

CONCEPTUALIZING THE IDENTITY MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

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Long Abstract

The crisis of identity movements in India does not remain a local issue and has a global impetus. Such studies are very frequent now-a-days, but they have perhaps been done from the imaginative power of anthropology that occupies the central dogma of the humanities. A field study has been conducted by the author in the northern districts of West Bengal, India, among the Rajbansi community. This community has been involved in an identity movement that may have historical, politico-economic and sociological perspectives. This is not the main aspect of the paper, but from this micro-level study, the author has tried to conceptualize how in such a remote area international and national issues can become so active and in turn meet the reverse action from the locals when humanity is so badly suffering from a global economic crisis.

Introduction:

India is a diversified country, basically agrarian with a sense of unity in diversity. Diversity is everywhere in terms of geography, ethnicity, language, culture and racial composition. The agrarian social structure is very much complicated and may have some alternatives. This is actually related to the identity and identity crises of the people living in South Asia.

Identity for the Agrarian Rural Structure of India:

Indian agrarian system has a peculiar institution of caste system that clearly shows overlapping of social, political, economic and religious organizations. This is one type of occupational stratification but ideally ascribed in nature. Caste has also been tried to be visualized from *Hindu* texture and mythology, superordinate-subordinate relationship in a human society, racial superiority and purity, superiority in other sense viz. cultural heritage, ancient values and norms of the indigenous/tribal communities. Many of the

latter have remained nearly the same, whereas others have transformed into complex categories or greater/ wider social folds. They long crossed the bar of totem and taboos and formed complicated social structures on kinship assemblage and developed such Great Traditions when they could not be treated as tribe or other simple community. People living with their own World View and innumerable deities of homes, villages, nature, hunting, forestry, sacred groves, agriculture, disease-cure and fertility give rise to the sense of Little Republics. Exchange of caste services through generations within a village or village cluster provides an isolated attitude where there is no need to establish communication with outside. Caste service exchange was the indication that people could not rely on ancient barter system and the mode of exploitation of nature was rapidly changing with agrarian revolution. People in India have developed their scattered Traditional Knowledge Systems regarding their agricultural practices, management of rich biodiversity, agro-based folk life and feed-back concept with the nature. Structural change in caste system such as formation of dominant caste, caste as a reference group for socio-cultural mobilization and tribe-caste continuum are some features that remain in the limelight of Indian anthropology for some time. Some caste-like organizations have been also developed that are not too much hierarchical as pure caste structure. Caste may be described as typical division of labour for an agricultural society that neither believe in estates and serf, system of slavery, pure economy with rationalism, penetration of the State in every aspect of rural life, establishment of big farm houses and entrepreneurship nor is facilitated with modern technologies so that these people could depend on credit and equity. Even in many tribal belts of Central India, it is no doubt true that agricultural tribal communities that do not have ever any caste or caste-like system have developed

the notion of superordination-subordination. Similar situation has occurred among the agriculturist and other related communities of Nepal Himalayas and people there in mountainous region and valleys basically distributed among castes but on ethnic ground with a unique concept of purity and pollution.

Alternative Identity to Agrarian Rural Structure:

But this does not mean that Indian communities are totally agriculture oriented and there is not a single trace of other alternatives. The villages remain no longer Little Republics in isolation and have gradually developed themselves into Rural Cosmopolitans where people are so much depending on Nature and Super-Nature and at the same time hold connectivity with outside on the basis of trade, kinship and political assemblages. This is a common taboo that people from the same village cannot marry one another for the sense of common origin, brotherhood-sisterhood and horizontal-vertical solidarities. Such marriages within the same village or hamlet or clan or lineage are considered consanguine, deleterious, profane, sin, crime and often subjected to factionalism. Actually, this has to be seen from a different angle: traditional agrarian societies devoid of any modern technologies or slavery have nothing to do but generate huge man-power from within. So, exchange of women between two clans or village hamlets basically within the same caste/occupational group is the key for increasing the man-power in every generation. Family, the basic unit of a society, has become joint-extended type when there have been added many such commoners who have neither any blood relation nor any marital connectivity with the main family. Such norms are strictly institutional and related to traditional agrarian economy.

Despite this kinship linkages; other factors like trade, pilgrimage and political emblems actually help to maintain external links and provide alternatives to singular agricultural dependability. I would not say that either Aryan stalks migrated into several *Vedic* pockets of India or Elite cum Priestly people in the *Brahminical* mainland who better think addressing themselves “*Arya*” the Superior brought or developed the alternative like Trade. Rather, they might be both related to agriculture or at least animal husbandry. Migrated people might have used the routes that were utilized for trans-national trade and not more than that. Vedic Aryans might have introduced and/or strengthened the system of feudalism in India that was quite common with the Estate system in Mediaeval Europe under Holy Roman Empire or Great Poland-Lithuanian Duchy. *Rajputs* in India are regarded as the pure Aryan stalks but that does not mean that they were the first Aryan intruders in the Indian mainland as we have come to know the names of previous stalks like Indo-Aryans and Indo-Iranians. Historians and Linguists have proven their language Sanskrit how closer to earlier Iranian and Latin. Vedic people might have better preferred to stay in grazing lands, highlands, hilly areas, mountainous landscapes and cool cum dry places for their environmental adaptability. *Rajputs* are one of the best examples that how Aryan stalks from time to time were accepted in Indian agricultural sectors and deployed as the superordinate ruling sects/ higher authorities protecting the agrarian sectors from external influences and other economic alternatives. But like all the ruling categories, these Aryans have to negotiate with the culture of the Indian mainlanders as well as the common folk (tribe, non-tribe, ethnic group, caste and sub-caste). Common ecological set up and economic similarity might be the reason

