

CHAPTER –VIII

Origin of Identity Crisis: Response and Reaction
among the Rajbanshis in all Indian Perspective

CHAPTER-VIII

ORIGIN OF IDENTITY CRISIS: RESPONSE AND REACTION AMONG THE RAJBANSHIS IN ALL INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

To explain the origin of identity crisis of the Rajbanshis, we have to discuss the character of the caste mobility in Bengal during colonial and postcolonial period that led to the Rajbanshis to caste hierarchy and separate ethnic identity movement during the period of our study. One important aspect of caste mobility in Bengal is that the members of low caste often tend to claim the status of a higher caste. Thus, the aspiration of a caste is invariably to push itself up the caste ladder and get rid of the ignominy of being on the rung of lower castes. In Hindu society, the Hindus constituted the majority of the population; it had to take place within the structural framework defined by the caste system. Although we know, caste position being determined by birth was immutable in the upward direction, but in practical, the system did permit vertical mobility generated by the opening up of new frontiers of economic opportunities.

I

From the substantial historical account, we have come to know the various aspect of the caste system of Bengal. ¹ Out of four traditional *varna* i.e. *Brahman*, *kshatriya*, *Vaisha* and *Sudra* Bengal has only the *Brahmins* and the *Sudra* caste system. However, in the broad sense of *Varna* framework, the caste hierarchy could be further classified into six categories on the basis of the prevalent notions of ritual purity

i.e.i) *Brahmins*,ii)the *Baidyas* and the *Kayasthas*, iii) the *Nabasakh* castes,iv) the *ajalchal* castes, v) the caste between the *Nabaskh* and the *ajalchal* groups and vi) the *Antyaja* castes. ² In the predominant local traditions of Bengal, this caste based ritual ranks still had a significant bearing on the forms of social interaction. In spite of the growing influences of modern secular values and the collapsing of caste based occupational structure caused by the result of colonial rule, there was not much change in social outlook towards caste. Shekhar Bondopadhyaya in this connection observes, “Prescriptions of caste still determined the patterns of social interaction and dominated inter-personal group relations of the Bengali Hindus”.³ In this regard, it may be mentioned here that among the elites in the Bengali society caste was the decisive factors in regulating social relationships, like matrimonial alliance, partaking of cooked food from the lower castes etc. Caste pride was also very prominent and usually the upper castes thought of themselves to be culturally superior to those lower castes. Such caste related cultural stereotyping often-generated social tension. However, as it was difficult to visualize any alternative means to register their protest or ventilate their grievances, the aggrieved lower castes looked for a solution with in the caste structure itself by claiming higher status.

During the colonial period, it became much more pervasive that altered the political base of the caste system, while a market economy operating under the aegis of the colonial government with marketable land and labour struck at the economic foundations of the traditional hierarchical, yet interdependent structure of relationship. Nevertheless, the caste system prevailed as an important determinant of social behaviour of the Hindus. Shekhar Bandopadhyaya observes, “Vertical social mobility in a secular context, therefore, had to be

ritualized through movement upwards in the scale of caste- ranking which was still prestigious.” He also remarks, “Those who had improved their economic opportunities, demanded a corresponding higher rank in caste hierarchy, and organized articulate caste agitations in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century.”⁴ It is to be mentioned here that the caste movement had been developed into two stages. Firstly, the concerned caste aimed acquiring the symbols of high status. Then in the second stage, the emphasis shifted to the more material sources of high status, i.e. education, employment, and political power.⁵ In Chapter No. VI, we have discussed both of these stages regarding Rajbanshi social movement. How did this social or caste movement of the Rajbanshis correspond to the origin of identity crisis would be the subject matter of the present chapter.

II

The most important component in a society was perhaps the caste ranking and individuals could rise in prestigious dimension only if their castes could rise as corporations. Therefore, the changes in the distribution of productive resources and political power that altered the patterns of account and secular social interaction between groups and individuals, often sought expression through attempts at achieving a higher ritual rank. In general, the discrepancies between the secular status and the rank of a particular caste were sought to be resolved through “Sanskritization” on symbolic justification.⁶ Rowe observes, “Most of these agitations for caste mobility, that we come across not only in Bengal but in other parts of India as well, during the early twentieth century were in the shape of ‘attempt to change the group name to one

more hallowed in Hinduism".⁷ In this regard, most of the caste mobility movements recorded in the Census Reports and known from the wide variety of caste literature, sought three types of *varna*-affiliations-*Brahmanic, Kshatriya and Vaisya*, the three twice-born *varnas* of the classics. Each of these castes resorted to some origin myth, which associated them with one or the other of these *varnas*, and quoted *Puranic slokas*, sometimes spurious and sometimes incomplete, in support of these claims. Their pretensions were later validated through securing *vyavasthas* (religious judgments) from the Nabadwip *pandits* whose discussion were already influenced by the present secular status of the caste concerned.⁸ Historical records reveal that beginning of the twentieth century in Bengal as else where in India, there had been consistent movements for upward mobility within the caste system. On the part of a particular caste, the principal objective of such a movement was its promotion from a lower to a higher birth in the *Varna* /caste hierarchy and greater respectability in terms of the given conditions of caste system in a region. The following statement shows the claim of different castes in Bengal for specific *Varna* affiliation as had been recorded in the Census Reports from 1911 to 1931.

<u>Caste</u>	<u>Reference categories</u>
Kamar	<i>Brahmin</i> (a 1931 claim, their 1921 claim being Kshatriya as 1911 claim <i>Vaishya</i>)
Napit	<i>Brahmin</i> (a 1931 claim, their 1921 claim being <i>Baidya</i> , and 1911 claim <i>kshatriya</i>)
Kayastha	<i>Kshatriya</i>
Aguri	<i>Kshatriya</i> (<i>Ugra kshatriya</i>)
Mahisya	<i>Kshatriya</i> (1931 claim, their 1901 claim being <i>Vaisya</i>)

Goala	<i>Vaidya (kshatriya)</i> (a 1931 claim, the earlier being <i>sadgop</i>)
Sundi	<i>Kshatriya</i> or <i>Saundik kshatriya</i> (a 1931 claim, the earlier claim being <i>saha</i>)
Rajbanshi	<i>Kshatriya</i> (a 1911 claim, their earlier claim being <i>Bhanga or Bratya Kshatriya</i>)
Pad or Padmaraj	<i>Bratya Kshatriya</i> (fallen <i>Kshatriya</i>)or <i>Paundra Kshatriya</i> .

From the above statement it is noticed that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an increasing number of lower castes adopt the “Sanskaras” or social beliefs and ritual ceremonies, that had once been peculiar to the higher *varnas* and following social practices that had been the hallmarks of the respectable castes enjoying a higher position in the regional caste hierarchy. For example, the *Baidyas*, *kayasthas*, the *anguris* or *ugra Kshatriya*, *Paundra Kshatriyas*, *Mahisha*, *Goala*, *Sundri*, *Rajbanshi* and the *jogis* had started wearing sacred thread and claiming *Kshatriya* status, while a section of the *Sadgops* and the *Mayras* introduced *Kulinism* with all its ancillary taboos and customs.⁹ The social hierarchical movement of the different castes corresponds to *kshatriya* movement in North Bengal. It corresponds to the two identities in the forefront of social mobility among the concern caste i.e. i) caste identity and ii) Ethnic –cum-caste identity.

In the first front i.e. ‘Caste Identity’ issue, some castes like *Ugra Kshatriya*, *Malla Kshatriya*, *Paundra Kshatrriyas*, *Sundri Kshatriyas*, *Mahishya*, *Goala*, etc only claim the caste identity against the Brahmanical system. They claim *Kshatriya* status to establish higher social position in the existing caste system. This movement of particular

castes corresponds to the caste identity only. They did not raise any ethnic base identity movement against the existing caste system.

