

Economic Status of the Rajbanshis of Northern Part of West Bengal in Post Independent Period

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ABSTRACT: *The Rajbanshis are considered the most important indigenous group inhabiting in the northern part of West Bengal, comprising the districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Darjeeling, North & South Dinajpur and Malda. Economically they are more dependent on primary sector, i.e. agriculture. The Mughal land revenue system, the British land revenue reforms, the customary practices of different areas, and the ecological conditions largely determined the patterns of agrarian relations in different parts of Bengal. Unlike the upper caste gentry, these local peoples did not face the problem of status inconsistency if they themselves cultivated the land. However, the situation began to change from the late ninetieth century with the migration of people in this region. In North Bengal, large-scale transfer of land from the Rajbanshis to the non-Rajbanshis, which had started, from the late nineteenth century was only accelerated further by these later developments. Alienation from their ancestral land and the transformation of Rajbanshi from land owing peasants to wage labour proletariats had various social connotations too and tension has been grown in North Bengal from time to time in respect of separate state and autonomous power in North Bengal.*

KEY WORDS- *indigenous, ecological, migration, agrarian, Rajbanshi, transformation, proletariats, separate state, autonomous*

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Introduction

The Rajbanshis are considered the most important indigenous group inhabiting at the northern part of West Bengal, comprising the districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Darjeeling, North & South Dinajpur and Malda. According to Census Report 1981, the Rajbanshis constitute 19% of total of Scheduled Caste population of West Bengal. Out of the total Rajbanshis of North Bengal, about 74% lives in Cooch Behar, 32% in Jalpaiguri, 13% in North and South Dinajpur and 8% in Darjeeling and Malda districts. Therefore, the major concentration of the Rajbanshis is in the districts of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. The sex ratio of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal is 952 females per 1000 males (1971 Census). The Rajbanshi is one of the major Scheduled Castes in West Bengal.¹ Out of total 2258760 Rajbanshis in West Bengal, 77.19 percent of them are found to live in the northern part of the state known as North Bengal. Some scholars believe that North Bengal is the homeland of the Rajbanshis and since long as a local community, have been dominating the ethnic situation of this climate.²

Economic Pattern of the Rajbanshi People

Economically the Rajbanshis are more dependent on primary sector, i.e. agriculture. The agricultural structures prevailing in different parts of Bengal varied widely. The Mughal land revenue system, the British land revenue reforms, the customary practices of different areas, and the ecological conditions largely determined the patterns of agrarian relations in different parts of Bengal. We may distinguish the Bengal agrarian structures into three categories-i) peasant small holding system in Eastern Bengal, ii) the prevalence in Bengal and Central Bengal of vast personal demesne of lands cultivated by landless labourers and iii) rich farmer-share-cropper system of Northern Bengal. Sugato Bose also frames the same structure of agrarian system of Bengal.³ In the present section of our study the agrarian structure of North Bengal will be focused in which the Rajbanshis as a cultivating community are to be situated.

The *Jotedari-adhiari* system was dominant pattern of the agrarian relations in North-Eastern part of India. However, there are different parts of the region like –Dinajpur, Rangpur, parts of Jalpaiguri, which were permanently settled areas, and where *zamindari* system existed. There was no *zamindari* system in the Western Duars of Jalpaiguri and in Cooch Behar. The land was given to *jotedars* or rich farmers by the government in exchange of some undertaking to pay annual rent in these regions.⁴ There were also variations of position and privileges enjoyed by the *jotedars* and other under tenants in different part of northern part of present West Bengal.⁵

In pre-British time, there were vast stretches of uncultivated lands which were given to rich men at very low rents in order to motivate them to bring waste land under cultivation. This rich men gave the lands to poor cultivators, initially for no or minimum return. However, once cultivation started regularly the cultivators paid, generally in kind, $\frac{1}{2}$ % of produce to the original titleholder. Thus, the cultivators who reclaimed the wasteland become the sharecroppers and the rich men by virtue of their economic supremacy became the landlords.⁶ During the British rule, this system of agricultural structure became much more popular among the substantial landholders.