behind such negotiations; cultural diffusion and acculturation give rise to particular Cultural Pattern(s) that help(s) in building up of Common Personality or general World View of the people. Ideationally, people of India, uneducated or illiterate, show a basic feature of trial and error; or we can say virtual acceptance and rejection, before the final approval of any aspect to be introduced within the course of life with some modifications.

Negotiation is the central dogma of the Indian society that could be better illustrated from the ethnic/linguistic mutual adjustments. So, ecology, natural resource, economy, politics and cultural accommodation among the indigenous stalks, early comers and later intruders (irrespective of Aryan stalk) are the key factors behind the unity among such diversities in India. These diversities have ultimately grown into Multiculturalism when one might face off its connotation in situations like Majority versus Minority; Pleural versus Ethnic; Communal versus Secular as well as Local versus National/Trans-National/Global. Here, obviously comes out the question that who is the aboriginal in Indian Sub-Continent (South Asia). Hard to answer; but still many think that they might be Proto-Australoid and Paleo-Mediterranean (Dravidian). And there might be some Mongoloid stalks in places from the earliest time period and traces of Negroid population though they have not been found now in pure now at least in Indian mainland.

Migrations in India do not have followed only the path of land and mountainous passes singularly from Eurasian Tundra/ Steppe/ Mediterranean; but also through sea and river routes. Besides the Silk Route connecting Far East and Europe (that might have

some sub-lanes through Indian Territory); other trade routes were nearly all through the water ways. In ancient mythology; whale, tortoise and birds were provided with great importance up to rank of major deities. These creatures are acting as natural compass. Snake is compared with river flow, source of life-saving drug and king of serpentine (*Dragon*) ruling the wild life. Myths of Dare-wolf in Europe and Grizzly Bear in North America still now seem to be much common with the story of *Nrisimha/ Narsimha* – a metamorphosis between Man and Lion/Tiger. Folk people in India still at places pray to Tiger and Elephant deities.

Within this caste-torn *Hindu* social system, there is quasi-egalitarian option in the name of *Vaishnavism*. The mentor of this sect is *Krishna*: many have found His similarity with Jesus Christ. Actually, this *Vaishnava* community like some other tribal and non-tribal sects is associated with animal husbandry. *Vaishnava* while being considered along with rural artisans (both tribe and caste/caste-like) constitutes a larger bulk. Basically, they fall within the peasantry and the subsidiaries or helping agents of agrarian economy. But, actually this quasi-egalitarian social fold likewise the Aryan stalk is not bound to be restricted within caste-based agrarian system. Aryans have the alternative of farmland/estate and similarly, quasi-egalitarians could develop a trade-based economy. The subordinate *unclean* labour-providing caste categories and the superordinate *clean* authoritarian caste categories are actually the real parts of the traditional agrarian system still prevailing throughout a larger part of modern India; these two are often spoken off as *Dalit* and Upper Caste/ *Savarna* respectively. These two categories have relationship of exploited and exploiters. And they still are associated to the same agrarian economy and

fulfilling each other's requirements through both-way caste service. With gradual development of feudalism; this caste services have started transforming unidirectional: from lower category to higher category only. When there is some negative external influence upon the agrarian system, peasant agitation takes place from time to time in India in order to reduce that stronger economic alternative in the form of *Vaishnavism*, pure Islam or some other instances. Such a situation incorporates all the tribes, *Dalits* and *Savarna* (whether *Brahminical* or *Vedic*) together. And still there lasts the alternative of trade: not just in a sense of village to village or village to town/ regional trade center/ place of pilgrimage/ administrative center/ military base/ fort/ academic center, but at a Trans-National level.