On the other hand, the Rajbanshi *kshatriya* movement corresponded caste identity and ethnic issues simultaneously. For *Rajbanshis*, the sacred thread had in fact become a symbol round which a lot of social mobilization actually took place. In 1912, the *kshatriya Samiti*, organized its first mass thread-wearing ceremony called the *milankshetra*, at Bhogmari in Rangpur district, where four to five thousand Rajbanshis went through the ceremony of ritual rebirth. This was followed by many other such *milankshetras* organized in different districts, resulting 'lakhs' of Rajbanshis donning the sacred thread as a mark of their *kshatriya* or twice-born status.¹⁰ We have already discussed this elaborately in the Chapter No VI. The social movement of the Rajbanshis correspond their caste identity in the social system. Analyzing this issue Swaraj Basu has remarked that their search for *kshatriya* identity was only a symbolic cultural expression of this emergent collective self-consciousness.¹¹ By this self-consciousness, the Rajbanshis tried to legitimize their social and ethno-cum caste identity issue that led them a ethnic and racial difference between them and the Koches. This demand of ethnic based /racial based identity of the Rajbanshis is one of the arbitrary constructions, which led the Rajbanshis to the origin of identity crisis later on. Let us discuss how did the ethnic-cum-caste identity gears up the origin of identity crisis of the Rajbanshis as follows.

III

The social movement of the Rajbanshis is a historical fact. During the Census of 1872, the Rajbanshis of Bengal and some part of Assam were trying to dissociate themselves from the tribal Koches and frantically dependent entry in the Census as a distinct caste i.e “Rajbanshi”. In the process of Hinduisation, they declared themselves as *bratya Kshatriya* (fallen *Kshatriya*). One of the earliest reference to the Rajbanshi people is available from a ballad ascribed to a folk poet named Ratiram Das who had lived under oppressive rule of Debi Singha, the *Ijaradar* of Dinajpur and Rangpur districts in Bengal during the administrative period of Warren Hastings (1772- 1785) the first Governor of India under East India Company. Ratiram Das in his *Jaggan* said-

Rane bhanga diya mora ai-deshe asiachhi

*‘Bhanga kshatriya’ Rajbanshi ai name achhi.*¹²

[Free translation: Fleeing away from the battlefield we have come in this country and took the name as *bhanga Kshatriya* Rajbanshi.]

This descriptive term like ‘*Bhanga Kshatriya*’ and ‘Rajbanshi’ were already in vogue at that period while these epithets are not to be found in the older Persian records or in foreign accounts, or in any of the dynastic epigraph of that period. Even it is absent in *Darang Rajbanshabali*, the only genealogical account of the Koch Raj family of the of the Brahmaputra valley in Assam.¹³ Risley¹⁴ also accepted that there is no historical foundation for the claim of the Rajbanshi to be a provincial variety of the *Kshatriyas*. The Rajbanshis also used the reference of *Yoginitantra*, *Kalika Purana*, and *Bhramari Tantra* to establish their claim as *Bratya Kshatriya* or *Bhanga Kshatriya*. They also formed an association, under the leadership of Harimohan Ray Khazanachi, the *Zamindar* of Shyampur in Rangpur namely *Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati*

Bidhani Sabha. The Rajbanshis lodged several deputations to the District Magistrate, F.A. Skyne with the *Vyavasthapatra* of the Rajbanshis to use themselves as *Bratyā Kshatriya* in all the government deeds in 1891 May (*Jaistha*, 1298 B.S.)¹⁵

From the beginning of 1901, when the Rajbanshis were found as only 'Rajbanshi' in the primary census enumeration, resentment was caused. During this census period, the Rajbanshis began to boast of a pure *Kshatriya* origin. They have lodged several deputations to the census authority, District Magistrate, and Sir John Woodburn, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal but there was no result. The Rajbanshis and the Koches were therefore again classified as members of the same caste in the Census Report of 1901.¹⁶

In 1910, from the very beginning of the census operation the Rajbanshis again started their campaign for having themselves enumerated as *Kshatriya*. There were several meetings held in the different districts of Bengal to claim as '*kshatriya*' status and memorandum also submitted to the District Magistrate and census authority in support of their *Kshatriya* claim and distinguished their from the Koches. They also appealed to the District Magistrate in different districts to permit them to use respectable titles such as Barma, Ray, Singha in place of Das, Sarkar etc. Almost all the districts this permission was granted except in Cooch Behar, the Princely State, where the Government official strongly opposed it. However, by interference of E.W.Denith, the state superintendent, the matter was solved latter on. They began to emulate many Hindu manners and customs discarding their old practices in order justify their *Kshatriya* appellation and Aryan origin. However, in 1911 Census, the first demand of the Rajbanshis, i.e.

separation from the Koches was conceded, while the second i.e. be recognized the Rajbanshis as *Kshatriya* descent was turned down.¹⁷ These all their efforts to get recognition as *Kshatriyas* had ultimately failed except successfully enlisting their name “Rajbanshi” with “Kshatriya” in brackets separately from the tribal Koches.¹⁸

Under this circumstance, the Rajbanshis felt the need for an association to mobilize the community around the census for attaining a respectable position in social hierarchy. In the meanwhile, Rangpur *Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Bidhayani Sabha* of Harimohan Ray Khazanchi, the Rajbanshi *Zamindar* of Shyampur in Rangpur moves social movement but failed to make wider impact on the community. Therefore, the Rajbanshi felt to need an active organization to legitimize their *Kshatriya* demand in society. Meanwhile, the most pragmatic among these leaders, who actually took the initiative to unite the Rajbanshis under the banner of a single organization was Raisahib Panchanan Barma (1866-1935 A.D.), the son of Khosal Sarkar of Khalisamari village of Mathabhanga subdivision, the then Princely State of Cooch Behar. It was under his leadership the *Kshatriya Samiti* was established in 1910 A.D.(1317 B.S.) at Rangpur. The *Kshatriya Samiti* carried of social and political mobilization among the Rajbanshis. During the Census period of 1921 A.D. and 1931 A.D., the *Kshatriya Samiti* launched social mobility to establish their *Kshatriya* status instead of *Rajbanshi Kshatriya*. In the Chapter No. VI, we have discussed how did the *Kshatriya Samiti* mobilized the Rajbanshis to legitimize their *kshatruiya* identity through different stages. However, during this period the Rajbanshi had to face opposition from the caste Hindus. Meanwhile, under the leadership of Panchanan Barma, the *Kshatriya Samiti* managed to over come all their opposition and finally the Rajbanshis were

recognized *Kshatriya* in the census report of 1931. However, their official recognition as 'Kshatriya' was challenged by the upper caste Hindus as their social threat to own social domination. As Swaraj Basu ¹⁹ has described that –“In spite of their general passive attitude towards the whole movement, they often, made ridiculous statements about it and some places there was also active opposition”. A.K. Ray ²⁰ has observed that the movement (*Kshatriya*) inevitably brought about face-to-face confrontation with other caste particularly the so-called upper castes of Hindus who neither were nor prepared to accept these men as *Kshatriyas*. Many Brahmins began to refuse to serve these people as their priests in religious and social ceremonies and some officials refused to record the caste of these people as *Kshatriyas*.

From the above discussion, it is to be mentioned here that the endeavour of the Rajbanshis to be placed higher up in the order of precedence and be recognized as *Kshatriya* continued until 1931 by assuming in different census. In their desire to be recorded as a member of high caste, they passed through at least four distinct social identities from one census to another i.e. from Koch to Rajbanshi (1872 A.D.) ,from Rajbanshi to *Bratya/ Bhanga Kshatriya*(1891), from *Bratya/ Bhanga Kshatriya* to *Rajbanshi Kshatriya* (1901,1911,1921 A.D.) and from *Rajbanshi Kshatriya* to only *Kshatriya*. These occasional distinctions of the Rajbanshis had been raised their identity question to the present generation of the community. Such type of identity question corresponds to the identity crisis when they searched reservation about being as 'depressed classes'.

IV

During the beginning of the 20th century the anti- imperialist agitation have been grown up that caused headache of the Colonial Imperial Government. The Colonial Government took some policy of protective discrimination through which sought to grant special favour in matters of education, employment and constitutional rights, to the Muslim first and then to the depressed classes.²¹ The First direct colonial intervention to develop a separate identity of the "Depressed Classes" had come on the eve of the census operation of 1911, while the commissioner circulated an instruction to enumerate them separately from the other Hindus castes.

