

## **CHAPTER - III**

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### **Socio Political Movement of the Rajbanshis up to 1947**

Some crucial changes had come to the socio-economic structure of North Bengal in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of the important consequences of this change was that the Rajbanshis or the sons of the soil, who once strengthened their grip in the social and economic fields, came under the subjugation of newly born upper class people. There was a vast difference of culture between the Rajbansi and the upper class gentry. Among the Rajbanshis, the elite (the educated section among the Rajbanshis) played an effective part to rise up the community consciousness with a view to putting into active use the members of their caste for collective mobility. Now the question arises in mind why the Rajbanshis asserted themselves for creating a new identity and in what way they tried to pour the consciousnesses among the other members of the community. A satisfactory answer to this question is to be searched in the chapter.

The declaration of the ‘Kshatriya’ identity by the Rajbanshis was not new before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We have enough references that the Rajbanshis spoke of their royal lineage and claimed Kshatriya status in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>1</sup> towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this demand got more spirit and the Rajbanshis started an organized movement in order to fulfill their claim from the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the Rajbansi caste history and the Government records we can draw a picture of this growing caste movement in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The institution of caste got recognition as the central point of Hindu Society. The identity of a man mainly depends on his caste affiliation. Some expressive transformations took place in social outlook with the change of social values. But caste still preserved its tradition in determining the model of social and cultural interaction in Indian society, though its rules and regulation varied from

region to region. In Bengal the caste system was not very rigid in comparison to Southern and Western parts of India. It still occupied an important position in determining social behavioral norms. Barring this, caste was also defined as an important mobilizing power, in the absence of any other powerful means of mobilization for socio-political movement.<sup>2</sup> Before going to this question of continued importance of caste in society it is very much essential to note the caste structure in Bengal.

There is a host of historical literatures on the various sides of caste system in Bengal.<sup>3</sup> Out of the four popular varnas i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra, only the Brahmin and the Sudras could be seen. But within the broad structure of Varna, the caste hierarchy could be further divided into six categories centering the notion of ritual purity, i.e. (a) the Brahmins (b) the Baidyas and the Kayasthas, (c) the Nabasakh castes, (d) the Ajalchal castes and (e) the castes between the Nabasakh and the Ajalchal groups, and (f) the Antyaja castes.<sup>4</sup> Still now this caste-based ritual rank had an effective bearing on the shape of social interaction. During the colonial rule the social outlook towards caste was not much altered. ‘Prescriptions of caste still determined the patterns of social interaction and dominated inter-personal group relations of the Bengali Hindus.<sup>5</sup> Even in the Bengali Hindu society caste played an important role in regulating social relationships particularly marriage system. Marriage between the same castes was only allowed in society. Caste pride was very prominent among the upper castes who thought themselves as superior than the lower castes. Any little crime was regarded as belonging to lower caste culture. If a person behaved in a rough way, he was called chandal. There were such many examples of daily practices in Bengali life which prominently expresses the state of mind of the upper castes towards the lower castes.<sup>6</sup> this type of mentality often created social tension. As there was no alternative means to ventilate their demands, the deprived lower castes looked for a solution by claiming themselves as higher caste. If we find at the Rajbanshis in the context of social reality, it will be easier to comprehend the origin of Rajbanshis’ eagerness to declare them as Kshatriya.

In the social hierarchy of Bengal the Rajbanshis had been given the same place with the Namasudras, the pods and the other antyaja castes. Among the Rajbanshis who were much more advanced both economically and educationally, were not ready to think themselves as lower caste and stood bravely in favour of their Kshatriya status. Besides the Rajbanshis, many other lower and intermediary castes in Bengal and other parts of India were also claiming higher caste status at that time. There were mainly two reasons for changing their attitude.

The colonial rule had collapsed the traditional economy and thereby declined the economic basis of the Indian caste system. The British rule had created new avenues for job and an urban civilization was started. Urban influence and modern education had extended the worldview of some section of the lower castes and inspired them to find out ways and means to correct the existing social irregularity. The colonial caste policy gave the guidance to see a way out, staying within the caste system. Consequently the difference between the upper and lower caste ‘was essentially a social and cultural dichotomy, was now given a definite political shape.<sup>7</sup>

It can be said without any hesitation that the colonial policy directed a new path in order to serve the interests of certain under-privileged groups from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This policy undoubtedly strengthened the caste identities and indirectly encouraged to mobilize along caste lines. It all began with education as the Government had declared that it was going to assist those ‘who belonged to the very lowest classes of the Hindu social system or ... were outside the pale of caste altogether.’ The Government ardently took care for the schooling of the children of these classes.

Special schools were founded in the backward areas and for spreading education the Government also extended its hand for economic help.<sup>8</sup> Special grants were sanctioned in order to build hostels for various backward classes like Namasudras, the Jogis, the Rajbansi etc.<sup>9</sup> The Government made an arrangement to enlist the names of depressed classes and made condition for the reservation of jobs at Governmental institution for the members of these classes. In this matter the Government made a notification in 1923 stating that it would nominate

candidates who belong to the backward classes and they would be appointed according to the provisions of reservation in Governmental jobs.<sup>10</sup> In the legislative council and other local representative bodies, the seats were also reserved for these classes in the same way. The Morley –Minto Reforms in 1909 and the Government of India Act 1919 did the same for the depressed classes and extended their right of special representation by nomination. In this way the colonial Government gave protection to the depressed classes and recognized caste as an official category. This policy also recognized caste identities which had roused a new spirit among the lower classes to work for caste solidarity, in order to assert their own separate identities. This led to social isolation and created tensions between the upper and lower castes.

The local social situation was also responsible for the Rajbanshis' assertion of a Kshatriya identity and their effort to build up caste solidarity. With the habilitation of upper caste Hindu gentry in Rajbanshi dominated areas of North Bengal, equilibrium of local power structure was totally changed. In course of time the upper caste gentry had strengthened their grip in the arena of society, economy and politics and emerged as a powerful landholding class. On the other hand, the Rajbanshi had failed to establish their position in the society. There was an extreme difference between the cultural practice of these two classes and the upper caste gentry treated the Rajbanshis as 'backward' uncultured and even antyaj<sup>11</sup> they also referred the Rajbanshis as 'bahe' which was a cultural distortion of the word 'babah'. By it the Rajbanshis generally called a person.<sup>12</sup> They also referred the outsiders as 'Bhatia' which means an outsider to their land. Thus, the tendency of cultural superiority of the immigrant upper caste Hindus and their mentality to hate the Rajbanshis had closed a friendly relationship between the two groups. Consequently the caste solidarity among the Rajbanshis promoted.

This sense of isolation among the Rajbanshis made stronger by the insults and humiliation which they had to face with the Brahmanical culture. In the Rajbanshi caste literature and also in other contemporary accounts there are various examples of insulting the Rajbanshis by the outsiders. The Rajbanshis had no right to enter the places of worship, kitchens of the upper caste households.

