

## SUBALTERN RENAISSANCE: THAKUR PANCHANAN BARMA & RAJBANSHI SOCIETY

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*Abstract: Panchanan Barma (1866-1935) is the chief architect of the Renaissance in Rajbanshi society in the twentieth century. Under his leadership, along with other intellectuals of the society, the subaltern Rajbanshis spontaneously joined a social reform movement known as the Kshatriya movement under Kshatriaya Samiti. They restored their Kshatriya identity based on rationalism. The extent of its activities was in North Bengal and Assam province in colonial India. The article shows how the subaltern Rajbanshis were re-Kshatriyanized and developed social life by returning from a condition of outcaste life. However, in this Sanskritization (movement from lower caste to upper caste) movement, he got inspiring help from some upper caste Hindus, although many conservative varnas (upper caste) Hindus had conspired to prevent the Kshatriya movement. Ultimately, the social movement gave birth to the rise of the political movement. Due to this movement, India was saved from another partition.*

### Introduction

The nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance is a memorable event in the intellectual history of India, which originated from modern Western education and was limited to an educated middle class. It should have touched the more significant part of Bengal, where subalterns lived and sank into ignorance and illiteracy, staying far away from the Renaissance. Ram Mohan Roy, the great scholar of the first half of the nineteenth century and the first modern man, started a renaissance in Bengal, confined to the urban area; rural areas were unaffected. Due to this limitation, Anil Seal, a Cambridge historian, calls the nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance the elitist or upper class and upper caste movement. In the Renaissance movement, there were mainly two targets; one was exploring the Indian cultural past by applying Western creative, rational knowledge through the Reformation movement, and another was the introduction of socio-political developments.

The second half of the 19th century in North Bengal saw a renaissance or reformation movement confined to town areas, and the 20th century witnessed a renaissance-reformation movement covering both town and countryside under the Rajbanshi intellectuals. It was subaltern, partly under colonial support. This kind of subaltern consciousness movement was possible due to the acceptance of modern Western education and its secularization. As a result of modern education, psychological changes were primarily noticed among the Rajbanshi intellectuals.

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They discovered that their ancestors were *Kshatriya*<sup>1</sup> in identity by studying the good sources thoroughly, but due to unfavorable situations, their forefathers could not have followed Hindu principles. Thus they lost their *Kshatriya* identity in Hindu society and became outcasts, untouchable in the eyes of the upper-caste Hindus. The reformation movement, which was started by the Rajbanshi intellectuals to restore their *Kshatriya* identity, is known as *Sanskritization*.<sup>2</sup> Primarily, the movement was social, but later it was socio-political.

### I. In search of *Kshatriya* Identity

Renaissance in North Bengal and northeastern India emerged in the twentieth century among the subalterns Rajbanshis; the man who first came to lead elaborately was Roy Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma, the 'dearest one' of the Rajbanshi society through Har Mohan Khajanchi started the movement in the early period. He (Panchanan) fought for the welfare of the Rajbanshi society till the last day of his life. Therefore, he is called the 'father' of the Rajbanshis. Under his leadership, the Reformation movement gained fame as a *Kshatriya* movement. The point at which the reformation movement of the Rajbanshis was introduced was to prove that the Rajbanshis were *Kshatriya* and to conduct the movement accordingly. After joining Panchanan Barma, the reformation movement gained more momentum than before. He first published various materials, such as local proverbs, discourses, history, folktales, and folk songs, in the journal *Rangpur Sahitya Parishad* to prove the authenticity of the *Kshatriya* identity of Rajbanshis (Shastri, 1939, 19-20; Barman, 2001, 12).

Some ancient Indian Sanskrit scriptures show that the Rajbanhsis were *Kshatriyas* in ancient times and analyze how they were detached from *Kshatriya* status in the past. According to a Sanskrit scripture named *Vramari Tantra*, five sons of Rajyavardhan and his relatives started living in fear of Mahapadma Nanda, a strong king of the Nanda dynasty, by migrating from Paundravardhan (ancient name of North Bengal) to Ratnapith (Kamarupa). Moreover, gradually they were detached from Brahmins and *Kshatriya* activities. Later they were known as Rajbanshis. In the same way, *Kalika Purana* denotes that the Rajbanshis had to accept *Mlechchha* (uncivilized) religion by leaving their *Kshatriya* identity in fear of Parshu Rama, who had determined to destroy the *Kshatriyas* (Tarkaratna, 1348 BS<sup>3</sup>). *Yogini Tantra* and

<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, India consists of four *varnas*, viz. Brahmin, *Kshatriya*, Vaishya, and Sudra from upper to lower, respectively. The *Kshatriya* is placed in the second rank in the *varna* system or the Hindu society. The Rajbanshis organized the *Kshatriya* or reform movement to acquire *Kshatriya* status in the *varna* system. Generally, scholars are used to the terms *varna* and caste as the same.