At a time cow or gold was considered as the wealth and the capital for the trade. In Indian Epic stories in *Ramayana*, there have mentioned social equation among *Rama* (symbol of agrarian economy), *Varana* (forest-dwellers), *Garura* (bird migrates) and *Ravana* (symbolizing the alliance among *Naga* / Snake community, *Rakshasa/Raksha* and *Yaksha*: the latter two were related to gold economy). The rivalry was more focused on *Rama* and *Ravana*- representing two typical opposite symbols of pure agrarian "civilization" and urban-industrial boom on trade relations. *Rakshasa* was presented as the symbol of conspicuous consumption, gold, urbanization, technology, sea routes, magic and cloth (silk?). Their place Sri Lanka was such a dumping ground of exported clothing, that any fire could completely destroy the whole city. Both *Rama* and *Ravana* prayed nearly to the same deities, but rituals were quite different: religious versus magical/magico-religious. *Yaksha* and *Rakshasa/Raksha* were probably then ruling over

two major international trade links, namely 1) the Tibet Plateau controlling the Silk Route [with two sub-lanes through Brahmaputra and Indus River Valleys leading to Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea] and 2) Sri Lanka along with parts of South Indian peninsula and numerous islands in Indian Ocean [connecting Eastern African Coast, Red Sea, Persian Gulf to the west and coast of South East Asia, Malayan Peninsula and Indonesia to the east which were in cluster the gateway to Far East, Pacific Ocean and beyond]. No proper evidence is there, but presence of Negroid Racial Elements in Pacific islands, megaliths in Easter Islands and prevalence of Inca settlements much more along the Pacific rather than Atlantic might provide some important clues.

In another Epic of *Mahabharata*, racism has been reduced to a remarkable amount than in *Ramayana* and concentration has been more given up on clash *Vedic* and non-*Vedic* (*Brahminical*?). The epic was based on ideologies, enmity between pure patriarchy and matriarchal communities as well as rivalry between worshippers of Aryan male deities and local female fertility cults along with *Shiva* (Jehovah?). *Shiva* in Indian Sub-Continent is the common symbol of forest deity, Lord of all the Creatures, Hunting God, and God of fertility cum Agriculture and Seasonal Change. He is also linked up with destruction, Moon, snake deity and deity of Ganges River. Probably, earlier forms of *Shiva* were prayed along with various fertility cults in Indus Valley Civilization (IVC)/ Harappan Civilization (matter of “Proto-History”; developed near about 5000 years back from pre-Harappan forms in Baluchistan-Southern Afghanistan with higher amount of yearly precipitation). The backbone of this civilization was trade of crop and various industrial products like metal, pottery, stone tools and ornaments to Persian Gulf as far as

Near East and Egypt. These locations, along with that of Greece and Crete were Nation-States, sometimes developing into Big Empires were actually centered on their Urban Locations and Ports. Fall of IVC might be happened due to several reasons, such as, climatic change, internal deterioration, fall in trade, internal disputes, diseases, natural calamities, social disorders and so forth. But the most crucial one there was the attack of the pure Aryan stalk, mainly the Indo-Iranians that within 1000B.C conquered all these Nation-States from Indus valley to Near East and the even the Egyptian Empire. They had long running battle with the Greek urban centers. Iranians prayed to the Fire. Fire might be the other name of life for those people who were migrated from the Tundra. Even they used to sacrifice their dead to the carnivorous birds: might be there any hint of how they used to respect the migratory birds (the only natural compass for the land nomads)!

In India, in all major religious ceremonies and rite-de-passage performances; the mainstream *Hindus* use Fire, but they rather more prefer to worship the Sun and provide the highest prestige to the *Suryavanshis*, i.e. “of the Sun Dynasty”. This is the Sun that leads to the unification of magical and religious versions. Sun was no doubt important for all agrarian communities and somewhat related to the gold-based trading communities irrespective of Inca, Sri Lanka, South India or Egypt that were said to be more magical. Mummification was a common death ritual for the ancient Egyptians. That clearly has indicated that how they were advanced in dealing with their dead rather burning them or sacrificing in water or to migratory birds or simply burying them. They should have adequate knowledge regarding human biology. Such practices were also performed in

India on magico-religious ground (*Tantra*) followed by blood sacrifice, human sacrifice and black magic. The mainstream *Hindus* today generally avoid such practices, consider them effective but impure and prefer religious chanting (*Mantra*) while praying in front of Fire. Still then we can consider mummification; worshipping the dead; preserving the skeleton or skull; strong believe in power of ghost, malevolent deities, spirit and soul; and lastly, eating the dead the best example of magico-religious performances (*Tantra*). These *Tantric* values came closer to the *Mantra* through the intervention of Sun. Pharaohs in Egypt were mummified after their death and kept inside tombs within Pyramids looking like each an artificial hill or something perhaps to communicate with the external world. The chambers where the mummies were generally kept inside were provided with hole so that sunlight could have its way. According to the Two Soul concept, one soul can return back to wake up from the sleep; but the other once leaves the body never returns back and meets the Sun the energy source. *Vaishnava* priests in India are neither burnt after their death nor buried, but preserved in subterranean wooden chambers in sitting posture with bent knees. Some out-caste *Hindus* and some other Indian communities including tribes do not burn the dead, but actually bury them and put stone pieces or megaliths on their burials. This is often thought that megaliths of eminent personalities were worshipped and from there the concept of stone worship has developed among the *Hindus*, especially in case of *Shiva* worship. Amalgamation of Two Soul Concept, Sun, Dead Worship, Chanting and Fire is clearly visible in Indian society. In *Mahabharata* also, a negotiation between two opposite poles has been drawn with care. So, in Indian society there has to be two basic pillars: agrarian on one hand and

trade-oriented socio-economic structures. And at the same time, there should be certain level negotiation between Vedic and non-Vedic elements.