Even water was not taken from their hands by the upper caste Hindus.<sup>13</sup> According to Charu Chandra Sanyal writer of the ‘History of Jalpaiguri District,’ casteism at that time strictly existed in that district and both the castes used to take seats at different rows on the occasion of any public lunch or dinner. Although the Rajbanshis were referred as ajalachal and they had no permission to use the wells of the upper castes with the starting of the Kshatriyaization movement, these superstitions were disappeared gradually.<sup>14</sup>

But this was regarded as an offensive process. Upendranath Barman, in his biography of Panchanan Barma, has told that one day lawyer Panchanan Barma by error had gone to the court room wearing the toga or the cap of some Maitra who was higher in caste and a colleague in the bar. When he returned the toga to Mr.Maitra, he became angry and threw it saying ‘I hate to use toga used by a Rajbanshi’. In another example, Sri Barman mentions that one day a Rajbanshi student of Rangpur Normal School boarding house had entered the kitchen of the Boarding House to know from the cook if the food was prepared or not. But on this excuse, two or three boys of upper caste Hindu classes denied to accept food. At last they threw it outside as a food of cows and fresh food was prepared for them<sup>15</sup> in his autobiography Sri Barman also told another bitter experience. During his student life (1916-20) at the Cooch-behar Victoria College Hostel there were two dining halls where the students attended according to their own will. But one day the hostel Superintendent served a notice declaring that one hall would be reserved for the Brahmins and other for the Kayasthas. Special arrangement would also be made for the students of other classes for accepting food. Sri Barma protested strongly against this caste differentiation and brought the matter to the notice of state administrator and also College Principal. They also took an effective step in this matter. This was the first bitter experience of casteism which Sri Barma had to face at first.<sup>16</sup>Another example is that at the Rajbanshi college hostel a Rajbanshi student was not allowed to the hostel dining hall, and had to eat their meal at their hostel room and also they had to wash their own utensils after taking meal.<sup>17</sup> The other Rajbanshis have narrated the accounts of similar experiences of caste hatred.<sup>18</sup> Faced with such humiliation, the elite among the

Rajbanshis were eager for collective mobilization in order to achieve their aims. They were also aspiring for Government jobs and representation in different self-governing institutions. But they had failed to compete with the educated upper caste elites who were already strengthening their power in North Bengal. Thus the desire for higher social status and political power induces the Rajbansi elites to raise caste consciousness among the Rajbanshis with a view to launch a well-organized movement for social justice.

The direct factor for mobilizing the Rajbanshis and to demand a Kshatriya status was the government policy of numbering Hindu castes in the Census Report on the principle of ‘social precedence as organized native public opinion’. L.S.S.O’ Mally wrote that‘ ... there was a general idea in Bengal that the object of the census is not to show the number of persons belonging to each caste, but to fix the relative status of different castes and to deal with questions of social superiority .... This warrant of precedence gave rise to considerable agitation at the time and proved legacy of trouble.’<sup>19</sup>

The Census operation had created an idea among the Rajbanshis and other lower castes if they could enlist their name in the census reports in the class of twice born they will get recognition in the indigenous society. So this wrong idea of legitimacy that census gave birth in local society persuaded the quick growth of caste associations and caste movements. This also had a great impact on the Rajbanshis as well. A.K.Roy has observed-the origin of Kshatriya movement could be located in the hatred and ill-treatment received by the community at the hands of the upper castes of the Hindu society. But the immediate cause of this movement was census of India, 1891<sup>20</sup> In a nutshell, Brahmanical cultural domination, British lower caste politics and the social changes brought about by British rule were responsible for Rajbanshis’ attempts to claim a Kshatriya descent.

The Rajbansi caste leader followed the same way like the other mobile castes in Bengal. The common feature was to demand affiliation to one of the three twice born varnas, and then in support of that status, to change the models of religio-culture behaviors, to create legends to prove their claimed origin and to

request the pandits for favorable rulings.<sup>21</sup> On the one hand following Socio-religious and cultural reforms the Rajbanshi leaders wanted to raise a consciousness among their caste people. On the other hand, they became eager to legitimize their demand by appealing to the traditional guardian of social hierarchy—the pandits, to the modern reformers of social rank- the colonial rulers.<sup>22</sup>

The Rajbanshis started their movement for Kshatriyaization depending on a myth to prove their Kshatriya status. The legend, noted in the Census Report of 1901 considering their origin as follows:

The Rajbanshis of North Bengal wished to be styled Varna or Bratya Kshatriya and to be classed amongst the twice born castes. They speak of various stories of their origin. The favourite one being the well worn legend that their ancestors were the descendants of Kshatriyas who discarded their sacred threads when fleeing the wrath of parusrama.<sup>23</sup>

The myth is constructed more detailed in the Rajbanshi accounts. This community claimed that they were originally the Kshatriya Varna. At the time of the complete destruction of the Kshatriyas by sage Parasuram, they gave up their ancestor's land and took shelter in a place called Paundradesh, which belonged to the districts of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Bagula and the adjoining areas. With a view to conceal their Kshatriya identity, they left their seared thread and began to live with the local people and addressed themselves as Bhanga Kshatriyas or the Fallen Kshatriyas.<sup>24</sup> Sri Rati Ram Das - a famous Rajbanshi poet in his 'Jog Sangeet' (a kind of palagan or folk song) has told that after threatening of Parasuram to the Kshatriyas, they came to North Bengal and lived there as 'Bhanga Kshatriya Rajbanshi'.<sup>25</sup> Again in the introduction of their memorandum to the Indian Statutory Commission, the Rajbanshi commented that, they (the Rajbanshi Kshatriya) were once the ruling race in this part of the country, sometimes with divided territories and different capitals, their last capital being Kamata Behar known as also Gosanimari is now with the state of Cooch-behar. About 450 years ago sudden aggression made by Muslim invaders from Bengal brought about secretly by some non Kshatriya traitors surprised and made away with the late

Raja Kamteswar, leaving the people quite concerned and without a recognized head.<sup>26</sup>

Though the Rajbanshis were the descendants of Cooch-behar royal family, the Rajbansi caste leaders did not equate themselves with this Cooch-behar royal family because the tribal origin of the Cooch-behar royal family was well-equipped in historical narratives. In order to avoid such genealogy the Rajbansi caste leaders had depicted their origin from the legends.