<sup>2</sup> M. N. Srinivas, a renewed social scientist of India, propounds the concept of Sanskritization. *Sanskritization* means gradation from lower caste status to upper caste. For detailed information, see Srinivas, M. N. (2007) *Social Change in Modern India*, New Delhi: Orient Longman Private Limited.

<sup>3</sup> BS means Bengal era or Bengal style, the same as CE. It varies 594- or 595-years difference with CE. Converting into CE is only possible if the Bengali era's date, month, and year are available in the source.

*Kamateswar Kulakarika* also prove the claim of the *Kshatriya* identity of the Rajbanshis since long ago.

Harikisor Adhikari (scholar in Sanskrit and Hinduism), a Rajbanshi intellectual, justified in his book *Rajbangshi Kulpradip* that the Rajbanshis were Poundra *Kshatriya*.

Intellectuals like Govinda Chandra Roy's *Kshatra Sangit*, Jagmohan Singh's *Kulkunda*, and Maniram Kavabhusan's *the Rajbanshi Kuldeepak* tried to prove the Rajbanshis to have been *Kshatriya*. Eighteenth-century renowned poet Ratiram Das, in his "Jaga Sangeet," describes the Rajbanhsis in the Palatiya song (a kind of folk song) as *Kshatriya*. By adopting these lines, Roy Saheb claimed that the Rajbanshis were *Kshatriya* (Adhikary, 2014, 93). The census report of 1901 CE also records the Rajbanshis as Bratya *Kshatriya* rather than *Kshatriya*. It says, "The Rajbansis of North Bengal wished to be styled Bhanga or Bratya *Kshatriyas* and to be classed amongst the twice-born castes. They tell various stories of their origin, the favorite being the well-worn legend that their ancestors were the descendants of *Kshatriya* who discarded their sacred threads when fleeing from the wrath of Parasurama." (Census of India, 1901, p. 382) In this regard, the liberal Brahmins extended their free hands to assist in the movement for the restoration of the *Kshatriya* identity (Mandal, 1972, 27-32).

## II. Why the Movement "Subaltern"<sup>4</sup>

In the nineteenth-century Renaissance, the Renaissance was confined to the upper caste and middle class, led by Brahmo Samaj. In the twentieth century, under the leadership of Panchanan Barma, the reformation movement came out from Rangpur town to the whole of North Bengal (including the Princely State of Cooch Behar) and some parts of northeastern India. Rangpur, a British territory, worked here as a nerve center of the reformation movement led by him with its organization "Kshatriya Samiti" as was Calcutta for the Brahmo Samaj. His reformation movement was the overall movement of the Rajbanshi society, where all the *jotadarsh*<sup>5</sup>, lawyers, students, teachers, peasants, and even the poor joined and made a united forum. Agriculture was the main driving force of the Rajbanshis. Peasants were a significant part of this movement. Poor farmers also joined the movement under his leadership. District Commissioner of Dinajpur, F. O. Bell, in his travelogue (in the 1930s), mentions an event while going to Thakurgaon and Garea where a poor farmer informed him that he and his several thousand Rajbanshis from neighboring villages had taken membership of the Kshatriya Samiti in 1922 CE. They subscribed to the Samiti Rs. 2.5 per head. The barbers shaved their heads. The Brahmin chanted

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<sup>4</sup> The subaltern concept was propounded by Ranjit Guha, where he emphasized the movement of subalterns and their consciousness rather than the role of elites and the upper class (Ranjit Guha, 1983). The peasantry, representing the more significant part of Rajbanshi society, participated spontaneously in the reformation movement led by Panchanan Barma. Therefore, the movement is called the subaltern movement.