Such Negotiation policy was much similar to that of Alexander the Great of Macedonia who had taken the policy of unification of West and East; and fighting in favor of Greece, defeated whole of Indo-Aryan Persian Empire. From that time, alternatives like Buddhism and Jainism from India successfully spread to a wider territory based on trade. Similarly, after a later phase, Christianity emerged out in Near East and spread out in the “African Horn” Abyssinia, Coastal South India and then in Europe. Trans-National politico-economic connectivity helped Buddhism to flourish into Sri Lanka and Tibet plus Far East, South East Asia and parts of Central Asia. That were the India’s own Buddhism developed in the Indo-Aryan pocket (*Association of Peoples’ Republic*) along today’s Indo-Nepal border. Turko-Kushana elements from Central Asia from 1st Century B.C. ruled out direct occupancy of Christianity and colonization of the Abyssinian traders inside Indian mainland and even the Indus Valley. In post-Kushana period, the Guptas successfully launched Brahminical supremacy exceeding over both Vedic and Buddhist values. Ultimately, Guptas could not rely on agrarian economy, had to negotiate with Trade with Roman Empire and praised Buddhism. During Hun and German attacks on Western Roman Empire during 5th Century A.D.; White Huns targeted successive attacks on the Gupta Empire. Those attacks ultimately disintegrated India into many power centers and sub-centers with growing indication of feudalism. Later on, Islam was brought into India by the Arab traders but found restricted to the ports and coastal areas; they could only establish their colony in Indus delta. Arabian

influence could not meet the opportunity of filling the gap due to decaying Buddhist heritage. In 8th century A.D. North India, the vacuum was filled up by *Rajputs* and other local groups; whereas with revival of Hinduism in South India, local elements initiated competition with Arabs over the issue of hold on Sri Lanka, South East Asia, Buddhist Bengal, Indian Peninsula, Gujarat and Bay of Bengal. Such things were proved against the benefit of Arabs that indulged in Crusade with European Holy Roman Empire over the issue of Mediterranean Control during 10th-11th century A.D. But due to the disagree between Holy Roman Emperor and Pope over the power share and power lacuna in Eastern Europe provided the scope to the Turks, Turko-Afghans and Turko-Mongols for spreading over a wider part of the Old World. Power struggle between Moscow and Istanbul started from 15th Century A.D. and gradually the western European Nations for the first time tried to search new sea routes through the Atlantics (not depending on Turks, Arabs or other Mediterranean groups). Such power struggle between Priestly category and Ruling warriors could be also evidenced from mythical story of *Parasurama* of the hoary past: this priest in India started defeating all the warrior groups and the latter then went to another mentor *Kashyapa* of Kashmir valley who was said to be the biological father of all the Divines, Demons and Devils. Those Hindu warrior-cum-rulers thereafter lost their status of *Kshatriya* (ascribed ruling category); and they were regarded as excluded warriors or *Braty-Kshatriya*. These people still follow their common clan *Kashyapa* and have been mostly converted into quasi-egalitarian *Vaishnavism*. In 16th Century A.D., Turko-Mongol successfully occupied Indian mainland from the Turko-Afghans who had permanently ruled a wider part of India: especially the earlier Vedic settlements (along the Himalayan foothills), other Hindu-

dominated agricultural buckets in North India, Bengal delta, Indus Valley and major trade routes in North India since 13th Century A.D. Turko-Afghans had constant ambush with *Rajput*-dominated Central Indian territories; and temporarily occupied other dumping stations in South India. The Policy of Unified India and *Rajput*-Mogul coalition made the Moguls more successful than the Turko-Afghan tribes. All Islamic versions actually started spreading in India during regimes of those Turko-Afghans and Turko-Moguls; but the method was basically Sufism. Religious reformations also took place among the *Hindus* and Sikhism had also evolved in Punjab. Till 18th Century A.D. when *British East India Company* rule began in India with the occupancy over Bengal Presidency and Coastal Andhra; Arab elements in South Indian Mysore and Sikh Empire in western Punjab could do nothing by tying up with the French. Muslim Nabobs, Hyderabad *Nizam*, Sikh elements in eastern Punjab, *Dogra Rajputs* in Kashmir, Hindu *Rana* in Nepal, *Rajput* Estates in Rajasthan and Central India, numerous Princely Provinces in Gujarat and Brahmaputra Valley, Muslim rulers in the extreme south and Hindu rulers of Kerala took the policy to stay with the British. Hindu elements, chiefly the Marathas were defeated by the British followed by the British win over Buddhist elements in Tibeto-Burmese plateau willing to conquer Brahmaputra Valley and Bengal Delta. Apart from Sri Lanka and Malaysia; Sindh-Baluchistan and Tribal pockets of North Eastern Frontier Provinces (Now in Pakistan) were gone into British hands. That was happened because of the possibilities of Afghan/Persian/Franco-Russian involvement there.