The creation of myths was followed by request for the reform of socio-religious and cultural habits of the community. Hara Kishor Adhikari, one of the publicists for the caste movement, referred three direct paces for the upliftment of the status of the Rajbansi community. There was (a) support of Kshatriya like customs. (b) Decreasing of the period of asauch or ceremonial mourning after bereavement and (c) adoption of Kshatriya titles like Barma, Roy etc. By dint of the existing ones like Sarkar, Das, Mandal etc.<sup>27</sup>

Another Rajbansi, Chandreswar Roy, mentioned some other steps to uplift their social status. He told his caste brethren not to permit their women to wander around the market like the caste Hindu. In the same way widow- remarriage was to be abolished. The food items which were not taken by Hindu religion were not to be shared by the Rajbanshis either.<sup>28</sup> At the same time attempt was also made to obtain favourable rulings from the pandits of different places in support of their demand to Kshatriya origin and their authority to put off sacred thread.<sup>29</sup>

These reform Endeavors' had affected a small section and persuaded them to furnish their social behaviour like the Kshatriya model. But very soon the Rajbansi leaders felt that this movement for Kshatriyaization could not be successful without a proper organization. Side by side the development of associations by other castes also influenced them very much. But before going in details it is very much necessary to note this matter that in what way the Rajbansi caste leaders recognized themselves as Kshatriyas in the census reports.

The Rajbansi leaders at the period of every census tried to convert the census officials about the legality of their claim for a new identity. It began with

the 1891 census, when the Government made an attempt to take the Rajbanshis and the Koches as category of the same castes. According to Upendra Nath Barman, this order hurt the caste sentiment of the Rajbanshis and they began a movement within the community.<sup>30</sup> When the Census officials refused to recognize them as Kshatriya, they rejected to fill up the census returns and under the presidentship of Hara Mohan Roy, the zaminder of Shyampur in Rangpur district formed an association called ‘Rangpur Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Bidhayani Sabha.’ According to a meeting of the sabha, a protest letter was despatched to the District Magistrate on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1891. The District Magistrate had discussed with the local pandits about this matter and wanted their opinion. The pandit Raj Jadaveshwar Tarkaratna, on behalf of local pandits, assured the District Magistrate about the superiority of manners and customs of Rajbanshis than the Koches. He also gave verdict that the rituals and ceremonies of the Rajbanshis were same like the caste Hindus. After it Skye-the District Magistrate gave an order stating that from now the Rajbanshis would be regarded as Bratya Kshatriya in all government deeds. Against this order a few Zaminders and upper caste elites protested strongly. But there was no change in the Government order.<sup>31</sup>

Though the District Magistrate’s order had gone in favour of Rajbanshis, the census report of 1901 again classified the Rajbanshis and the Koches as members of the same caste.<sup>32</sup>

At the time of the next Census (1910), the Rajbanshis again continued their movement for recognizing themselves as Kshatriyas. In this context, a large meeting was held at Rangpur on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1910. Sri Madhusudan Roy, a pleader of Jalpaiguri became the president in the meeting. The meeting was attended by the representatives of Jalpaiguri, Cooch-behar, Rangpur, Dinajpur and other districts of Bengal. The delegates of the community met Sir Lancelot Hare, the lieutenant Governor of East Bengal and Assam at Dacca and the Census Commissioner, E.A.Gait, at Calcutta and gave them a memorandum stating their demands and grievances. About 2000 Rajbanshis had signed the memorandum. The Rajbanshis of various districts made an application to the District Magistrates in order to recognize them as Kshatriyas and differentiate them from the Koches. They also

applied to allow them to use the respectable titles like Burma, Roy etc. Except Cooch-behar all other districts granted their application. At last under the guidance of E.W.Dentith — Cooch-behar state superintendent, the royal officials of Cooch-behar conceded their application. The Rajbanshis became successful and fulfilled their claim as Kshatriya in the final report of 1911 census, where they got recognition as a separate Hindu caste, ‘Rajbanshi’ with ‘Kshatriya’.<sup>33</sup> At the census operations of 1921, they again made an expedition and applied to the Census Authorities to recognize them as only ‘Kshatriya’ in place of Rajbanshi Kshatriya.<sup>34</sup>

Thus on the basis the issue of Census the Rajbanshi leaders wanted to strengthen their position in social hierarchy only and to rise a community consciousness among the Rajbanshi, which could be further develop through the processes of ‘Sanskritization’ and ‘Westernization’. The process was completed with the creation of a caste association and the agenda was taken for the construction and assertion of this new identity.

Before the establishment of Kshatriya Samity the Rajbanshis felt the necessity of forming an association of their own. In the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Haramohan Roy, the Rajbanshi zaminder of Rangpur had fulfilled the aspiration of Rajbanshis founding an association named ‘Rangpur Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Bidhayani Sabha’. But this was only the association of some elites. It had no social base. Consequently the organization had no impact on the community. But the developing movement and the census operations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it made easy to some Rajbanshi leaders to form a broader association of their own which could be able to voice their grievances. Among the Rajbanshi leaders who took the Rajbanshis under the banner of such association, was Sri Panchanan Barma. Under his active guidance the Kshatriya Samity was established in 1317 B.S. (1910) at Rangpur. Its goal was to put forward the matter of social and political mobilization among the Rajbanshis.

The foundation of this Samity gave a new path to the Rajbanshi Community. The first meeting of the Samity was commenced at Rangpur and almost 400 members from Rangpur, Goalpara, Cooch-behar, Jalpaiguri and

Dinajpur were present in the meeting. Madhusudan Roy, a pleader of Jalpaiguri became the president of the meeting. Sri Panchanan Barma was then chosen as secretary. In his popular address Sri Barma spoke about the aims and objectives of the Samity,<sup>35</sup> which he wrote in detail in his letter to the District Magistrate of Rangpur, on 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1924. ‘The Kshatriya Samity,’ Barma wrote to his letter ‘aims at the religious, social, intellectual, physical and general progress of the community.’ It was mainly connected with the welfare of every direction of the Kshatriya Community, but not connected with the welfare of India.<sup>36</sup> The Samity thereafter was interested for the social regeneration of the Rajbanshi community through religious and cultural reforms. The Samity believed that group solidarity was very much necessary for all round progress of Rajbanshi Community. The samity also wanted to generate a community spirit and sense of pride among its members and rousing in them the consciousness of a constructed glorious past.

Later, the Samity was doing the registration and also extended its own constitution to control the different activities. Gradually all Rajbanshis became the members of the Kshatriya Samity. But the Article 14 of the constitution had classified them into three categories i.e. Manya, Ganya and Sadharan. Any Rajbanshi who conveyed hundred rupees or more than at a time to Samiti’s fund was considered as a Manya Sabhya or a respectable member. Those who gave Rs.2/- each as annual donation were called Ganya Sabhya or notable members. Barring these two categories the rest members or Sadharan Sabhya.<sup>37</sup> There was a governing body of the Samity which was called Sansad. The members of the Sansad were nominated every year from the members of the samity named Ganya and manya Sabha.