<sup>5</sup> Well-to-do farmer among the Rajbanshis.

the *mantra*. Moreover, they did this at the behest of Roy Saheb Panchanan Barma. Even some of them told Mr. Bell that they knew Mohan M. K. Gandhi, but, astonishingly, none of them knew Fazlul Haque, founder of Krisak Praja Party (Bengal). They did not even know who Bengal's governor or India's governor-general was. Roy Saheb Panchanan was more important to them than others (Basu, 1992, 186). They had no headache to keep in mind anyone else. From the speech of the poor man, it is understood that the reformation movement of Rajbanshi society was not confined to Rangpur town but also entered every corner of the houses of the Rajbanshis under the strong influence of Panchanan. So, it is said that the movement did not belong to Rajbanshi elite class. It is a movement where all Rajbanshis participated spontaneously, whoever might be common or commonest. From this point of view, the movement is categorized as a subaltern movement.

### III. Course of Events of the Movement

#### 1. Social Movement (1891-1919)

Prior to the arrival of Panchanan at Rangpur, the first *Kshatriya* movement was launched by Harimohan Khajanchi, a Rajbanshi intellectual, at Rangpur town under the umbrella of *Rangpur Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Bidhayani Sabha* founded in 1891 CE. Later it was turned into Rajbanshi *Kshatriya Samiti* in 1910 EC (Singha, 1940, 8). Indeed the Rajbanshi *Kshatriya* movement originated primarily when in 1891, F.A. Skyne, District Magistrate of Rangpur, as well as census superintendent of the district, issued an order to classify the Rajbanshis as Koch, a tribal community of North Bengal and lower Assam and the Princely State of Cooch Behar (Barman, 2001, p. 9; Barman, 2011, p. 73). The colonial government offered equal status to the Rajbanshis and the Koch in the late nineteenth century, i.e., *Bratya Kshatriya* (Risely, 1981, 492). In protest of the wrong status, the Rajbanshi intellectuals and some notable Brahmin intellectuals opposed it. To protest it, the Rajbanshi intellectuals invited 400 Brahmin scholars and other noblemen from different parts of India to a religious congregation at Rangpur town, and it was concluded collectively that the Rajbanshis were Aryans and *Bratya Kshatriya*. Therefore, the intellectuals expressed their grievances to Mr. Skyne on February 7, 1891 CE. In this respect, Mr. Skyne took the opinions of the local *pundits* (scholar Brahmins) to decide the status of the *Kshatriyahood* of the Rajbanshis. Mahamaho Padhaya Yadavaswar Tarkaratna, a scholar, expressed his opinion that Koches and Rajbanshis are not the same; they are two separate castes. The Rajbanshis originated from the Aryan race, and they were *Paundra Kshatriya* or *Bratya Kshatriya*, which means they fell from *Kshatriya* status (Barman, 1422, 9-12).

In the wake of the strong demand of the Rajbanshis, Mr. Skyne issued a decree that since 15th May 1891, the Rajbanshis would be allowed to write down as *Bratya Kshatriya* in all the government documents. Therefore, they refrained temporarily from the movement. Some Brahmin scholars who recognized the Rajbanshis as a *Kshatriya* caste had been Shri Siddhanath Vidyabagish, Shri Modaknath Smritiratna

(scholar of Cooch Behar); Shri Kamakshanath Sharma, Shri Govinda Chandra Tarkatarna (Calcutta); Shri Radhanath Goswami, Shri Vidyanath Dev, Shri Durganath Sharma (Assam); Chandra Bhushan Sharma, Keshav Sharma Ojha (Banaras) and Bhuban Mohan Sharma, Srikrishnanth Sharma, Sriramohan Sharma (Nadia and Vikrampur). The 1901 census caused anger and disgrace among the Rajbanshis. Because, in the census, the Rajbanshis and the Koch were shown together as the same. The Rajbanshis started opposing it. The first session of the Kshatriya Samiti (founded at Rangpur 1910) was held at Rangpur in 1910. Its first secretary was lawyer Panchanan Barma. Madhusudan Roy, a renowned lawyer from Jalpaiguri district, presided over the session. The movement became stronger than before. In the census of 1911 CE, the Rajbanshis were shown as a separate caste, and they were allowed to write as Rajbansi *Kshatriya* (Bandyopadhyay, 1990, 144-45) due to their movement. At last, after a long struggle over 40 years, the Rajbanshis were recognized as merely *Khatriya* in the census of 1931. Mere official recognition could not establish the Rajbanshis in a respectable social position within the Indian *varna* system. Thus, they approached the *Brahmins*, who had the sole right to determine the caste status of any community of traditional Indian society from a social viewpoint out of the official aspect. Under the able leadership of Panchanan Barma, the Rajbanshis were recognized by the Brahmins of eastern and northeastern India as merely *Kshatriya* and instructed to follow Hindu religious rituals (Mandal, 1972, 27-32; Barman, 2011, 77).

