

## An outlook of Social custom of Rajbanshis in West Bengal

<sup>1</sup>Keshab Mandal & <sup>2</sup>Prasanya Sarkar

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department Of Geography, Cooch Behar College, Cooch Behar, West Bengal (India)

<sup>2</sup>Guest Lecturer, Department Of Geography, Cooch Behar College, Cooch Behar, West Bengal (India)

### ARTICLE DETAILS

#### Article History

Published Online: 10 October 2018

#### Keywords

Rajbanshis, indigenous people,  
Pantola, Pani chhita Baap

#### Corresponding Author

Email: sarkarprasanya[at]gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

Rajbanshis are one of the indigenous people in North Bengal. The study includes cultural and social aspect of Rajbangsi people. The paper emphasis to high light the primal social life of them and the changing scenario of it. It will discuss custom related to birth, death, marriage etc. To find out above objective we have collect information of from my *Brother in law* and *my friend* who is belongs to Rajbanshi community. The paper shows change and continuity of Rajbanshis social custom.

### 1. Introduction

Rajbanshi are the son land of North Bengal. Rajbanshi are founded mainly in northern part of Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, North Dinajpur, South dinajpur, Maldah and newly formed Alipurduar, Kalimpong and part of Jalpaiguri district. The study includes cultural and social aspect of Rajbangsi people. It high lights the primal social life of them and the changing scenario of it. It will discuss custom related to birth, death, marriage etc. To find out above objective I have collect information of from my *Brother in law* and *my friend* who is belongs to Rajbanshi community. The paper also shows change and continuity of Rajbanshis social custom..

They worship various Gods and Deities. Bisohori, Bhandani, Tistaburi, Mahakal, Garam, Sanyasi, Pater thakur, Pachim Pir, Dharma Thakur, Hudumdeo etc are the Goddesses of the peoples. Lakhir dak, Dhan kata puja, Naya Khoi, Khet uthani, Pushuna, Bherar ghar, Jurabandha, Dodhikado khela etc are the separate rituals of these people in North Bengal. Masan puja is another ritual of these people. Gradually a profound culture is mixed up and therefore some of the age-long customs disappeared altogether. The last decades of the twentieth century, there were some works about the Rajbansis of North Bengal. Even recently some researchers are prosecuting their works on this area. After the migration of the immigrants, there was a changed in the socio-economic condition of the Rajbanshis.

### 2. Objectives

1. To highlight the social life of the Rajbanshis in North Bengal.
2. To assess the modern outlook and attitude among them.

### 3. Literature review

There are many research on aspect of social custom of the Rajbansis in North Bengal. Sukhabilas Barma's "The Social and Political Movements in North Bengal" have been mentioned some social and political movements and tensions in North Bengal. "Sabhyta-Sanskritir Sandhane Uttar Banger

Lokedevdevi & Lokachar" by Dr. Narendranath Roy. Here he highlights the Gods and Goddess as well as rituals of the Rajbansis. Biplab kumar saha in his "Lokosanskrit: Uttarbanga & Assam," explains the rituals of the Rajbansis of North Bengal and Assam. "Uttarbanger Itihas & Sanskrit" of Dr. Narendranath Roy, Prof. Binay Barman draws the identity and culture of the Rajbansis. Kamal Choudhuri in his "Uttarbanger Itihas & Sanskrit" describes the historical and cultural background of the Rajbansis.. Dr. Ananda Gopal Ghosh and Dr. Nilangsu Sekhar Das have described some social, political and cultural Scenario of the Rajbansis in North Bengal.

### 4. Methodology

To find out above objective, data and information are gathered by particularly attending festival of Rajbanshis and interviews with known person particularly older person of family. For finding social custom existing now, we take a survey in village area of Talliguri, Dhalpal, Shalbari, Nagurhat of Tufanganj block –I and II. The secondary information is collected from different sources like books and journals.