With a view to arriving to the Rajbanshi peasantry, the Samity organized a multilayered structural set up. The structure was:-

Kshatriya Samity,

- i) Mahamandali (in each sub-division)
- ii) Mandali (consisting of one, two or more village)
- iii)Antarmandali (consisting of some paras)

The organization of villages under different sub-units was the most interesting feature of the Samity. Among the various units in a village organization top was the Mandali and at the bottom was Patti. One gadiani was formed taking ten or twelve patties and five or seven gadianes had formed a ghata. There was a pramanick or pattanayaka in each Patti. A ghata or Mandali was organized taking five or seven gadianis and the pattanayakas.<sup>38</sup> The main activity of Mandalis was to run socio-religious reforms within the community, to advice its different social functions and to give energy to the common people for accepting social practices maintaining their social status. The Samity also gave appointment to the preachers or pracharaks for the same purpose.<sup>39</sup> The representative of the different units and sub-units had submitted annual progress reports of their activities at the annual conference of the Samity and this was regarded as a part and parcel of their accountability to the main Kshatriya Samity. Thus by 1926 about three hundred local units had been forming all over North Bengal, which tells us that the Kshatriya Samity was successful in developing its organizational network at every nook and corner with a view to mobilizing the common Rajbanshi peasants as their supporters.<sup>40</sup>

Barring the peasants, careful attempt was made to raise caste consciousness among the Rajbanshi students so that they can participate in the Rajbanshi caste movement. In this context, Kshatriya Chatra Samity was founded in the year of 1917. All Rajbanshi students were requested to take the membership of this association. The main organizational body of this association was formed consisting of the representatives from all the districts and students of each school and colleges nominated one representative each and sent this list of its members to the head association.<sup>41</sup> In fact, the Kshatriya Chatra Samity was the sister of the Kshatriya Samity and took part in all its social and cultural reform programmes.

From 1920 onwards, the Kshatriya Samity began to publish a monthly journal called Kshatriya. Its main purpose was to reconstruct an imaginative history of the Rajbanshi Kshatriyas, to appeal the present generation inorder to rouse their Kshatriya Spirit and to make strong the bonds of community solidarity.

Through this journal the motto of ‘Kshatriyaization’ was also preached. According to the Samity leader, the most important purpose was religious reform. Sri Shyama Prasad Barma, one Rajbanshi leader wrote, religion was the source of progress of a caste. By no means, wrote Barma, they should give up their traditional religion—the religion of the Kshatriyas.<sup>41</sup> If this Kshatriya dharma was to be practiced, the community, in the true sense of the term would get back its lost glory.

Following this thinking, the first crucial step of the Kshatriya Samity was to organize the Milankshetras or ritual congregation at various places for the Upanayan Sanskar or the ceremony of ritual rebirth, was written in the Shastras for the men of the Kshatriya varna. In 1911, the second annual conference of the Kshatriya Samity was held at which a suggestion was given for putting up the sacred thread to the Rajbanshis but no concrete resolution was passed. It was determined that the view of the Brahman Pandits from various places would be accepted in this context and their rulings would be given among the members of the community for constructing a suitable public opinion. So consequently the pandits of Mithila, Benaras, Calcutta, Nabadwip and Kamrup had given their opinion which was distributed among the members of the Samity, presenting its third annual conference. The secretary of the Samity took the responsibility of deciding the time and place for the organization of a mass thread wearing function. Accordingly in the month of Magh 1319 B.S. (1912 ) at a place named Debiganj in Jalpaiguri district, at the side of the river Karotoa, the pandits of Nabadwip, Mithila and Kamrup gave sacred thread to the Rajbanshi according to the rule of the Hindu Shastras and the ceremony continued for three successive days. Following this similar Milankshetras in various districts was formed at which many more Rajbanshis accepted sacred thread which would indicate their Kshatriya status. For example, in the year of 1923-24 Sri Panchanan Barma- the Secretary of kshatriya Samiti came to Maldah. He had gone with Karpur Madal at various places of Habibpur and Gazole. There he delivered a lecture about the importance of wearing sacred thread among the Rajbanshis of different areas. Consequently many Rajbanshis had selected place of Mahamilan-kshetra and

began to wear sacred thread. From 1916-1924 the Kshatriyaization movement started in Maldah but failed to achieve any success.

Side by side in the year of 1920 under the co-operation of Gobinda Chandra Roy, Premhari Barman, Sailaja Kanta Roy etc. the sacred thread wearing day was observed at Debiganj village on the bank of river Atreyi. The secretary of the Kshatriya Samiti was present on that day. In 1927, at the place named Jaulokahar under the Thana of Kushmandi the Mahamilan-Kshetra was prepared and about two thousand Rajbanshis wore sacred thread. In Jalpaiguri on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 1912 under the leadership of Panchanan Barma, Harikishor Barma and Kamini kumar Singha Roy many Rajbanshis put on sacred thread at the village named Peralbari of Debiganj thana. In this ceremony some Rajbanshis came from Cooch-behar and joined to it.<sup>42</sup> The wearing of sacred thread was regarded as a goal in order to put forward the kshetriya movement. Special importance was given to the usefulness of observing religious practices of the community according to the verdict of the Hindu sashtras. An earnest request was also made to abide by the rulings of the Brahmin priest, who were invited to different social ceremonies in order to play their priestly role.<sup>43</sup> Tolls were established in various places in order to develop religious education among the Rajbanshis and the Kshatriya Samity also took Brahmin priests from abroad to run proper shastric rituals among the Rajbanshis mass.<sup>44</sup> Besides this, regular rituals of worship which were practiced by the kshatriyas such as Gayatri, Sandhya puja, Achman, Gita path etc. are also introduced. The kshatriya Samity published a host of pamphlets with a view to giving the details of these rituals which was hoped to be put in practice by the members of the community in their daily life. But the most important feature of this process of religious reform was the beginning of the worship of Goddess Chandi by Panchanan Barma. It was determined at every annual conference that Goddess Chandi would be worshipped as the symbol of power and power was regarded as the basic quality of the kshatriyas.<sup>46</sup>

Another important aspect of the Rajbansi movement was the gradual awareness about protecting of the dignity of women. Following the upper class model of feminine mentality, the Kshatriya leaders also prayed to make some

changes in the existing practices in their society in which the Rajbansi women enjoyed much more freedom and equality. Consequently the parda system was introduced and they did not allow their women to go to market. This type of norms was considered as a symbol of high status.<sup>47</sup> This was nothing but an attempt to lessen the freedom of Rajbansi women. The woman had lost their status and became a subject of protection by others. This was regarded by the leaders of the kshatriya Samity an important concern to protect their women particularly from the Muslim gundas. The matter repeatedly placed the agenda of the annual conferences of the kshatriya Samity and there were ardent appeals through the journal named Kshatriya to the members of the community to become watchful to protect their women. A suggestion was given by Sri panchanan Barma in 13th annual conference of the kshatriya Samity for the establishment of volunteer groups with appropriate training in every village mandali to protect women from hooligans. Everybody in the kshatriya Samity had accepted the proposal. In order to arise the kshatriya spirit for protecting women, Panchanan Burma wrote a fiery poem in local dialect whose name was ‘Dangdhari Mao (mother with the power to protect).<sup>48</sup>