The Rangpur Bratya *Kshatriya* Jatir Unnayani Sabha, founded by Har Mohan Khajanchi, had begun the practice of adopting *paita* or *yagyopavita*, as the process of *Sanskritization*. In 1901 CE, subaltern Rajbanshis participated in the ceremony of *yagyopavita* (Thomson, 1931, 358). It was decided that on 9 February 1913, a great congregation and mass *upanayan*<sup>6</sup> and *yagyopavita* would be held in the village of Perulbari on the banks of the river Karotwa (Devigaj, Jalpaiguri). The subaltern Rajbanshis from all sides attended the ceremony spontaneously in the congregation. The Brahmin *purohits* (priests) of Kamarupa and Mithila performed the process of *yagyopavita* to convert the Rajbanshis into *Kshatriya* status from socially outcasted positions. In a short time, many Rajbanshis took *paita* and rose to *Kshatriya* status through the process. The figures of *paita* worn by the Rajbansi rose to 182154 on 13 April 1913. This figure was the result of the 250 congregations held in different districts. The Rajbanshis sought to regain their lost *Kshatriya* status by following the *Kshatriya* designation, conduct, and observance of Hinduism. Because of this, they started abandoning their existing titles (e.g., Das, Sarkar) and adopting *Kshatriya* titles (e.g., Roy, Barman, Barma, Singha). The Brahmin *purhitas* (priests) were being started inviting to their religious ceremonies. In places where there was a lack of the *Brahmin* priest, the saints of the Rajbansi society titled *Adhikary* started performing the priestly role. The goddess Chandi started worshiping as a symbol of power as a part of Hinduism among the Rajbanshis. In the villages of North Bengal, several units and sub-units were formed to promote the ideals and programs of the *Kshatriya* Samiti. To engage the peasants in the *Kshatriya* agitation, 300 local units were set up

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<sup>6</sup> A Vedic ritual is associated with changing titles.

in the villages of North Bengal by 1926 CE (Bandyopadhyay, 1990, 145). The *haribasaras* (temple houses of Lord Vishnu) showed the path of an upgraded life to the Rajbanshis through religious and social viewpoints. These were also a part of *Sanskritization* of the Rajbanshis. Arrangements were made for taking multidimensional quality-based lessons over *Kshatriyahood* in the *haribasars* in the villages of the study area. The discussion was done about the necessity of mastering virtue as well as the discussion was held regularly in terms of etiquette, good manners, literacy, the dignity of women, education society, efficiency in the financial development of the community, developed agricultural system, and so on (Roy, 2011, 60). However, the development of modern education was part of the process of making Rajbanshi a civil society.

Social mobility was also considered by the Rajbanshi intellectuals who were leading the *Kshatriya* movement. In this case, the role of liberal Brahmins cannot be denied. According to the proceedings of the eighth conference of the Kshatriya Samiti, Shri Yogendranath Chakrabarty (a Brahmin) brought the members of the *Kshatriya* Movement to his house and fed all of them (Barman, 2018, 18). It was a symbol of social recognition to the Rajbanshis by liberal Brahmins in the *varna* system of India. On the one hand, liberal Hindus recognized the Rajbanshis in the *varna* system, and on the other hand, the conservative high-caste Hindus could not accept it from their minds and did not sleep quietly. Swaraj Basu writes about the inhumane social restrictions imposed by the contemporary upper-caste Hindus upon the Rajbanshis,

At the village level, partaking of cooked food from the lower castes was unthinkable and if one committed this social misdeed, he had to perform prayer or penance of the rites or else he might be out-casted. Caste pride also exists very much there and usually the higher castes thought of themselves as being culturally superior to the lower castes (Basu, 1992, 83).