### 5. Discussion

Life is full of transitions in cyclic order. In the language of Arnold van Gennep, "the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another." In this, take up for discussion the various rites including those concerned with birth, puberty, adoption, and death. The Rajbangsi's Lead A Visible Social Life, which are different From The other People of West Bengal. After Independent Of India The Rajbansis Of North Bengal Provided A Very Simple Life. Socially They Were Two Groups I.E. Jotedars(Land Lords) And Adhiyars(Peasants). Seven Decades(1964) Of Twentieth Century The Jotedars Lost Their Jotedary(Land Lordship). After That There Were No Any Divisions Among Them.

Life cycle of Rajbanshis more or less centres round the three important rites birth, marriage, and death. There are also many ceremonies connected with different stages of life. I discuss with the following heading 1. Life cycle: Customs relating to Birth, 2 Life cycles: custom relating to Marriage, 3

Social custom relating to death, 4 Seasonal and agricultural; connected beliefs and practice.

**Life cycle: Customs relating to birth :** There are many points may be noted at time of pregnancy, carefulness and restriction ,restriction of food for mother ,hair cutting ceremony, name giving ceremony etc.

**At time of pregnancy-** In respect of pregnancy generally detected when menstruation discontinues. An expectant mother discloses this fact before her mother in law or any female member of the house. A pregnant woman is not allowed to do any work. There are also restriction on her food .She is not allowed to visit or touch any dead body. The elderly women of the village perform the duties of **midwife**. The Rajbanshi believe in the existence of ghost and sprits. In order to keep away evil a piece of iron or knife is kept below bed.

During past days there were traditional healer who used to *jharpuk* and chanting mantras in water pot with holy basil *tulasi* leaf and gave pregnant woman to drink and some water sprinkled on the body. But today, every woman to health institutions to take suggestion from health workers. Most of them go to hospital for delivery. Some people still call TBAs for home delivery but when it gets prolonged then referred to the hospital.

**Hair cutting ceremony-** Hair cutting ceremony is performed by Rajbanshis only in case male child .Generally in the case of the first born male child the hair is allowed to grow long for a period of one or two years after which the hairs is ceremonially cut. A day is fixed for the ceremony .the maternal uncle of child is invited to cut the hair of his nephew in presence of relatives and villagers.

**Name giving ceremony-** Name is chosen in a peculiar manner .children are given pet names associated with i.)The physical appearance of baby, ii) the name of the day on which the baby is born, and iii) the affection or the love of the parent or relatives. In some case Teachers are fully authorised to select the names of the children according to their own choice. In the case of educated the formal names of their children are given by themselves without consulting others.If two children born together then this called *Jagtiya Chawa*.

**Ceremony relating to feeding the newly born child-** At the time of giving rice to the child for the first time at age between five and seven months the parent follow customary procedures. After the preparation of rice the parent first offer to their domestic gods and goddesses' .At the time of offering rice the oja recites some mantras praying for the welfare of the child.

**Life cycle: custom relating to Marriage:** The marriage ceremony of the Rajbanshis is divided into three stages-

**Pantola-**First is the pre-marriage preparation centring round the selection of the bridegroom (pantola). The guests of bride are gone to the house of bride groom and the new clothes and ornaments are weared to the bride groom and blessed her. This occasion is called Pantola. **Adhibas-** In the

second stage the following occasion are performed --- turmeric was touched to the body of the bride groom called adhibas and in the occasion called **Naua kamani** was performed.

**Marriage Rites:** Then the Hargouri puja, Nandi mukhi shradhya and the last stage the main marriage ceremony is performed.

Before performing the marriage ceremony the worship of Kulaguru, placed the east corner of the house is given and thereafter the worship of Bishahari is given. Among the local customs or rituals of the marriage ceremony among the Rajbanshis a **Mittar'** or friend is to be selected at the time of marriage who remain as a friend or a relative of the bride in the whole life. Another custom is seen, a person who dropped water in the head of the bride and bride- groom at the time of marriage and related with them as their parents called **Pani chhita Baap'** and **Pani chhita Mao'**. They are also related with the bride And bride- groom in the whole life as their parents. Another custom in the marriage of the Rajbanshis which is not seen in the marriage of Aryan culture a **Bairati** played a vital role in the whole marriage ceremony.

