

CULTURAL COMPONENT AND BELIEFS OF THE RAJBANSHIS OF WEST DINAJPUR: A BRIEF STUDY

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Abstract:

The history concerning the origin of the Rajbanshis is a mystery. The term Rajbanshi means people of royal lineage.¹ According to Haripada Bhattarai, the Rajbanshis belonged to the great 'Bodo family'² that entered India in the 10th century B. C. from the east and settled on the banks of the Brahamaputra and gradually spread over Assam and the whole of north Bengal.³ Some scholars believe that North Bengal is the homeland of the Rajbanshis and they are the local ethnic community dominating the land over years.⁴ At present, the Rajbanshis of North Bengal are striving to preserve their ethnic identity. They have been striving for it for quitesometime. Over time and space it has evolved a lot.⁵ The Rajbanshis are found in all districts of North Bengal, some parts of Assam, Nepal, Meghalaya, Bhutan and Bihar. Besides, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Panchgarh, Thakurgaon, Joypurhat, Gaibandha, Nilfamari, Bogra, Jessore, Mymensingh district of Bangladsh.⁶

Keywords: Rajbanshi, Culture, Belief, Dinajpur, Material Culture, Folk Games etc.

Introduction:

Francis Bacon imported the word 'culture' in English literature in the late 16th century. Then in the middle of the twentieth century, Robert Era Park, Tailor, Turner, Laksi were used that term in broader and deep sense. Since then, the word 'culture' has been used in different subjects like political culture, ethical culture, religiousc, agriculture, horticulture etc.⁷ It is said that culture can be used as development in a special level of human mind and brain. It means that if a society or community holds a standard regulation, fair universal character, behavior, then it is said to be the culture of the respective community. In modern times, the world become small by the extent of the spread of knowledge and the spread of the communication system, the culture is becoming more and more untimely. In essence, culture is an individual personality, or culture of community.⁸ According to Robert Bierstedt, "Culture is one of the most important concepts in contemporary social science. Culture is the complex that comprises of everything that we think and do have as a member of society." According to Hoebel in his book, Anthropology, "Culture is the integrated system which is a member of a society."

Prior to 1947, the cultural elements of Rajbanshis were similar in the adjoining areas of present West Dinajpur district. However, since 1947, the cultural elements of the Rajbanshis of East Pakistan are combined with the local *Rajbanshi-Polyia-Desiya* cultural materials. As a result, the traditional cultures of Rajbanshi society of West Dinajpur came together with folk culture of the Rajbanshis, who had come from East Pakistan. As a result, the folk culture of West Dinajpur is full of variety and diversity. This cultural theme has been combined with the Islamic cultural element, the cultural elements of the lower caste Hindus and the cultural elements of upper-caste Hindus. The cultural elements are exchanged due to living together of different socio-cultural and religious communities in the same land. As a result, folk culture of West Dinajpur has spread among different communities and it is very difficult to separate them from each communities. Although folk elements have disappeared among the various communities due to taking modern education but still, those are associated with the society and culture of the Rajbanshis. Because the Rajbanshis have adopted many aspects of folk culture from different communities and kept those for decades. In course of time, the cultural elements have become their own culture.

Thus, various folkcultural elements have been systhesed in the Rajbanshi culture. We may refer some of the folkculture of the Rajbanshi society like, *Palatiasongs, Chikni Dance, Ghamhira Song, Behar Dance, Hudum Dao Dance, Mashan Dance, Mask Dance* etc. Various folk games may be mentioned like, *Pata Lukochuri, Iching Biching, Lafhalafhi, Patakhela, Gollachhute, Bouchi, Lukochuri or Dhappa, Gadal or Dariya, Ashkash, Marbel-Guli, Buraburi, Chara or Khola, Kukkut, Ekkadokka, Bakbakuri And Dang-Guli* etc. The rituals of folk-Gods are mixed in the Rajbanshi culture. For example, *Lokbatta, Dala Puja, Nabnanna, Amait Or Ambbuchhi, Hudum Deo, Ghamhari Puja, Pusubuna Or Paush Parwan, Kashpuja, Gaita Puja, Gochhorpon Or Gachibuna* etc. Besides, *Folk-Riddles, Folk Tales, Folk Songs, Folk Fairs, Crafts, Trade smiths, Shola Art, Kantha Art, Idol Industry* etc are included in the Rajbanshi culture. There is a trend to worship the folk Gods among the Rajbanshi society such as *Gram Devota* (village gods), *Mashan puja, Mather worship*, worship of folk god etc. There are some songs that are popular in the society, but those songs can be seen only the Rajbanshi society. For example, song of *Kandani Bishohari, Palatia, Satyapeer, Khon, Alkap*, song of paddy cutting, song of the peasant etc. We may refer the name of the different musical instruments such as *Do-tara, Khanjani*, bamboo flute etc. In addition to speaking in Bengali, the Rajbanshis used their own language *Rangpuri, Rajbanshi or Kamtapuri*⁹ language as the medium of communication. It is very difficult to express about the culture of the Rajbanshi society excluding the elements of the folk culture of the Rajbanshis. Some of the folk elements of the Rajbanshi culture have given below.