The sharecropping system became popular in this region due to the scarcity of labour compared to the availability of land. It results that land is being less precious than labour.⁷ Under this circumstance, the wastelands are attributed to a want of farmers, and common workers or porters cannot be procured without the utmost difficulty.⁸ There were also other causes like rise in prices, purchase of land by money lenders, and merchants, effects of the war, and the depression- all contributed to the expansion of the share-cropping system. Landlords, particularly those who had no link with land, like traders, and moneylenders or upper caste gentry, preferred share-cropping because it ensured good returns without any direct involvement in the agricultural process. Thus, because of this gradual extension of the sharecropping system a highly stratified and complex agrarian structure developed in North Bengal.⁹

If we follow the agrarian structure of this region, we will find that the *Zamindar* was the top of the hierarchy. He got land from the government, subject to the payment of a fixed amount of revenue. Next to the *Zamindar*, there was the *jotedar* who got land from the *Zamindar*, subject to the payment of rent at prevailing rates. The rent paid by the *jotedar* was subject to enhancements.¹⁰ Though the *jotedars* formed an exclusive group of landlords, there were differences among them in terms of amounts of land hold. There were very big *jotedars* as well as a good number of small *jotedars*. A. Beteille has observed that *jotedars* were not an economically homogenous group and there were both rich and poor *jotedars* owing or cultivating large as well as small lands.¹¹ There were enormous sizes of *jotes* in different parts of northern part of present West Bengal.¹²

Land Holders of North Bengal

There were different categories of land holders in northern part of present West Bengal.¹³ However, the classes which were eventually recognized in law and by sufferance were four i.e; *jotedar*, *Chukanidar*, *Dar-chukanidar* and *Adhiar*.

Jotedar:

A *jotedar* is a person who holds land directly of Government. He is a tenant with a heritable and transferable title in his holding vested in him by the fact of possession with power to transmit this title to those to whom he sublets. He has the right to resettle of the land included in his *jote* on the expiry of the term of the settlement, but subject to an increase of rent.¹⁴ His title to possession of the land included in his *jote* is, however, always subject to the superior right of government as proprietor to resume any portion required for public or other purpose or proportional abatement being made in the rental and compensation allowed for any payment improvement. A *jote* may be acquired by direct settlement, by purchase and by inheritance.

Chukanidar:

The tenant immediately below the *jotedars* is the *chukanidar* or *mulandar*. The rent payable by him is fixed. His title to his holding is heritable and transferable. He is not allowed under the provisions of the *jotedar's* lease to sublet the whole or any portion of the tenure under pain of immediate forfeiture of such tenure. But he is permitted to employ *adhiars*.¹⁵ *Chukanidars* cannot be ousted from his holding, except by order of a competent court, notwithstanding the fact that he may not have been twelve years on a *jote*. There is an unwritten law between him and his *jotedar* that he cannot be ousted from his land as long as he pays his rent.¹⁶

Dar-Chukanidar:

This class of tenants hold direct from the *Chukanidars*. The tenure rights of this class of tenants were neither found relevant by the Bengal Government nor approved by it. In a letter sent by the Revenue Department to Mr. Sunder, the settlement officer, it was stated, "The Lt. Governor approves your proposal that the newly created under-tenure of *dar-chukanidar* in the *Duars* estate should be absolutely ignored, as much as these tenures have been made contrary to the express order of the government".¹⁷ The *dar-chukanidar* was the under tenant of *chukanidars*. All these under tenants had occupancy rights in Cooch Behar, but not elsewhere.¹⁸

Adhiar:

Adhiars or *Prajas* are holders on the *metayer* system. They cultivate land immediately under the *jotedars*, *chukanidars* or a derivative *chukanidar*, but whatever the designation or status of the *adhiars* immediate superior be, he is known as the *adhiars giri*, half the produce of the land. The *giri* usually makes an advance of seeds and cash to the *adhiar*, which is adjusted when the produce is divided. The cattle and plough sometimes belong to the *giri*, sometimes to the *adhiars*. The legal status of various classes of *adhiars* unfortunately remained uncertain.¹⁹ As the *adhiars* had to pay half of his produce, he was in a chronic state of debt and had very little means to improve his position. He had to take advance from his landlord to survive, and this the landlord realized with heavy interests during harvest time.²⁰ There were no doubt variations in the position of *adhiars* in different areas of North Bengal. However, it was in this section of the local peasantry who had to bear the major burden of exploitation by the state and the landlord.²¹

