

# Uttar Banger Rajbanshi Samaj O Lokayato Sonskriti

Paper Submission: 16/07/2020, Date of Acceptance: 26/07/2020, Date of Publication: 27/07/2020

## Abstract

The Rajbanshi constituted the most predominant section of the Hindu population in the districts of north Bengal and were yet place quite low in the hierarchy. Their religions-cultural practices were simple and free from Brahminical inflexibility. Educationally they were very backward. Economically, agriculture was their basic occupation and their representation in other profession was not very significant. The Rajbanshi peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which in habituated the country. The culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

**Keywords:** Inhabited, Considerable, Communities, Aboriginal, Apparently, Amalgamations, Complementary.

## Introduction

It has been learnt from the Vedas, Purans, ancient scriptures, and account of the foreign travellers and Historian that the area of North Bengal that is presently inhabited by the Rajbanshis was referred to a Prakjyotish, Louhitya, Kamrup, Kamatapur at different ages. The area that falls under the districts of Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, the plains of Darjeeling in North Bengal, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts ( now in Bangladesh), the district of Goalpara and Dhubri in Assam had been a part of ancient Kamrup. The original inhabitants of this reign are known as Rajbanshi style. This Kamrup region is also inhabited by Brahmins, Kayasthas, Yogis, Washerman, Koch, Mech, Rava and Muslim communities. They are all nurtured in Rajbanshi culture.

“The Rajbanshis came originally from Koch Behar six or seven generations ago, but can give no reason for their immigration. The collector states that tribe is evidently a hill people, but they have now lost all remembrance o their own country and cannot even state where it was. The collector has been unable to find any district in considerable number. The Rajbanhis keep themselves all of from the rest of the population and never amalgamate with them, although admitted a caste of the general Hindu community. They are permanent settlers and follow the same occupations as the Koches of which tribe, indeed, they are said to be an offshoot. The upper classes of aboriginal Koches when they embrace Hinduism became Rajbanshis.”<sup>1</sup> Descendants of all those communities who have been successful in retaining their ethnic culture, heritage, occupation, social norms, language, religion etc, Have come to be known as scheduled tribes in modern India since the British colonial era. According to anthropologists, researchers, government census and medical experts the Rajbanshis are the product of racial mixture. Their present society, culture, language, religion call for emphasis to be given to their habitant, physical feature, ethnology and linguistics.

This brief ethnological description of the socio-cultural practices of the Rajbanshis clearly contraindicate that they had very little in common with the local upper caste Hindus. It was this cultural distinction which defined the boundary that separated the Rajbanshi community from the upper caste Hindu society of north Bengal. A common practice of the upper caste Hindu all over Bengal was to follow the Shastric codes of conduct. In the case of the Rajbanshi, the cultural practices and social norms were determined more by local influences and their own traditions, then by the orthodox Hindu Shastras. Thus they had in a not so distant historical past, a cultural domain of their own.



**Jitesh Chandra Roy**

Assistant Professor and P.G. -  
Coordinator,  
Panskura Banamali College,  
Panskura, R.S., Purba Medinipur,  
West Bengal, India

However the gradual settlement of the caste Hindus in the north Bengal disturbed the freedom of this state, bringing the Rajbanshi closer to the orthodox Hindu culture, which was also the culture of the influential social group. This resulted in the orthodox Hindu culture a section of the Rajbanshi to emulate the orthodox Hindu cultural practices. The reasons for the development of this social attitude have been dividing. However, in course of time notion of status hierarchy develop among them, particularly among those who were economically and educationally advanced them the common peasant folk. It was possibly with the emergence of a section of people within the community who could sustain themselves on other people's labour that a sense of differentiation came to determine the patterns of social interaction among them.

