti leaders gradually switched over their allegiance to different national political parties leaving aside the importance of the Kshatriya Samiti which ultimately gave birth to grievances in the mind of the educated youth of the Samiti against those leaders particularly in the post-independence era and that led them ultimately to form a regional political party of their own.

In the part of economic background, the economic profile of the Rajbanshi people in the colonial and post-colonial periods has been explained. The land alienation problem from the hands of the Rajbanshi

community to other communities especially to the Bengali caste Hindus and Namasudra cultivators has been explained along with the adverse effect of the Zamindari Acquisition Act of 1953 and the West Bengal Land Reforms Act of 1955 on the local Rajbanshi Jotedars. Concerning the political background, the changing activities of the Kshatriya Samiti till the post-independence period and the gradual loss of its earlier vigour have been critically discussed. It has also been discussed in this part how the Cooch Behari identity question of the Hitasadhani Sobha had encompassed all the Rajbanshi at one point with an indirect impact on the formation of the U.K.D.

In the third chapter, the foundation and the organization of the Uttarkhanda Dal have been discussed historically taking into consideration the socio-economic background of its origin. The immediate background of the formation of a political organization by a majority section of the Kshatriya Samiti members has been discussed thoroughly. In addition to this the final emergence of the party, its various committees and party program names has been explained. A discussion on the Draft and the final printed Constitution of the Dal has been made chapter-wise and article-wise.

The fourth chapter deals with the organizational activities of the Uttarkhanda Dal. The first phase covers from its very foundation to 31 May 1980. It has been shown that till then the Dal did not raise the demand for a separate state. The activities of the Dal were limited to only strengthening its organizational structure and extending its public relations in different parts of North Bengal during this phase. Apart from this, the reaction of the indigenous people to the appeal of the Uttarkhanda Dal along with the response of other National political parties in North Bengal have been discussed very critically. In brief, it has been shown in this chapter that the activities of the U.K.D. in its first phase were mainly directed towards a search for a separate political identity i.e. a political party of the autochthons of North Bengal but not a search for a separate state.

In the fifth chapter, the electoral politics of the U.K.D. and its results have been dealt with. The main, shown in this chapter is the poor performance of the Dal in various Bidhan Sobha (Assembly) elections of West Bengal so far as its candidates were fielded in various Assembly seats of North Bengal mentioning the percentage of votes it received till its final split in 1987. Similarly, its performance in the various Lok Sobha (Parliamentary) elections held during that period mentioning the percentage of votes has been explained critically. Again, the electoral activities of the Dal and its results vis-a-vis the strong presence of the other national political parties especially of C.P.I.M., Indian National Congress in the region of our study have been discussed elaborately pointing out the election results in the table.

In the sixth chapter, the second phase of the activities of the Dal has been discussed thoroughly and critically. This chapter begins with May 31,

1980, when the U.K.D. first raised the demand for a separate state. In this connection, the demand for the recognition of the Kamtapuri Language as a part of fulfilling the demand for a separate state has been stated elaborately. Apart from this the oath-taking programmes by the Uttarkhandists for acquiring the separate state of Kamtapur mentioning the name of some of the oath takers have been discussed. The Rail Roko movement, organized by the Dal very desperately to draw the attention of the general people and the Central Govt. has critically been explained. It is to be stated that this is the chapter where an important aspect of the activities of the Dal ie the demand for a separate state has been explained very critically.

The seventh Chapter clearly explained how this intra-party conflict along with other external factors led to the final split of the Dal and ultimately it was divided into two factions i.e. the U.K.D. and the KamtapurGana Parishad. It sounded the death knell of the Dal and out of its ashes, emerged a new regional political party i.e. Kamtapur Peoples' Party (K.P.P).

Despite some room for improvement, this book is an important addition to post-independent history, especially in today's time when the demand for separate statehood is gaining momentum with each passing day. This book is not only relevant in the field of academia, but also it should be read by the wider section of our society.

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