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## **Recommendations of the Language Commission and the Movement of TASO in Dinajpur District in West Bengal**

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### **Abstract**

*TASO is an organisation founded by Mahammad Rafique and Pasherul Islam at Islampur sub-division in the district of Uttar Dinajpur in West Bengal to raise the voice of protest of the local people as the area suffered from illiteracy, social, political and economic exploitations since its birth when the area was transferred from Bihar to Bengal in 1956. They started the movement to implement the recommendations of language commission as the Commission recommended that the transferred area should become a separate district and parliamentary Constituency. So the organisation gathered the voice of protest in the concerned area and in national level they also raised different issues in different times. Now in transitional period in West Bengal TASO revived its strength.*

***Key Words: Suryapur, Re-organisation Commission, Islampur, Pasherul Islam, Refugee.***

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One of the main features of Indian history is its diversity. The tract of land lying in the region with the Himalayas in the north, Kanyakumari in the south, from the Bay of Bengal in the east to the Arabian Sea in the west is called India. Diversity lies in the realms of race, religion, provincialism, food, taste, civilization, creativity, dresses, means of enjoyment etc. India is a country wherein the people of almost all religions live in. It is an enigma that even the diversity among the Hindus overwhelms the world society. There are differences in the fields of casteism, festivities, dietary habits, creativity etc in the Hindu society in the panoramic sense. In spite of the differences of such magnitude the Indian people are found united solidly. That is why V. A. Smith has used the terms 'Unity in Diversity' to characterize the Indian society. But behind the curtain of unity the tunes of disunity has been traced at different times and at different places and the glaring examples of secessionism may be traced in Darjeeling of West Bengal or Telengana of Andhra etc in recent time. TASO is an organization which is not devising in the sense of the term, but its activities and the nature of its programme expose its localized character and that would be discussed in the following pages.

Now, we may come to the context of the meaning of TASO, its aim, the backdrop of its origin and evolution, its demand etc and if language or religion has cemented the unity of them or not? When the people of India attained independence at the mid-night of 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, the people of the country probably thought that they were completely free and the days of their sorrow, privation and deprivation were over. In reality the Indian people set aside many other problems and took up the struggle against the colonial rule as their kernel object of life. But when the struggle for independence was over, the people who once dedicated themselves wholeheartedly for the freedom struggle, exhibited militancy against the post independent polity in India. The glaring example of post independent military is the movement that started over the demand for the emergence of state on the basis of language. In the national movement Rabindra Nath Tagore to Jawahar Lal Nehru everyone emphasized on mother tongue. In 1937 J.N.Nehru remarked, "Our system of education and public work must therefore be based on the provincial languages."<sup>1</sup> The first prime minister of India after independence Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru faced the new challenge over the demand for the development of new states on the basis of language along with the facing of the problems of hunger, poverty, fratricidal riots etc. So the unnecessary but lively problem of the development of states on the basis of language propelled Nehru to set up the Dar Commission under the leadership of S.K.Dar, the then justice of the Allahabad High Court. The object of the commission was work into the prospect of the

viability of the creation of state on the basis of language .But the commission made the blunder by keeping off the viability of creating linguistic states and setting up the rational for the creation of states on historical, economic administrative and geographical basis.<sup>2</sup> To review the decision of Dhar Commission JVP Committee was formed in the month of December that year comprising of the members like Jawaharlal Nehru, Ballav Bhar Patel and Pattavi Sitaramaiya. That committee also in its report published in the month of April, 1949 articulated not in favour of the founding of states on the basis of languages. As a consequence the people rose in rebellion all over the country. The people took up arms even and there was large scale violence all around .The violent mob burnt buses, trains, shops, domestic establishments etc. The demand centered round the foundation of a separate state on the basis of language. The similar type of movement with the façade of violence took place in Andhra for the creation of separate state for the people using Telegu language as mother tongue. The freedom fighter Patti Sri Ramalu launched the movement and the movement assumed momentum with the holding of hunger strike of the freedom fighter for 58 days that caused his death.<sup>3</sup> The result of the movement was the founding of the Telegu state. The rebellion spread like wildfire as a consequence and the government of India was forced to create a new state cutting off the region using Telegu language from the Tamil area.<sup>4</sup> In this respect Prof. Basudev Chattopadhyay made a remark, “Within twenty four hours Nehru’s carefully orchestrated concept of a strong centre and four administrative zones has collapsed.”<sup>5</sup>To decide the relevance of the creation of separate states on language basis , the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru set up ‘The State Re-organization Commission’ under the leadership of Fazal Ali on 22<sup>nd</sup> December,1953.The other two members of the commission were K.M. Panikkar and Hridaynath Kunjuru.<sup>6</sup> The language commission was endowed with the responsibility to enquire into the possibility of the creation of new states throughout India. Anyway pursuant to the decision of the commission ‘State Reorganisation Act’ was enacted on 1<sup>st</sup> November,1956.The result was the reorganization of states within the Indian nation on the basis of language and the fallout of what was the evolution of Indian nation with 14 states and 6 union territories within it. Later on, once and again, it became imperative on the part of the polity of India to help in the emergence of states on language basis. Till today, there are 28 states and 7 union territories within the Indian nation. The matter has been narrated below.

