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## STATUS OF THE RAJBANSHI COMMUNITY OF DAKSHIN DINAJPUR BEFORE INDEPENDENCE: A BRIEF HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

*Dinajpur is land of legend under Pundravardhanan Bhukti. The land had been divided by several administrators again and again. Dinajpur is a famous historic place in Eastern Bengal and it founds several ancient texts by different historic names. The general history of Dinajpur has discussed by different scholars. But the impacts of the historical geography of the region were not focused by any researcher. Recently, people from different caste and communities are living in this region. Those who were lived in this region for the period of B.C., they are now extinct or have disappeared in other communities. But the people of Rajbangshi community are flowing till now from the period of Aryanization. Who once fought for his own survival and built Janapadas and ruled over the land. Sometimes they fought regarding the king as Army. They have fought for the state to provide security was called Kshatriya.[1] The Priests of ancient times were conferred them as 'Barman' by showing for their bravery, heroism, courage, honesty and so on. So that they are known as 'Barman Kshatriya' from the Christian era. They have been surviving as Barman Kshatriya after dethroned. During the Muslim rule they have built relationships with the different communities at different times to protect their survival.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Rajbanshis Community, Socio-Economic Status, Colonial Rule, Status before Independence.*

### INTRODUCTION

During pre-Aryan era, peoples belong to Astrika, Dravid and Mongoloid language group spread their settlement in Bengal. Pandit Haraprasad Shastri, in course of ethnicity discussions of the Bengalees, he willing to say all Bengalees are belongs to Mongol-Dravidian in race but do not wish to be involved Brahmin group of peoples. He included Brahmins in Bengalee groups, at the same time, he willing to say that all Bengalee peoples are Mongol-Dravian in origin. But he do not wish to involved the Brahmins. Is this

not taken selter in pertialities? Reverend Mr. Risley said again that the ancient Bengalee peoples were originated from the Mongal-Dravidian mixture groups. But in so many Bengalis who are Dravidians and who is not, he could not identify them. Yet, he tried to substantiate that the rajbanshis are originated from Mongolian. If this is accepted, then almost all of the Indian people of Mongolian descent or they are all Rajbangshis origin. Folklorist Ashutosh Bhattacharya said, all Rajbanshis from Cooch-behar, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, and Darjeeling in norther part of Bengal are the

descendants of Kirat and all high blood inhabitant of south bank of the Bhagirathi were the descendants of Armenian and alpine language group. But he could not speak properly among which peoples of North Bengal were belonged to Kirat or who is not. Keep in mind; Bengalees were made of a mixture of blood in a hybrid race, which was formed in a mixture of ancient Aryan-Non-Aryan blood stream. Indeed, during the British colonial period, some Indian scholars of British underling tried to frustrate and to do isolated the ancient inhabitants without doing search their own ethnicity. F.J. Monahan said in his ancient history book, "Today we hating them of those peoples regarding barbaric, savage etc, but it will be seen in historical analysis, some of them may be one of the greatest, uphold and civilized nation."<sup>19</sup> Many of those peoples under the recent Bengalee polite societies are known as the descendants of those ancient barbarism. But today only a worthy descendant of the ancient nation writes the history of ancient people regarding barbarism. Today the so-called highblood respected scholars were utilized the British colonial ideology and carrying out efforts for taken to a high position in the society. To succeed in this work, they called to other members of the larger society in different appellation and led the history of ethnology towards the other side. Therefore, the information provided to them regarding Rajbangshis Ethnicity is not correct.

In ancient times, such as the north-west of the Aryans entered India, like as the peoples of Mongol groups had entered the country along the way of eastern side of the Himalaya. The reason may have been the origin of the Mongol residents of northeastern. This is evident of history that the Mongolians were settled in the north-Eastern India. Mongolian customs of the old beliefs, rituals, and the Aryan culture, along with a new mixed culture was created there. So, there is nothing unusual that have dominated the local religion and culture on the Aryan language peoples. It is inevitable that local effects on any ethnic group, because culture and adopt the human organism. Therefore, there is nothing impossible to effect of the Mongolian influences upon the the Rajbanshi Kshatriya peoples who were lived from B.C.