Since the late nineteenth century, the colonial officials were thinking of preparing a list of 'depressed classes' to provide special protection from the government. Meanwhile, the Calcutta University Commission prepared a list of 21 castes, which required such special assistance and called these the 'depressed classes'. The Rajbanshi leaders argued that as they were educationally and economically backward, they should be included in this list. However, many other local associations such as *The Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha*, *The Bangiya Brahman Sabha*, *The Indian Association* etc. strongly opposed the inclusion of the Rajbanshis in the list of 'Depressed classes' because of their claimed higher ritual *Kshatriya* status in the *Varna* order.²² Only *The Bengal Depressed Classes Association* (1932) was favour to include the Rajbanshis in the list of 'Depressed Classes'.²³ Regarding this debate on the inclusion of the Rajbanshi in the list of 'Depressed Classes', Panchanan Barma argued that some castes including the Rajbanshis were needed special protection from the Government in order to make

themselves equal with the advanced classes. However, he suggested the term "Depressed Classes" bore social stigma and it smacked of social inferiority and in place of "Depressed Classes" the term, "Backward Classes" could be used. He also suggested that education could be made the main criterion for ascertaining backwardness.²⁴ In this connection, it is to be mentioned here that under the leadership of Panchanan Barma, the *Kshatriya Samiti* appealed to the British Raj to nominate them to the local bodies and to extend preferential treatment to them in the matters of education and employment. In a personal note to the government, Sri Panchanan Barma pleaded for "special electorate" to protect the political right of the Rajbanshis.²⁵

In 1932 A.D., Lord Lothian made an enquiry into the special electorate right of the Indian citizens and prepared a list of "Depressed Classes" of 118 castes, including some educationally and economically backward castes to avoid any anomaly over such inclusion of castes in the "Depressed Classes" category in order to granting them special electoral privileges. The Lothian Committee also recommended that "Untouchables" must be the main criterion for ascertaining the social backwardness of any caste and who is to be listed as a member of "Depressed Classes".²⁶ However, *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samiti* protested against such recommendation and reiterated its earlier decision not to enlist them in the category.²⁷

In 1933 A.D. the Government of India by a resolution, instead of "Depressed Classes" the term, 'Scheduled Caste' was used. By this resolution, it is said that rights of temple entry, untouchables etc. were to be taken into consideration along with other factors such as educational, economic, and political position of the castes for inclusion in

the special list.²⁸ Finally, in 1935 A.D., the Bengal Reforms Office published the final list of Scheduled Castes for Bengal and the Rajbanshis were included in it.²⁹ The question of inclusion in the list of 'Scheduled Castes' also raised a debate within the Rajbanshi community itself. There were a strong feeling among certain section of the Rajbanshis, that this would be inconstant with their *Kshatriya* status and lower their social dignity.³⁰ But Panchanan was successful to establish his argument infavour of inclusion of the Rajbanshis in the list of 'Scheduled Castes' in special meeting of the *Kshatriya Samiti* in order to take the advantages of reservation in politics, education, and administration. He also argued that without protection from the Government the Backward classes could not improve its social position merely by capitalizing on caste pride.³¹ However, by this inclusion, the Rajbanshis gained special concessions, in reservation, in politics, employment, education, and administration that have been discussed in detail in the Chapter No. VI.

Bidyut Chakraborty in his (ed) book *Communal Identity in India: Its Construction and Articulation in Twentieth Century*, observes that if identity politics is about expressing one's agency and creating new forms of collective agency, then the Rajbanshis did that by playing on the politics of difference and of identity at the same time. Their caste movement was a negotiation of difference to register an altered from the projected view about themselves as Koches.³² But in virtue of that alteration, what it aspired to be identity with high-ups in the Hindu caste hierarchy. Since caste ranking is necessarily, 'interactional' rather than purely "attributional", the Rajbanshis required a long process of social and discursive interaction in this score. However, other counter forces queered the pitch for them, so much that it was engulf in it, providing thereby the presence of a more compelling imperative in them to act as

community ethnicity rather than a caste. They enlist themselves as 'Scheduled Caste' and enjoying the movement. Professor Girindra Narayan Ray in this respect says, "This inevitable contradiction as much as contemporary politics soon eroded the edge and credibility of the *Kshatriya* movement. No wonder their history happened to be more of a fulfillment as 'Scheduled Caste' rather than as *Kshatriya*. It was from this contradiction and failure of resolution that the postcolonial phase of their identity movement got its different start as separate state regional autonomy etc. by some section of Rajbanshis in North Eastern part of India.³³

Regarding the social identity question, the situation of the Rajbanshis in Assam was however, somewhat different. While the Rajbanshis of West Bengal secured some special protection to recognize as a 'Scheduled Caste', the Koch Rajbanshis in undivided Assam could not find any place in the list of 'Scheduled Caste'. How and why the administrators could mete out differential treatment to the same ethnic category distributed between two political unites remains a historical and sociological mystery.³⁴ The Koch-Rajbanshis of undivided Assam moved to the Backward Class Commission headed by Kaka Saheb Kalekar on whose recommendation they were declared as OBC in 1953. They were further categorized into two segments. The Koch- Rajbanshis of undivided Goalpara district were categorized as MOBC while the rest of Assam remained OBC. As observed by P.S. Dutta, the same ethnic group thus achieved three different statuses for official purpose- i.e. SC in West Bengal, MOBC in Goalpara and OBC in the other districts of undivided Assam.³⁵ The fact of the identity question of the Rajbanshis is not over here. The Rajbanshis of Meghalaya and Tripura are regarded as Scheduled Tribes, while in Bihar they are treated as OBC under the same

constitutional protection for political, social, educational, and economical uplift being given to the Rajbanshis in Meghalay, Tripura, and West Bengal but not in Assam and Bihar. On the other hand, the Rajbanshis of Nepal and Bangladesh are treated as general castes. This is one of the prime factors of identity crisis of the Rajbanshis that they are considered in different status in different states within the same Indian constitution and abroad also.

Under this circumstances, the international forum of the Koch- Rajbanshi has been initiated a new move in demand of tribal status. The forum has produced the following arguments behind its demand-i) the Koch –Rajbanshi are originally belong to Indo- Mongoloid tribal stock, ii) the Koch- Rajbanshis of Assam and Bengal cannot have two separate officially ascribed status. Such a differential treatment leads to utter confusion in their national identity and affects social intercourse between the Rajbanshis living in two adjoining states. Therefore, no such differential in fixing statutory identity to the people belong to the same ethnic stock would be allowed ,and iii) due to their ambiguous social position in the caste hierarchy and officially astrictive backward groups, the Koch- Rajbanshis suffer from various discriminations in socio-economic and political spheres. Therefore, a uniform ethnic identity and official status may help them in mitigating many problems from which their community men have been presently suffering.³⁶

The Koch- Rajbanshis of Assam has been demanding since 1967 to include themselves as Scheduled Tribes. To fulfill the issue they had submitted numerous memorandums, deputations to the Union Government and State Government but in vain.³⁷ However, they did not give up hope to fulfill their demand. The demand for conferring

Scheduled Tribes status to the Koch-Rajbanshi has been mooted in an international conference of the community concerned held at Bhadrapur in Eastern Nepal during 9-11 March 1996.³⁸ To make fruitful the conference, delegates from Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Burma, Assam, Bihar, and North Bengal participated in it. Sri Purna Narayan Singh, a former M.P. from India and the then sitting president of Koch-Rajbanshi International Committee presided over the conference. In this conference one of the main resolution was that for the overall uplift of the underprivileged Koch-Rajbanshis, they need to be immediately recognized as a 'Scheduled Tribes' in India, and also in the neighbouring states where they inhabit in large number. The conference also urged upon the cultural integration of the Koch-Rajbanshi with the main stream of society.³⁹ Thus the matter of recognition of the Koch-Rajbanshis as Scheduled Tribes has become an important ethno-political issue to the Rajbanshis.

The economic condition of the Rajbanshis in Assam is, however, very much deplorable. Under the chairmanship of Sree Amar Ray Pradhan the then Member of the Parliament a Committee was appointed by the Indian Government to submit their tribal status of the Assamese Rajbanshis. The committee had submitted the report to the Parliament. The Chairman of the abovementioned committee remarks that the condition of the Assamese Rajbanshis is really like the tribal people. This remark and observation of Amar Ray Pradhan revealed the suffering of the Rajbanshi of Assam. They have lost their language, their livelihood, their territory.⁴⁰ They are in the disillusioned stage. However, the report of that committee has not published yet. In addition to this, they have acted as the main muscle power during the anti- foreigner agitation of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU). Now they are facing

two- pronged threat of Assamese Caste Hindu Chauvinism and the Bodo Military. The demand of the Assamese Rajbanshis for 'Scheduled Tribes' status is also a lost case. This is actually a last straw on the camels back. They dreamt that if they got the 'Scheduled Tribes' status they would be emerged as the largest community in Assam. This will help them to control the politics of the Bodo Autonomous Council .⁴¹ But their long cherished dream has been shattered down.