The states set up in the year of 1956 were i) Andhra Pradesh ii) Assam ii) Bihar iv) Bombay v) Jammu and Kashmir vi) Kerala VII) Madhya Pradesh viii) Madras ix) Mysore x) Uttar Pradesh xi) Orissa xii) Punjab xiii) Rajasthan xiv) West Bengal.

The union territories were as follows: i)Andaman-Nicobar Islands ii)Delhi iii)Himachal Pradesh iv)Lakshadweep iv)Manipur vi)Trip era.

The states created on the basis of language are:-<sup>7</sup>

State away from	Date of their creation	Associated states broken
15)Gujrat	1960	Bombay
16)Nagaland	1964	Assam
17)Haryana	1966	Punjab
18) Meghalaya	1971	Assam
19)Himachal Pradesh	1971	Converted into a state from union territory
20)Trippera	1972	do
21)Manipur	1972	do
22)Sikkim	1975	Converted into a state from a ‘associate state’
23)Mizoram	1987	Converted into a state from union territory
24)Arunachal Pradesh	1987	do
25) Goa	1987	do
26)Chattisgarh	2000	Madhya Pradesh
27)Uttaranchal	2000	Uttar Pradesh
28)Jharkhand	2000	Bihar
29)Telengana	2014	Andhra Pradesh

The new union territories which came into existence as a result of the reorganization of states. They are:

- 1) Andaman and Nicobar Islands
- 2) Chandigarh
- 3) Dadra and Nagar Haveli
- 4) Delhi
- 5) Daman and Diu
- 6) Lakshadweep
- 7) Pondicherry.