Emergence of the New Land Holders Class

From the above discussion, it is cleared that the *jotedars* constituted the most dominant group in local agrarian social structure. An important to add in this context is the absence of non-cultivating upper caste gentry in this region under study. Some parts of Bengal there was a class of upper caste gentry who owned substantial amounts of land. They did not cultivate themselves, as manual labour was a matter of disrespect in society. They, however, enjoyed maximum power in society by virtue of their social and economic position. There was another situation in northern part of India. Till the advent of the ninetieth century most of the land in North Bengal was in the possession of the local people i.e.; the Koches, the Rajbanshis, the Mechs etc. Unlike the upper caste gentry, these local peoples did not face the problem of status inconsistency if they themselves cultivated the land. However, the situation began to change from the late ninetieth century with the migration of people in this region. They not only consolidated their position as non-cultivating gentry, but also came to form a middle class at the village level, as it was from the group that the majority of the *Zamindari* agents and the staff of the local *cutchery* were recruited. Taking advantages of the backwardness of the local cultivators or poor *rayots*, they began to exploits them. In this respect we may refer from the Rangpur settlement report as follows-²²

“These men, of whom one or two are to be found in almost every village, are the leaders of the local factions who by a smattering of legal knowledge and ready wit have gained the confidence of their co-villagers. Often they are retained by the *Zamindar’s* staff and in return for land at favourable rates of rent or even rent free they watch their interest”.

Thus, the non-cultivating *jotedars* increased day by day in this region and secured a dominant position in the local agrarian structure. Based on the settlement reports, Amit Mitra has shown the ethnic composition of the *jotedars* of the Falakata *tahsil* in Jalpaiguri district between the year 1894 and 1905 where the Rajbanshis held 40% of the total *jotes* in 1894 and around 34% in 1905.²³ There, were however, subsequent changes in the pattern of land control in North Bengal with the result that the Rajbanshis were gradually pushed out by the non-Rajbanshi land holders from their position of eminence. In 1911, only 1.2% of the Rajbanshis who had any occupation derived their income from rent. In Rajshahi division, which contained the major concentration of this caste population, they constituted only 10.68% of the rent-receivers, while, the representation of the Brahmins in this category amounted to 25.26 %.²⁴ Another example may be given here; one fairly big *jotes* (618 bighas) in the *paragana* Mekhliganj where Chunder Kishore Nandy was the proprietor of this *jote*. He leased out the entire *jote* to one Chutiram Doss, who after retaining 335 *bighas* and his direct management (*Nij Chukanidars*) sublet the rest to 10 *Dar-chukanidars*. By title (or family names), these were 7 Dosses, 1 Nasya, 1 Doss Mali and 1 Singh Doss. Thus, a caste from Bengal obtained this *jote* and sublet the whole to nature inhabitants of Koch Behar, namely, a Rajbanshis (7 Dosses, 1 Doss Malli and 1 Singh Doss) and a native convert to Muslim (Nasya).²⁵

The changes that were taking place in the economic share because of war, depression, and famine in Bengal also severely affected the existing pattern of land ownership in the North Bengal districts. The rise in prices of food grains, and other necessities, following the World War II, also seriously affected the middle and poor peasants and this culminated in the great Bengal famine. The beneficiary’s from this crisis were the merchants, moneylenders, and speculators- those who also invested their capital in land. The result of this development was the transfer of land from small *jotedars* and middle peasants to rich farmers, moneylenders, and speculators.²⁶ In the North Bengal, large-scale transfer of land from the Rajbanshis to this non-Rajbanshis, which had started, from the late nineteenth century was only accelerated further by these later developments.

Migration of Population in North Bengal

Another important reason for land transfer to the non-Rajbanshis was the migration of a large number of outsiders to different districts of North Bengal. At the earlier stage, the attraction of this region were the abundance of land, possibility of good business, job opportunities in Government offices as the local people

were not in a position to compete with them , opening of tea gardens which provide job facilities for both the ‘Babus’ as well as labourers.²⁷

Regular settlement work was undertaken and the *Duars* had been brought under regular administration providing security to the inhabitants. This administrative stability had particularly induced migration. However, most important factors that had encouraged the migration of the landed gentry were the land price of land and low rent compared to the situation in other parts of Bengal. Therefore, in the third settlement a large number of people who were not born to the soil could obtain lease could obtain lease from the Government as *jotedars* in the settled area.²⁸ Some ones acquired *jotes* through purchase. Escalation of land price caused by migration furthered transfer of *jotes* through sale to outside. In fact, the migrants were controlling many of the *jotes* paying revenue from Rs. 20 to 2000 per annum after the 1895 settlement in Western Duars.²⁹ Comparing the population statistics of the 1881 Census with that of 1891 one finds an increase of 114277 in the population of the Western *Duars*. The breakup of the increased population, who were migrants, can be studied based on the following table.³⁰