Material Culture:

Material culture is the most closely allied to environment factor. It deals with such material things as clothing, ornaments, food, habitations and implements. All raw materials for food, clothing, shelter and implements depend on natural products.¹⁰ The history of the origin and evolution of folk art is very old. In fact, this folk art was origin and developed at the urging of people's daily needs. This folk art is not only old but also very important in the context of its own characteristics, customs and traditions, culture, religion, folk religion, social evolution, and ethnic economic analysis. As a member of social group, people have formed

society for their own needs from their social environment. From the social environment, people create different artifacts for their own needs. These art works are included in folk art. In the context of daily needs, the art of the traditional art with the help of available elements can be identified as folk art like, cottage industries, wooden work, handicrafts, pottery or ceramic, painting etc.

Pottery or Ceramic industry: It is not the profession of the Rajbanshi community but most of the Rajbanshis has taken their profession to make pottery things such as the idol of *Durga*, *Saraswati*, *Kali*, *Ganesh*, *Shib*, *Lakshmi* and *Narayana* etc. Some families of Rajbanshis are living by depending on the crafts of pottery.

Craft of Kantha Stitch or Nakshi Kantha: *Kantha* is used for the beds for sleeping. Rajbanshi elderly women are make *Kantha*¹¹ by old *saris* or *dhotis* arranged one by one and after wearing threads on needle to stitch it. This *Kantha* is made for the uses of family purposes. But many Rajbanshi people stitches *Kantha* for money. However, the *Kantha* which has made in the Rajbanshi society is not as beautiful or elegant as the *Nakshi Kantha*.¹² *Kantha* Knitting equipments are needed like, used or less expensive sari, medium needles, different colored threads etc.

Shola Craft: *Shola* is an aquatic plant. It is born in ponds, reservoir and so on. Craft of *Shola* is observed everywhere throughout Bengal. Actually, the profession is belonged to *Malakar* community. But a few Rajbanshi families depended on the working of the crafts. From the marriage to the idol worship, the art of *Shola* is very essential. The trees of *Shola* usually grow in ponds or wetlands and they have to be cut and dry in the sun. Then it made according to size or design by the sharp knife. Many Rajbanshi families in the southern part of West Dinajpur depend on the livelihood, by *shola* on the crafts.

Bamboo Crafts: It is not for the profession of the Rajbanshi community but they make bamboo crafts for their live. Bamboo or (*kanchi*) small branch of Bamboo is the main ingredient of this crafts. Thin *silca* was made by cutting the bamboo. He is made of *silka* with various shaped baskets, such as *Kula*, *Chaloon*, *Dhama*, *Paddy*, *Fishing Container*, *Khat* etc. Although it is the hereditary occupation of some communities, many people of the Rajbanshi family also make those Bamboo crafts. Even, it is not making for business; it has made for their home. In fact, the people learnt to see the works who are interested in living in the same village or neighboring villages in rural areas. Later, this practice is used for the needs of their home.

Wooden Crafts: Wooden furniture is one of the essential items for everybody. The carpenter makes normally wooded furniture. Different types of wood are used in this crafts. For example, wood of Mangoo, Jackfruit, Sagun, Stick, Mehagani etc. These wooden funitures are chair-table, *khat*, bench, rack, cupboard, showcase, stool etc. Now the demand for timber products has decreased due to increase the production of iron or steel furniture.