Gradually by the influence of western education and the touch of Bengali culture as well as globalization the Rajbangsi people become aware about the age of marriage

**Life cycle: custom relating to death:** Just after the confirmation of death the dead body is taken out from the house and kept in the middle of the courtyard. The place where the dead body is to be kept is cleaned with cow dung mixed with water. The dead body washed with water and a new cloth gamcha is tied on body. The hair is combed after applying hair oil. The near and dear ones offer rice and some favourite foods of the dead person with water before taking the dead body to the cremation ground. The dead body is placed on sangra,a kind of trellis made of raw bamboo. The women and children are not allowed to participate in procession..while the dead body is burnt the pyre is arranged .there is the system of placing five or seven stack of wood while the pyre is arranged. After the cremation is over the members of the funeral part take bath in the river or stream before returning to their respective house.On the 13 or 11 day from the day of the death of person the shraddha ceremony is held. Serving of meat common in the saradu ceremony .the villagers and relatives of dead person are entertained with rice beer .some time a bullock is set free in the name of dead.

## 6. Seasonal and agricultural; connected beliefs and practice

**Nabanna**—This worship is observed at the time of collecting new crops. There is a custom prevailing among many of the Bengali Hindu families that they worship Nabanna' before eating new crops.

**Baishakhi puza** or worship is performed in the month of Baishakha (April-May) Bananas, Kandali etc. different types of fruits and flowers are given in this worship.

**Gochubona**-This worship is observed before growing plants of paddy in the land. At first land is prepared for growing

plants of paddy, thereafter a worship called guchubona is performed in the lands. Few plants of paddy is poured these worship is performed to their deity with rice, banana and other fruits.

**Benger Biyo** (marriage of frog)-When rain is not seen in the rainy season as a result of which agricultural cultivation is affected. One of these festivals is Benger Biyo'(marriage of frog). This occasion is performed by women. A proverb is prevailing in the society of North Bengal that when frogs croak rain is falling. So for falling of rain Rajbanshi women perform the occasion of frog's marriage.

## 7. Conclusion

As the Rajbanshis were converted into Hindus which is referred earlier, they perform all the worship, festivals, occasions in accordance with the Hindu customs and mythology. But many of the customs, festivals and worships and rituals are found which is out of the Aryan culture. These cultures have been going on through the ancient period to the

present day. Charu Chandra Sanyal states that "In the year 1950 A.D. Phanindra Das of Kumarpara, Jalpaiguri, was Married at the age of 14.His wife was 12."Gradually by the influence of western education and the touch of Bengali culture as well as globalization the Rajbani people become aware about the age of marriage. In the last half of the twentieth century the parents gave value to their daughter's opinion for choosing Widow marriage and remarriage of a man (when his wife accidently died) is not prohibited in the society. . Widow *Polygamy* was seen in the society of the Rajbanshis meaning of which that a Rajbanshi man could marry more than one. *Widow Remarriage* was also a common practice in the society of the Rajbanshis in the pre-colonial and colonial period where in the society of higher caste widow remarriage was a hard task. In this point of view Rajbanshis were *more liberal than the higher caste people*. In conclude it may be said that for the migrated people from Bangladesh, Rajbanshi people are changed, not only their food processing is changed, their total life style is also changed.

## References

1. Brahma Kameswar; A study of Socio religious Beliefs, Practies and ceremonies of the Bodos, Kolkata, 2010(1992)
2. Basu, S. (2003). *Dynamics of a caste movement: the Rajbansis of North Bengal, 1910-1947*. New Delhi: Manohar
3. Sanyal, C. C. (1965). *The Rajbansis of North Bengal: A Study of a Hindu Social Group*. Asiatic Society.
4. Norgaard, R.B. 1948. Traditional Agricultural Knowledge: Past Performance, Future Prospects and Institutional Implications. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 66; pp. 874-878.
5. B. Choudhuri and S. Choudhuri. (eds.) *Indigenous People: Traditional Wisdom and*
6. *Sustainable Development*. IUAES INTERCONGRESS (Vol-4). New Delhi: Inter-India Publications.