Table NO. 1: Number, and place of migration

| Place of Origin | Number |
|--|--------|
| Darjeeling | 1588 |
| Dinajpur | 505 |
| Rangpur | 10101 |
| Kuch Behar | 32224 |
| From Other District of Bengal Province | 11364 |
| Bihar Districts | 8491 |
| Orissa | 292 |
| Chhotonagpur | 20341 |
| Other Province | 29371 |
| Total | 114277 |

Source: Sunder’s Report; Grunning, *Jalpaiguri District Gazetteers; Census Statistics, 1881and 1891.*

This process continued as the 1901 Census shows that nearly one third of the inhabitants of Western *Duars* were foreign born and the figure of the migrants rose to 188223. All the migrants i.e; 73946 persons after 1818 have settled in different police stations of Western Duars.³¹ Most of the migrants from Darjeeling, Bihar and Chhotonagpur have been employed by the tea gardens as workers. People from Dinajpur, Cooch Behar have taken up land as *Jotedars*. The census figure on migration for the period between 1891 and 1921(table No. 2) in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts give us an idea of the volume of migration that was taking place in north eastern part of India.³²

Table 2: Migration to Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur from contiguous and other District between 1891-1921

| Year | From contiguous District | | From other districts to | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--------|-------------------------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Migration to Cooch Behar | | | | |
| 1891 | 12997 | 15191 | 3262 | 1201 |
| 1901 | 9161 | 12531 | 12668 | 2255 |
| 1911 | 11000 | 13000 | 5000 | 2000 |
| 1921 | 9000 | 12000 | 10000 | 6000 |
| Migration to Jalpaiguri | | | | |
| 1891 | 30920 | 27835 | 12431 | 7641 |
| 1901 | 24354 | 23856 | 65272 | 48636 |
| 1911 | 18000 | 15000 | 15000 | 10000 |
| 1921 | 21000 | 19000 | 5000 | 4000 |
| Migration to Dinajpur | | | | |
| 1891 | 22670 | 18819 | 9308 | 5894 |
| 1901 | 13901 | 13319 | 60143 | 34871 |
| 1911 | 19000 | 16000 | 12000 | 6000 |
| 1921 | 12000 | 13000 | 10000 | 7000 |

Source: A Mitra ,*West Bengal District Hand Book*, Calcutta 1951, Cooch Behar ,P.XXXVi, Jalpaiguri,P.Lii, West Dinajpur, P. Xii.

This large influx of people not only led to a growing demand for land but also led to a rise in land prices. Local people, tempted by the spiraling prices soon began to sell their lands leading to the transformation of the local small and middle *jotedars* into under tenants, subservient to a new class of immigrant landed gentry. In Rangpur and Dinajpur, the big *jotedars* and non-agriculturists brought the maximum number of *jotes*.³³ In Jalpaiguri, the number of *jotes* held by the Rajbanshis are decreased, while the *jotes* held by the Marwaris, the upper caste Bengali, middle –class people, others are increased sharply.³⁴ By 1872, in Cooch Behar 54% of the revenue paying land had passed into the hand of the outsiders.³⁵ Indeed all over North Bengal the phenomenon of transfer of land from the hands of the Rajbanshis to those of the non-Rajbanshis became a standard pattern and in course of time it generated a sense of grievance among the disposed Rajbanshi gentry.

Demographic Change of North Bengal

Migration of population created demographic changes in an issue of concern while figures quoted by authorities are suspect it is pertinent to note that in the 20th century under British rule, immigration and migration, particularly into Assam, North Bengal and Tripura, was probably to the extent of about 30% of the population of which about 2/3 was from East Bengal (Bangladesh).³⁶ Unfortunately, after independence this trend was allowed to continue, with the majority of the migrants, being from East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). In 1971 again was a major refugee exodus from East Pakistan (present Bangladesh), the majority of who never returned owing to the situation, which leads to the Indo- Pak war. The population growth of North Bengal may show in Table No. 3 during 1951-2001.