Folk Games:

Pata lukochuri: (leaves hiding): This game requires eight to ten players. Both boys and girls can participate in this game. Each player has to be in a round spot. A '*huri*' is selected for this game from the participants. Players ask to the '*huri*' '*Ata-pata kiser pata?* (What kind of leaf?). Then '*huri*' calls the name of a tree for collection of leaf, such as mango, jackfruit, pipul etc. Players then ran away to collect the leaf of the tree. It is compulsory that during collection of selective leaf the player should use single leg and when any particinats touched both legs on earth then he or she marked as '*huri*' of the game. The players hide the leaf under the ground in their own circles. The '*huri*' tried to find the hidden leaves. If the '*huri*' finds the hidden leafs, in which the players circle then she sellected as '*huri*'.

Itching beaching: It is a rhythm-based game. Players kept their hands on the ground around and began to disperse with touching their hands. The touching hand will end in the hand, and he will keep his hand on his head. The last two players will be left in the same way after all the players to win. Those two will sit face-to-face, and other players will jump out. During jumping, when the feet of the players touch to the legs of *Buri*, then she will become '*huri*' and her legs will sit.

Jumping Game: A player has to press hands on ground with bent down his or her body. Other players have jumped over their back with to press their hands. If he touches the back of the leap while jumping, he will die or expell. The aborted players have to stand on the ground with their hands and others jump over their back. Many times, it is said to be a rhyme during the game and to be jump.

Pata khela or Hat Kheya: It is held every year in the Bengali month of *Bhadra-Arsheen*. From crowded places, supporters and spectators gather to show this game. The spots contain a banana tree and fans can touch the banana tree or put the hands on the ground under the banana tree to raise the *bhor* (affected by the Gods). Now a *Gunin* touched another hands and reading *mantras* to raise *bhor* on his hand. On the other hand, those who are outside the round line will try to catch the hands of men who involved in *bhor*(enchanted to the deities). The person who can pull most hands, he will be declared victory and rewarded. All games shall be managed by *Gunin* and supported his followewers from the beginning.

Gollachhot: In these game two equal groups are needed. Then it is determined that any team will play before throwing money at the top. A circular circle is drawn in the middle of the field, and it touches one foot in the middle of the stain and holds each one's hands and legs long. The central party surrounds the opposition team. Understanding the scope, the central team members ran away from one side. If the opponent touches any of them during the run, the team will die (means banned) the team will be canceled and the opponents play as the central team. Ordinary shepherd boys play this game. Take the cow to the grazing ground and take part in the game.

Bouchi or playing game of Buri: There are two equal proportional teams in this game. In this game, there is a round spot in the field where the *Buri* sitting. On the contrary, there is a four-

cornered stained house where other participants of the game are sitting there. Cutting out two spots from the room of *Buri* to the player's house, a certain road was made to get the players from the *Buri* to the house. The opponents are standing outside this stain and the *Buri* is standing around. Any one from the central party saying kit-kit-kit... and will try to touch the opponent by one blow and if he touches, he will be suspended from the team. At that time, the strength of the central party member is gone and at that time the opponents touch them, the team will be canceled. If he is out of breath, he can take shelter in the house of *Buri*. To get him back from the *Buri* house, another member of the central party runs away ... and if he gets a chance, he can escape from the house of *Buri*. Thus, the game continues until the members of the opposition team are finished.

Hiding or Tuki-Dhappa Game: Before the game a start, three players stand by their hands and the *Buri* is selected by hand clapping. The *Buri* in this game stands on the other side, the other players run away, and hiding themselves. After going into hiding, the two told the word 'tuki'. Then the *Buri* rushed to find hidden players. If the hiding players at the time of finding them touch the *Buri*, then she or he remained as *Buri* again. If the old woman finds the hiding person, then whoever finds her first is identified as old. If the *Buri* does not find a hidden person, then the *Buri* is saying *onetuki... two tuki ... three tuki ...* the hiding player himself comes out. That is, the elderly admits to hiding in the players and again they play as *Buri*. This way the players can play as long as possible.

Gadal or Dariya Banda: This game is known as *Gadal* or a *Darya Banda*. *Gadal* is a very favorite game for boys and girls. For this reason, eight to ten people are needed. The square is needed to play the game. There is a long span and three or four spots in the cross border. The middle of each spine is equal to the house and the quadrilateral. A group is standing in the stains and the other people enter into the house. On the opposite side of the house where there is a house, named salt house. No one will be able to give *Gadal* without eating salt. Points are available if all the rooms are filled with salt after giving them a saddle. If the opponent is able to touch his opponent any players while going to the field, then their team will be canceled. Then the opponents get the opportunity to play.

