

'Asset' to Burden : A Changing Profile of Rajbanshi Women (1875-1975)

Utpal Roy

Abstract:

The Rajbanshi is one of the dominant castes of the northern part of Bengal, Assam and Rangpur District of Bangladesh. Recently, some scholarly attempts try to consolidate the historiography of the North Bengal in the socio-cultural, political and economic point of view. This paper is related with the historiography of the gender study of North Bengal which will try to reckon the factors responsible for the social degradation of the Rajbanshi women within a century between the years 1875 to 1975.

I

Asset:

Social degradation of the Indian women was started at the end of Rigvedic era. The socio-economic deprivation of women has been continued before the starting of western education and social reform movement in the 19th century. Although, few steps like protest against 'sati' was taken by Humayun and Akbar during Mughal period, but the condition of women remain unchanged before 19th Century. Prominent Brahmanic literatures of ancient India reflex the miserable condition of the ancient Indian women. In the *Gita*, women were explained as '*papayoni*' who were need to '*parang gati*' or '*nirvana*' like as *Visya* and *Sudra*¹. According to *Agnipurana* the women had no right to recite the '*mantra*' in the ceremonial occasion². As said by *Manusmriti* and *Sukranitisara* women, son and slave were '*adhana*' or subordinate under the family's head and had no property right even whatever they earn³. *Manu* and *Yajnavalka* clarify that women never would be independent and also said that in childhood they are protected by their father, at young and old age they are accordingly protected by husband and son⁴. So, according to ancient Indian Sanskrit literatures, the condition of women in ancient India was same as *Sudra*. Women and *Sudra* were born as slave only to serve their master⁵. In India, from the Later Vedic period the history of women is actually the history of degradation of women's power and prestige, which later on strengthened or solidify by the practice of '*sati*' and '*purdah*'.

Before accepting this conclusion or generalize the concept we should keep in mind a few exceptional examples. Some north- eastern tribes like *Garro*, *Khasi*, *Naga*, *Seema Naga* are the good example of female dominated society. I think it should not be wrong, if we accept that the evolution of the status of women in Indian sub-continent is highly interrelated with two important variables: mode of production and environment (both socio-cultural and physical).

Accordingly the mode of production in the Rajbanshi society was completely based on agriculture. The Census of 1872 in the Coochbehar state indicates out of 176396 male population 160212 were dependent on agriculture⁶. In that economic structure the role of women were also dominant, after carrying out the household work they also took part in the agricultural work⁷. According to Charu Chandra Sanyal, "The women never till the land with the plough. But they help man to weed jute, paddy or tobacco, to prepare and sow paddy seeds for nursery of winter paddy (*aman dhan*), to transplant '*aman*' seeding in the fields (*oa-gara*) and help cutting the paddy plants when the paddy is ripe⁸". It is remarkable that the women of the Rajbanshi *jotedar* family also took similar part in the production system. Even, at the end of 20th century, in some parts of North Bengal, we get the example where the wife and daughter of the *Jotedar*'s family helping the men folk in agricultural field⁹. Interview with Karuna Kanta Roy, Date of birth: 1343BS, son of a Rajbanshi Jotedar, vill & p.o.: Ambari, Coochbehar, interview dated on 28.02.2012

It was possible, because the community was completely based on agriculture. After dividing the land to the *adiars*, the rest of the land was directly ploughed by the *jotedar* himself with the help of his family member. So, in the 19th Century, the community was highly dependent on women for agricultural production. As a whole the society was paternal but some dominant maternal characteristics were also prevailed.

Not only the agricultural activities, women were also associated with the weaving of cloth and fishing net. Weaving of rope from the jute was conducted by the men but women took essential role in preparing the jute threads¹⁰. Women, generally the widow or aged women after completing the household work at night and dawn they sell their own finished products of rice: *chira* (*flattened rice*), *muri* (*puffed rice*) and finished rice in the local market. Few women were also associated with small trade of finished agricultural products; after purchasing the agricultural products like paddy from the villagers' they sell the finished products to the big market by their own¹¹. Cattle rearing was another important source of income of the Rajbanshi women. Almost all women were associated with this profession and it was treated as an extra source of income. Although, whatever they earn by selling the animals (goat, cow, duck, hen, pigeon and also egg), they basically used for buying the household essentials and ornament¹². The most remarkable feature is that the extra earning of the women was also used for helping the family's economy. We have also some example of strong dedication of the Rajbanshi women in the practices of rituals and ceremonies. *Hdumdeo* (deity of Rain) *Puja* was organized at the dark of the night where the aged women tried to satisfy *Hudum*, the god of Rain by singing and typical dancing to save their family from long drought and famine¹³. Analyzing the importance of the women in the production system of the Rajbanshi society, Charu Chandra Sanyal aptly remarked that, "In fact a Rajbanshi woman is the main worker and a great asset to the family¹⁴."