Table No.3: The growth of population in North Bengal from 1951-2001
(Population in Lakhs).

| District | Area sq km | 1951 | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 | 2001 | % of decadal growth (1971-81) | % of decadal growth (2001-2011) |
|---------------|------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Darjeeling | 3,386 | 459.6 | 624.6 | 781.8 | 1,024.2 | 1299.9 | 1609.1 | 28.74 | 14.47 |
| Cooch Behar | 3,075 | 668.1 | 1,319.8 | 1,414.2 | 11,771.8 | 2171.1 | 2479.1 | 25.27 | 13.86 |
| Jalpaiguri | 6,224 | 916.7 | 1,369.3 | 1,750.1 | 2,214.8 | 2800.5 | 3401.1 | 26.11 | 13.77 |
| West Dinajpur | 5,206 | 976.9 | 1,323.8 | 1,857.9 | 2,404.9 | *1897.0 **1230.6 | *2441.7 **1503.1 | 29.19 | *22.90 **11.16 |
| Malda | 3,313 | 937.6 | 1,221.9 | 1,612.7 | 2,031.8 | 2637.0 | 3290.4 | 26.19 | 21.50 |
| West Bengal | 21,625 | 3,959.7 | 5,549.4 | 7,418.7 | 9,447.6 | 68077.9 | 80176.1 | 22.96 | 13.93 |

Source: Census Reports

The table No. 3 shows that the decadal growth of the population of North Bengal in every district is higher than the growth rate of West Bengal. Darjeeling and West Dinajpur is most high rate. However, there are certain causes of growth rate of population in North Bengal. It is situated at national and international boundary and the media for communication with Eastern India. This geographical situation helps to induce the migration problem. Besides, in 1960 the Tibetan refugees settled in the *Duars* of North Bengal, the Bengalese from Assam came to North Bengal due 'Bangal Kheda Andolan' in 1960-61, Nepalese from Meghalaya and Bhutan were driven away who took shelter in India and the extensive pressure of migrants for Indo-Pak war in 1965. This influx of immigrants' people created an extensive pressure and crisis in socio-economic structure in North Bengal.³⁷ Marcus Dam says, "Indian authorities continue to thwart attempt by Bhutanese refugees back to their homeland. The problem of these displaced people is expected to snowball into a major geographical crisis in North Bengal specially Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri because they are sandwiched between Nepal and Bhutan".³⁸

Government Policies and Condition of the Rajbanshis

In addition to the demographic changes, the policy of the West Bengal Government, particularly the land reforms programme had directly contributed to the growth of ethno-cultural regionalism in North Bengal. After the introduction of land Acquisition Act (1953), a large number of *jotedars* of North Bengal lost their lands in excess to the limit of seventy- five *bighas Khas* (vested) land had been distributed to the landless cultivators. Although the victim *jotedars* were mostly of the Rajbanshi community, but their caste fellows were not sole beneficiaries. Hence, there was a strong voice for the distribution of the vested land to the Rajbanshis

only. Naturally, land alienation to the non-Rajbanshis began with the first phase of land reforms in West Bengal germinated the seeds of deprivation among the pre-settled communities of North Bengal.³⁹

Second phase of land reform was undertaken in West Bengal with the coming the United Front (UF) Government in 1967. The UF Government during 1967-70 vested one million acre of land, which broken the backbone of social dominance of the landed aristocracy (*jotedars*) of West Bengal.⁴⁰ The *jotedars* of North Bengal could not escape from it. However, third phase of land reforms called “Operation Burga” under the Left Front Government was successful in vesting family land and recording 1.2 million of sharecroppers within three years(1978-81)⁴¹ According to the official sources, 428179.95 hector vested land has been distributed among 2605432 beneficiaries. In North Bengal 170081.80 hector vested land was distributed among 671841 beneficiaries out of whom 301498 are SCs and 144181 are STs.⁴²