Ashkosh Game: Younger boys and girls play this uncomfortable mood. 'Ashkosh Singer Bulbuli Mastok, this rhyme is called. When this rhyme saying is end, it will be selected the 'buri' of this game. Then the hand of the 'buri' should be kept across the table and the opponents will slap her head. If the opponent does not take the clapp in the hands, of the 'buri' then she will die or *mor* (canceled) and she will have to be selected as 'buri' of this game. Boys and girls participate to the game in the evening.

Marble Shot Game: Two or more boys together can start the game. To play this game a small hole to be digand throw away the marble from the certain distance. The hole that is far away from it will have the opportunity to put it in a hole. In this case, the player has to hit the marbles with a finger. In this way, all of them get the opportunity to hit the top of the marble. If you can put another in marble, he will get one point. If you cannot put another in marble, you can get points even if you can put it in the hole. In such a way that he cannot make ten

points or fall behind everyone, he will be 'buri' or 'gai'. He would have to throw the marble on the holes again and the opponents targeted to throw marble by his finger. As long as the 'buri' cannot be thrown her marble into the hole, she will remain as *buri*. There are many rules of this game in particular in the game.

Bura Buri Game: In the *Bura Burigame*, there are two groups on the side of *Buri* and the other is the antagonist. To make this game, we have to create a round a circle that is stained in the ground, where the 'buri' lives. Nearly twenty-five and a half feet away, there is a square room with stains on the ground where other players on the side of 'buri' may have been sitting.¹³ It is very difficult to go to the circle of 'buri' and the opponents try to touch the *Buri*. If the opponents can touch the *Buri*, then the team gets the opportunity to play analog with the 'buri' of the game.

Kut-Kut or Ekka-Dokka: Girls usually play this game. Five parallel cells of the same size are to be found on the floor of the house or on the laun. Clay made instrument called 'Chara' (broken piece of pitcher) needs to manage the game. The premises should be thrown out of the house in a specific circle and it should be kept in mind that 'Chara' can not go out of the circle. Now it is necessary to bring the stove back on one leg and the right wing. Thus, when all the houses were rounded with all the façade. The ground was thrown back and aimed at the house. The house that the garrison will wear, the house was bought. During one play, he will be able to take his breath away from the house and buy it again. If you want, the opponent can buy a part of this house for its use. If the strain is stuck in the scars of the house, it will become 'dead' or it will be canceled. Then, whoever has the right, will have the opportunity to play. So long as the whole house is not bought, the game will continue.

Danguli or Dandaguli: It is also called *phuti-danthi*. There is a one-foot tall wooden stick, which is called *danda* or 'stem'. There is a small 'bar' of wood in a three-foot size, which is called 'Futi'. That is why this game is called 'danda-guli'. This game has two teams. A team threw the 'Futi' towards the opponent team and the opposition team tried to catch that *Futi*. Equivalent distance and parallel to the top two spots on the ground. A small hole was dug to the side where the central party was located, and pushing the shot on the hole with the 'rod' or 'danda' pushed the 'Futi' to the front.¹⁴ The opposing team tries to catch the flying 'Futi'. If the opponents can catch, the flying 'Futi', the central team dies or 'mor' and the opponents get the opportunity to play. The central team can get the points. At that time, the central team will measure the distance from the holes to the 'Futi'. There is a rhyme in the measurement, that is, *Eri, Dukhi, Thaadi, Chaul, Champa, Jhek, and Lanka*. After being a 'Lanka, counting began the same way again. The results of the game were announced by the estimation of what the team has done.

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- ⁸Chakraborty,Dhyanesh Narayan.,*Bharatiya Sanskritir Uttaradhikar*,Kolkata: Progressive Book Forum, pp.22-23.
- ⁹.It is Bengali-Assamese language spoken by the Rajbanshi people of India and Rangladesh. It is called Kamtapuri language formed by Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan languages. According to census reports of 1991, it was spoken by 5 million people. It is not a dialect of Bengali. It is a native language of Rajbanshis of North Bengal and has her own identity.
- ¹⁰.Op.cit.,Ahmed,Wakil. *Banglar Lok-sanskriti*,pp.,28-29,in Iyer, Krishna & Ratnam,Bala. ed. *Anthropology in India*,Bombay,1961,p.133
- ¹¹. 'Kantha' is made by old used cloths and it is swewing by niddle through cotton sting by hand. It is used for bed undr bed cover; sometimes it is used to wear as body cover to protect cold wind.
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- ¹⁴.Ibid.,*Uttar Banger Itihas O Sanskriti*,p.207.