

A probe into the Social Life of the Rajbansis in North Bengal (1947-2000 A.D.)

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ABSTRACT This paper will attempt to look into the characteristic features of the Rajbansi society and their culture in North Bengal, during the second half of the last twentieth century (1947-2000 A.D.). It may be mentioned that a growing interest in recent times is discernible among some scholars, historians for writing history on the Rajbansis. The Rajbansis are the ancient tribe, originally from the ancient Koach Kingdom. They had a rich cultural heritage and their own language. The Rajbansis, the Koaches and the Paliyas have the same origin and they came from a Dravidian stock with a possible admixture of Mongolian blood. They had ceased to flourish in today's world (North Bengal, West Assam, Meghalaya, Bangladesh and Nepal). The social condition of the Rajbansis in North Bengal was very backward. They lead their primal lives like other ethnic people. Deunia (landlord) was the supreme authority of a village and all people of the village obeyed them like the Suntals. Most of them were illiterate. There was a tendency among these people to marry between the ages of ten (10) to twenty (20). The women took at least five (5) or six (6) children. They put on patani (a cloth similar to the loin-cloth which is tied up to the upper part of their chest). The men of this community wear dhuti and shirt. They were animist and they had separate religion and separate rituals. They had some separate foods like 'cheka-sak', 'pelka' etc. They were deeply superstitious. They had some separate games, sports and proverbs. After the seven decade of the twentieth century the people gradually change their social condition, while the other ethnic people (Bodo, Rava, Mech etc.) of North Bengal remained the same position. With the intrusion of the migrant people and the touch of western education as well as globalization few Rajbansi people have become the civilized educated people.

Keywords: Ceased, Intrusion, Lead, remained, Worship,

I. INTRODUCTION

North Bengal is a place where live various ethnic people, like Bodo, Rava, Toto, Mech, Dhimal and Rajbansi etc. But the Rajbansis are the majority people of North Bengal. They are the ancient tribe originally from the ancient Koach Kingdom. This tribe is referred to as Koach Rajbansi or Rajbansi or Rajbongsi. The name Rajbansi literary means 'Royal Race'. They have a separate language, which is known to us as 'Kamatapuri', 'Rajbansi', 'Goalparia', and 'Tajpuri'. The language has a complete grammar. A large number of Rajbansi people now live in North Bengal.

1.1, Nature of the problem The Rajbansis lead a discernible social life, which are partly different from the other people of West Bengal. After Independent of India the Rajbansis of North Bengal provided a very simple life. Socially they were two groups i.e. Jotedars (land lords) and Adhiyars (peasants). Seven decades (1964) of twentieth century the Jotedars lost their Jotedary (land lordship). After that there were no any divisions among them.

1.1.1, Patriarchal society The Rajbansi society was Patriarchal. The father or grandfather was the head authority of the family. All members of the family obeyed to him. The village was controlled by a headman, who known as Deunia (landlord). Charu Chandra Sanyal in his 'The Rajbansis of North Bengal' states "The biggest land lord (Deunia or giri) acts as chairman in the village's court". But after the destruction of the Jotedary (land lordship) system the Pradhan or Panchayet (representative of common people) tried to control the village.

1.1.2, Position of women Though the family was patriarchal, the women were not valueless in the society. The Rajbansi girls lead their lives under the control of their father or grandfather or elder brother. When a girl becomes marriageable, her guardian arranges a colorful ceremony for the purpose of her marriage with a choice able bridegroom. When the girl crosses twelve or fourteen years, she would be considering as marriage

able bride. There was a custom to give and take dowry. Charu Chandra Sanyal states that “In the year 1950 A.D. Phanindra Das of Kumarpara, Jalpaiguri, was Married at the age of 14. His wife was 12. Phanindra’s father paid Rs.140/-(sat-kuri) as bride price.” Gradually by the influence of western education and the touch of Bengali culture as well as globalization the Rajbani people become aware about the age of marriage. In the last half of the twentieth century the parents gave value to their daughter’s opinion for choosing her life partner.

The Rajbansi girl begins to take education and get service under various institutions. This tendency has been started from the last two decades of the twentieth century. They have started to lead their lives equally with the men. They equally shared to the events of their husband. Most number of educated Rajbansi women led their lives like other modern women. Once the Rajbansi women took five or six children but gradually they take only one or two child. Widow marriage and remarriage of a man (when his wife accidently died) is not prohibited in the society.

1.1.3, Foods The Rajbansis are the food loving people. They principally consume rice, curry, beaten rice (chura) and the variety of pickles like ‘checha-sak’, ‘pelka’ etc. domestically prepared. They like to eat meat, fish and various vegetables. Dry fishes are very preferable to their menu. They also take tea at the time of breakfast with beaten rice (chura). Maximum numbers of the people are non-vegetarian. There is no any difference between male and female in taking food. Few men of this community drink wine and take tobacco.

1.1.4, Dresses Traditionally the Rajbansi women wear patani (a cloth similar to the loin-cloth which is tied up to the upper part of their chest) and men put on dhoti and shirt. But gradually a changing scenario appears before us. By the influence of western culture the Rajbansi women wear saari and blouse. Girls wear shirt, pant etc all type of modern dresses. On the other hand the boys put on all types of dresses, like jeans, T-shirt, coat tie, shoe etc. The women traditionally put on ornaments on their head, neck, waist, arms and legs.