Greater Dinajpur was comprised an area, which in ancient times formed a part of the kingdom of Pundravardhana, the country of the Pundras.<sup>[2]</sup> Variuos phases in history the old Dinajpur had been divided in several times for better governs during the British regime. As a result, sometimes the area of greater Dinajpur had decreased. Thus, shows in historical perspectives. The district of West Dinajpur came into existence in August 1947 with the partition of Bengal. The Province of Bengal was divided into two parts in accordance with the Partition. The dividing line passed through the district of Dinajpur, the portion

lying to the west of the line being named West Dinajpur. West Dinajpur District was bifurcated on 1<sup>st</sup> April of 1992. The northern part of West Dinajpur is called Uttar Dinajpur and southern part is called Dakshin Dinajpur. Though two districts were located in North Bengal but their shape is different one another. <sup>[3]</sup> So, the history of this region would not mach with Greater Bengal.

There were so many problems for urbanization during the ancient times. So, the sign of cities has not found nearly a thousand years after the urbanization the Indus valley civilization in the country. And from the second to the sixth century BC was the beginning of urbanization. In the fourth century BC to the fourth century AD, was the final stage of urbanization. Once upon a time, many of the cities were built under the patronage of the ruler in different parts of present Dinajpur area. Most of those cities were destroyed by any reason and the area has changed in geographically, but historical names of those cities remains today. Gradually the culture and society of the region became changed by the impact of bistro-geographical evolution.<sup>[4]</sup>

The Northern part of the region known as 'Kirat-bhumi' during the age of Mahabharata. Subsequently, the north-eastern part of this region was known as Pragjyotishpur and Pundravardhana, during the age of the Gupta Empire. Kotivarsha and Mahasthangarh was two famous business centre of the Gupta period. Those old cities were destroyed and there builds some new cities. Dinajpur area was known as Barind during the Pala period and northern part of the region was known as Kamrupa-Kamta. Some of the moving cities were originated during the Pala period and those were destroyed. The region came to be known as the names of the cities instead of the vast land. This sequence continues until the era of the Sultanate.

## **DINAJPUR AND RAJBANSHI COMMUNITY**

Dinajpur was ruled under the king of Dinajpur. The development was confined in proper area of Dinajpur town. But after the advent of the East India Company's rule in Ghorgha, Dinajpur was turned as one of the important towns in the territory. Ghorghat was another commercial place in eastern India which emerged during the reign of East India Company. Gaibandha, Joypurhat and Birampur were developed under the Ghorghat territory of the British Company. Khansama, Parbatipur also developed at the same time. Most of the area of Ghorghat territory turned as British Colony. But after a few years later the British Company had captured surroundings of Ghorghata territory and applied British rule there. After that the Company had applied their economical absorbing motive in Dinajpur area. Thus the land settlement system was beginning by the hand of Lords Cornwallis in 1793.

Eight years after the Battle of Plessey in 1765 AD, this territory conquered by the army of

the East-India Company. The Nawab's regime as well as the former capital city of Ghorghat became collapsed. Then Dinajpur begins to develop as modern city. During the colonial period between 1861 to mid 1757, reducing the size of Dinajpur for the benefit of revenue survey. The area of Dinajpur became 4,543 square miles. In 1872 AD, it comes down to the square mile in 4142. At the end of British rule came to 3,946 square miles. From 1800 to 1801 AD, the large estate of Purnia, Rangpur and Rajshahi districts are associated with Dinajpur. In 1833 AD Dinajpur was associated with a far-flung part of Bogra and Malda. In 1864 to 1865 AD, a vast paraganas named, khatta is associated with Bogra district from Dinajpur. During the period from 1897 to 1998 AD, Mahadevpur P.S., located in the southern part of Dinajpur was transferred to Rajshahi. Dinajpur was no longer altered until the time of East-Pakistan.[5]

'Rajbanshi' is the name of an indigenous people and largest ethnic group, settled in Dakshin Dinajpur District. They lived in the region from ancient times but some scholars are doubted that they had entered this area from the Himalayan region or from the Brahmaputra valley. Anthropologists opined that they are looks like Mongoloids in features but their ethnic theory of Rajbanshis is absolutely wrong. Some portions of the Rajbanshis might be Mongoloids but not more than 30% of total Rajbanshis.[6] Major portion of the community are belonging to Kshatriya. They live mostly in Rangpur, Dinajpur and Rajshahi districts and a small number of them in Bogra and Mymensingh in undivided North Bengal. Majority Rajbanshis were lived in undivided Dinajpur but in the period of divided India and post independent period most of the Rajanshis were left from East Pakistan and entered into Western part of Dinajpur i.e. West Dinajpur due to communal riots.