The matter of abduction of women had become really more general relation.<sup>49</sup> It was a developing and in reality a more psychological matter of the Hindus all over Bengal and India. The dread of the Muslim abductors was really more metaphorical than real. Women were regarded as the emblem of chastity of the community and abduction of women by Muslims was considered as an open insult to the community pride. The Hindu Mahasabha took initiative in this respect all over India and urged both the administration and the Hindus to save the dignity of their women from Muslim.<sup>50</sup> The local news papers also presented the matter. For instance, the sarathi, a news paper publishing from Calcutta in December 1923 wrote ‘in broad daylight turbulent Musalman badmasas’ kidnap women and brutally outraged them, while like helpless persons we read it in the papers. If government is incompetent, the oppressed people will be compelled to take the place of the avenger’<sup>51</sup> However, the government opinion in this respect was totally different. In reply to a question which was raised by Panchanan Burma in the

Legislative council on the women abduction issue in Rangpur, H.L. Stephonson, who was in charge of the police station had placed the figures of abduction cases in different sub-divisions of Rangpur. From the figures it is known that it was not only the Muslims alone who played the role of abductors, nor were only the Hindu women abducted always.<sup>52</sup> Thus, entering into the procedure of ‘sanskritization’ the Rajbanshi caste leaders accepted the communal idiom of the dominant Hindu culture and chastity of women as its sign. However this also encouraged them to gather all from their community and raised into it a dependable degree of militancy.

However the movement for Kshatriyaization was not only limited to the arena of upper caste culture or religious behavior. The secular ideas of community formation were not thus regarded, though often such attempts were also shown in cultural symbolic codes. For instance, endeavours were continuously made in different ways to revive the Kshatriyas martial spirit and to reawaken the community through educational reforms.<sup>53</sup> In order to develop spirit among the Rajbansis the Kshatriya Samity attempted to encourage the youths to join the army citing examples of those heroes of the Rajbansi community who had earned fame in the past. About 400 Rajbanshis had responded to such appeals and joined as soldier in the First World War.<sup>54</sup> Sri Panchanan Barma argued that the Rajbanshis had included in the war considering it as their sole duty. He begged earnestly the Bengal Government to make a separate regiment for the Rajbanshis.<sup>55</sup> Side by side new jobs were created exclusively for them. The strategy of Rajbanshi mobilization was more expressed in their leaders’ mentality towards education and public employment.

The Rajbanshi leaders knew quite well about the backwardness of the community and also about the fact that without educational improvement the community would not feel the value of social reform. So the Samity adopted a host of steps to develop educational spirit among the members of the Rajbanshi community. Among them the financial help for the needy students, construction of hostels, and the rise of consciousness among the farmers about the value of education for their children must be mentioned. In this context, the Samity had

repeatedly appealed to the Government for giving aid for their education. It also depended on self help as well. It is known from the report of the 16<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Kshatriya Samity that the Samity had provided financial help to about 70 students.<sup>56</sup> The Samity also raised from among its members with a view to constructing a hostel for the Rajbanshi students in the Rangpur district school. The members of the Samity also realized if the Government had employed some of the educated Rajbanshis, more people would be enthusiastic to take education. So, Panchanan Barma ardently appealed to the Government to give some special educational privileges to the Rajbanshis with regards to the matter of public employment like the Muslims. According to him, it was very much essential to develop education among them for the gradual improvement of their social status.<sup>57</sup>

Side by side the leader also felt the need of material welfare of the peasantry. In this respect the leader of the community also tried to make a fund for the general welfare of the community. They also lunched a financial company called the ‘Barma Company’. It was situated at Gaibandha in Rangpur district. The primary objective of the company was to supply loan to the poor during emergency, so that they could be able to protect themselves against landlords and money lenders.<sup>58</sup> A Kshatriya bank was also established in Rangpur. All these attempts were made to mobilize different communities of the Rajbanshis and thereby to develop among them a commonly shared community identity.

The Rajbanshi leaders also tried to create link with the All India Kshatriya movement. From 1912 Sri Barma had been trying to make relation with the Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha. The representatives of the Mahasabha came to the Samity and the journals of the Mahasabha regularly sent to the Samity Office. In the year of 1922 Sri Barma was the elected Vice-President of the Bengal branch of the Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha which was known as the Bengal Prantik Sabha. At that time he had an intimate relation with Janaki Pal Sing, a Punjabi Kshatriya who took a deep interest to make a close contact between the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samity and the Mahasabha. In the year of 1920 under his guidance Panchanan Barma and other members of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samity had gone

to Puri to join the conference of the Kshatriya Upakarini Mahasabhas which was conducted by the Maharaja of Sailana. Janaki Paul was called to attend the Gaibandha, Chakdulia and votamari conference of the Kshatriya Samity as the representative of the representative of All India Mahasabha. In 1924, the Maharajas of Alwar and Sailana became the president and the secretary of the Mahasabha. In that year the Bengal Prantik Kshatriya Sabha was also commenced at the University Institute Hall in Calcutta. Its president was the Maharaja of Sailana. Panchanan Barma also had attended the conference. At the same year Barma, Kamini Kumar Singha and Upendra Nath Barman went to Alwar in order to attend the conference of the Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha. In 1917 its indoor conference was also joined by Panchanan Barma, Harikishore Barma and others.<sup>59</sup>

The main two objectives to develop interaction with the Bharatiya Kshatriya Mahasabha were (I) The Rajbanshi leaders felt the need of recognition of their Kshatriya status by the Kshatriyas in other parts of India. According to their belief, it would extend some sort of legitimacy to their social claims. (ii) This interaction also would extend the much required political support of the all India body for their own cause. In fact, the Kshatriya movement of the Rajbanshis wanted to enter into the lime light of modern institutional politics of colonial India.

Side by side the Rajbanshis had earned the wrath of the upper class people. They were not successful to change the attitude of the upper class people towards them. The Brahmins who generally dominated the society refused to give services to the Rajbanshis and the Maithili and Kamrup Brahmins who had given services the Rajbanshis were called as Brahmins of a lower order.

The movement inevitably brought about face to face confrontation with other castes particularly the so-called upper castes of Hindus who were not prepared to accept these men as Kshatriyas. Many Brahmins refused 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.<sup>60</sup>

Sashi Bhushan Fouzder also wrote that the Brahmins and other upper caste people had spread the rumours that most of the Rajbanshis wore sacred thread and

practiced ritual in order to disobey the rulings of the sashtras and thereby had committed a great sin.