They started opposing the *Kshatriya* movement, being led by inhumane social dogmatism. They did not want to recognize the Rajbanshis as *Kshatriya* (after Brahmin) within the framework of the Indian *varna* system. Many were highly educated but did not show their high thinking; they showed their narrowness. They loosed humanism. They used derogatory words towards the Rajbanshis and insulted them by telling *mlechha*, *antaza*, *adhapatita*. Even they avoided their touch, and the result became indescribable if anybody of the Rajbanshis would have touched any articles used by the upper caste Hindus. For example, Thakur Panchanan Barma, the father of Rabanshis, was a professional lawyer at Rangpur Court. One day, he mistakenly used a toga (hat) of a colleague, whose title was Maitra, an upper caste Hindu at Rangpur Court. That toga was rejected by his colleague in disgust for re-usage as he considered Pachanan a “lower caste” or untouchable. It is very unforgettable matter to the Rajbanshis that Upendra Nath Barman, a Rajbanshi intellectual of North Bengal, during his academic life at Victoria College, Cooch Behar, where he too was subjected to face caste discrimination by an upper caste Hindu who was the hostel superintendent (Basu, 1992, 90-91).

Upendra Nath Barman has mentioned the discriminative behavior of high-caste students also. He writes that one day some Rajbanshi students had entered the kitchen “*to enquire from the cook whether the food was ready or not, but on this plea instantly two or three boys, belonging to the upper castes, refused to accept food, which ultimately had to be thrown away for the consumption of the cows and fresh food had to be prepared*” (Adhikary, 2018, 44-46). The Rajbanshis were not allowed to enter the place of worship on occasions of social festivals, the kitchen of the upper castes, and even drinking water from their hands was not accepted by the upper caste Hindus (Basu, 1992, 90). On the days of the congregations, the upper caste bureaucrats of the Princely State of Cooch Behar tried to create disorder in Deviganj, Jalpaiguri. They also tried to deconstruct the ceremonies inside Cooch Behar tactfully and plotted accordingly. In this regard, Roy writes that 1913, Panchanan Barma and his established Kshatriya Samiti faced extreme opposition, especially in the Princely State of Cooch Behar. The high officials of the State were directly involved in the opposition. Even Kalika Das Dutta, the then prime minister of the State, was directly involved in the conspiracy to undermine ceremonial rites launched by the Rajbanshis. He cautioned the Rajbanshis who were willing to take the *paita* (sacred thread) at Dodewarhat adjoining to the Cooch Behar City within the jurisdiction of the said State. *Nayeb Ahelkar* (sub-divisional magistrate) of Mathabhanga Sub-division went one step further, declaring that the money collected from the congregations would be deposited in the treasury and the money already sent to Rangpur from the jurisdiction of the State might be returned to the State. No congregation would be allowed to organize by the Rajbanshis within the State. The official also threatened that the leaders of the Kshatriya Samiti would be thrown into criminal cases and arrested; all their movable and non-moveable properties would be scraped off if rules were violated (Ray, 2011, 46).

The 18th annual conference of the Kshatriya Samiti was held on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th of July 1927 CE in Patgram (zamindari area of Cooch Behar), where also the Kshatriya Samiti had to suffer racial discrimination. In the case of Rangpur, the leaders of the upper castes requested the Rangpur Magistrate to permanently reject the custom of accepting the *paita* by the Rajbanshis. However, the magistrate rejected the irrational plea of the upper caste leaders. The magistrate informed all residents of Rangpur that there was no objection from the government to wearing *paitas* by the Rajbanshis through congregation (Ray, 2011, 46). A proceeding of Kshatriya Samiti reveals that though the Rajbanshis started returning to Hinduism by following Hindu rituals, the reactionary upper caste (*varna* Hindus) bureaucrats of the said State did not recognize them as *Kshatriya*. The Rajbanshis were banned by them from entering the famous Baneshwar Temple of the State (Ray, 2011, 47).

However, there arises a question in the minds of curious readers as to why the Koch kings (of the Princely State of Cooch Behar) opposed the reformation movement. The main reasons for the conflict against the Reformation movement were socio-political perspectives. Combining two aspects provoked extreme steps against the *Kshatriya* movement in the State authority within its jurisdiction. The Rajbanshis thought that Koch and Rajbanshi were separate communities, not the same social phenomena. The upper caste Hindus considered themselves superior to the Rajbanshis.

in the State; in the same way, the Rajbanshis considered themselves superior to the Koch community. In this case, the kings of Cooch Behar were also traumatized by ethnic sentiment as they belonged to the Koch community. Being a Rajbansi-populated state, they did not want to raise the issue by commenting provocative speech against the Rajbanshis, but they took strategic steps instead and accordingly applied the sentiment of the high ranking high, senior caste officials of the State, who had come from outside to take service under the state government. Kalika Das Dutta played a leading role in this regard. The upper caste Hindus did not want to share employment with the Rajbanshis, the sons of the soil of the State. They feared they would be driven out of the State of the Rajbanshis were employed in the government service. Even Panchanan Barma was not employed to an appropriate post due to a conspiracy of the high caste bureaucrats of the State. However, he was the first postgraduate among the Rajbanshis. As a result of discrimination, he left the State, started law practice at Rangpur court, and worked for the backward Rajbansi society for the rest of his life (Ahdikary, 2014).