So, there is always a strong feeling towards trade based economy under the *Rakshasa*, the Buddhists, the Indus Valley Civilization, the Kushana *Turk-Shahi/ Hindu-Shahi*, South Indian Peninsula, Brahmaputra Valley-Bengal Delta, Tibeto-Burmese

enclave, Kashmir Valley, Arab Colonies, Turko-Afghans, Turko-Moguls, Shiite Colonies in Deccan and the European companies. Majority of Indian population have been found agro-based. So, this can be ruled out that India is the only place of agriculture. There is always a continuous nexus between trade and agriculture in Indian Sub-Continent and the most transforming/mobilizing stalk has been here the Aryans or at least those who entered India but through land and not from sea routes afterwards the Harappan Civilization ended in 1500 B.C. These people could not remain static and have been experienced all the manifestations of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and various Philosophies.

Nexus between Agriculture and Trade: Common Identity of an Indian:

So, to identifying Indian population has gradually become more and more complicated. It may be stratified into tribes, ethnic communities, linguistic groups, regional segments, Nations, castes, sub-castes, caste-like groups, dominant castes, reference caste groups, agrarian social folds, trade-based communities, trans-national groups, migrated groups, religious groups, folk people, Vedic and non-Vedic *Hindu*, Jain, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, *Savarna*, *Vaishnava*, *Dalit* and so forth.

Who are the Rajbansis:

Rajbansis in and around the plains of northern West Bengal, India have their own history of thousands of years. During that phase, they have transformed from a community to a huge complex heterogeneous social fold incorporating Animism, ancient non-Aryan versions of Hinduism, various mythical elements, Buddhism, *Tantra*, Bratya

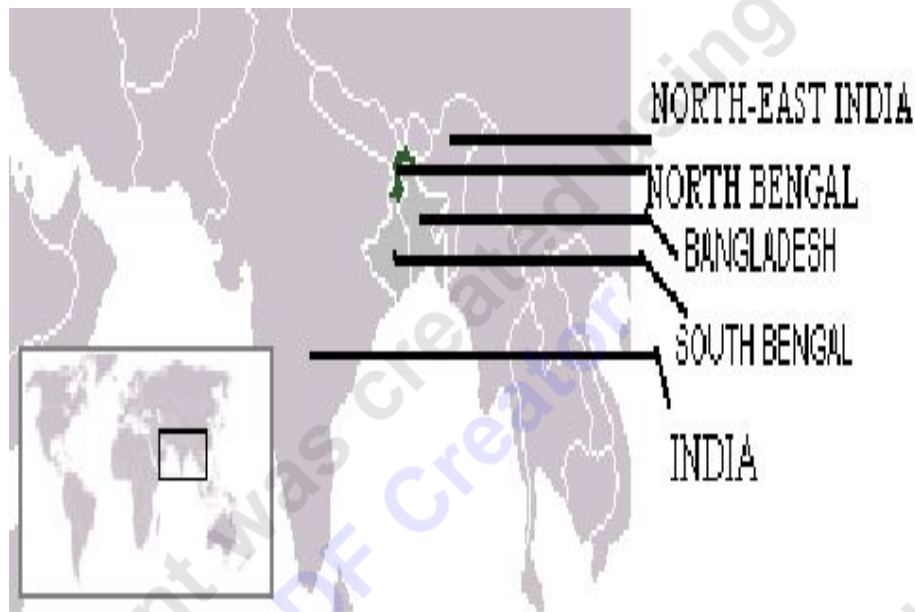
Kshatriya-*Kashyapa* combination, *Vaishnavism* and Sufism. Some of them have “purified” themselves with all religious norms to regain the status of *Kshatriya*. Rajbansis are traditionally peasants and have become a huge social fold from simple folk community overtime. Simultaneously, northern West Bengal has itself transformed into a multicultural area. The concept of Multiculturalism with contrasting features like majoritarianism versus minoritarianism, secularism and communalism, integration versus assimilation, plurality against ethnicity, regionalism opposite to nationalism and nexus between globalization and localization is highly relevant in this area of northern West Bengal.

Place of the Rajbansis:

The northern six districts of West Bengal are geographically very much diversified and rich with bio-diversity. The term North Bengal, at the present moment has become a geopolitical reference. The six northern districts of the state West Bengal are collectively spoken off as North Bengal which can be viewed from different angles, viz., geographical diversity that is very much associated with ecosystems and each respective biodiversity. The region contains mountainous slopes, foothills, river valleys and highlands, older and newer plains. North Bengal is the northern political geography and administrative zone of West Bengal state of India. Out of total 19 districts of the state, the region contains only six and these six districts are all lying northern to the river Ganges (Jalpaiguri, Cooch Bihar, Darjeeling, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Maldah). North Bengal could be divided into several zones: Darjeeling hills, Kalimpong hills, Terai (all in Darjeeling district); Bengal Doors (along Jalpaiguri-Bhutan international