Now, we may come to the context. The Commission after its coming into existence made an extensive tour to the regions which were sensitive or the regions where the demand for the creation of states on language basis was very articulate.<sup>8</sup> The object was to unravel the real truth making extensive confabulation with the common men of those regions. Suryapur Pargana of Islampur sub-division within the district of Uttar Dinajpur happens to be a sensitive area like that. But concerning the geography of that region, it was extremely necessary that it should be amalgamated with West Bengal. The reason for its remaining with in West Bengal was that the Ganges have probably divided West Bengal into North and South Bengal and the Suryapur Pargana is lying in the middle of North Bengal. Varendrabhumi and Dinajpur district are lying in one flank and Terai-Dooars and Coochbehar district are lying at another flank. So it is easy to feel the necessity for the amalgamation of Suryapur Pargana with West Bengal.<sup>9</sup> Apart from that the majority of the people of that region were Bengalees and were using Bengali a mother tongue. The people of that region were very much in favour of the amalgamation of the region with West Bengal from the point of view of education, culture and civilization, economy etc. So the movement for the inclusion of that region in West Bengal cropped up at Suryapur Pargana in the Purnea district. The State Re-organisation Commission went to delve deep into the relevance of the demand of the inhabitants of the Suryapur Pargana. The region of Suryapur Pargana in Bihar rose in rebellion against its amalgamation with West Bengal .The Commission after making an entry at Purnea felt the pulse of the people at large. The business community of Kishanganj sub-division was fundamentally dependent upon Islampur.<sup>10</sup> The people of Bihar were not, at that time ready to forgo the tea gardens of Debizora and its adjoining regions.<sup>11</sup> Today's Islampur sub-division happens to be densely populated with the Muslim people and they had to face court cases over land disputes regarding the matter of inheritance application and the trial was held at Kishanganj court<sup>12</sup> As a result, the advocates of Kishanganj were not prepared to hand it over to West Bengal. Apart from that the people of Islampur were not prepared to forgo the facility they enjoyed in the fields of medical treatment, communication and many others by segregating their connection with Kishanganj.<sup>13</sup> Side by side with this, the contemporary prominent educationists of Islampur were not in favour of its inclusion with West Bengal. They will be overwhelmed by the Bengali intelligentsia in every sphere. More over one lakh people demonstrated before the SRC when the commission visited to the area. So it was evident that there were opinions in favour of its handing over to West Bengal and against that.<sup>14</sup> The leaders who took up the scepter of the movement for handing it over to West Bengal were late Swadesh Sen, Panchkari Mandal of Manora etc. They demanded the inclusion of many other parts of Purnea apart from Islampur with West Bengal. In this way there ensued movement between Bengal and Bihar regarding the handing and taking over of Suryapur Pargana. At length there came to an end of longstanding unresolved problem. Islampur was amalgamated with the Darjeeling district of West Bengal on 1<sup>st</sup> November,1956 on the basis of the recommendation of the commission.<sup>15</sup> But in the next day, on 2<sup>nd</sup> November,1956,Islampur region away from Bihar was merged with West Dinajpur and declared Islampur as a sub-division.<sup>16</sup> Later on, another notification of March 3,1959, an area of 49.78 square miles lies to the north of the river Mahananda incorporating 19 mouzas belonging to Phansidewa Police Station had been again included in the Darjeeling district thus giving the Islampur sub-division its present shape.<sup>17</sup> The areas around Islampur sub-division are as stated below:<sup>18</sup>

Name of Revenue collecting Thanas	Police Thanas	No. of Villages	Square Miles	Population
1)Islampur	Thakurganj	12	58	14357
	Chopra	129	158	52949
	Islampur	123	139	59652
2)Kishanganj	Kishanganj	285	180	66810
3)Gopalpur	Goalpokhar	95	73	36028
	Karandighi	269	151	47492
	Total	913	759	277288

With the inclusion of Islampur sub-division the total area of the newly formed West Dinajpur was 2052 square miles. As per the Census Report of 1961 the population of the District was 1,323,797.<sup>19</sup>

The most important point is that the Suryapur Pargana (Islampur Sub-division) was handed over to West Bengal keeping off the rituals, sentiment and many other things of the inhabitants of Bihar. They only took into account the interest of narrow selfish groups. After all, the SRC pledged for the wholesale development of the region parted away from Bihar. SRC also promised to declare a parliamentary constituency covering the region and to give the transferred area the prestige of a district. But the govt. forgoes to redeem the pledges.

The refugees of Bangladesh and those of Assam started infiltrating in Islampur Sub-division like waterfalls. They were in search of livelihood. They started dominating the economy of the region by virtue of labour and economic strength. As a result of the pressure of those outsiders the local economy, culture, language and many other things are affected and those are gradually eroding. The owners of the large tea gardens took over the vast agrarian fields of the region. On the other hand, after the setting up of the subdivision at Islampur, the opportunity for service in schools and offices were thrown open to the middle class people. But though promised, the process of industrial development of the region is little. The consequence of all these are the spreading of unemployment, poverty, malnutrition famine over the region. Today the local language, heritage, culture, economy are in danger and the sons of the soil felt an urge for the preservation of their existence. They raised the voice of protest for the revival of the Suryapuri culture that was at stake as result of the infiltration of the foreigners. In this way came into existence, the outfit like 'The Transferred Territory Peoples' Development Organization (TTPDO)'. The person who was closely associated with laying the foundation stone of the organization was Nizamuddin, the renowned advocate of that time. He strengthened the movement for the execution of the recommendation of the SRC Committee.<sup>20</sup> But the movement failed to strike root at the heart of the people at large.

