

Response of the Rajbanshis to the National Movement in India with Special Reference to Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur District of West Bengal (1920-1947)

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Abstract: *National Movements of India an important issue in the arena of Indian history. Much writing was written upon this matter. But more of writings were concentrating on a one section of society. Present paper highlighted on the National Movements of India and the participation of the Rajbanshi people of northern Bengal of West Bengal. North Bengal basically the area covered with hills and forest, only few indigenous peoples were lived here with their own traditional identities. Among of them Rajbanshis was the major community. We can also know about them in the writings of Sunder's, Milligan etel. After so many years of Independence, in the history of National movements, the struggle and sacrifice of these people of West Bengal are still elusive. A large number of Rajbanshi people from different districts of North Bengal gave their lives sacrifice in this National movement. The arrival of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi, Bidhan Chandra Roy, gave a new impetus to the movement in West Bengal's peoples.*

Keywords: *Jotedars, National Movement, Peasants Movement, Rajbanshis, Zamindars.*

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Introduction

Indian's National movement not only a serious issues but also a very much wide in the area of Indian history. On which we can see multiple books and article. But one thing is, no movement in history can be carried out by the upper caste intellectuals alone. People from all walks of life have an equal footing in it. We often forget to mention all these ordinary people

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who are inherent in the mainstream of a society. Standing in this stream of history writing, the subject of the article is the role of the inhabitant Rajbanshi people of West Bengal in Indian National Movements. This inspiration and audacity are taken from the writings of Mr. Nirmal Chandra Chowdhury and Sri Girindra Nath Barman. Actually the Independence movement of West Bengal was mainly centered on Calcutta, the common people of Bengal always are denied. But if we thoroughly review the history of National movements, people of every community participate in different movements for protect their nation. The Landlords, *Zamindars*, *Jotedars*, presents spontaneously were participating in various movements. Primitive peoples were not far behind from all these. We can see the equal participation of these primitive peoples specially the Rajbanshis in Non- Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, Quit India Movement and also other Presents Movements of India.

Naturally the questions may arise here that who was the Rajbanshis. The Rajbanshi peoples basically lived in North Bengal, the northern part of West Bengal. North Bengal of West Bengal the area covered with hills and forest. Various British writer in their writing highlighted North Bengal as a Jungle area. Some indigenous people *like Koch, Rabha, Mech, Santhal, Oraon, Lepchas* etc were living here with their own cultural identities. Among of them Rajbanshis were the major indigenous communities, lived with their own traditional identities. Writings of W.W. Hunter, Sundar, and Milligan we can find the identities of the Rajbanshi people of North Bengal.

I

Originally the independent sunrise of Bengal came to an end in 1757 with the battle of Plassey. After which multiple movements were organized at different times all over India. West Bengal was no exception of all the movements. The people of West Bengal not only fought for independence but also formed their movements at different times against the monarchy system. The peasant movement in North Bengal was the first Peasant movement against the British.¹ Hunter one of his reports in 1896 highlighted that the *Rajbanshis* were the courageous caste. They did not want to bow their head in front of British Raj. Basically, they organized many peasant revolutions that time. Even when the census of north Bengal started, the people of Rajbanshi communities strongly protested against it. Because according to census report there was two separate rooms for married wives and widows. They start protest it with their own style, they sing some song to protect the widows. This song is-

*'Dakshin hoite ashil lekhn ari dhoribar
Jato ari jukti kare khonit sondebar
.....
Mante arir ghar sondea sadheya par nil
Adhar ati jonak poka chechay din din'.²*

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The famous and one and only *Rajbanshi* leader Rai Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma and his *Kshatriya* Society in 1920 started various movement in Bengal. Even Panchanan Barma expelled from his native village Cooch Behar for promoting and supporting swadeshi.³

Indigenous people of North Bengal not only participated in the National movements but also received imprisonment and death penalty for their involvement. We get this account from one of the oldest magazines of Jalpaiguri called '*Trishota*'. During in 1931, Rajen Shil a Rajbanshi leader of Jalpaiguri district, he was shot dead by police for his Swadeshi concept. The same case was happened in Falakata division also, two Rajbanshi leader killed by police. In 1932 in Dinajpur district five Rajbanshi leader killed by police.⁴ The same picture also followed in other Districts of North Bengal.