The different tribal organizations in Assam including the Bodos resisted against the inclusion of the Koch- Rajbanshis in the list of Scheduled Tribes. *Assam Tribal Sangha* and *Tribal Students Federation* launched a resistance movement not to include the Koch Rajbanshi in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Assam. However, the Assam Institute of Research for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes recommends its reports in twice to the court in 1992 and 1994 while in the first report the Koch Rajbanshi did not able to fill up of its criterion for Scheduled Tribes. Based on the contradictory report of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Institute, the *Tribal Students' Federation* including the Bodos appealed to the court not to include the Koch Rajbanshi in the list of Scheduled Tribes.⁴² However, the Bodos has succeeded to sign Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) in Assam. Perhaps, it is the expectation of the Koch Rajbanshis that after establishment of BTC they would be a larger in number than the former with the support of other backward caste and would be gain in political goal. That is why politically conscious Bodo leaders do not agree to accept the demand of Koch Rajbanshis to enlist Scheduled Tribes. Both the Central and the State Government do not intent to interfere this issue immediately to create a new crisis.⁴³ In this situation, the inclusion of the Koch Rajbanshis in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Assam is still pending yet.

From the above discussion, it is cleared to all that in the beginning of the twentieth century, the Rajbanshis of North -Eastern Bengal socially dissociated them from the Koch tribal stock. Through the process of *sanskritization*, they embraced Hinduism and declared themselves as pure *kshatriyas* by origin. However, at the last phase of the twentieth century some sections of their descendents are contesting that position by retracing their old ethnic affinity with the Koches. In this way, the contrary to their earlier cherished *kshatriya* status, they are now aspired Scheduled Caste status and some of them seeking Scheduled Tribes status; a phenomenon deserved serious attention from both the sociologists and historians alike.

The objective of the Rajbanshi *kshatriya* movement was the promotion of the Rajbanshi from a lower to a higher berth in the *varna* order and greater respectability in terms of the given conditions of the caste system in the region. The Rajbanshi finally secured their aim in officially in 1931 census. On the other hand, they took the advantage of “Protective discrimination” of policy of the British Government in favour of certain castes and communities, which was started at the beginning of twentieth century and firmly established by 1937.⁴⁴ So, in adjunct to *sanskritize* their life ways, the leaders of *Kshatriya Samiti* also realized that a new prestige system had emerged in which education white-collar jobs, were important secular ingredients for social ranking and mobility. Therefore, they looked at the government for official patronage and in extending them preferential treatment in matters of education, employment, and legislators. They thus caught in between ritual rank aspirations via *kshatriyaization* at one point and the prospect of material

achievement via “Protective Discrimination” on the other. In their pattern of choice between two available alternative models of social mobility, the *Kshatriya Samiti* leaders accepted for the latter.⁴⁵ On this issue, the *kshatriya* movement became more faction- ridden. The social movement of the Rajbanshis that initially began for achieving superior status in the caste hierarchy was thus ultimately reduced to a mere politics for reservation. In due course of time, that led to certain confusion, contradiction and change in social identity of the Rajbanshis.

The move of the Koch- Rajbanshi in demand of tribal status is altogether a new phenomenon. It is perhaps another manifestation of seeking comfortable accommodation in the institutional framework of protective discrimination. Mukhopadhyaya here raise pertinent question- “Does it imply that the Rajbanshis who had eagerly aspired after an upward social mobility in the early part of this century, their successors later in the bandwagon of backward tribal groups for demanding special treatment by the government taking up a course of downward mobility?”⁴⁶

Thus, the Rajbanshi leaders created many tensions through the *kshatrization* movement while they understand there was status anxiety without much benefit in concrete terms. Afterward their pitiable economic condition and craze for power and status led to process of downward mobility through aspiration for reservation benefits. They had identified the backward socio-economic status, which is the prime criterion for reservation, is contrary to the realization of *kshatriyaization*. In respect of economic backwardness, though the demand of reservation of the Rajbanshis is acceptable, at the same time recognition as Kshatriya status in the *varna* hierarchization perhaps appeared to them antithetical to each other. The consecutive changes in social identity of

the Rajbanshis led them to issue a problem of identity crisis in the twenty first century.

VI

The year 1874 is the watershed in the history of North – Eastern Part of India including Northern Part of undivided Bengal. Before, 1874, Rangpur, Goalpara and Princely State of Cooch Behar were known as the lands of the Rajbanshis. Since 1874, reorganization division and partition whatever, have taken place in each time the Rajbanshis community has been marginalized sometime linguistically, sometimes in number of population and some times politically and culturally.

The province of Assam was created in 1874 with a view to relieving the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal of a part of his huge responsibility. The head of the newly created province was given the title of Chief Commissioner. It is true that the size of the province of Bengal was big-naturally; the creation of a new province was necessary. However, the composition of the province has raised certain questions. The question was not raised at the time of the formation of province, even in the closing phase of the colonial rule, no organization or association of the Rajbanshi community raised the question. It was only after the partition and independence; some people wanted a separate state and afterwards a Kamatapur State. In due courses of time, the groups or associations have raised different types of demands.

The new province was created by five Assamese-speaking districts namely Sibsagar, Nagao, Darang, Lakshimpur, and Kamrup. These districts were geographically known as the Brahmaputra Valley. Dibrugarh of upper Assam was included with new province later on. However, the Bengali speaking Surma Valley, Sylhet district and Goalpara district were also included with this new province. In this context we are concentrating our attention on the inclusion of Goalpara formerly a part of the Bengal's Rangpur district. Since then Goalpara became a cause of disagreement between the Bengalees and the Assamese. The Surma Valley's Sylhet was Bengali speaking district is an acknowledged fact. However, the inclusion of Goalpara with Assam, there was another fact. A notion prevailed amongst the colonial administrators that the historical Kamrup kingdom consisted of Goalpara, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri (East Bank of Karotoya), parts of North Mymensing (Netrocona Sub Division), and the entire Brahmaputra Valley region. In fact, Karotoya was the boundary like between Kamrup Kingdom and Bengal. This conviction perhaps was indeed Goalpara in the new province of Assam. They finally believed that Assam was the successor of the old Kamrup Kingdom. Apart from this, since the conquest of Assam proper from the Burmese by the English East India Company, Goalpara was added to the commissioner of the conquered territory i.e. Assam proper in 1826. The interesting fact is that the contemporary Rajbanshi social leaders did not put objection to it. Had the Rajbanshi social leaders of the time protested against this decision of incorporating of Goalpara with Assam the course of history of the Rajbanshis community might have different.⁴⁷ The administrative Reorganization of Bengal and Assam in 1874 and its impact upon the Rajbanshi identity question of North Bengal and Western Assam. Unfortunately, the Rajbanshi leaders could not understand the future situation.

The Rajbanshis felt that there is nothing wrong for the inclusion of Goalpara with Assam province since the day of the Kamrup-Kamata- Cooch Kingdom they had been living here. Only during the latter phase of the Muslim rule, they had been administered from Bengal as a part of the Rangpur district. Naturally, they could not find anything it. However, there was a great difference between the Ahom rule of the Pre-British period and the Assamese administration of the post 1874 period. The western educated Assamese now wished the dream of the linguistic state since 1874. Due to the consistent demand of the western educated Assamese, Assamese was introduced as the medium of instruction in the newly created province. This was the beginning phase of Assamization in course of time and the process of Assamization has been increased. However, the Rajbanshi leaders of Goalpara district, where the 80% people in 1874 were Rajbanshis could not understand the far-reaching consequences of this nascent linguistic Chauvinism. Local historian of the post-colonial period is describing this incident a historical blunder on the part of this Rajbanshi leaders of Western Assam have never raised the question of their mother tongue i.e. Rajbanshi or Kamata language. On the other hand, they lost their two hundred years connection i.e. from 1639 to 1822 with Bengal. In 1639, the region of the present day Goalpara was incorporated with Bengal Rangpur and it was served from Rangpur in 1822. In that year, the Goalpara district was created. Prof. Amlendu Guha has rightly stated that where as in the Goalpara district of the Brahmaputra Valley the majority, according to early census figures, spoke Bengali this was because once it formed a constituent part of Bengal continuously for about two hundred years from 1639 to 1822 .⁴⁸ Historically speaking, the separation of Goalpara from Rangpur by the East India Company was a curse to the Rajbanshi community. Because,