boundary); Western part of Tista-Brahmaputra valley (Jalpaiguri-Cooch Behar); Upper plain of Mahananda valley (North Dinajpur); Lower Plain of Mahananda valley (Maldah); and Borendrobhum plains (parts of North and South Dinajpur districts). Bengal Terai is the foothill of Central/Nepal Himalayas that somehow extends its easternmost part into the foothill area of Darjeeling district. Doors is continuous with Assam Doors that together constitute the foothills of Eastern Himalayas. Doors foothills are just beneath the Eastern Himalayan terrene where States like Sikkim, Bhutan, disputed hill track of entire Darjeeling ("*Gorkhaland*") and *Arunachal Pradesh* (claimed by China) are situated. Numerous rivers come down here from Tibeto-Burmese Plateau forming so many mountain passes that once acted as alternative sub-lanes of the Silk Route. Water of all these rivers ultimately mix up with the main course, i.e. Brahmaputra River. Only Mahananda River does not meet the Brahmaputra and constitutes the easternmost valley originated from Himalayas to meet the Ganges. This river originates from Darjeeling hills, forms Mahananda-Mechi basin (famous for pineapple cultivation) in Terai and then flows in a zigzag way through both northern West Bengal and eastern Bihar states of India. This Mahananda river valley and the Tista (*Teesta*)-Brahmaputra river valley triangle are actually segregated by a highland called *Borendrobhum* major portions of which fall into neighboring country Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the Mahananda-Ganges (*Padma*) and Tista-Brahmaputra joint flows along with various other rivers originated from the midland *Borendrobhum* actually meet together to form the biggest delta and the richest mangrove forest of the World. Parts of the delta fall in southern West Bengal. Rivers from Central Indian Plateau and Indo-Myanmar (Burmese) international boundary also nourished this delta. But northern West Bengal is situated outside this delta and other

river ways. Some pockets in South Dinajpur, North Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Bihar (Koch Behar) and Darjeeling Terai contain traces of this *Borendrobhum* highland.



North Bengal is a place provided with multicultural circumstances- so many racial, ethnic and linguistic groups are there. These people belong to tribal and non-tribal groups, caste and caste-like groups, indigenous and non-indigenous groups, various religious categories, linguistic strata with so many dialects and so forth. People here could again be classified on the context of class, race, ethnicity, region of origin, nationality and even gender and age-groups. But these people together form few agrarian rural structures, such as the tea garden laborers of foothills, the tea plantation workers and step cultivators of hilly region and the most important one- the peasants in the agricultural landscape of plain. Of so many people in North Bengal; Rajbansis constitute one of the eminent indigenous groups very much close to the nature. According to Indian Census 2001, *Hindu* Rajbansis are 129,904 in Darjeeling of total individual 1,609,172; in Jalpaiguri 811,567 out of 3,401,173; in Cooch Bihar 972,803 out of 2,479,155; in Maldah 144,158 out of 3,290,468; in North Dinajpur 405,140 out of 2,441,794 and in South

Dinajpur, 224,988 out of 1,503,178 and there of total 14,724,940 population of North Bengal, Rajbansis have a population of 2,688,560 (18.258%).

Identity of the Rajbansis:

Rajbansis are agriculture oriented and once used to live in huge joint-extended families in both the lower and higher plains of Mahananda as well as western parts of Tista-Brahmaputra valley triangle. They might have undergone regional diversifications. Rajbansi as a title might also be used by other categories in other parts of India. In Cooch Bihar; Koch tribe after coming into power started using Rajbansi status and prestigious *Barmana* surname. They have become *Hindu* caste and held *Kshattriya*. They in 16th Century A.D. had joined the Mogul-*Rajput* alliance followed the British *Raj* in India. The state formed by these *Koch-Rajbansis* was renowned by the name of Koch Behar- a Princely Territory in British India. Just before the formation of Koch Behar when there had been Turko-Afghans in the center of power; Rajbansis had been highly influenced by new power combinations in Brahmaputra valley made up of intruders from Burmese-Thailand region (12th Century A.D.) that ruled out the last trace of long running *Bhagadatta* regime there. At that time, Rajbansis under the guidance of *Khens* had formed the statehoods of *Kamtapur* situated in the present day of Cooch Bihar. So, Rajbansi community could attach its name definitely with two statehoods, namely Kamtapur and Koch Behar for the last one millennium.

Rajbansis were originated from the mixing up of local Mongoloid inhabitants *Kirata*, continuous with the Shiwalik hills of Himalayan range and the *Bratya-Kshattriya*