The Rajbanshis were an aboriginal tribe, apparently of Mongolian origin, which at the beginning of the sixteenth century, rose to power under their great leader Viswa Singh. His son, Naranarayan, extended his conquests as far as Upper Assam Tripper. The Koch king had attained to a position of such power that the aboriginal people were anxious to be enrolled as members of this tribe. The result is that at the present day the name is no longer that of a tribe but a caste into which new converts to Hinduism are enrolled.<sup>2</sup>

To put it in brief, the Rajbanshi efforts to claim a Kshatriya descent was an outcome of Brahminical cultural domination, British lower caste policies and the social changes brought about by the colonial rule. To that extent it was only a logical outcome of the contemporary developments. It was only a logical outcome of the contemporary developments. It is in this context that the production of the Rajbanshi caste movement has to be understood. "Those Koch who are now Hindus are principally known under the name of Rajbanshis, but large number of them has become Mussalmans so that of mere number of people of the Rajbanshis tribe affords no idea of the number of people Koch extraction in the country."<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand the socio-cultural scenario is based on economy and the latter brings about different changes in the social order over the years. E.B. Tyler said that "Culture is that complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>4</sup> Contextually, it can be said that economy plays a major role in developing the standard of living and folk culture of the Rajbanshis. In the process of analysing the same their economic background need of the considered. Their agro-based life, culture and the evolution of their agrarian life-style demand discussion.

Since Ancient days there have been amalgamations of different faith and religion in the Rajbanshi society of North Bengal. In this region various religious sects like the Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Shaivites, Vaishnavites, Christians etc, have come into being. The culture of North Bengal is essentially a mixed one. Therefore this region retains and carries forward a folk culture of prominence. This

region has seen imbalance in the beginning but separation later. Faith has prevailed always since.

While analyzing the religious faith of the Rajbanshis, it can be said that religion plays a very important and positive role in human life. Religion is matter of realization. A community gets its rituals and customs from its religious faith rituals. But sociologists, anthropologists and theologians differ in their opinions regarding the origin of religion, which is quite natural. Religions differ but their essence is the same and that is philanthropy. There may be similarities and dissimilarities both among people with respect to changing times and places, but their culture remains the same.

The religious practices of the Rajbanshi also differentiated them from the upper caste Hindu of Bengal. Both Saivism and Vaishnavism were popular among the Rajbanshi, though the latter was adhered to by more people. The Rajbanshi had their own priests known as *adhikari*, *deosi*, *deodha* etc., who officiated in their religious ceremonies. The *adhikari* also lived in agriculture like the other Rajbanshi but enjoyed a special status in society. He was the village priest and officiated in all ceremonies in the village. The *deosi* performed the worship in the temples and at the *charak* festival. The *deodha* performed five sacrifices and other tantric rites. The most important features of this acculturation were the worshipping of clay images and the induction of Brahmin priests for performing religious rites, all of which they adopted at a later stage from the orthodox high caste Hindus.

Educationally the Rajbanshi were very backward which was in fact the case with north Bengal itself compared to other parts of Bengal. As a result, "according to the 1911 census only out of 1,000 Rajbanshi were literate, the male-female ratio was even worse, as against 97 males out of 1,000, only 2 females out of 1000 were literate".<sup>5</sup> This suggests that though the general progress among the Rajbanshi was very delayed. The language in which the Rajbanshi generally spoke was a local dialect of Bengali, which Grierson has described as "the 'Rajbanshi dialect'.<sup>6</sup> This dialect was mainly used for verbal communication and many songs and books, articles, *chilkas*, in this dialect have been preserved. The Rajbanshi caste claimed that the 'Rajbanshi' dialect was a separate language, also published their caste literature, articles, pamphlets, etc.