However, Panchanan Barma and Kshatriya Samiti continued their social activities for the welfare of subaltern Rajbanshis. Basically, the Rajbanshis lived in agriculture and even today. For the development of agriculture, some steps were taken. He tried to develop agriculture life. Well-to-do members of the Samiti started a community fund called Barma Company to provide loans to the farmers at shallow interest in their emergency. Due to the benevolent enterprise, the poor farmers got relief from the high interest of moneylenders. To help farmers, a *Swadeshi Bank* named *Kshatriya Bank* was also launched at Rangpur in 1920 by the enterprise of him and other members of the Kshatriya Samiti (Singha, 1940, 32). Kshetra Mohan Singha, a member of the Samiti, stretched worthy hands to the bank. Unfortunately, the initiative did not last long (Adhikary, 2014, 98). It continued only till 1947 AD.

The students also engaged in the *Kshatriya* movement like that of the farmers. A student association *Kshatriya Chhatra Samiti*, was founded in 1917 CE<sup>7</sup> as a wing of the Kshatriya Samiti. Panchanan Barma emphasized the education development of the Rajbansi generations and acted sincerely. Because he knew that no society could develop without education, he considered education as a weapon of community consciousness and making civil society. As a part of social development, some schools were established in different places of North Bengal under his enterprise with the assistance of the Rajbansi intelligentsia. A Middle English School at Fulbari led by Padma Nath Barma, a Rajbansi intelligentsia, was one of the instances (Ray, 2016, 136-37). There was an essential college for higher education at Rangpur. In 1917 AD, the Collector of Rangpur district, Mr. J. N. Gupta, pleaded for Rs. 25000 to establish an A-grade college for the Rajbansi leaders from the fund of Kshatriya Samiti. However, it did not come into force due to the difference of opinion of the Rajbansi intellectuals. At last, a renowned social worker alias intellectual *Zamindar Ananda Mohan Roy Choudhuri* subscribed Rs. 100,000, and due to their contribution Carmichael College at Rangpur was founded under the Collector J. N. Gupta (Proceedings, 1916, 16-17). Panchanan was always active in helping poor students for

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<sup>7</sup> Proceedings of Kshatriya Samiti, 1326 BS, pp. 15-16

the continuation of education. Two funds, namely Sadharan Artha Bhandar and Arthnaitik Company (Barma Company), were made with the contribution of the Rajbanshis to help the needy meritorious students. Jogesh Chandra Roy (resident of Mekliganj) was a genius student who studied in England and was helped with an amount from the fund of Kshatriya Samiti. (Ray, 2016, 136-37)

## 2. Socio-Political Movement (1919-1935)

The Kshatriya Samiti became a socio-political organization in 1919 CE. Thakur Panchanan thought that the development of the Rajbanshis was not possible only with the demand of social status, namely *Kshatriya*. However, for their development, they should participate in electoral politics. Efforts should be made to improve agriculture, land reformation, and increase opportunities for public service being elected in electoral politics. However, social and political activities went together. The Rajbansi leaders were influenced by the All-India Depressed Classes' Association (1917). The leaders of the Bengal depressed classes formed the Bengal Jana Sangha in 1922 and, in 1926, the Bengal Depressed Classes' Association. (Badyopadhyay, 1990, 164-65). The Rajbansi leaders took part in both organizations (Barman, 1392 BS, 84.) When the Montague-Chelmsford Reform Act was passed in 1919 CE, the British colonial government reduced the amount of revenue and taxes to enhance participation in electoral politics. As a result, in 1920 AD, Panchanan took the opportunity to contest in the Rangpur district, which consisted of one non-Muslim constituency with two seats (Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms, 1918, 1-2). He was elected to represent the Kshatriya Samiti (Barman, 2005, 85-92). Other candidates of Kshatriya Samiti also got the victory. The candidates of Kshatriya Samiti took part in the elections held in 1923, 1926, and 1929, won grand success, and became members of the Legislative Council of Bengal. Several times, he and Nagendra Narayan Roy became members of the Legislative Council of Bengal (Debnath, 2016, 75). Those successes in the elections testified to how the Kshatriya Samiti united the Rajbanshis politically (Roy, 2011, 60). Panchanan was defeated in 1926 AD as he was ill and could not propagandize. 1929 Panchanan Barma, Nagendra Narayan Roy, and Prem Hari Barma were elected to their respective constituency. Behind the success of the candidates, Panchanan had many roles (Adhikary, 2014, 118).