excluded Hindu Warriors who fled into foothills and northern plains of North Bengal from the adjacent ancient state of *Paundrabardhana*. The latter has been mentioned in *Mahabharata*, was most probably settled in the Mahananda valley and the people there have still been regarded as *Pundras*, whereas the same in Brahmaputra triangle known as *Mech/ Deshi* (aboriginal) and if combined with the Koch, then *Koch-Rajbansis*. Some of them have been treated as *Puliya* due to the 400 years long Buddhist *Pala* regime here in Bengal (750-1165 AD). The Rajbansis are still singing Kushana song that probably indicates out of once Kushana occupancy (Buddhist) over the trade routes here in North Bengal. Kushanas were followed by Tibetans, *Moghs*, *Palas*, *Kambojas*, Turk elements and the British who in 19th Century A.D., established lots of Tea Estates here in Terai, Doors/Duars and Darjeeling hills. During that phase of tea garden establishment; numerous ethnic groups from Nepal and people from Central Indian tribal territories (both tribes and non-tribes) have entered in this land. Some agricultural tribal communities from the same Central Indian region entered the territory, never went to the Tea Estates and some of them started cultivation along with local Rajbansi and various Bengali caste groups. Rajbansis are now a caste group, mostly Hindu; asking for their superior status; but at the same time they are simple, little bit backward, searching for socio-economic mobility often in a political line, not prepared to shed off all the knowledge systems and cultural values in the name of Global Market Economy; and facilitated by the Government of India with constitutionally approved reservation opportunities for education, occupation and social justice. Still they are successful in maintaining their knowledge bulk and cultural values more or less intact.

Identity Movement by the Rajbansis:

These Rajbansis from past one decade started movement in the name of ancient Kamtapur and for recent few years in favor of Greater Koch Behar. Though these socio-political movements in the name of identity crises have not been too much successful; but still there might be so many reasons behind such identity issues and crises.

Why Identity Movement:

Historically, these agrarian rural structures including all their overlaps and complicated stratifications have long existed side by side and therefore, there might be certain degrees of interaction on both space and time dimensions. So, various social structures in North Bengal (including that of the Rajbansis) are very hard to treat each with a particular identity. However, these agrarian structures are very much dependent on certain values and norms non-reflective. Anthropologists consider culture as the psychic unity of mankind, so cultural identity should be a path to diagnose any structure of the society including all the social, economic, religious and political organizations. So, identity movement in such a multicultural region of North Bengal is a historical fact. But such historical facts, sentiments and evidences could be used to misguide the local folk.

The politico-economic significance of this kind of identity movement is here also exclusive. The place is continuous with the North East India and situated on a branch of the traditional trans-national trade route from Brahmapurta-Tista valley up to the Bay of Bengal. This trade route has now been severely traversed by several international boundaries. That attracted various people who from various parts of the World came here

and even established their political occupancy and brought others to work as labor force or forced to remain sub-ordinate. The place also produces crops like silk, areca, betel, snail lime, jute, tobacco, flowers and fruits, spices and vegetables, some exclusive rice varieties, teak, rubber, tea, timber, ethno-medicines and other forest products. The legacy of prosperity might be over, but people are often getting nostalgic. Still traces of conspicuous consumption and crude ways of consumerism have prevailed within way of living of the indigenous tribal communities in this place. However, stories of trans-national trade have now preserved in showcase of past reminiscence and even forgotten to a great extent. So, people of this region have become highly involved in agrarian economy and are renowned for their solidarity in peasant movements and labor class struggles upon both agricultural sectors and tea estates. The situation is now quite different. In this era of Globalization, when a pure market cum credit based capitalistic attitude is expanding its branches in every sector of Indian society with increasing social disparity, people are losing their temper more and more. They started thinking that the region of North Bengal is long being neglected and not properly developed. Development and industrialization are two great demands here with regeneration of the traditional trade routes irrespective of all political and strategic disputes with neighboring countries. They have no other option rather than to either struggle for their socialistic values or make a compromise with capitalist framework. Demands are there for public private partnership and even of absolute privatization. On the other hand, rapid economic growth in the country has caused inflation and so happens severe price rise. This situation compels the common people to earn money at anyhow condition otherwise let themselves become impoverished. But mode of development becomes very much controversial. People are

clearly divided into two major halves on issue of whether there would be any control of the government or not- the State interference can reduce the margin of profit for many and so they blame it anti-democratic and anti-people policy. The other group says that such policy could bring in mass-criminalization, mass-corruption, excessive consumerism and no savings, human trafficking, smuggling, drug peddling, prostitution, bio-piracy, illegal transfer of body organs, anti-national activities, sentiment of antiestablishment and demoralization among the youth in the name of modernization. A third group is also there that protests against this kind of unidirectional development and also demands in favor of sustainable development, protection of bio-diversity, protection to the traditional cultural values and symbols as well as proper balance between folk life and the State, ethno-science and science, civilization input and culture cognition, social norms and the Law and so forth. It is a fact that technological assistance and modernization are breaking the traditional joint-extended family structures previously required for supply of huge amount of labor force; the same thing is happening in the name of socio-cultural identity as the agrarian structures are rapidly losing their validity. These folks have opined that there should be a State interference that would balance among traditional agrarian sectors, urban-industrial sectors and implementation of global market but too carefully. Globalization should be as such so that people do not feel being neglected and the approach should be from Local to Global. Suppose, there is a food-processing Multinational Company and if it deals with local farmers properly, gives the price adequate for a local market, selects a less-fertile land to establish its factory, provides farmers feedback to cultivate fruits and vegetable at per the international quality, does not alienated peasants from their land but signs contract for mutual benefit and creates job