Land reforms and distribution of vested lands to the landless agricultural labourers by the UF and LF Governments had direct impact on the socio-economic pattern of the indigenous elites in North Bengal. Although SC/ST people were benefited by the land distribution process of the Government, the anti foreigner feelings and feelings of deprivation of the indigenous people were generated. Under this situation, the Rajbanshis were forced to migrate into the nearby urban areas and to the other province only to be absorbed into the marginalize section workers, domestic servants whose survival depended upon the selling of labour power. Alienation from their ancestral land and the transformation of Rajbanshi from land owing peasants to wage labour proletariats had various social connotations too and tension has been grown in North Bengal from time to time in respect of separate state and autonomous power in North Bengal. The self –sustain village community⁴³, however, began to change with the beginning of the commercialization of agriculture⁴⁴ particularly tea production, Jute, Tobacco production and the introduction of railways in North Bengal. The gradual penetration of moneylenders, merchants and middle-class service groups as appendages of the market economy, brought significant change in the existing agrarian social structure as well. However, the Rajbanshi who constitute the bulk of the *adhiars* in this region did not benefit from this transformation and they did not able to compete with the Caste Hindus.⁴⁵ There was also a tendency among the Rajbanshi *adhiars* to work under the *jotedars* of their own community and this is one of the causes of Rajbanshis economic depression. Another important causes of miserable economic condition among the Rajbanshis that they did not invest money in other economic fields than cultivation though the latter was not fit for modern cultivation system. As a result, it is to be mentioned here that after the abolition of *Zamindari* system in West Bengal (1953), the upper caste gentry would managed their economic crisis but the Rajbanshis could not.

Measurable Condition of the Rajbanshis in Professional Field

The miserable condition of the Rajbanshis in the occupational field had been shown in census reports. From the table No.4 we may get a general impression about the occupational patterns of the Rajbanshis. There are, however, ambiguities in categorization and classification of different occupations in the census reports. The table shows that a small section of Rajbanshis was rent receivers and their representation in other subsidiary occupations was insignificant. An over whelming majority of them were various kinds of cultivators, including a vast section of *adhiars* and field labours. This makes one point adequately clear, that whatever be the magnitude, there was a vertical division within the Rajbanshi community along the economic lines.⁴⁶

Table No.4: Occupational pattern of the Rajbanshis.^{47*}

| <u>General Field</u> | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------|------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------|
| Income from labourers | | Cultivators off | | Agent & Managers of landed | | | Field workers | | |
| Rent of Land cutters | | of all Kinds | | Estates, Planters, Rent Collectors | | | | | |
| Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 3767 | 537 | 414812 | 9110 | 482 | 1 | 23230 | | 385 | |
| <u>Public Administration</u> | | | | | | | | | |
| Traders | | Gazetted Officer | | Others | | Lawyers, Doctors Teachers | | Religious persons | |
| Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 3009 | 1863 | 18 | (Not found) | 116 | 2 | 497 | 2 | 610 | 39 |

Source: *Census of India*, 1911, Vol. V, pt II, Bengal, Table XVI, PP.374-7.

Note: *Rajbanshis of Darjeeling, Cooch Behar, Faridpur and North Bengal are included.

The Table No.5 also shows that the Rajbanshis of North Bengal mostly dependent on primary section.

Table 5: Percentage distribution of Rajbanshi workers into different occupational categories.

| District | Census | I | II | III | IV | V | VI | VII | VIII | IX |
|-------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Darjeeling | a | 87.77 | 6.42 | 0.23 | 0.85 | 0.23 | 0.07 | 1.17 | 0.16 | 3.10 |
| | b | 55.13 | 23.75 | 12.83 | 0.40 | 0.51 | 0.20 | 2.24 | 0.88 | 4.06 |
| | c | 47.30 | 39.03 | 0.67 | 0.30 | 1.89 | 1.13 | 2.16 | 1.58 | 5.88 |
| Jalpaiguri | a | 89.40 | 4.09 | 0.98 | 0.86 | 0.39 | 0.15 | 1.03 | 0.43 | 2.61 |
| | b | 68.85 | 13.05 | 9.97 | 0.86 | 0.81 | 0.20 | 0.08 | 0.90 | 5.28 |
| | c | 57.06 | 32.77 | 0.84 | 0.41 | 1.37 | 0.29 | 1.35 | 1.93 | 3.98 |
| Cooch Behar | a | 89.89 | 5.81 | 0.06 | 1.09 | 0.23 | 0.02 | 0.57 | 0.12 | 2.21 |
| | b | 78.58 | 16.77 | 0.17 | 0.53 | 0.44 | 0.03 | 0.56 | 0.27 | 2.65 |
| | c | 59.89 | 32.21 | 0.25 | 0.74 | 1.50 | 0.14 | 1.13 | 0.88 | 3.26 |
| W.Dinajpur | a | 73.64 | 19.63 | 0.84 | 1.71 | 0.39 | 0.11 | 1.05 | 0.14 | 2.49 |
| | b | 64.50 | 29.64 | 0.86 | 0.37 | 0.74 | 0.06 | 0.83 | 0.32 | 2.68 |
| | c | 56.27 | 36.17 | 0.84 | 0.83 | 1.45 | 0.11 | 1.44 | 0.58 | 2.31 |
| Malda | a | 69.88 | 13.78 | 1.16 | 6.62 | 0.96 | 0.05 | 0.67 | 0.47 | 6.41 |
| | b | 39.45 | 30.19 | 6.68 | 5.85 | 3.93 | 0.58 | 6.63 | 1.26 | 8.43 |
| | c | 59.13 | 27.96 | 1.58 | 2.18 | 4.68 | 0.16 | 1.25 | 0.92 | 2.18 |
| N.Bengal | a | 87.03 | 7.04 | 0.53 | 1.29 | 0.34 | 0.08 | 0.82 | 0.25 | 2.62 |
| | b | 70.73 | 18.57 | 4.01 | 0.85 | 0.78 | 0.12 | 0.65 | 0.53 | 3.76 |
| | c | 57.76 | 33.27 | 0.63 | 0.71 | 1.61 | 0.22 | 1.31 | 1.16 | 3.33 |