It is interesting to note that the Rajbanshis had faced strong resistance from Cooch-behar state administration. It refused to recognize them as Kshatriya. The administration was under the grip of the upper caste Hindu gentry and the local backward people were failed to compete with them.<sup>61</sup> It was specially reported in the 4<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Kshatriya Samity that at many places of Cooch-behar especially in Mathabhanga sub-division, there was a strong opposition to the places of thread wearing ceremonies. The Dewan of the Cooch-behar state named Priya Nath Ghosh in a local hut told the Rajbanshis not to put on sacred thread. In this matter Sri Barma met with the Sub-divisional Officer of Mathabhanga. The officer told that the Dewan wrote a letter to him (Sub-divisional officer) by which it was clear that the Dewan became angry about this movement. So no Milan-kshetra would be allowed in the state. If the leaders of Kshatriya Samity violated it, their property would be confiscated and they would go to the Jail. Panchanan Barma refused to follow it. Consequently the state authority tried to separate the Milan-kshetras with violence. The state police resisted the Rajbanshis from wearing sacred threads during the Asokashtami fair at Baneswar area in Cooch-behar.<sup>62</sup> The Rajbansi people felt that their authority in local society would be ended for coming outsiders or Bhatias (upper caste people) ‘If we, the Kshatriyas; raise our voice’, resolved the Kshatriya Samity , ‘they would lose their domination over us. So being scared, they are not allowing, us to unite and to awake our Kshatriya Spirit.’<sup>63</sup>

But the Rajbansi leaders did not show much sympathy to the Koches and the Rabhas and refused to stay to the same rank with them. In fact, their major effort was to create distance from the Koches and the Rabhas.<sup>64</sup> Instead of creating a common platform with them the Rajbansi leaders wanted to satisfy their own community centric interest.

The Rajbansi’s gradual attempt for gaining Kshatriya identity expresses their belief that caste was not a God gifted and fixed phenomenon, rather it was changeable. The Rajbanshis became totally conscious of their degraded caste

position. 'The continued exclusion ... from social privileges, economic resources and political power'<sup>65</sup> created demands among the lower castes and raised voice against upper caste domination. Barring Rajbanshis, the Mahishyas, the Sadgops, the Namasudras, the Pods etc. followed the same path. The major violent push of the Rajbansi Kshatriyaization movement was on the wearing of the sacred thread and the adoption of upper caste Hindu practices. But there was an important aspect that no economic reform was included in the agenda of the Samity. Though it told about education, public employment and military services, there was no idea about these issues among the peasantry.

Since the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the political scenario in Bengal was abruptly changed. At this time the Bengali Bhadralok or the elites strengthened their power. With the introduction of the Government of India Act, 1919, the situation was changed. Commenting on the political development in Bengal, Broomfield observed: 'they (the bhadralok) were given no indication of the way in which the franchise or the system of representation would be developed and were unprepared for what happened in 1921: the enfranchisement of a million new voters of whom the majority were rural illiterates'.<sup>66</sup> The force of nationalist upsurge had compelled the Government to search counter forces to resist this tide. The Government got it into the deprived sections of Indian society. Adopting a policy of promotion and protection for the interests of the lower castes, the Government now became eager to set them as a counter force against the socially and politically dominant upper cast gentry.<sup>67</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the colonial ruler tried to create communal tensions between the Hindus and the Muslims. He adopted the policy of patronizing the Muslims to decrease the existing dominance of the Hindu gentry in political institution. Consequently in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries a large number of religio-political associations grew. Among them mention must be made of Anjumans whose primary objective was to serve the interests of the Muslim elite must be mentioned.<sup>68</sup>

The colonial Government policy of promotion and protection towards the Muslims had a great effect on the lower caste minds. The different lower caste

associations strongly protested against the monopoly and domination of the upper class people in the fields of education, jobs and representative bodies. Depending on their own strength they wanted to enter into the new colonial institutions which became the safety places of the upper caste elites. This was the origin of the separatist political line among the lower castes.<sup>69</sup> following the path of other lower cast elites, the Rajbanshi leaders became frayed for power and the revolution in this way had crossed the boundary of Kshatriyaization. At last they entered into the arena of politics.

Among the most prominent leaders of the Rajbanshis reference must be made of Panchanan Barma, Upendra Nath Barman, Monohar Barma, Kshetra Nath Singha and others. Panchanan Barma was the leader of the movement and became the secretary of Kshatriya Samity up to his death (1935). In order to re-establish Kshatriya status of the Rajbanshis, Haramohan Khajanchi – a Rangpur zaminder had started a social movement in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>70</sup>

Side by side Panchanan Barma found for a higher status of the Rajbanshis within the elite society. For that purpose he felt the need of British support and was not ready to make a common front with the nationalists against the British. But he failed to realize it that without some basic economic reforms, his movement would not be a successful one. Panchanan Barma's successors had no difference in this regard. So beyond Kshatriyaization the politics of the Rajbanshi caste movement was particularly limited to the distinct utterance of the demand for being subjected as a scheduled caste, so that they could obtain special protection in the fields of education, employment and representation in the legislative council and the other local bodies.

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British officials were planning of making a list of castes which felt the need of special protection from the Government. The Calcutta University Commission first prepared a list of 21 castes, which needed such special help and called these the “depressed classes” later the Government had extended this list by including more and more castes at different times. At every stage the Rajbanshi leaders on the basis of their education and bad economic condition demanded their inclusion in this list. Some local association strongly

protested against it. For instance, the Bangiya Brahman Sabha in a resolution submitted to the Reform Officer to the Government of Bengal noted that,--- those castes only can be called depressed who have no Brahmans to perform their religious and social ceremonies'. From that point of view, the Rajbanshis and other castes could not be subjected in the list of the depressed classes.<sup>71</sup> The Indian Association also remarked that the condition of social and political backwardness for inclusion of castes in the list of depressed classes was not suitable to the Rajbanshis. 'It is well known that this caste had already called them as Kshatriya and wore sacred thread. Their leaders had already attended the Kshatriya conference along with the Kshatriya ruling princes'. For this the Association told that the Rajbansi and other castes should not be included in the list.<sup>72</sup> The Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha also expressed the same opinion. According to it, since the Rajbanshis claimed themselves as real Kshatriyas and for serving this purpose they had taken the sacred thread, so they could not be called as a depressed class.<sup>73</sup> Panchanan Barma argued that till the Rajbansi and other castes required special protection from the Government with a view to making themselves equal with the already advanced higher castes. He also opined that in place of depressed classes the term 'backward classes' should be used and education might be made the criterion for determining backwardness.<sup>74</sup> In a special meeting of the executives of the Kshatriya Samity he tried to make his fellow caste leaders understand that a backward class could never be improved itself without protection and reservation in spheres of politics, education and administration. He was successful to pursue the other members regarding to the inclusion.<sup>75</sup>