opportunity; then there may not be any problem to collect raw materials in time and export in world market with a good profit margin. However, the Leftist Government in the State from 1977 to the present day continuing may not deviate from its responsibilities for such peasant agitations that ultimately causing problems like separatism and terrorism. Till the Cold War ended; this Government showed its alliance with various regional parties and certain caste combinations like *Yadav* (*Vaishnava* like quasi-egalitarian social fold in North India) and Muslims (Y-M combination). This combination was against the then Indian National Congress (INC) that took the policy in the 1970s' to remain with then USSR. That was a coalition against the Western World and Arab World that opposed growing influence of USSR in Afghanistan and South Asia. So, the Leftist coalition in West Bengal and on national platform actually helped the Western-Arab coalition; even in that coalition, there might have many internal disputes. But, after end of Cold War and fall of USSR, when INC started taking pro-Western policies; the Left had nothing left but to make a Third Front and tie up with INC directly or indirectly in the name of protesting the peoples' opposition against this radical alteration in Indian politics but on a fascist/ extremist/ communal way. Peasants were angry including both the *Savarnas* and *Dalits* along with the agriculturist communities like in North Bengal-Assam (Brahmaputra valley), southern West Bengal; Punjab (Indus valley), Jatland in Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana; Central India, Maharashtra; Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Y-M's own heartland Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Political turmoil has become prominent and that exceeded the scope of Terrorism, Separatism and other alternatives. However, problems like Separatism, Terrorism, Ultra-Left Movements, Gun and Drug Snuggling, ethnic and religious conflicts became so

common. Multinational Companies (MNC) have started penetrating Indian market and so have tried the Indian companies with big money game. But these were all to delay the upcoming Global Economic Meltdown as a result of long running Cold War. Indian peasants, basically of the eastern India strongly protest against any kind of fertile land alienation in the name of big scale industry in the name of “Chinese Model of Development”, monopoly of MNC over retail business and food processing as well as unjustified application of genetically modified food, uncontrolled use of ground water, abrupt replacement of food plants by cash crops and bio-fuel, application of harmful pesticides or fertilizers from MNC and formation of big farm houses in the name of Green Revolution. The separatist movement by the Rajbansis actually originates from such an crisis in agrarian economy, but later it was mishandled by various objects like separatists, terrorists, political parties and even the former feudal lords who had lost their position due to land distribution movement of the Leftists throughout entire West Bengal from and before 1977. With increasing population bulk, uplifting economic disparities, reduction in permanent job guarantees, growing consumerism, money outflow from agrarian and industrial sectors to the global sectors, and frustration in the society; peasants have started becoming tenants and tenants becoming landless labours.

Social Causes and Consequences of Identity Movement:

Sociologically saying, these identity movements in the name of common way of expression (such as, language) or racial similarities and secondly, by means of common historical background rather than class interests were at a time specific excuses to have unity within diversity, increase the bulk size under a common umbrella, stop exploitation,

become dominant, ensure human resource development and capacity building, set free from underestimated situation by becoming more privileged advanced groups and assure human rights. With time the aim has been radically changed so as to ensure grip of the majority over other minor groups and to ensure the biggest piece of development cake. Development needs a boom but resource is limited; so the gainers should not be much in number...competition is so high and you have a World Market before you to ensure the margin of profit. That may crystallize into a specific shape with demand for separate statehood on ethnicity. The main problem is here that this kind of absolute dependence on global market economy can hamper the one's own system built upon the sentiment of common cultural identity, way of living, dealing with nature and supernature and nothing else. One type of fundamentalism/ self-resistance/ radical thought/ opportunistic behaviour/ solidification followed by sense of Separatism automatically originates. The problem becomes more complex if temporary ups and downs in the market mix up with any global economic recession provided with other problems (biodiversity loss, global warming, food crisis, inflation and abrupt price hike, and so forth). People may get more and more frustrated, exclusively when in such a situation they have found themselves unable to return back their traditional institutions which they have neglected long and considered less-profitable and therefore destroyed with the civilization machinery. In such a situation, social anarchy may arise and rebel groups fighting for "*justice*" can transform into terrorists and people may have no other evil hope rather than to accept terrorism as the crudest and the worst type of earning money. Only economic reforms in a sustainable all-acceptable manner and proper awareness among the people could solve such problems. On theoretical ground I could only say that separate dealing, peaceful

coexistence and thoughtful interaction among agrarian sector, urban-industrial sector and global technological sector may be the way. State should try to control pollution, prevent biodiversity loss, regulate inflation and bank interest rates, bring a balance between public and private sectors, secure the state economy from the giant global economy, spend on public distribution system and create employment, fix market price of essential commodities up to a limit and aware the commoners usefulness of saving money rather than spend it all for conspicuous consumption, assure controlled supply of fertilizer-raw materials and fuel, provide food security, involve in the competition of corporate houses, solve disputes of corporate houses and big capitalists with local markets and traditional establishments, ensure sustainable development by not converting the wealth all into the currency system and educate people so that moral degradation of the youth could be reduced to the minimum level.