

Bi-annual Journal

ISSN 2249-2909

**Volume 1
Number 1
July 2011**

G E O - A N A L Y S T

A Research Journal of Social Sciences



GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF NORTH BENGAL

Editor: Piyal Basu Roy



From the Desk of the Secretary

Geographical Society of North Bengal is an NGO located in the district of Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, India. Initially it was formed for educational development in the under developed Dooars area but its area of operation is not restricted in a single point and rather it is open for all, irrespective of geographical space. Geographical Society of North Bengal has stepped in to eight year of its working. The society is bound by promise to continue its unending efforts in the processes of social development and the first edition of ‘Geo-Analyst’ is one of such endeavours related to that. I thank all the members of the society for their kind co-operation to publish this Journal. I appeal to every Academician, Research Scholars and Social scientist from India and abroad to enrich the idea of social science related themes.

Alipurduar
July, 2011

Hiranmoy Biswas
Secretary



Editorial

In our contemporary life, the study of social sciences arouses great significance as the social landscape has been rapidly changing. In view of multi-faceted and dynamic nature of social sciences each and every micro level study of it highlights distinct importance in multi-disciplinary studies. Recently, there is a sign of growing interest as well as anxiety about the social changes taking place almost every part worldwide and the interest in social studies is growing for this reason. The introducing issue of Geo-Analyst, a bi-annual journal of social sciences of the Geographical Society of North Bengal is out on the stand, which has addressed to complex, changing and challenging issues along with few innovative ideas of development in the courtyard of social sciences.

Alipurduar
July, 2011

Piyal Basu Roy
Editor

Counter Ethnic Movements in Dooars: A Geo-Political Study

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Abstract

India has been experiencing many ethnic, regional and counter-ethnic movements throughout its territory. All such movements are generally emerged as a result of economic deprivation, political subjugation and social domination of the small group of people by comparatively larger or dominant section of the people living in the same territory or region. The Dooars region of West Bengal which is situated at the foothills of Himalayas has become socially disturbed and sometimes hostile owing to ethnic movement organized by the tribal people residing areas like Kalchini, Madarihat, Chalsa, Metely, Malbazar, Nagrakata and some other parts of the region. In fact, this tribal people are mainly found in the tea garden areas where they work as tea garden labourers to maintain their livelihood. However, the present situation of the tea garden is well-known to all that often the tea garden labourers are found agitated due to socio-economic and political insecurity. The paper attempts here in brief to analyze the cause-effect scenario of such geo-political and movement in the Dooars area of West Bengal.

Key Words: *Ethnicity, tribal, Gorkha, Constitution, Government*

Introduction

The word “Ethnicity” is now frequently used by the scholars, academicians in studying different social as well as political aspects. It is a very well-known fact that Indian cultural setting is basically based on the concept of multi-culturalism. Ethnic identity is generally defined as a group of people who are distinguished from other group of people in respect of their language, dress, diet, religion, race etc. In fact, an ethnic group has different objective cultural criteria as well as a subjective feeling of distinctiveness from other groups. Actually the word “ethnicity” has been derived from the Greek word “ethnos”, meaning nation and the word ethnicity was first used by David Riesman in 1953. It is also true that an ethnic group is not necessarily a minority or a sub-group; it may refer to a majority group as well depending on the cohesiveness and objective as well as subjective differentiation from another group. However, it is also a fact that ethnic group identity is not always isolated, it may get absorbed and merged with another group and as a result intra-ethnic conflict may sometimes lead to group division and formation of a new group.

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So, ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity, which is consisting of the subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by 'a group of people' in order to differentiate themselves from other groups (George, 1975). The basic characteristics of an ethnic group are to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups. However, ethnicity may develop into nationalism in the course of time. At that moment the ethnic group becomes aware about the ingredients of nationhood imbibed with political consciousness and demand for autonomy or separate state etc. In this perspective, ethno-nationalism emerges when an ethnic group occupies the necessary ingredients required to build a nation. From this standpoint, ethno-nationalism refers to the sentiment of belonging to a group identified by ties of ethnicity as well as those of nation state.

Counter-Ethnic Movement in Dooars: An analysis.