In the nineteenth century the colonial administration had tried to use the existing communal tensions between the Hindus and the Muslims, by the adopting a policy of patronizing the Muslims to minimize the existing dominance of the Hindu gentry in political institutions. This is the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's resulted in the growth of a large number of religion-political associations among the Muslims, known as the *Anjumans*, whose primary aim was to promote the interests of the Muslim elites. These elites using community identity as their chief political tool tried to mobilize the Muslim masses in support of their demands and to pursue such goals, it was necessary to rally behind colonial rule. However, compared to the eastern and other parts of Bengal, communal tension was occasionally visible in this

area. One of the basic reasons for this relative harmony was the mutual interaction between the Rajbanshi and the Muslims. The majority of the local Muslims were called Naysay, meaning that they were converting to Islam from the Rajbanshi Hindus. The difference in religion did not stand as a barrier for social relationship between the two communities. As the village level both the communities regarded each other with complete tolerance and took part in each other festivals. This statement clearly reflected the natural harmonious relationship that existed between the Rajbanshi and the local Muslims.

This differentiation in terms of cultural practices and social values within the Rajbanshi community is important as it helps us in understanding the genesis and dynamics of their caste movement. A discussion on the economic profile of the community will further clarify this point. This brief ethnological description of the socio-cultural practices of the Rajbanshi clearly indicates that they had very little in common with the local upper caste Hindus. It was this cultural distinction which defined the boundary that separated the Rajbanshi community from the upper caste Hindu society of north Bengal. This differentiation in terms of cultural practices and social values within the Rajbanshi community is important as it helps us in understanding the genesis and dynamics of their caste movement.

The Society is a group that shares common heritage, customs, life-style and is inspired to live together developing a positive and careful attitude towards one-another. Therefore society is a group of human beings who sustain and carry forward a common cultural heritage in the process of social progress. Both these terms are complementary of each others. The term 'cultural' serves as a means to achieve materialistic and non-materialistic ends of man. Whatever activities man has undertaken is known as his culture. His materialistic culture includes dwellings, utensils furniture etc, and non-materialistic culture is namely skill, knowledge, faith, concept, sense of values, music, dance, literature etc, Both these cultures figure in this research work.

One of the major effects of this change was that the Rajbanshi who once dominated the local society and economy were slowly subordinated by the newly settle dominant upper caste gentry. The domination of an essentially immigrant gantry as well as the cultural differences between them and the Rajbanshi created a sense of community solidarity among the latter .The most articulate section among the Rajbanshi, the elites, played an important role to whip up this community consciousness in order to mobilize the members of their caste for collective mobility.

#### Objective of the Study

1. To find out the relevance of north Bengal Rajbangsi's concept of society in today's India.
2. To discuss their Lokayato sonskriti defined his ideal society.
3. To find out shares common heritage, customs, and life-style and is inspired to live together.

Author can do this research work to observe our national heritage in the sense of unploughed area. Author believes this work will be indicating our national harmony or unity and diversity of India. On the other hand in this work, want to do a subaltern studies on Rajbangshi folk culture of North Bengal, state of west Bengal. All these works help us in device methodically our ideas about the Rajbangshi. But what still lacks is a systematic analytical history of the Rajbanshi quest for identity, their manipulation of caste symbols, modes of mobilization and extent of success. Above all the Rajbansi caste movement needs to be situated within its historical context. In the light of contemporary developments and the growing concern among the various lower and intermediary castes for twice born status, the Rajbanshi caste movement had become especially significant in the social history of Bengal. Every research work has a specific objective and purpose and with respect to those, its periphery is determined. Here, it is important to mention the implication of the terms 'society' and 'culture'.

#### Endnotes

1. W.W. Hunter: *A Statistical Account of Bengal*; Vol. V; London: Trubner & Co; 1876-1877; page=42-43.
2. B.C. Allen: (Ed.), *Assam District Gazetteers*; Vol. V & VII; Calcutta; City Press; 1905-1906; Page=93-94.
3. G.A. Grierson : *Linguistic Survey of India* ; Vol. V ; Part-1 ;First Ed.1903; Reprint 1988 ; Delhi; Motilal Banarssidas ; page=163.
4. Edward Burnett Taylor: *Primitive Culture*; Vol. I; London; John Murray; 1891; page=322.
5. I.S.S. O'Malley: *Census of India*; 1911; pt. 1; Subsidiary Table –VI; Page=373.
6. G. A. Grierson: *Linguistic Survey of India*; Vol. - V; pt. - 1; Calcutta; 1903; Page=163.