linguistically and racially they were the single largest community of Rangpur district. Apart from this, the continuous territorial change of the Goalpara district was also harmful to the Rajbanshi community. At the time of its creation i.e. in 1822 it comprised the three police stations such as Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari. After the second Anglo-Bhutan war of 1864-65, the seven Duars known as the Eastern Duars was merged with Goalpara. It was a thinly populated tribal zone, though a vast tract linguistically, ethnically geographically it was different from Goalpara. In addition to this, Goalpara was a permanently settled area whereas the Eastern Duars was a non-permanently settled area. In this connection, the fate of the Goalpara district may be compared with her sister Jalpaiguri district which comprised the permanently settled area and the non-regulation of the Western Duars. The Western Duars area was brought under the British domination after the second Anglo-Bhutan war of 1864-65 A.D. like the Eastern Duars. The Western Duars was also a sparsely populated area and a tribal area. The composition of the two districts i.e. Goalpara and Jalpaiguri seem to be almost identical. What is interesting is that today the two districts are facing the same problem of the Rajbanshi linguistic ethnic identity question. It is a unique situation in the history of the present day ethnic linguistic turmoil of the Western Assam and Northern Bengal.

Another important thing is to be noticed that at the time of creation of Assam Province, the total Assamese speaking population was roughly 35 *lakhs* while the total Rajbanshi ethnic population was also roughly 35 *lakhs*.⁴⁹ But there was a difference in the geographical distribution of the Rajbanshi population. The Assamese population had been generally living in their own homeland. The number of Assamese people in the outside of Assam was extremely significant whereas the

Rajbanshis had been living in Goalpara and Kamrup of the Assam province the Princely State of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling Terai, Rangpur, Dinajpur of Bengal, Purnea district of Bihar, Jhapa and Morang of Nepal. The Colonial Government had created a separate province for the Assamese but not for the Rajbanshis. It is true that the Assamese did not demand a province before 1874. The Assamese had resented the introduction of the Bengali language in the schools of Assam. Therefore, the province of Assam was a creation of the British Government not for the Assamese demand. It was believed by some people that the British Government had a thought for creating a new administrative zone in the Northern part of Bengal. Finally, it was not materialized for the two reasons. Firstly, though before 1874, the Northern Zone of Bengal was the land of the Rajbanshis but the scattered distribution from Goalpara to Jhapa, had created a hurdle. Secondly, the gradual extension of the British power over the North Eastern part of India had changed the mind of the British colonial Administrators. Therefore, the thinking for the new administrative zone had been abandoned permanently.⁵⁰

In Chapter No. V, we have discussed that how the creation of Assam province heaved a deathblow to the future community consolidation as well as the linguistic uniformity of the Rajbanshis of Assam and Bengal. Gradually the Rajbanshis of Goalpara accepted the process of Assamization. The Western educated Assamese, intellectuals had extended pressure for the introduction of Assamese in the school teaching. But the Rajbanshis did not understand the far-reaching consequences of the change. Therefore, they accepted and embraced the new process of Assamization systematically. However, a problem of differentiation arises between the Rajbanshis of Goalpara and the Rajbanshis of Rangpur as the former was an integrated part of Rangpur

since 1639. During the period of State Reorganization Process, this differentiation became more acute in 1935-55. But the Rajbanshi leaders namely Upendra Nath Barman of North Bengal had fervently advocated the retention of Cooch Behar with West Bengal and Sarat Chandra Singh, the Rajbanshis leaders of Goalpara had also fervently advocated the retention of Gaolpara with Assam. Professor Ananda Gopal has rightly observed that both the leaders had forgotten the question of the community solidarity and the Rajbanshi homeland .⁵¹ Had Goalpara been not corporated with Assam in 1874, such type of situation i.e. linguistic identity crisis might not have been arisen? ⁵²

Needless to say, that the Rajbanshi community had lost their geographical homogeneity and linguistic consolidation. It is true that – since the fall of the Kamata- Cooch Kingdom the Rajbanshis had been started to lose their community identity. In the colonial period when Goalpara district was included in Assam in 1874, it really created a problem of identity for the Rajbanshis. Their identity question was further dependence during the partition of the country in 1947, Because Rangpur, the epicenter of the Rajbanshi life and culture was included in the East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh). The loss of Rangpur was irreparable. The first blow of 1874 and the second blow of 1947 had virtually aggravated the identity crisis. Nevertheless, the partition was not an unmixed blessing. It had provided an opportunity to the Rajbanshi leaders of Western Assam and North Bengal to restore their community consolidation partially. However, before we proceed to discuss the circumstances leading to the restoration of the community consolidation, we have to revive this period to worthwhile the issue.

its second session in 1928 held at Goalpara that the five thousand delegates of the session are fervently declaring that their language is Bengali.⁵⁶

Under this circumstance' the role of the Rajbanshis was pro-Assamese. They did not assert their linguistic on racial identity. The educated young Rajbanshis, such as Sarat Chandra Sinha, Raja Ajit Narayan Deb, Purnendu Narayan Singha and others have advocated the assimilation of the Rajbanshis with the Assamese.⁵⁷ Thus the difference between the Rajbanshis of Assam and their counter part in Bengal was created on these issues. There are many other issues, which accelerated the difference between them. They have already been discussed in the Chapter No. VII.

Immediately after the independence, an excellent opportunity had come to the Rajbanshi of Assam and West Bengal for re-union. The Government of India had appointed a Commission i.e. State Re-organization Committee in 1953 to meet the deviated linguistic status .But in this historic time the Rajbanshi community of Assam and the Rajbanshi community of Bengal could fail to wherever unity amongst themselves. On the contrary, a sharp and open division was displayed. As a result, the last chance of the community consolidation of the Rajbanshi was disappeared.

Let us explain the circumstances that destroyed the chance of community consolidation. Since the inclusion of Goalpara to the province of Assam in 1874 to the partition of India in 1947, Goalpara became a cause of disagreement between the Assamese and the Bengalese. This time, in addition to Goalpara, the Princely State of Cooch Behar also

It is unfortunate that the Bengali 'Bhadralok' of neither Calcutta nor the Rajbanshis social leaders of Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, and Goalpara raised any question on the inclusion of Goalpara into Assam. The same incident was happened during the partition of Bengal in 1904-1905 and the re-unification of Bengal in 1912. Therefore, the inclusion of Goalpara with Assam became a settled fact. However, the people of Goalpara were divided on its inclusion with Assam. The All Goalpara Association (an umbrella organization of the Zaminders of Goalpara) wanted merger with Bengal. In its Annual Session on 15 December 1918, the Association resolved that the district of Goalpara mainly identical in race, language, social customs, and systems of lands with Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar be placed under the same laws and administration with the district of Rangpur and Jalpaiguri.⁵³

It was also decided that the resolution be placed in the ensuing meeting of the Assam Association scheduled to be held at Goalpara towards the end of December, 1918.⁵⁴

The Assamese intelligentsias on the other hand, had a different view on this issue; they considered the district as an integral part of Assam. The intellectual like Lakshminath Bezbarua, eminent poet and son-in-law of the Tagore House of Jorasanko, Kolkata; Tarun Ram Phookan, the president of Assam Association strongly opposed against the resolution of inclusion of Goalpara with Bengal. In the Annual Session of Goalpara Association at Goalpara on 27-29 December 1918, Phookan emphatically declared, "the (Goalpara) district should never be taken away from Assam; if necessary the whole of Assam might be united with Bengal."⁵⁵ Raja Prashat Chandra Barua the president of the All Goalpara Association categorically stated in his presidential speech in

its second session in 1928 held at Goalpara that the five thousand delegates of the session are fervently declaring that their language is Bengali. ⁵⁶

Under this circumstance the role of the Rajbanshis was pro-Assamese. They did not assert their linguistic or racial identity. The educated young Rajbanshis, such as Sarat Chandra Sinha, Raja Ajit Narayan Deb, Purnendu Narayan Singha and others have advocated the assimilation of the Rajbanshis with the Assamese. ⁵⁷ Thus the difference between the Rajbanshis of Assam and their counterpart in Bengal was created on these issues. There are many other issues, which accelerated the difference between them. They have already been discussed in the Chapter No. VII.