The overwhelming influence of the culture of outside and the economic dominance of the foreigners to this soil set in force the movement of secession. At that moment some persons of the soil with revolutionary spirit came forward to bolster up, once again local aspiration and to organize the protest movement. In this way came into being a remonstrance organization called 'Transferred Area Peoples' Organisation' (TAPO, 1988). The first president of the organization was Samsujjaman Raza and the secretary was Abdul Basi.<sup>21</sup> The other members were Pasarul Islam, Parimal Saha, Basu Biswas etc. This organization too failed to raise the voice of protest to momentum and the result of what was the dwindling down of the outfit within two years (1988-90)

There is a regular flow in history. It never ceases its motion. Changes occurred simultaneously with the changes in the political scenario. The district of West Dinajpur has been divided into two parts-Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur. Islampur sub-division has been brought under the fold of Uttar Dinajpur district. The district headquarter is established at Raiganj bringing it away from Balurghat. It shortened the distance and the district headquarter is now 130 kilometer away only. But it has failed to efface the sense of deprivation and frustration of the people of Suryapur Pargana. The quality of education of the local people of the area deteriorated very steeply. The pitiable picture may be visualized in the realm of local language and the pressure of the Bengalis has brought the Suryapuri language to the brink of extinction. The snobbery of the outsider Bengalis has dragged the local people away from the arena of local language and they have started speaking in Bengali. The condition of health and hygiene deteriorated. The female education has reached to its last dreg. The influence of the owners of tea gardens has brought the peasants of agricultural land to extinction converting them to labours in tea gardens. As a sequel to the wholesale devastation of that community at this pitiable backdrop offence of different nature has taken root and the local youths have crossed over to different territories in India. Abduction of women has become common feature occurring every day. In that perspective of hard reality the contending sons of the soil have organized movement and set up an outfit named 'Transferred Area Suryapur Organisation' (TASO). Those who held the keystone of its foundation were Mahammad Rafique, Pasharul Islam and Parimal Saha. Pasarul Islam was the first president. It was given birth at ground adjoining the station road on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1997. TASO happens to be an organization more matured and relevant than those preceded it. It has been trying since its birth in 1997 to bring the hope and aspiration of the people of all work of life with in one umbrella. They are also trying to make the outfit relevant to the provincial and national level with

forsaking the local emotion and aspiration. The demands they placed before the administration for retrieval are given below:<sup>22</sup>

- 1) The total transferred area should be consolidated into single political unit and returned into a separate parliamentary seat..
- 2) The process of the development of the transferred area should be initiated on the basis of the recommendation of the State Reorganisation Commission.
- 3) Infiltration of the foreigners should be put to an end.
- 4) Youngmen and women of the transferred region should be provided with employment and the discrimination between Raiganj and Islampur Employment Exchange in the field of giving employment should be put to a halt.
- 5) Mother tongue must be allowed to use in the Primary and Secondary level.
- 6) The sons of the soil of North Bengal should be allowed to have reserved land like of the tribal people
- 7) The Border Security Force should be forced to refrain from tyrannizing the people living in the border region. In this way giving prominence to the local issues TASO got unprecedented response in the interior or rural areas. The indigents, the Hindus and Muslims, Santhals and Rajabanshis came forward to uphold the movement of the TASO.
- 8) North Bengal should be given autonomy on the basis of the article 244(A) of the Indian constitution. The TASO, in order to enhance their acceptability in state and national level, has been trying to interlink the local sentiment with different programmes in the state and national level. With a view to enhancing the relevance of the TASO movement, they are trying to get involved in Singur, Nandigram and many other relevant peoples' upsurges. Side by side with that the TASO has raised its voice of protest and reviled at the root of the inequities like the corruption over mid-day meal, Tahelka misappropriation of fund and many other immoral practices. They also raised demands for 27% reservation in service for OBC communities and the imposition of the inhibitory order with regard to the sale of cold drinks rampantly.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to those general demands mentioned above the TASO, in order to strengthen the mass movement, has identified many local issues and problems and has strived to redress the problems with the help of the interference of higher administration. Those demands were reservation of land for the sons of the soil, the tea gardens emerged out of the extinction of agricultural land of the tribal people, refugees should be handed over to the original owners of land; extension of education in the primary level in Kamta, Sadri, Santhali etc languages along with Bengali ;to take steps to ensure the stoppage of trains running for long distance like North East Express, Darjeeling Mail, Kanchanjanga Express and Capital Express etc to arrange for the spread of education simultaneously in Bengali, Hindi, Urdu medium paying importance to the sentiment of the people of the locality, to hand over ration cards to the real citizens, the inclusion of the communities like Nasyasekh and Sersabadia in the of the list of OBC etc.<sup>24</sup>