1.1.5, Religion and rituals The Rajbansi people had separate religion and separate rituals. Previously they were animist. In the course of time they became most Hindu aboriginal people of North Bengal. Therefore they worship various Gods and Deities. Bisohori, Bhandani, Tistaburi, Mahakal, Garam, Sanyasi, Pater thakur, Pachim Pir, Dharma Thakur, Hudumdeo etc are the Goddesses of the peoples. Lakhir dak, Dhan kata puja, Naya Khoi, Khet uthani, Pushuna, Bherar ghar, Jurabandha, Dodhikado khela etc are the separate rituals of these people in North Bengal. Masan puja is another ritual of these people. Gradually a profound culture is mixed up and therefore some of the age-long customs disappeared altogether.

1.1.6, Superstitions Once, most of the peoples of this community were illiterate. But gradually they became literate. Therefore most of them are superstitious. They believe some superstitions and that is why they observe various rituals. They deeply believe the existence of some evil spirits like Poiri, Gorbo Thakurani, Mogor etc. But the new generations of this community are not eager to continue these previous rituals and they are ready to go to the doctors’ chambers in lieu of the Magical beliefs and practices. Various media help them to be conscious.

1.1.7 Games and sports Indoor games and outdoor games are equally accepted among the people of this community. Card play, Tsokor tsal khela (a game of skill), Solo paita game (putting sixteen) are the indoor games and Pakhi khela (sports of run), football etc are the outdoor games of them. Folk songs, Thief song, Zatra, Palatiya gaan are very interesting to them. “Fande pariya boga kande” is the most populated song of them. Flout, dotara, dhak, turumuru, khol, kartal, akrai are the main organs of them for singing songs.

1.2, Previous works In the last century there was more than one research on the socio-economic and political condition of the Rajbansis in North Bengal. In their “The Rajbansis of North Bengal” by Charu Chandra Sanyal is important work on this topic. But he only superficially generalized the social, economic and cultural condition of the Rajbansis of North Bengal. Sukhabilas Barma’s “The Social and Political Movements in North Bengal” have been mentioned some social and political movements and tensions in North Bengal. There are some Bengali books on this topic. These are i) “Sabhyta-Sanskritir Sandhane Uttar Banger Lokdevdevi & Lokachar” by Dr. Narendranath Roy. Here he highlights the Gods and Goddess as well as rituals of the Rajbansis. ii) Debesh Roy in his “Tistaparer Brittanta” mentions rural life, hat bazaar (small market), Uttarakhanda movement and rituals of the Rajbansi people. iii) Biplab kumar saha in his “Lokosanskriti: Uttarbanga & Assam,” explains the rituals of the Rajbansis of North Bengal and Assam. iv) “Uttarbanger Itihas & Sanskriti” of Dr. Narendranath Roy, Prof. Binay Barman draws the identity and culture of the Rajbansi. v) Kamal Choudhuri in his “Uttarbanger Itihas & Sanskriti” describes the historical and cultural background of the Rajbansis. vi) Besides these “Uttarbanger Satkahan” of Gouri Sankar Ghosh, “Uttarbanga Darpan” of Dr. Dilip Roy and Pramoth Roy, “Uttarbanger Jati & Upajati” by Ratan Biswas highlight in briefly the social, economic, political as well as cultural condition of the Rajbansi people including the other ethnic people of North Bengal. Dr. Ananda Gopal Ghosh and Dr. Nilangsu Sekhar Das have described some social, political and cultural Scenario of the Rajbansis in North Bengal.

But the above mentioned authors and the editors of these books did not clearly describe the social life and probe into the factors which led to the social development of the Rajbansis in North Bengal. They did not clearly cover the process of improvement of the social condition of the Rajbansis.

1.3, Purpose of the paper The main purpose of this paper is to draw the historical explanation and presentation of undiscovered facts regarding the social life of the Rajbansis in North Bengal. In this paper I want to high light the primal social life of them and the changing scenario of it. This paper will probe into the factors which led to the progress of the Rajbansis in North Bengal.

1.4, Contribution of the paper The last decades of the twentieth century, there were some works about the Rajbansis of North Bengal. Even recently some researchers are prosecuting their works on this area. But there are a little bit of gap regarding the process of the improving social life of the Rajbansis in North Bengal. After the migration of the immigrants, there was a clashed and changed the socio-economic condition of the Rajbansis. After some decades of the migration, the Rajbansi people have been influenced by western education, globalization, as well as the immigrants but backward than the migrant people. Naturally there was outbreak of some political movements for the demand of separate identification of the Rajbansi people. Superficially these were political affairs but the main causes were hiding into the social background. This paper probes into social tensions and improvement of the Rajbansis in North Bengal during this period.

II. CONCLUSION

In conclusion we may say that the Rajbansis were suppressed and considered to be the most backward ethnic people in North Bengal as well as North-East India. There are lacks of proper social development as well In the recent years some Rajbansis have gained education through schools, college, university as well as various educational institutions. Educated Rajbansis are leading modern life in towns. They set up buildings and enjoy all kind of facilities in modern civilization. On the other hand the land holder or land less Rajbansi farmers live in villages in their small cottages and believe their indigenous culture as well as their traditional way of life. It is a struggle to maintain the age-old practices of their forefathers without turning away from the fruits of modernity. Only time can reveal the outcome of this social metamorphosis taking place in the Rajbansi heartland of North Bengal.

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