In 1932, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar pleaded at the Round Table Conference in London to provide a separate electorate for the depressed classes. The British government accepted the proposal and announced the "Communal Award" in 1932. Accordingly, a schedule of the backward classes was prepared, and 15 seats in Bengal were reserved in the proposed West Bengal Legislative Assembly for such Depressed Classes' candidates, who would only be elected by the depressed classes' voters. The leaders of the Kshatriya Samiti wholeheartedly advocated the proposal (Barman, 2001, 76). Many opposed including the Rajbanshis in the list of the depressed classes<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> GB, Appointment (Reforms), File No.IR-2 of 1933, April 1934, Progs. Nos. 9-61, Serial No.9.

as the Rajbanshis were enlisted already as *Kshatriya*. However, meanwhile, the name “depressed classes” was replaced by that of “Scheduled Castes” in 1933 by the Government of India. It was decided that temple entry rights, untouchability, etc., were to be considered along with other relevant factors, such as the castes’ educational, economic, and political position for inclusion in the particular list. At the end of 1933, the Bengal Reforms Office published the final list of “Scheduled Castes” for Bengal, and the Rajbanshis were included.<sup>9</sup> In 1937 CE, as per the Government of India Act 1935, in the provincial legislative assembly election (in Bengal), Upendra Nath Barman (Jalpaiguri), Puspajit Barma (Rangpur), Kshetra Nath Singha (Rangpur), Premhari Barma (Dinajpur) and Syama Prasad Barma (Dinajpur) were elected respectively from their respective constituencies as the candidates of the Kshatriya Samiti. After this period, the Kshatriya Samiti started losing its solid political position due to internal conflict between the members and the death of Panchanan (1935), and at last, the Kshatriya Samiti kept its political character till the partition of India in 1947.

Political activity was prohibited as a Princely State of Cooch Behar; thereby, it is crown. The representative politics he was stepping into was dangerous for the said state. Earlier, in that state, the upper caste bureaucrats opposed the reformation movement of the Rajbanshis, and the anger and vengeance of the state authority increased manifold as the Kshatriya Samiti entered into politics. The state authority took stern steps to carve out the influence of the Kshatriya Samiti-led Panchanan Barma in its jurisdiction. Sitesh Chandra Sanyal, Registrar to the Regency Council of the state, issued a repressive notice in this regard, “...And whereas the council considers it necessary in the interest of the state that Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma should be prevented from carrying on mischievous propaganda in the state... and scandalous propaganda ... calculated to bring Her Highness the Maharani regent and the Regency Administration generally into contempt with the subjects of the state... to create discontent against Her Highness the Maharani Regent... it is hereby ordered that that Seth Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma is prohibited from entering the state for a period of 5 years... without the special permission....” It was also announced that if Panchanan entered the state border without prior permission, he would face punishment (*Cooch Behar Gazette*, 1926, 120.). Besides the upper-caste Hindus of the said state, other upper-caste Hindus of Bengal did not stop showing their low mentality. Chaterjee (2002, 192) writes, “From the late 1920s, however, some Hindu leaders began to recognize the need to ‘reclaim’ the low castes in order to create a unified Hindu political community, which grew out of a perceived need to counteract Christian and Muslim proselytism, underlined solidarity among the different Hindu castes.”

In this phase, social activities also continued parallel with political activities. Panchanan and Kshatriya Samiti had a relationship with the Indian *Dalit* movement led by Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. In 1924 and 1928, he and Upendra

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<sup>9</sup>. GB, Appointment (Reforms), File No. IR-2 of 1933, April 1934, Progs. Nos. 9-61, Serial No. 50.