In 1932, Lord Lothian had prepared the list of 'depressed classes. But there was no name of the Rajbanshis in the list. So the Rajbansi had appealed to the reform officer, Government of Bengal and thereby argued that due to their social and political backwardness they should be included in the list of depressed classes. In the meantime through a Government of India' resolution the name 'depressed classes' were changed to that of 'scheduled castes'. At the end of 1933, the Bengal Reform office published the final lists of scheduled castes for Bengal and there was inclusion of Rajbanshis in it.<sup>76</sup> the next important activity of the

Rajbanshi leaders was to obtain reservation in jobs for themselves in Bengal provincial services. The data with regard to the appointments of the backward classes in these services shows that during 1930-31 in Dinajpur out of 61 appointments, no one went to the backward classes, in Jalpaiguri out of 81 appointments only one, and in Rangpur out of 75 appointments only two had gone to such classes. This proves the educational backwardness of the Rajbanshis<sup>77</sup> Which was the main cause of their exclusion from the government services. But the Rajbanshis soon understood as the government had adopted measures to make safe the reservation of the Muslims, the same should be given to them as well. This thought led the Rajbanshis to make a resolution in 1936 in the annual conference of their Samity that the protection and facilities should be given to them like the Muslims in education and government services.<sup>78</sup> In this respect Sri Barma told that recommendation of higher officials was required with a view to securing government services. The Rajbanshi leaders also appealed to Raja Rajendra Narayan, the Maharaja of Cooch-Behar to appoint the Rajbanshis in the state administration and the latter had given assurance them in that respect.<sup>79</sup>

In the year of 1931, a resolution was moved in the Bengal Legislative Council. Mukunda Behari Mullick -- a member of the Namasudra Community, had placed a demand that at least 20 percent of the appointment in all provincial services should be reserved for the backward classes. Panchanan Barma had applied a strong defense for the resolution. We hear that everything should go by superior merit and that all classes have the appointment by force of their superior merit, all these may sound very fair. The advanced classes will get the services. But where will the rest go? Are they not to take the burden of administration on their shoulders? Are they to be treated always as the lots... . Then should those classes who already have had opportunities always go up and others go below and further below? Should this sort of thing be perpetuated?<sup>80</sup>

This was a very ardent appeal no doubt and it touched the feelings of the Rajbanshis and other depressed classes very much. Gathering other backward castes with them the Rajbanshis tried to prove that due to their numerical strength they had a legal claim in the spheres of provincial services. But all their efforts

were in Vain. According to the report of the Rajbanshi divisional officer, in the year of 1934-35, out of 21 permanent vacancies in the division there was only one member of the depressed class who could be filled in. The commissioners also observed that ‘as Rajbanshis from the majority among backward classes in Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur and as activities of their association (Kshatriya Samity) would indicate, sufficient number of candidates from their community may be available, if it is widely known that a percentage of vacancies would go to them.<sup>81</sup>

Another major step of the Rajbanshi leaders was to get sufficient representation of their castes in various legislative and local self governing bodies. The Kshatriya Samity vowed to place their demands to the Government of India and accordingly, Panchanan Barma—the secretary of the Samity in a letter to the chief secretary of the Bengal Government represented the following demand:-

That in the matter of administration, Municipality, Village communities and Panchayets should be founded and recognized as units and this will be the basis of public representation.

That if public representation in the council of government is wanted, every community irrespective of high or low, every interest should be allowed to be represented by members of their own community and not by men who belong to other community as they have no feelings on any subject.

That care should be taken by the Government of India to serve the interests of the small communities sending one or few representatives.<sup>82</sup>

The demands were thus depended upon the same argument that the interests of the backward classes were not uninjured in the hands of the higher castes. So when power would be decentralized through representative bodies, the Rajbanshis should have the right to represent in them. There was a suggestion for a unicameral legislative council for the provinces and separate electoral system for the Muslims in the Government of India Act.1919. The constituencies were separated into Muslim and non-Muslim categories. There was no provision of separate representation for the depressed classes. Under this Act, the first council

election was commenced in 1921 and Panchanan Barma was the sole Rajbanshi candidate in Rangpur who had won the election. The second general election was held in 1923. The congress party did not participate in the election owing to its non-cooperative programme. In place of this party, the newly created Swarajya party which was created by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das contested the election, Panchanan Burma and Nagendra Narayan Roy- the two candidates of the Kshatriya Samity from Rangpur gained victories defeating their Swarajya party rivals. Kshetra Nath Singha, another Rajbanshi stood as an independent candidate in the election but he did not pass.<sup>83</sup> From Dinajpur, Premhari Burma as a candidate of the Kshatriya Samity stood in the election but he was defeated in the hands of Jogindra Chandra Chakraborty of Swarajya party.<sup>84</sup>

In the next council election of 1926, Nagendra Narayan Roy, as only candidate of the Kshatriya Samity had won the election from Rangpur. Panchanan Burma also stood in the election from Rangpur but he was defeated by Jatindra Nath Chakraborty - a congress candidate. In the 4<sup>th</sup> council election in 1920-30 both Panchanan Barma and Nagendra Narayan Roy became victorious from Rangpur.

If we make a survey on the election result of the Rajbanshis, we can say that among Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and Rangpur constituencies, Rajbanshi got much success in Rangpur because the movement for Kshatriyaization stared at first from Rangpur and it was the headquarter of the Kshatriya Samity for all practical purposes. The leaders were very much organized and active here. They had much influence in the local society. All these circumstances were not present in Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur. In Jalpaigury, Prasanna Deb Raikat – the Raja of Baikunthapur, had won all the council elections since 1921. He stood there as an independent candidate. Though he belonged to the depressed class, the leader of the Kshatriya Samity did not recognize him as a member of their community. In Dinajpur, the local upper caste zaminders, joteders and merchants had continued their victory in the election. But in these two districts the majority voters were Rajbanshi.<sup>85</sup>

But this majority strength could not achieve any success. Their sincere appeals to their member to vote for their own community candidates remained unsuccessful.<sup>86</sup> In such condition they only depended on the Government to get justice. They now earnestly requested to the Government to nominate their members in different representative bodies.<sup>87</sup>