Counter-ethnic movement is also an ethnic movement but when two ethnic groups launch parallel movements on the same social, political and economic issues and demanding various sanctions and autonomy from the government considering that they are oppressed, at that moment the comparatively larger ethnic group tries to merge with the lesser ethnic group in order to create profound pressure on the government. Such smaller ethnic group bears some sort of fear psychosis that their separate cultural identity may be overlapped by the larger ethnic group. In that case, the movement launched by the smaller ethnic group may be termed as counter-ethnic movement. It is simply because the two ethnic groups have different objective cultural markers in respect of their language or dialect, dress, diet, religion or race etc. Naturally, the smaller ethnic group always tries to maintain their separate identity and distinctiveness from the larger ethnic group. The cultural differentiation as well as the feeling of oneness among the group makes such ethnic group to be separated from the larger or dominant ethnic group. So counter-ethnic movement is generally an ethnic movement launched against the government on some basic issues like inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the constitution, warranty of autonomy on behalf of the government, economic benefits, recognition of their mother tongue in the Eight Schedule of the constitution, mother tongue is to be introduced as the medium of instruction etc. vis-à-vis the larger ethnic group (Datta, 1993).

The Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha (GJMM) in the Dooars region launched their movement as per with the Darjeeling Gorkhaland Movement viewing the fact that the Dooars region has also considerable number of Gorkha people. From this perspective, the

GJMM is considered as the dominant ethnic group in the Darjeeling and Dooars region. The Gorkha people try to include the tribal people in their movement in order to spread the movement in Dooars and Terai region of West Bengal. But the tribal people inhabited in the Dooars region do not accept the proposal initiated by the Gorkha leadership. Previously the Gorkha leadership appears to some extent successful to bring the tribal people in the Dooars region under their leadership to launch united movement against the government on the same social, political and economic line though the tribal people have different political aspiration and economic deprivation. But especially, at the time of Kalchini Legislative Assembly by-Election, the bifurcation between the two ethnic groups was emerged and as a result of that the Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Bikas Parisad and Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha fought election separately.

So, the movements launched by the Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha (GJMM) and Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Bikas Parisad (ABAVP) are basically two groups of ethnic community in the Dooars and Terai region and the GJMM has tendency to merge with the ABAVP. As a result of that, the ABAVP launched a separate movement simply defying the Gorkha leadership. From that perspective, it is stated that the ABAVP's movement is not only against the government it is also against the GJMM in order to maintain their separate ethnic identity. From this standpoint, it may be said that both the Gorkha and the Adivasi movements in the Dooars region are ethnic in character but Adivasi movement may easily be termed as counter-ethnic movement because it is a movement against the government vis-à-vis the Gorkha ethnic people though the ABAVP has no open agenda against the Gorkha people living in the Dooars region. However, the fact is that both the ethnic groups are considered as the oppressed section of the society and economic agenda against the government are almost the same but they fought separately on the same issues

(Ghosh, 1998). The ethnic movements in the Dooars and Terai region have profound negative impact on the general mind set of the people living in this region. It does not only affect the tea industry immensely but also destabilize the communal harmony, peace and tranquillity of this region. The frequent strikes called by such ethnic groups often create huge law and order problem in this region.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be said that the Dooars region has been experiencing various ethnic and counter-ethnic movements since a few days. The different ethnic groups living this

region have now become conscious about their age-long economic deprivation and unfulfilled social and political demands. They united themselves considering their separate ethnic sentiments and feelings of distinctiveness from other ethnic groups. A sense of intolerance and unfaithful atmosphere prevails among each and every ethnic group. Every ethnic group tries to achieve narrow social, political and economic gains without having any consideration for national sentiments and harmony. Communal harmony and national integration is now a distant dream viewing the separate ethnic uprising in different parts of Dooars region. The uneven economic development is considered as the major reason behind such ethnic movements. Not only that, after independence, no effort is made on behalf of the government to respect and protect the interest of the separate ethnic groups. No real venture is made by the governments to ventilate the unfulfilled aspirations of the ethnic groups living in this part. All such ethnic groups consider themselves oppressed in terms of social, political and economic developments. The prime concern of all such ethnic groups is to the inclusion either in the Fifth Schedule or in the Sixth Schedule or in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian constitution. At the same time, they also demand self-rule or autonomy from the central and state government to form autonomous council for their own development. In some cases, these ethnic groups have already achieved some success in drawing the attention of the governments both at the central and state level but it is really a matter of thought that how can emergence of such separatists movements be tackled when those activists do not want to consider and compromise the national harmony.

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