Immediately after the independence, an excellent opportunity had come to the Rajbanshi of Assam and West Bengal for re-union. The Government of India had appointed a Commission i.e. State Re-organization Committee in 1953 to meet the deviated linguistic status. But in this historic time the Rajbanshi community of Assam and the Rajbanshi community of Bengal could fail to wherever unity amongst themselves. On the contrary, a sharp and open division was displayed. As a result, the last chance of the community consolidation of the Rajbanshi was disappeared.

Let us explain the circumstances that destroyed the chance of community consolidation. Since the inclusion of Goalpara to the province of Assam in 1874 to the partition of India in 1947, Goalpara became a cause of disagreement between the Assamese and the Bengalese. This time, in addition to Goalpara, the Princely State of Cooch Behar also

became an issue of tug of war between Assam and West Bengal. Before independence, the question of Cooch Behar did not come as an area of conflict as it was a Princely State. However, after the lapse of the paramount like the other Princely States, the fate of the Princely State of Cooch Behar also became an issue of hotbed discussion, whether Cooch Behar should be merged with West Bengal or Assam or holds the status of union territory. When it was decided that Cooch should be merged the neighboring province, their tug of war was started between West Bengal and Assam. The Assamese, intellectuals, the political parties have demanded the merger of Cooch Behar with Assam. The Bengali intellectuals, the political parties, on the other hand, demanded the inclusion of Goalpara with West Bengal.⁵⁸

It was the most critical time to the Rajbanshi community. It was an acknowledged fact that both Cooch Behar and Goalpara was predominantly a Rajbanshi region. Naturally, their savings and reactions were more important than to the Assamese and the Bengalese. Now, we are coming to discuss the role of the Rajbanshi leaders of Assam and Bengal during the most critical hours of that period to the Rajbanshi community.

The Rajbanshis of Goalpara wanted to stay in Assam but not to be a part of West Bengal. They never liked to be a part of West Bengal. Sree Sarat Chandra Singha, a young Rajbanshi political leader of Chapar in Goalpara district had organized a movement against the inclusion of Goalpara with West Bengal. When the members of the State Reorganization Commission went Assam to gauge the mind of the local people, the majority of Goalpara district, Rajbanshis under the leadership of Sarat Chandra Singha and the Goalpara immigrant Muslim under the

leadership of Muhammad Qamaruddin has organized a mass movement against the inclusion of Goalpara with West Bengal.⁵⁹ Besides, Sarat Chandra Singha, Kabir Ray Prodhan, Atul Koch, Purnendu Narayan Sinha, Madhab Rajbanshi, Shibendra Nath Koch have participated in this movement. They also demanded that Cooch Behar should be merged with Assam .Their slogan was that Assam should not be divided –“*Asamer Angachhed Ibno Bare –Amar Bhasa Asamiya*”⁶⁰

The Second group mostly consisted by the Bengali Hindus demanded the merger of Goalpara with West Bengal. Ramani Kanti Basu, a dweller of Dhubri was the leader of the group.⁶¹

The third group under the leadership of Santosh Barma of Gouripur has submitted a memorandum to the SRC for the creation of Kamatapur State.⁶² For the first time we found the demand of the Kamatapur state and it came from Assam. In the proposed Kamatapur State, they have included Goalpara of Assam and Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur of West Bengal. It was supported by Raja Ajit Narayan Deb, Raja of Sidli, Prakitesh Chandra Barma (Lalji) of Gauripur Raj family etc.⁶³

After the accession of Cooch Behar with the Indian unions, a section of the Rajbanshi of Cooch Behar wanted the inclusion of Cooch Behar with Assam. On the other hand a section of the Rajbanshis with Muslims wanted to join with Pakistan .(Khan Choudhury Amanatullah , the Revenue Minister of Cooch Behar State, Hakim Ahmed Hussain, SDO Mathabhangra Subdivision).⁶⁴ Another section of the Rajbanshi wanted to remain independent of the union of India (Satish Chandra Singh, the education Minister of Cooch Behar State).⁶⁵ But the most

respected Rajbanshi political personality and member of Lok Sabha, Shree Upendra Nath Barman of Jalpaiguri and Shree Umesh Chandra Mandal a Gandhian Rajbanshi pleader of Dinhata, Cooch Behar have firmly supported the merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal. By showing and presenting various arguments Upendra Nath Barman who have spearheaded a crusade against Assam over Cooch Behar. It was Upendra Nath Barman's demand, which greatly strengthened the claim of West Bengal. They have criticized Upendra Nath Barman for his opinion on Cooch Bihar. Even many of the Rajbanshis of Cooch Behar believed that Upendra Nath Barman had made mistake. The Assamese Rajbanshi writers are also critical on the Cooch Behar issue. Ambika Charan Sarkar a Rajbanshi of Assam unit work that due to weak leadership of Assamese people the intelligent Bengali people with the help of the central Government the old centre of the Kamrup Kingdom- the Ratnapith region was included with West Bengal.⁶⁶ Thus, the opportunity of re-unification of Goalpara with West Bengal was destroyed. If Goalpara came back in West Bengal in 1916, the course of the history of the history of Northern Bengal might have been different.⁶⁷ In support of this connection, we are presenting here just one point that if Goalpara had reunited with West Bengal, the Rajbanshis became the half of the population of North Bengal despite the influx of the refugees from the East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh). An excellent opportunity of re-unification of the Rajbanshi community was lost due to the lack of farsightedness of Sarat Chandra Singha and others. Had Sarat Chandra Singha been showed his commitment to community solidarity the course of the history of the Rajbanshi in the post SRC period might have been very different? It was the most turning points in the history of the Rajbanshi community of North Bengal and North East India in the Post Colonial phase.

However, some of the Rajbanshi leaders have secured important post of the state such as the post of Chief Minister (Sarat Chandra Singha 1974-1975 as a member of the Indian National Congress Party. He was the staunchest champion of the introduction of Assamese language every sphere of his life. He never exposed the cause of the Rajbanshi language of Rajbanshi identity at any stage of his political career. The second Rajbanshi political heavy weight was Golok Rajbanshi, who became the president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. Kabir Ray Pradhan and Bhumidhar Barman hold important portfolio in the cabinet of Hiteshwar Shakia Government. However, all these they got at the cost of the Rajbanshi formerly believed in the policy of assimilation and accommodation, not separation. It is true that the successive Assam Government has been trying to woo the sentiments of the Rajbanshi by declaring the birth day of Chila Ray, the legendary military general as a state holiday, and they founded the Second Bridge on Brahmaputra as Chila Rai Setu etc.

VII

It is an interesting and serious fact to be mentioned here that in the sphere of language, there is no universal uniformity among the Rajbanshis of the North Eastern Part of India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The Rajbanshis of North Bengal are demanding recognition for their language as distinctive form is called Rajbanshi/ *Kamatapuri* language, which separate from Bengali. In order to crystallize their demand a section of Rajbanshi intellectual of Northern Bengal organized a good number of socio-political and cultural movements throughout North Bengal that has been discussed in the Chapter No. V. However, in Assam

there is no utterance for their language identity. It is interesting to be noted here that the Rajbanshis of different region have been using different scripts to accommodate themselves to their region viz, in Assam the Rajbanshis use Assamese scripts, in West Bengal they use Bengali scripts while in Nepal the Rajbanshis use “Devanagari” Scripts and in Bihar they use Hindi scripts. In Bangladesh, there is no demand for Rajbanshi language, similarly in Nepal, Meghalaya, Bihar there is no separate linguistic identity question. This differentiation made the linguistic issue to be very complicated one and it is very tuff to be solved. This controversial linguistic issue accelerated the Rajbanshi identity crisis into a new phase while a section of Rajbanshi people namely KPP has made some radical departures in their objective.⁶⁸ Professor Girindra Narayan Ray observes, “It is not caste and religion determining the communitarian politics any longer. It is now culture and language that shaped the politic of difference from the dominant Bengali community as a Hindu *kshatriya* caste association to adopt another term.”⁶⁹ This section of the Rajbanshi have popularized the term “Kamata” having charged it with historical and cultural connotations. This claim of the KPP indicates the area the Kamata and the latter kings had ruled for centuries and where the indigenous people spoke the same language and shared the same culture. Ray Sahib Panchanan Barma, the most dominant socio- political leader popularly known as the father of the *kshatriya movement* called this language “Kamata Behari”. Purnendu Mohan Shanobis, a veteran writer in Rangpur Sahitya Parishad also followed him. Very recently Dharma Narayan Barma a retired Headmaster in his work “*A Step of Kamata Behari Language*” called it as “Kamata-Behari”.⁷⁰ This denomination emphasizes the determination of cultural identity not caste identity in terms of a region, language and culture. It is not the Rajbanshis alone but the local Muslims who were Rajbanshis, converted into Islam

as much as a number of other sections that subscribe to this language and culture. It is on the ground that these people to have formed a “Nationality”, and in terms of the principles of linguistic organization of state claim a different state. The name is suggested for the state as “Kamatapur” and the language as “Kamatapuri”.⁷¹ Professor Girindra Narayan Ray has observed rightly that the crux of the claim is contingent on challenging the dominant discourse, that subsumes the ‘Kamatapuri’ language into Bengali as one of its dialects and the ‘Kamatapuri’ people to be Bengali by acculturation and assimilation.⁷²