In order to secure the interests of the depressed classes, the Government wanted to bring certain changes in the existing constitutional arrangements and in this regard the Indian Statutory Commission was appointed. In a memorandum the Kshatriya Samity proposed to the commission a host of measures for securing the interests of the depressed classes. The commission applied their attention to the various sides in which the Rajbansi Kshatriyas and other such social groups were oppressed by the dominant classes' day in and day out. The stress was given on this matter that the time had come of ending the oppressive rule of dominant classes upon the depressed classes and every facility should be given to the depressed classes so that they can get scope to develop their resources and promote their social, political, educational and economical interest. The Rajbansi Kshatriya also demanded responsible Government with rather extension of the franchise with a view to increase this right to majority section of the society. But to make safe proper representation of the depressed classes the memorandum claimed, 'there should be a separate electorate for them to be represented by members belonging to the backward classes'. Barring this, representation for the minorities was to be ascertained and jobs were to be reserved for backward classes in different services.<sup>88</sup>

In the early 1930 the Government appointed the Franchise Reform Committee to determine the ways and means for making representation of the different castes and communities in the provincial legislature. In this connection Panchanan Barma and Nagendra Roy in favour of the Kshatriya Samity wrote to the Reform Officers of the Government of Bengal that two general and two scheduled caste seats should be permitted to each of the three districts of Rangpur, Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri.<sup>89</sup> Members of the Jalpaiguri Kshatriya Samity also gave a petition to the Reforms Officer requesting that 'the district be divided into three

parts for electoral purposes and for each division one general Hindu Seat and one special seat for the scheduled caste be allotted, making the total number of seats six in this district'.<sup>90</sup>

At the same time Dr.B.R.Ambedkar was presiding at the Round Table Conference in London for the provision of a separate electorate for the depressed classes. As a result the ‘Communal Award’ was announced by the Government in 1932. According to this Award, a schedule of the backward classes was made and in Bengal 15 seats were reserved in the proposed Legislative Assembly for such Scheduled Caste candidates, to whom the scheduled caste voters would obtain the right to select. The Kshatriya Samity supported this proposal by heart and soul.<sup>91</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi and other congress leaders realized the future effect of this system and persuaded Dr. Ambedkar to come to a pact which was known as Poona Pact (1932 ).<sup>92</sup> According to this pact, 30 seats were to be reserved in Bengal for the scheduled caste but the election was to be held jointly. The Bengal depressed classes vehemently protested against this settlement.<sup>93</sup> At last the Government of India generally accepted the Poona Pact and its proposals regarding electoral changes were subjected in the Government of India Act.1935.

Under this new Act. the first general election to the Provincial legislative Assembly took place in 1937. In this election Puspajit Barma, Kshetra Nath Singha from Rangpur, Upendra Nath Barman from Jalpaiguri and Premhari Barma, Syama Prosad Barma from Dinajpur became victorious as the candidates of the Kshatriya samity.<sup>94</sup> This was for the first time that a large number of Rajbanshi leaders won the election and it was undoubtedly a colossal victory for the Rajbanshi leader in the arena of politics. From this time they had also realized the importance of establishing a United Front with other backward castes in order to fulfil their goal. The Rajbanshi leader also tried in the Assembly to place the demands in favour of their community such as increased educational facilities, reservation of jobs, and Governmental assistance in this matter.

In the post 1937 period the Bengal political situation had began to alter. The most vital question in front of the nationalist leaders in Bengal was what will

be the way for preventing the Muslim League to form a ministry? Sarat Bose—the Bengal congress leader was much very eager to make an alliance with the various groups within the Assembly so that a coalition ministry could be organized. For the formation of the coalition ministry the support of the Independent scheduled caste members was necessary. Consequently the progressive Coalition Party under the guidance of Fazlul Hoque had formed a new ministry in 1941. Eleven scheduled caste members supported this ministry.<sup>95</sup> some of them were Rajbanshis. Their representative Upendra Nath Barman had gone to the cabinet as a minister of forest and excise.<sup>96</sup> This Fazlul Hoque Ministry came to an end in 1943 and Khwaza Nazimuddin with the support of the European Bloc, Old Swarajists and other had organized a new ministry.<sup>97</sup> It is interesting to note that Premhari Barma – a representative of the Kshatriya Samity entered into the ministry and took the responsibility of the same department to which his caste brother, Upendra Nath Barman held previously.<sup>98</sup> In this way a division was created between the Rajbansi caste leaders. Both Pushpajit Barma and Upendra Nath Barman were against the Nazimuddin ministry.

Since the late 1930 and the early 1940. The Kshatriya Samiti's organizational base was gradually weakened and the scenario began to change in Bengal politics. Certain consideration got more importance than caste identity for the Rajbansi leaders. As a consequence of the reserved constituency since 1937, caste appeal was no more a decisive factor to enter into the Assembly. The threat of competition from the upper castes had now gone. In place of it a competition had begun among the members of the depressed class themselves. There was an assurance of the return of the Rajbansi candidates from the Rajbansi based areas by the reserved constituencies. In the post 1940 period the most important matter for the Rajbanshis was now how to conclude pacts with the powerful groups for securing personal aspiration. They had no more interest to assert themselves into the progress of the Kshatriya Samity. Some Rajbansi candidates became victorious from Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur districts in the general election of 1946. But they were not all the candidates of the Kshatriya Samity. For instance, it is known from Upendra Nath Barma's own account that Mohini

Barman with the support of the congress leaders won in the election from Jalpaiguri, though he himself contested as an independent candidate from the same constituency with the backing of the Kshatriya Samiti. But in order to become a member of the constituent assembly he was interested to gain this support of Congress later on.

Thus in the post 1940 period there was a clear sign of disintegration in the politics of the Kshatriya Samity.<sup>99</sup> The support of the Samity or mere caste slogans were not enough for winning an election. In the year of 1946, Nagendra Narayan Roy only one official candidate of the Kshatriya Samity became able to win in Rangpur, though the Samity had placed five candidates in the districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur and the candidature of Upendra Nath Barman in Jalpaiguri had backed.<sup>100</sup> During the 1940s attempts were made by the Congress, the Communists and the newly established political branch of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation of Dr. Ambedkar to gather the scheduled castes in support of their respective party programme.<sup>101</sup> But there was much difference among them with regards to ideologies and interests. This was totally clear in the election of 1946. In that election the official Kshatriya Samity candidate was defeated. Rup Narayan Roy the communist party candidate gained victory from Dinajpur. And all other elected Rajbanshi candidates were Congress nominees. Among the name of following leaders must be mentioned; Harendra Nath Roy (Dinajpur), Mohini Mohan Barman (Jalpaiguri cum Siliguri), Rajni Kanta Roy Barman (Rangpur) and Haren Chandra Barman (dogra cum Pabna).<sup>102</sup>

As a consequence of this scenario the scheduled caste failed to emerge itself as a separate consolidated group in the politics of Bengal. They ‘operated essentially as an interest group, with the established political parties negotiating with its leaders and actually winning many of them over at different junctures’.<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, the elite leadership of the caste associations did not gain success to fulfil the demands of the masses rightly. So only appeals to caste sentiments could not always subject the support the masses for the scheduled caste leaders.

## References &Notes

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