II

Although the district of Jalpaiguri emerged during the British rule in 1869, yet the contribution of the people of this district to the history of Indian's national movement is undeniable. The long-term effects of the Quit India movement, Non-Cooperation and also other movement can be seen in different parts of Jalpaiguri district. Even in different times different eminent freedom fighters come to this region. Chittaranjan Das, Gandhiji, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose were among of them.⁵

Jagadindradev Raikat, one of the leaders of Raikat royal family of Jalpaiguri, usually belonged to the Rajbanshi community. His contribution in the national movements among the Rajbanshi communities is really commendable. Reviewing the history, it is seen that *Kirtan* ceremony is organized in his house in every week. Behind the light of this *Kirtan*, a revolutionary meeting was going on at his home.⁶ Even he resigned honorary magistrate position given by the British to protest the massacre of *Jallianwallabagh* in 1919.⁷ This step of his as a zamindar is really courageous. When Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das came to Jalpaiguri in 1920, he raised in *Raikat zamindar* house with the help of Jagadindra Raikat, where he organized a meeting, where a large number of Rajbanshi people came from different parts and joined.⁸

After 1920 when Jagadindradev Raikat selected president of the district Congress Committee, the ideology of the Indian National Congress spread tremendously in Jalpaiguri.⁹ There is, however a disagreement over Jagadindradev Raikat becoming the president of district congress committee. However, under his leadership the Non-Cooperation movement in Jalpaiguri district took a widespread form. At that same time, a large number of Rajbanshi people from different regions came forward for supporting Non-Cooperation movement. Among of them Surendra Das from Falakata, Jageshwar Roy from Madarihat, Mahendra Basunia from Amguri, Chandia Das from Dhupguri, Tarini Basunia from Ratherhat, Shibananda Roy and Debananda Roy from Pachagarh and also much more.¹⁰

During this Non-Cooperation movement in Alipurduar subdivision, the movement against taxes and rents took a massive form under the leadership of Magha Deuniya. Under whose leadership hundreds of *Rajbanshi* people came forwarded against to give rents and taxes. Chandradwip Singha, Vaibyanath Das, Nilambar Das, Lata Shing Barua, Madan Shing

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Barua, Budharu Das were famous among all of them. We can feel the suffering and survived of this movement, through the song, sung by the *palli kabi*-

*'Vat dim, pani dim, khajna dim na,
Jan dim, pan dim, taksho dim na,
Engreger khajna dim na'*.¹¹

(Rajbanshi Language)

Later Chittaranjan Das the leader of Swaraj Dal went to Jalpaiguri for collecting money, many aboriginal people and town's people donated money to the Swaraj Dal, Rajbanshi male, female, wives and aged peoples were not out of them. Even Deshbandhu gave the title, 'Amir-ul-muluk' to Muslim leader Munshi Sonaula Saheb for to donate his lot. Then on 9th June 1925 Mahatma Gandhi came to Jalpaiguri district. A large number of Rajbanshi men and women participated in the ceremony. Refugees did not arrive at that time, naturally the people of village meant the Rajbanshi peoples. '**Gandhi Maidan**' in Jalpaiguri district still bears the memory of Gandhiji's arrival in Jalpaiguri. One of the songs sung by the men and women of the Rajbanshi society

*'Mahatma Gandhiji
Hamra khaddar dhoirachi
Bilaiti nun ar khamona
Deshi dhoirachi'*.¹²

At that time another important events for the Rajbanshi peoples are, a girl's school and women institution founded by Bimala Roy the daughter of Rajbanshi leader lower Madhusudan Roy of Jalpaiguri, although now it is known as '*Kadamtala Balika Vidyalaya*'. Gandhiji visit the girl's school of Bimala Roy, during this time which known as '*Matri Mandir*' and give his worm blessing.¹³ The month of April in 1928 was one of the most important days for the people of Jalpaiguri because Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose along with Bidhan Chandra Roy came in Jalpaiguri.¹⁴ The former magazine of Jalpaiguri '*Trishota*' bears its proofs.