Indeed, that was once the Rajbanshi leaders through *Kshatriyahood* had aspired to merging into the *varna* Hindu hierarchy as Bengali. The latter leaders observed that this did not happen although that meant abolition of the true identity of the community. The upper caste Bengali Hindu society had never accepted them as “caste at all, although the official voice at times called them Bengali political expediency”. This issue led to vigorous attempt on the part of the ‘Kamatapuri’ leaders as well as the intellectuals of the community to establish their identity in terms of a politics of cultural difference that took pains to prove that their language was a different language from Bengali, not a distortion of it. Nor are their culture, food, habit, dress, and religious rituals in any way inferior to those of the Hindu Bengali. It take places them a shape of difference of the earlier called themselves ‘bratya’ or ‘fallen’ in terms of religious practices, rituals and other habits, and brought that they needed to pass through *shuddhi* or ritual purification in order to be incorporated into the *varna* fold. So, it is needed now for the new politics to turn the tide back from acculturation. However, in practice it propped to be difficult in a fast changing modern society where education, employment, and development are being carried on form the culturally dominant

position. That is why the educated middle classes of the Rajbanshis community were long unconvinced and still aloof from the political activities of the KKP, as much because of the long acculturation as because of the state terrorism unleashed on them from time to time.⁷³

Under this circumstance, a common question has been raised- What is the real identity of the Rajbanshis of North Eastern India? From the very beginning of the census operation, the Rajbanshis tried to establish their separation the Rajbanshis tried to establish their separate distinction from the Koches. Finally, they were recognized as '*Kshatriya*' in the official record of 1921 census. In this connection, from 1891 to 1923 the Rajbanshis social leaders vigorously carry on their social movement for social hierarchy status in *varna* fold system and several memorandums submitted to the different Government officials to establish their claim as "*Rajbanshi Kshatriya*". They neither identified themselves with the Koches as the same caste nor they included with the *Namasudras*; they were hundred percent sure about their identity as '*Kshatriyas*' and that is why they could able to organize such a successful social movement in favour of their social hierarchical status.⁷⁴

However, during the decade of eighty in the twentieth century a section of Rajbanshi community is trying to establish themselves as '*Kamatapuri*' instead of "*Rajbanshis*" and launched political movement on the basis of their language is so called "*Kamatapuri*" through North Bengal (Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, plains of Darjeeling district, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda) including lower Assam with the collaboration of All Koch Rajbanshi Students Union (AKRSU) of Assam. Based on their '*Kamatapuri*' language, the concerned section of the Rajbanshi demanded

Ray has observed that the politics of autonomy in a democratic and federal polity contains a necessary content of resistance for the efficacy of polity itself, and this is more so when it comes to the question of a region and a community in the face of cultural extinction.⁷⁵ Needless to say, after the partition of India the excessive pressure of immigration into the Northern Bengal created so many problems regarding social, economic, habitation, over population etc. to the local people. Under these pressures, the culture of once dominated indigenous people in the North Eastern part of India is going to be extinction directly or indirectly. The KPP and the other socio-political organization of the Rajbanshis community have tried in their limited way to put up this resistance. The organizations have been successful to rouse the ethnic emotions of the cultural community even in the face of a left progressive challenge in West Bengal. The KPP has especially successful to evolve the powerful discourse of the "Kamatapuri Nationality" based on a common culture, language, and region. However, the future of the movement both cultural and political does not make one very optimistic due to the lack of foresighted leadership.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. J.Wise; *Notes on the Races , Castes and Tribes of Eastern Benagal*, London, 1883; H.H.Rislay, *The Tribes and Caste of Bengal*, Vol. I, rpt, Calcutta, 1981; N.K. Dutta, *Origin and Growth of Caste in India*, Vol.,Vol. II ,Calcutta,1969; N.Ray,*Bangalir Itihas, Adi Parba, Vol.I, (Bengali)*, 3rd edn, Calcutta, 1980; N.K.Bose, *Some Aspects of Caste in Bengal*, in M. Singer (ed), *Traditional India:Structure and Change*, Philadelphia,1959; J.Sharma, *Caste Dynamics among the Bengali Hindus*, Calcutta, 1980; D. Mukherjee,*Jatibhedpratha O Unish Sataker Bangali Samaj(Bengali)*, Calcutta, 1981,; H.Sannyal ,*Social Mobility in Bengal*; S. Bandopadhyaya, *Caste Politics and the Raj,Bengal 1872-1937*, Calcutta,1990; Swaraj Basu, *Dynamics of a Caste Movement: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal 1910-1947*, New Delhi, 2003.
2. Hitesranjan Sannyal;*Social Mobility in Bengal*,Calcutta, 1981,p.36; Shekhar Bandopadhyaya; *Caste Politics and Raj:Bengal 1872-1937*,Calcutta, First Published 1990, pp.3-7.
3. Bandopadhyaya; *op. cit.*, p.53.
4. *Ibid*, p.95.
5. M.N.Srinivas; *Mobility in Caste System* in Milton Singer and B.S. Cohn(eds),*Structure and Change in Indian Society*, Chicago, 1968, p.194.
6. Bandopadhyaya; *op.cit.*, p.144.
7. Rowe,L. William; *The New Cauhans :A Caste Mobility Movement in North India* in James Silverberg, (ed) *Social Mobility in the Caste System in India*,The Hague, 1968, p. 55.

8. *Census of India, 1911*, Vol.V, Part I, p.440; text of some of these *vyavastha* may be found in Shyama Charan Sen Sharma, *Bangiya Baidya Jati* (in Bengali) Chittagong, 1330 B.S. pp.96, 165-167; Gurucharan Majumder, *Kayastha Kaustav in Bengali* (Calcutta, 1282 B.S; pp. 35-43; Sitikantha Smrititirtha, *Ugrakshatriya Samhita*, (In Brnagli), Calcutta, 1300 BS, appendix; Sureschandra Nath Majumder, *Rajguru Jogibansa Ba Rudra Brahmajatir Bibaran* (In Bengali) Kachhar, 1334BS, pp.207-212; also see Girischandra Basu, *Vyavasthapatramala*, (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1335 BS, Passim.
9. Modak; *Hitaishini, Agrahayan, Push*, 1336 B.S. *Jogisakha, Agrahayan* 1315 B.S. *Baishakh-Jaistha*, 1328 B.S. Shyamcharan Sen Sharma, *Bangiya Baidya Jati* (in Bengali) Chitagong, 1330 B.S., pp.66, 168; Girischandra Basu, *Kayastha Samajer Sanskar*, Calcutta, 1321 B.S. pp.78-85, 167-172; Sashibhusan Nandi Barma, *Kayasth Puran* (in Bengali) 2nd edn (ed) Girish Chandra Vidyalandkar ,Cal, 1335 B.S., pp.221, 339, 394; Sarat Chandra Biswas; *Sadgop Jati* (In Bengali) Chandannagore, 1328 B.S. ,Third part, pp.1-7; Sashibhusan Kundu, *Tilijatir Vaisyatva Praman*, p.23; Sibchandra Sil, *Ganda Subarnabanik* (in Bengali), Chinsurah, 1317 BS., p.53; Sitikantha Smriti Tirtha, *Ugra Kshatriya Samhita* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1300 B.S., pp.65-68.
10. Upendra Nath Barman; *Thakur Panchanan Barmar Jiban Charit*, First Published, 1379 B.S., 4th Edn, 1408 B.S. Jalpaiguri, pp.21-23; *Uttar Banger Sekal O Amar Jiban Smriti* (in Bengali), Jalpaiguri, 1392 B.S., pp.46-47.
11. Swaraj Basu; *op.cit.*, p.64.
12. Addressed by Panchanan Sarkar to First Conference of the Kshatriya Samiti held at Rangpur on 18-19 *Baishakh*, 1317 B.S. in *Thakur*