Once the Rajbanshis of Dakshin Dinajpur were belonged to Jotedaar family. During the age of Mughal period they lost their lands and turned into a family of decaying land-lordship. After that they had been lost their surplus lands during the colonial period. At the same time the Rajbanshis were involved in various movements to recover their lost dignity and social status. But their demand had not shape in the political scenerio due to lack of competent leader. They had lost not only their landed properties under the British colonial rule, as well as they lost their socio-economical and political opportunities. Whereas, the Rajbanshis were played a vital role in agricultural economy of North Bengal. So, they had gone to backward like other distress commuities in the contemporary society.

### **COLONIAL SCENARIO OF DINAJPUR**

After the advent of the British rule in Dinajpur, the socio-economical and political

scenario had changed. Bengal is the only fertile and grain-productive, as well as the main field of the British capital. Eighty percent of the company's capital comes from Bangladesh. This was the main field of agriculture. The British administration was established in Bengal easily, but it took a long time to establish monopoly right on agricultural economy. Because feudal system was established on agriculture in monopoly. So they had settled land-revenue system to rely on the feudal in this country. Lord Curzon had divided Bengal to detach the unity of Bengalese from one to another, i.e. among different communities of Bengal. But he not succeeded by his plan. But the division between Hindus and Muslims was able to produce. Thus the history of communal politics and the tension continued until 1912-1947. Communalism in India after independence did not end. The communal riots in Bengal had spread all over Bengal, but its effects have not entered to the northern part of Bengal. But the mutual hatred and violence continued in various communities. The educated Muslim community could not accept exclusive rights of upper class Hindus in this region of the contemporary society. They refused the authority of Hindu landlords. So they wanted to live independently. However, large parts of society, people who are living day to day, exploitation and oppression have been accepted, and they are mounted in the grain distraction. The division line was embodied in various communities in entire Bengal. The host and indulge of communal sentiment was the British Government. Different sections peoples like Muslims, Marwari, Businessman, Landlords, and Moneylenders etc. of this region were grew up association or organization by the self-centric mentality. Each and every organization or association made up of a special purpose. Actually, long before in this region diversity was triggered among different caste and communities. The situation has not been made till that time to come out from regionalism. Each community and mutual co-existence between religions, but has not developed to adjust. Each community or caste and therefore were considered separate and distinct from each other. The ideas of the relatively advanced social groups or communities to improve their own interests and unite the different committees were formed. In this case, the Muslim community was advanced. Mohammedan in the context of the Muslim community was formed 'Mahamedan Association' at the same time (1890 AD), "North Bengal overload Association (1907)," Namahsudra Association ' Search the parent association (1910), Dinajpur Landholders' Association (1905), Marwari Association was formed, etc.

### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF DINAJPUR**

Most of the people in the region depended on agriculture for the livelihood. But agriculture



was in control in the hands of the non-farmers group of people. Those who do not often get a foot in the field, who has no experience of farming, those who owned the land. Land revenue was aware of, but how to improve the cultivation of the requirements, they are indifferent about the same. As a result, the pressure would come, only to farmers. Many of the farmers were divided, self-reliant farmers, Middle class farmers, small or marginal farmers, landless farmers, Borgadaars (share croppers) and agricultural laborers, etc. The first class of each of the backward peasantry several feudal lords and the peasants in the bank would have been absorbed. The new land revenue system was to transform agriculture and production. To start earning cash rent was to meet the requirements of the commercialization of agriculture. As a result, farmers had begun to cultivate commercial crop, hopping to pay more revenues as cash to their lords. But did not bless their hope. But the cash crop production to meet the requirements of the farmers as cash capital and they compelled to approach by moneylenders. In this episode, the newly emerged business landlords were deal with the farmers as moneylenders and landlords at a same time. As a result, the landlords were gave the opportunity to exploit the farmers in monopoly. On behalf of the farmers, there was no way to get rid of the debt trap. Thus, a compulsory payment-based banker relationship was made between landlord and farmers day by day. While this system spread around the entire Bengal's protest grew up in various places. But the feudal land system in the northern region was long term. To protest conditions in the region until the early twentieth century, virtually non-existent. Panchanan Barma became worried to get out from the trap of debt of the landlords.<sup>7</sup> As a result, he organized much way to protest the moneylenders and landlords for save the exploited farmers. Most of the farmers were unconscious about their position in land and unknown to the trap of debt of the landlords. At the same time, Northern Bengal was belonged middle-age like and the western education has not been entered.