Then in 1930 when the Civil Disobedience movement started under the leadership of Gandhiji a large number of Rajbanshis came forward for supporting it. Many were arrested by police for participating in the movement. Among of them, Nagen Roy from Pachagar, Gopeswar Roy, Bilan Roy, Shukh Mohan Roy, Ramakanta Roy, Haricharan Roy, Satyen Basunia of Dhupguri, Mahendra Basunia of Amguri, Tarini Basunia from Rather hat etel. were famous. Many of them devoted themselves in the movement; Surendra Das from Falakata, Megha Deuniya from Kumargram; Alipurduar, Jageshwar Roy from Madarihat, Chaimuddin Miya from Nagrakata were famous among all of them.¹⁵ A large number of women and men of Rajbanshi community sacrificed themselves for the national movement. In every issue of '*Trishota*' a former paper of North Bengal bears all the documents of 1930's, where we found various names of Rajbanshi peoples of various division of Jalpaiguri districts took participated all the movements. Rajbanshi peoples not only joined themselves in various movements, but also, they donated large of money to move forward the movement. Sri Amar Singha Roy from rather hat, Sri Ram Mohan Roy was among of them.¹⁶

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Although the impact of the quite India movement did not have a significant impact on the Jalpaiguri district, but one of its effects can be noticed in Alipurduar subdivision. Nalini Pakrashi, Khagen Das, Vaibyonath Barman, Ganesh Barman etel., took an important role during this time. Rajbanshi women and men of Jalpaiguri district were not backward in any peasant movement. They united the Rajbanshi peasant in various places. 'Burima' a well-known women of peasant movement in Jalpaiguri.¹⁷ Whose original name was Puneswari Barman, took an important role. There is of course another name must be mentioned that is Kishori Barman. She is well known fighter in the peasant movement of Jalpaiguri and Rangpur district. Also, Kalti Barman, Lila Sen, Buri Barman, Maili Majhin, Ujani Barman were participated various peasant movement in Jalpaiguri district.¹⁸ Out of all a closer look at history reveals that Jalpaiguri district was one of the centers of Tebhaga movement, which is glorious aspect of the peoples of Jalpaiguri district also among the peoples of Rajbanshi communities. However, in the course of time it is gradually getting lost in the path of darkness.

III

Before English rule in North Bengal there were only three districts, namely Rajshahi, Rangpur and Dinajpur. Naturally Dinajpur district has its own historical significance. With the onset of British rule, Peasant and Fakir Revolts broke out in different areas of Dinajpur, where most of the common people of Dinajpur join directly. Most of which were belonged from Rajbanshi community.

In 1905 when partition of Bengal, announced by Lord Curjon, the Maharaja of Dinajpur, Girija Nath, strongly protest it. It is a very strong decision for a king who works under British rule. A large number of Rajbanshi people participated in this movement with him.¹⁹ They started to avoid British things and, in many places, start to established *Swadeshi Bastralaya*. Even this form of movement was seen during the Non-Cooperation movement led by Gandhiji. In 1920 when Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das came in Dinajpur district, peoples from all levels of Dinajpur welcome him with respect.²⁰ The same thing was happened when in 1925 Gandhiji came in Dinajpur to build a memorial for Chittaranjan Das, a large number of Rajbanshi people came to see him and donated a large amount to Gandhiji with the inspiration of *Swadeshi* thinking.²¹

Another identity of the Rajbanshi people to participate in movement was found in 1928 during the famine in Dhamonihat and Patnitala police station of Dinajpur. There were many peoples and peasants were died for starvation. At that time Dinajpur Congress leader Anil Biswas with 417 Rajbanshis peoples start a Satyaagraha movement. In this situation Governor General came in Dinajpur and donated 6 lakh rupees for the people suffering from famine.²² At that time, arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose in the year 1928, it creates a new excitement in the minds of the people here.

In Northern Bengal, 1920, the *Kshatriya* movement led by Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma flourished during this time. The impression of which can be seen in the freedom movement of Dinajpur district. Nabakumar Ray, Sharat Chandra Barma, Gopendra Nath

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Barma from Bibigange, Lalmohon Barma, Gurudeb Barma from Binnaguri, Ananda mohon Barma, Bishnu Charan Ray, Girija Mohon Ray, Ramkumar Barma from Haridah and Rajarpur, Haridas Barma, Pratap Chandra Barma, Ramlochan Barma, Bharat Chandra Barma from Shibrampur of Dinajpur were well known Rajbanshi leader belonged from Kshatriya society, they were directly participating with Indian National movement.²³ Even the Rajbanshi of Dinajpur organized a '*Chhatrishha Movement*', collaborate with the people of thirty-six nations.²⁴ They start their movement with 34 demands. Haricharan Barma, Khirod Barma, Dhiren Barma, Praneswar Barma, Chatu Barma, Gayneshwar Barma etcl., were the famous Rajbanshi leaders of the '*Chhatrishha Movement*' in Dinajpur.