- Panchanan Smarak* (ed) Kshitish Chandra Barman, Calcutta, 2001, Published by the author (in Bengali) p. 134.
- 13.D. Nath; *The History of Koch Kindom*(1515-1615), Mittal, Delhi, 1989, p.5.
- 14.H.H.Risley; *Tribes and Caste of Bengal, Vol. I*, First Edn.1891, rpt. 1988, Calcutta, p.491.
- 15.Dharma Narayan Bhakti Shastri Sarkar; *Rai Sahib Panchanan*, 1391 B.S.,Bagora,p.22; Swaraj Basu; *op.cit.*, p.69.
- 16.Upendra Nath Barman; *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Itihas*,1941, Jalpaiguri, pp.59-60; Dharma Narayan Bhakti Shastri; *op.cit.*, pp.22-23; A.K. Ray, *Some Notes on the Kshatriya Movement in the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Vol. XX,No.1*, pp.52-53.
- 17.Ranjit Das Gupta; *Economy ,Society and Politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri, 1869-1970*; Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, p.9.
- 18.Upendra Nath Barman, *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Itihas, op.cit.*, pp.63-64; A.K. Ray; *Some Notes on the Kshatriya Movement in North Bengal, op. cit.*, pp.55-56; Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, General (Miscellaneous) , File, No. IC- 2G/11, B, March Progs nos. 27-41; Rajat Subhra Mukhopadhyaya; *Contradiction and Change in Social Identity of the Rajbanshis in Journal of Indian Anthropology and Socilogy Vol. 34. 1999*, pp. 134.
- 19.Basu; *op. cit.*, p.80.
20. A.K.Ray; *op. cit.*, p.53 .
- 21.Shekhar Bandopadhyaya; *Caste and Politics and the Raj: Bengal 1872-1937, op.cit.*, p.52.
- 22.G.B Appoint (Reforms, File No. IR-2 of 1933, April Progs Nos. 9-61, serial No. 9; G.B. Appoint (Reforms),File NO. IR-2 of 1933, April, 1934, Progs Nos. 9-61, Serial No. 10; G.B. Appoint (Reforms) ,File No. IR-2 of April , 1934 Progs Nos. 9-61, Serial No. II.

- 23.G.B. Appoint (Reforms) ,File NO. IR-2 of April, 1933 ,April 1934 ,Progs No. 9-61, Serial No. 12.
- 24.Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, 35th Session, Vol. XXXV, 1930, pp.763-6.
- 25.Shekhar Bandopadhya; *op. cit.*, p. 230.
- 26.Rajat Subhra Mukhapadhyaya; *op. cit.*, p.134.
- 27.Upendra Nath Barman; *op. cit.*, pp.62-63.
- 28.*Ibid*, p.64.
- 29.G.B., Appoint (Reforms),File No. IR-2 1933, April 1934, Progs Nos. 9-61, Serial No. 50.
- 30.Upendra Nath Barman; *op. cit.*, p.59.
- 31.*Ibid*, p.59.
- 32.Bidyut Chakraborty(ed); *Communal Identity in India; Its Construction and Articulation in the Twentieth Century*; New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2003, p.6.
- 33.Girindra Narayan Ray; *The Rajbanshi Identity Politics: The Post Colonial Passages* in Sailen Debnath (ed) *Social and Political Tensions in North Bengal* (since 1947), First Edn 2007, Siliguri, p. 161.
- 34.P.S.Dutta;*Movement for Scheduled Status in a Poly Ethnic Society: The Case of Koch –Rajbanshis of Assam*, Journal of North –East Indian Council for Social Science Research, 1987, Vol. II, pp. 29-39.
- 35.*Ibid*, pp. 29-39.
- 36.Rajat Subhra Mukhapadhyaya; *Contradiction, and Change in Social Identity of the Rajbanshis*, *op. cit*, p. 136.
- 37.*Gana Chabuk*, Bengali-Assamese Half-weekly Patrika (ed) Dilip Kumar Chakraborty,Dhubri,Vol. 36. No. 16, 26.02.03.
- 38.*Uttarbanga Sambad*, 10th March, 1996.
- 39.*Ibid*.

40. Personal meet with Sri Amar Ray Pradhan, Ex- M.P. from Cooch Behar Lokasabha Constituency on 06.03.2005.
41. *Gana Chabuk*, Bengali –Assamese Half weekly Patrika Published from Dhubri (ed) by Dilip Kumar Chakraborty, Vol. 36, No. 16, 26.2.03.
42. *Ibid*, Vol. 35, No. 72, 27.08.2002.
43. *Ibid*.
44. Shekhar Bandopadhyaya; *Caste, Politics and the Raj: Bengal 1872-1937, op., cit.*, p.81.
45. Rajat Subhra Mukhapadhyaya; *op. cit.*, p.136.
46. *Ibid*, p. 137.
47. Ananda Gopal Ghosh; *The Administrative Reorganization of Bengal and Assam in 1874 and its impact upon the Rajbanshi Identity : Question of Northern Bengal and Western Assam* in Sailen Debnath (ed) *Social and Political Tensions in North Bengal (Since 1947)*, First Edn, 2007. N.L Publishers, Siliguri, pp. 131-132.
48. Amalendu Guha; *Planter Raj to Swaraj : Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics of Assam 1826-1947*, First Publication 1977, rept. 1988, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, p. 28.
49. Ananda Gopal Ghosh; *op., cit.*, p.134.
50. *Ibid*, pp.134-135.
51. *Ibid*, p. 136.
52. *Ibid*, p. 136.
53. H.K. Barpujari; *Political History of Assam*, (ed) Vol. I, 1826-1919, Government of Assam, 1977, p.232.
54. *Ibid*, p.232.
55. *Ibid*, p. 233.
56. *Gana Chabuk, op.cit.*, Autumn Number, 17.10. 1998.
57. Ananda Gopal Ghosh; *op. cit.*, p. 140.

- 58.A Memorandum on Maintenance of Statusque of Cooch Behar and Re-amalgation of the Goalpara District in Assam with West Bengal, submitted to the State Re- organization Commission by the Cooch Behar District Congress Committee on 16th May, 1955.
- 59.*Desh*- Weekly Bengali Literary Magazine 11.05.91.
- 60.*Smriti Grantha*, - Chander Dinga, Assam Sahitya Sabha, 63 Session Bilashiparta 1997.
- 61.*Ibid*.
- 62..*Ibid*.
- 63.Ananda Gopal Ghosh; *op.cit.*, p.145.
- 64.*Janamat* (ed) Charu Chandra Sanyal; 31st Bhadra, 1355 B.S.
- 65.*Ibid*.
- 66.Ambika Charan Sarkar;*Koch Rajbanshi Jatir Itihas Aru Sanskriti*, 1st edn 1969, 2nd edn,1993,Assam, p.143.
- 67.Ananda Gopal Ghosh, *op.cit.*, p.146.
- 68.Girindra Narayan Ray; *The Rajbanshi Identity Politics: The Post colonial Passage* in S. Debnath (ed) *op.cit.*, p. 167.
- 69.*Ibid*, p.167.
- 70.Dharma Narayan Barma; *A Step to Kamata Behari Language*, Tufanganj, 1991, pp. 21-48.
- 71.Chattered Demands of the KPP.
- 72.Girindra Narayan Ray; *op.cit.*, p. 168.
- 73.*Ibid*, p.169.
- 74.Ananda Gopal Ghosh; *Aspasta Itihas O Jati Parichaya Sankater Shikarer Khoje: Prasanga Uttarbanga*(in Bengali) *Kiratbhumi*, 1408 B.S. pp.5-13.
- 75.*Ibid*, p.12.
- 76.Girindra Narayan Ray; *op. cit.*, p.172.