Nath Barman, along with a few other members of Kshatriya Samiti, attended the All India *Kshatriya* Sammelan held at Alower and Indore, respectively (Debnath, 2016, 74). Several times Rajbanshi women were assaulted, abducted, and robbed forcefully by Muslims in different areas of North Bengal. Therefore, some preventive steps were taken to reduce the events. Accordingly, under Kshatriya Samiti, training women folk in martial arts, playing with clubs in mock battles, and doing physical exercises to build confidence was arranged. To save guard the women, two sub-organizations of Kshatriya Samiti, namely Nari Raksha Sevak Dal and Nari Raksha Bibhag, were formed. (Debnath, 2016, 72). Even Ramesh Das, the eligible disciple of noted revolutionary Pulin Das, trained the Rajbanshi male and female youths in multi-technique under the enterprise of Oanchanan Barma and helped them to be experts in respective fields (Roysarkar, 1990, 382). The Rajbanshi intellectuals wrote down their thoughts in their literary and non-literary works. Panchanan Barma and Gobinda Roy were mentionable. Panchanan Barma expressed his heart-touching view in his poem "*DandariMao*" against Muslim atrocities that happened to Rajbanshi women. He was associated actively with *Kshatriya*, a monthly journal, and *Rangpur Sahitya Parisad Patrika*, a journal, and raised different socio-cultural issues (Roysarkar, 1990, 365).

#### IV. Significance

The *Kshatriya* movement is essential in the sought Asian history, influencing India's contemporary and future socio-political contexts. The Rajbanshis acquired their lost glory due to a prolonged reformation movement. It is said that in North Bengal and the hilly states of northeast India, the influence of foreign missionaries led to the conversion of many people, viz. the Garo, Khasi, Mizo, Mech, etc., into Christianity. In the past, almost all converted Muslims came from lower-caste Hindus, which started during the Muslim period. Most Muslim populations known as Nasya Sheikh in North Bengal had been converted mainly from Koches and Rajbanshis since the 13th century when Muslims appeared in the region. The process of conversion to Islam can be termed as subversion in the cultural phenomena of the Rajbanshis. In this regard, Charu Chandra Sanyal said that once the Rajbanshis of North Bengal had abandoned Hinduism and were attracted to other religions, at that time Panchanan Barma and his Khatriya agitation saved the Rajbanshi society from subsequent conversion to Islam and restored the lost *Kshatriya* status by reformation movement. Thus, the process of Sanskritization was completed as a part of the solidarity of Hindu society and revived Hindu philosophy and culture. The role of the liberal upper caste cannot be denied in this regard. One of the most critical aspects of the Panchanan and *Kshatriya* movements was to prevent the De-Sanskritization process, which has affected the far-reaching future history of North Bengal. If the Rajbanshis could not have restored their *Kshatriya* dignity through the reformation movement, the Rajbanshis would have had to convert mainly to Islam. Thus, the Muslim population would have increased tremendously in the study area of the Indian part, and the Rajbanshi population would have decreased to a small number.

In 1947, Greater India was partitioned based on religion due to the majority Muslim population in West Pakistan (Now Pakistan) and East Pakistan (Now

Bangladesh). Actually, Bengal was partitioned for the second time in 1947. The western portion of Bengal, known as West Bengal, came under India, and the rest (East Pakistan, now Bangladesh), Muslim majority area, went to Pakistan. Dinajpur district of undivided Bengal was partitioned into two as per the ratio of the Hindu-Muslim population, and only the Balurghat Sub-division of the district went to India. Rangpur, known as the heartland of the Rajbanshis, also went under East Pakistan. Therefore, North Bengal would have been turned into a Muslim-majority land and turned into a part of East Pakistan if the reformation movement had not acquired its goal. The northeastern Indian states would have been detached on land transport and communication if Rajbansi-populated Cooch Behar, Uttar Dinajpur, Alipurduar, and Jalpaiguri had been part of East Pakistan. Therefore, Panchanan Barma and Kshatriya Samiti's reform activities or Sanskritization movement are memorable in the sought Asian history. Another critical aspect of the movement is that it influenced the contemporary Ravas's reformation movement.

### Conclusion

Therefore, it is said that being influenced by Western education and knowledge, the Rajbanshis have discovered their lost *Kshatriya* identity and restored it within Hindu society and have enriched the *Sanskritic* culture<sup>10</sup> in the study area as well as developed their other aspects of social-political issues through reformation. It is also most important in the sought Asian history that they saved beloved their beloved country 'India' from another future partition and mass genocide.

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<sup>10</sup> "Sanskritic" means Indian classical culture-based Sanskrit language. The different books, poems, epics, etc., had been written in Sanskrit. Religious principles and advice are available in that language for Indian society.

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<sup>11</sup> BS means Bengal era or Bengal style same as CE. It varies 594 or 595 years with CE.