Agriculture was the main pillar of the rural economy. However, farmers were financially weak, so they did not improvement of agriculture. Ownership of the land was not in the hands of farmers. The earned resources from land were invested to other markets and the land would not be improved. So there was no way to develop and sustain the rural economy. But the rural innocent people were so hard-working and dedicated. The unity to fight against the feudal was not among them. So, the feudal were exploited day by day in different ways. Thus, hand full of people of the society were exploited the energy and hard working monopoly. The energy used in only a particular class of countless people, society and the country does not benefit. Panchanan Barma intends to use

the energy and working power of the farmers to the country for major benefits. If you combine the energy of the society or the country will improve. The individual elements of society, then society will not move forward if the person does not develop to the fulfill. The society will move by the unity and equality among the people of the society. In this context, he had received some of the social plan.

## CONCLUSION

The Rajbanshis of Dakshin Dinajpur is a unique caste. From the Aryanization of Eastern India, they lived in this region and spread all over India. Actually they belong to Kshatriyas and protected several native states in ancient time. Once the Kshatriyas were established Barman Dynasty in North-Eastern India and spread to greater Bengal. Bhaskar Barman was the last powerful king of Barman Dynasty. After Bhaskar Barman, the Barman Dynasty became powerless and the region captured Pal Dynasty and then Sena Dynasty. During the Sultanate and Mughal period the Kshatriyas became minority caste. Most of the powerful Barman kshatriyas were converted to Pal Dynasty and then Sena Dynasty. Socio-economical backward Barman Kshatriyas were converted to Islam. Rest of the Barman Kshatriyas remained by the title of Barman caste. At the advent of British East India Company, the Kshatriyas became marginal class people in the contemporary society. At the same time, Koch Dynasty lost its kingship and turned into tributary state of the British. The successors of the Koch Dynasty were lived scattered in entire North-Eastern India. Koches and Barman Kshatriyas were lived in the same land and both of them were recognized as successors of the royal dynasty. That is why; the British administrators were indentified to the Barman Kshatriyas as Rajbanshi, as they were the successors of the Royal Dynasty. So, the successors of Barman Dynasty were recognized by the British as Rajbanshi or Rajbanshi Kshatriya. In 1807, Buchanan Hamilton during his Rangpur visit, he opined that most of the Rajbanshis are Koches; but many of the Rajbanshis belong to different tribes; who have abandoned their practices and have been admitted to communion'.<sup>[8]</sup> In the census report of 1901, H.H. Risley, the great majority of Koch, inhabitants of Jalpaiguri, Rangpore and part of Dinajpur... were remained Koch under the name of Rajbanshi. It was an affect of colonial motive. After a great protest by the Barman Kshatriyas, the British authority had declared in the census of 1911 under the superintendent, O'Malley that the formal request was hatred without hesitation, as there is no doubt that at the present day irrespective of any question of origin the Rajbanshis and the Koch are separate caste.<sup>[9]</sup> From that time the Rajbanshis became Kshatriya by caste. Next census of 1921, the British declared through his census report that the Rajbanshi Kshatriyas are only Rajbanshi. The

Kshatriya movement became powerful led by Panchanan Barma against the British Government and spread the movement in Dinajpur, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Assam provinces. After a decade protest, the British administrators were compelled to declare that in the census report of 1931, all Rajbanshis are Kshatriya.

According to the India Act of 1935, led by Panchanan Barma, the Rajbanshi Kshatriyas became scheduled under the British Government.[10] From that time, the Rajbanshi Kshatriyas were listed caste under backward class of West Bengal. The Rajbanshi Kshatriyas were recognized as Rajbansh caste.<sup>11</sup> As a result, during the partition of India, most of the lower caste of Hindus was converted to Rajbanshi community as their own process for receiving the constitutional privileges from the government. After partition of India, different political situation and crisis period, several castes of Hindus were included in Rajbanshi Community, as a result, the number of Rajbanshis increased in border areas of Bengal. Different censuses in India, after partition, variety caste from different communities were counted as Rajbanshi. Thus, the caste evaluation had started among the Rajbanshis of Dinajpur and the identity crises raised to them.

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