Note: a=1961, b=1971, c=1981 Census; Occupational category: I=Cultivators, II=Agricultural laboureres, III=Mining, quarrying, livestock, fishing, plantation etc; IV=Household Industry; V- Manufacturing other than household industry, VI=Construction; VII=Trade and Commerce; VIII=Transport, storage and Communication; IX= Other Services.

The Table No.5 depicts that in 1981, 57.76 percent of Rajbanshi workers were cultivators, and 33.27 percent were agricultural labourers. Therefore, about 91 percent of the Rajbanshis workers were principally engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Among the Rajbanshi workers, although the cultivators outnumbered the agricultural labourers in all the districts, the ratio of latter to former was high in the districts of Darjeeling and West Dinajpur.

Only about 9% of the Rajbanshi workers were engaged in various non-agricultural pursuits. However, excepting in manufacturing, trade and commerce, transportation, and other services, the proportion of Rajbanshi workers in remaining categories of occupation was less than 1%. In 1981, about 2% of Rajbanshi workers were manufacturing industries and only 3.33 percent were in other services. Thus, it appears that up to 1981, the economic activities of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal were less diversified and they were dependent an agriculture.

In urban areas, about 59% of the Rajbanshi workers were dependent an agricultural activities. Little changes in the means of livelihood of the Rajbanshi who were otherwise urban by their residential background. The participation of the urban Rajbanshis in service was less 19%. The corresponding percentages were 32,28 and 38 for the non- scheduled people, the other SC and the ST respectively.⁴⁸ In the manufacturing field the participation of the Rajbanshis of this region is insignificant than the other section of the people. Overall, it

appears that urbanization among the Rajbanshis was not accompanied by any significant change in their employment pattern.

Tapas Kumar Raychoudhry observes that the Rajbanshis were always prone to static. As all primitive communities, they were tied to family profession (agriculture) and were normally disinclined to changes professions.⁴⁹ He also says, when the tea gardens were opened the Rajbanshis never opted out to work as tea garden workers; this factor had compelled the planters to import labour from the tribal of Bihar and Chhotanagpur. The Railways too failed to induce the local people to work in railway construction programmes, though the wages were high. All the labourers used to come from the United Province and Bihar. Even during season time when a labour could have earned as much as Rs. 1.00 a day in jute Godwans, Rajbanshis labourers were not available.⁵⁰ Total abstentions from the non-family professions was the basic norms of the Rajbanshis milieu until the externals caused some important changes to be introduced in their attitude towards new professions. As they contact with the new forces of the society, a sense of exclusives gradually developed among the Rajbanshi elites, which created status differentiation within the community.⁵¹

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is to be mentioned here that in the late nineteenth and until the end of the twentieth century, some important changes had been taken place in the socio-economic structure of the region under review. Rajbanshis who once dominated the local society and economy were gradually subordinated and alienated from land by the newly settled dominant upper caste Hindus (elites). This domination of an essentially immigrant gentry as well as the cultural differences between them and the Rajbanshis created a sense of community solidarity among the latter. The most articulate section of the Rajbanshi people, the elites took an important part to whip up the community consciousness in order to formulate socio-political organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal. They raised a new identity based on social, political and linguistic problem and articulated movement in the form of autonomous and separate state movement after independence in North Bengal.

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