In 1930 when Civil Disobedience movement starts in all over India, Dinajpur district also impacted by it. Kashi Barman, Bashanta Barman, Pitambar Barman the well-known Rajbanshi leaders were took their important role during this time here.²⁵ The same participation was seen during in 1932 when police starting fire against the people who were organized their movement against rents and taxes in Akacha village near Gangarampur police station of Dinajpur.²⁶

During the Quit India movement in 1942, the people of the Rajbanshi community of Dinajpur district were not reversed their footsteps from participating movements. Not only did they participate, they can also sacrifice themselves. Choto Barman, Adhar Barman, Kekaru Barman sacrificed their life for freedom struggle movement.²⁷

During the peasant movement in Bengal or in the Tebhaga Movement people belonged from not only Rajbanshis even all communities of people come forward for supporting and participating in Dinajpur. Rup Narayan Ray, Dinesh Ray, Sushil Sen, Ajay Ray, Bhaben Singh, Rajen Singh, Jaymani Barman, Ramlal Singh, Poatu Barman, Pastaram Singh, Hemanta Barman, Nendu Barman, Dole Gobinda Barman, Amir Chad Barman, Nendali Singh, Maktu Singh were well known leader of Peasant movement in Dinajpur district.²⁸ Women were not far behind from the movement. In February 1947 when police want to arrest the agitators of peasant's movements, during that time the women were come forward to protest the police. Not only that, a number of man and women lost their lives in the police firing in this peasant movement. Most of them belonged from the Rajbanshi community of Dinajpur district.

IV

Like Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur districts the Rajbanshi people of the other districts of North Bengal, Cooch Behar, Maldah, Darjeeling, Rangpur were participated in National movement and Peasant movement in various times. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan of Cooch Behar was one of the patrons of the nationalist movement. Maharaja Jitendra Narayan also shows his interest in Nationalist movement. As because Cooch Behar State make allies with British, as a result it is impossible to start open agitation against the British rule there. But at that time Anushilan Samiti take an important role in here for promoting nationalism. Even one famous Rajbanshi leader Dineswar Barman of Mekhliganj subdivision starts Tebhaga movement in various areas of Cooch Behar. In the district of Rangpur, the Rajbanshis also played an

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important role, in every Peasant movement, Quit India Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement. Kshatriya Samity played as a role of political party for spread nationalism in Rangpur. Its effect can also be seen in Maldah district. In Malda '*Maldah Jatiya Siksha Samity*' and '*Swadeshi Bhandar*' was established to protest Bengal partition in 1905. Even after the coming of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das in Malda, a new direction of the movements was unveiled there. In the case of Darjeeling district, the Rajbanshi population is less, but they have never backed down themselves from the movements. When Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das died in Darjeeling, he was taken Shukla station to Siliguri station under the shade of Rajbanshi leaders. In Siliguri division of Darjeeling district, Quit India movement took a prominent role by the students under the Rajbanshi student leader Dilip Kumar Ray Sarkar. Also, *Rajbanshi* leader Tarak Chandra Ray, Khagendra Nath Ray, Direndra Nath Ray took important role to spread Swadeshi ideology and protest British rule.

Conclusion

It is unthinkable thing that the common people of North Bengal especially the Rajbanshis can take part any kind of national movement. The scope of discussion is wide. This can never be fulfilled in a few words or in a short time. The National movements of North Bengal are not just movements, there involving much more emotion of the primitive peoples. This is still elusive in the pages of history forever. We only mention one section of society who were always ahead in any movement or revolution. We forget to mention about the peasants, labors the common peoples, without whom we can ever move forward. That is why the participation of these peoples in the history of Indian National Movement has remained elusive, even in todays also. That requires more through research.

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