Since its formative state TASO is concerned with the problems of acquisition of agricultural lands for tea gardens. The organization is quite consistent in mobilizing the people and in augmenting its movement against any form of illegal conversion of agricultural land to tea garden. On this issue TASO submitted several memoranda to local administration and organized a convention last on February 9, 2009.<sup>25</sup> In said convention it was alleged that despite several protest movements about two thousand acres of land of the local people have been forcefully occupied by the tea-garden owners. Moreover, by adopting several unfair tactics approximately one lakh acres of agricultural land have been converted to tea-gardens. The number of landless people and agricultural laborers is therefore increasing fabulously. It is further alleged that in the area about 35 thousand acres of land are rightly in the possession of famous tea industrial house Duncans Company as tea-garden. For another Jayashree/Kumarika company the corresponding amount is about ten thousand acres. In addition to this big and medium tea garden there are about 300 small tea-plantations in different parts of Islampur sub-division.

TASO asserts that as per government's circular there is a prohibition on making any tea-plantation in the Teesta Command Area, on Vested, Patta and agricultural lands, on the land under the possession of tribal and refugees. But despite this prohibition some influential and moneyed persons with the help of local administration are illegally using and converting such lands to tea-gardens. In

protest TASO staged several demonstrations and submitted memoranda to the SDO, BLRO and OC Islampur demanding their intervention into the matter and for taking necessary action against these illegal practices.

In a memorandum (1999) TASO drew the attention of higher authorities against conversion of land within Teesta Command Area into industrial land namely tea-plantation. It is alleged that such conversion had been made without the consent of concerned Gram Panchayats and by totally violating the Tea Plantation guidelines of the government of West Bengal. TASO apprehends that if it is allowed to continue that may cause considerable loss to the local cultivators. Not only that, there is every possibility that ultimately the very objective of Teesta Canal Project may fail. TASO thus placed the following charter of demands to the SDO Islampur for necessary action: a) prevent any form of illegal tea-plantation tea gardens unlawfully run by the capitalists in the prohibited categories of land must be returned to the legal owners, and c) an enquiry by CBI on illegal occupations of land for tea-plantation must be initiated immediately.

On the issue of phenomenal growth of illegal tea-gardens in the transferred area TASO organized a sit-in-demonstration in front of the office of SDO, Islampur on December 18, 2006.<sup>26</sup> In this demonstration an anxiety was also expressed over the proposed plan of acquisition of agricultural land for construction of a by-pass on national highway 34 (NH-34) passing through Islampur. As a follow up TASO put an appeal to the President of India (letter dated December 28, 2006) through SDO, Islampur requesting his kind intervention in to the matter and not to approve the proposal of seizing agricultural land for the proposed by-pass. As an alternative he was requested to kindly ask the administration to think about the construction of a fly over bridge of 1.95 km length for the smooth running of traffic on NH-34 through Islampur. That may certainly cost less to the agricultural land and save many poor farmers from severe starvation and destitution.

Now, we may come to the point of the future of TASO. How far has the people of the state been influenced by the movement of the TASO? It came into existence in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The TASO at the initial stage of its existence could make its influence felt by dint of its self strength, but gradually its activity was confined to the giving of deputation at different offices. Today, the TASO, in order to maintain its existence, has felt the necessity of making alliance with different mass organization. It has brought into existence the platform for the movement seeking autonomy. In this platform there are similar outfits like UTJAAS, CPI (ML), PCC, UPJSS, CPRM, SJP, FIDER, RYO etc. in addition to the TASO.<sup>27</sup> The state is now in the teeth of a series of unrests. The creation of separate district of Alipurduar also has given fuel to the people of Islampur Sub-division. Taking advantage of this the dormant outfit of TASO has regained its past strength. They, once and again, have become conscious about their demands giving due weight age to the sentiment of the locality. So, the government should be concerned about the development of agriculture and economy of that region. It should be done as early as possible. The government should take steps for the wholesale development of the locality; otherwise the agitation may assume an alarming aspect of intractable regional problems. It may be the causes of consternation for the government as they are being regularly seen in the forest areas of West Bengal, Coochbehar, Darjeeling etc. regions of West Bengal.

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