#### References

1. Suniti Kumar Chatterji: *Kirata-Jana-Kirti, The Indo-Mongoloids, Their Contribution to the History and Culture of India*; The Asiatic Society; 1-Park Street; Calcutta-700016; 1998.
2. Swaraj Basu: *Dynamics of A Caste Movement, The Rajbanshis of North Bengal, 1910-1947*; Manohar Publishers; New Delhi; 2003.
3. Dipak Kumar Roy: *Rajbanshi Samaj Aro Sanskritir Katha; A Book on Rajbanshi Society and Culture*; Published by Sopan; Kolkata-06; 2012.
4. T. F. Gruning: *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers*; Jalpaiguri, Allahabad, 1911, P.32-33; [F.W. Strong, *Bengal District Gazetteers*; Dinajpur, Allahabad, 1912.
5. Abdus Sattar: *In Sylvas Shadows*; Dhaka; Sakib Brother; 1971.
6. N. N. Bose: *The Social History of Kamtapur, 1<sup>st</sup> Part*, Calcutta, 1922
7. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay: *Caste, Politics and the Raj*; K.P. Bagchi and Company, First published – 1990.
8. Sugata Bose: *Agrarian Bengal, Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947*, Cambridge, 1986.

9. SunitiKumar Chatterjee :*Kirata-Jana-Kirti, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta,1951 Reprinted in April,1998.*
10. H.N. Chaudhury: *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue – Settlement, Cooch Behar, Reprint, 1983.*
11. Ranjit Das Gupta: *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal, Jalpaiguri,1869-1947, New Delhi,1992.*
12. Omkar Goswami: *Agriculture in Slump; the Peasant Economy of East and North Bengal in the 1930, in Indian Economic and Social History, Review, Vol.-XXI, No.-3, July-September, 1984.*
13. W.W Hunter: *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Districts of Maldah, Rangpur and Dinajpur, Vol.-VII, First published – Concept publishing Company, Delhi, 1877, reprinted in India, 1984.*
14. CharuChandra Sanyal: *The Rajbansis of North Bengal (A Study of a Hindu Social Group), The Asiatic Society, Monograph Series, Calcutta, 1965.*
15. A.L. Basham: *Studies in Indian History and Culture; Sambodhi Publication Pvt.Ltd; 22, Strand Road; Calcutta-1; 1964.*
16. D.D Kosambi: *The Culture and civilization of Ancient India in Historical out line; Vikas Publishing House Pvt.Ltd; New Delhi-110014; 2010.*
17. Shekhar Bandyopadhyay & Abijit Dasgupta: *(Edited) Jate, Varna o Bangali Samaj; International centre for Bengal Studies; Delhi; ICBS Series: 24; 1998.*
18. Dr. Jitesh Chandra Roy & Ratan Chandra Roy: *(Edited) Uttarbanger Rajbanshi Somag o Sonskriti Kichu Prasongik Bhabona; Published-Sopan; 206, Bidhan Sarani Kolkata-700006; 2014.*
19. D.H.E. Sunder: *Report on the survey and settlement of the western Duars in the Jalpaiguri District 1889-1892, Calcutta, 1895.*
20. J.A.Milligan: *Final Report on the survey and settlement operation in the Jalpaiguri District, 1906-1916, Calcutta, 1920.*
21. *Census of India: West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandannagore, 1991, VOL-6, IA; Delhi, 1953.*
22. A. Mitra: *Census (1951) West Bengal; District Hand books, Jalpaiguri, Calcutta ,1954 .*
23. Barun De: *West Bengal District Gazetteers, Calcutta, 1981; (et. al).*
24. G.A.Grierson: *Linguistic survey on India; Vol-1, part-1, First Ed.-1903.*