Agricultural society is always based on 'labour', if the same 'labour' mostly generates from the women side, then undoubtedly women should be treated as an asset of a society. Hence, due to the mode of production in the 19th century Rajbanshi society, the importance of women was unquestionable and they were really treated as asset of family. In spite of that the society was patriarchic because 'in matter of succession to regular marriages, the

male children or the nearest male kin get the property. Female do not inherit. The sons of *ghor-dzia (ghar jamai)* do not inherit the property of their mother's father¹⁵.'

Post-colonial anthropologist like B.M. Das suggested *Koches* as Mongoloid like the other tribes of North-east India¹⁶. Swarthak Sengupta also classified the Koch within the 'greater *Bodo* family' consisted with other tribes like the *Garos, Kacharis and Rabhas*¹⁷. Administrative historian of the colonial period like Sir E.A. Gait specifically traced that there seems to no doubt that the true *Koches* were a Mongoloid race and very closely allied to the *Meches and Garos*¹⁸. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee also recognized *Koch* as Mongoloid¹⁹. At the same time finding racial identity, on the basis of linguistic study is more difficult and also controversial. Another post colonial scholar Robert Henry Clark mentioned in his Ph.D. thesis that "the term Dravidian to be more linguistic than racial. However, it does indicate the probable mixed origins of the group known as the Koch-Rajbanshi"²⁰. Hunter had remarked same probable mixed origin of the *Koch-Rajbanshi* before Clark mentioned²¹. Dr. Buchanan Hamilton also states that "there is reason to suppose that, until very lately, the different tribes of *Kamrup* permitted intermarriage²²." Hunter and Clark might be true because different tribes of the northern part of Bengal like *Rajbanshi*, permitted intermarriage²³, which caused the complexity to find out the racial identity on the basis of physiognomy and comparative philology. The debate should be end by following the modern scientific Genetic (DNA) analysis from where we can easily relief from the long run controversy²⁴. Mark D. Shriver, Michael W. Smith, Li Jin, Amy Marcini, Joshua M. Akey, Ranjan Deka, and Robert E. Ferrell, 'Ethnic-affiliation estimation by use of population-specific DNA markers, *Am J Hum Genet.* 1997 April; 60(4): p.957-964.

Although little specific Koch or Rajbanshi history exists until the time of the Muslim invasion, it has been shown that the groups were about as widely distributed at that time as they are today, and probably had been subject to the successive of religious influence are known to have passed that area in the previous centuries. These influences included Jainism, Buddhism, early *Shaivite* and *Sakta* forms of Hinduism, along with later *Tantrik* forms of Buddhism and Hinduism. These have left their traces in an amalgam with earlier tribal practices. This amalgam was further advanced by the Islamic invasion of the thirteenth century, which eventually resulted in the conversion of half of the Rajbanshi community²⁵, with the greatest influence in the southern section of the area. The rise of Koch kings in the 16th century resulted in an extension of the Hindu influence in the northern section and their rule developed and stabilized the Rajbanshi as a Hindu community. The self-conscious efforts at reforms (1891-1935) in the direction of Hindu orthodoxy that followed have remained as the principal focus of change within the religious life of the caste. But the movement was partly successful in the efforts to achieve orthodoxy. Careful observation by Sanyal (in 1965) shows the amalgam of tribal, Buddhist, *Shaivite*, *Sakta* and *Vaishnavite* elements in the socio-cultural practices of the Rajbanshi people²⁶. A field study, in the northern part of Rangpur was conducted by Clark (in 1969) which also supported the same argument²⁷.

According to Gail Omvedt (2003) even in the 19th century 'most of this tribes such as the *Rajbanshi, Pod, Chandal, Kouch* and other indigenous groups (in Bengal) had been

only lightly exposed to Brahmanic culture²⁸. Still, in the middle of 19th Century, the Rajbanshi was also to some extent isolated from the Cast-Hindu culture. According Basu (in 2003) "... brief ethnological description of the socio-cultural practices of the Rajbanshis clearly indicates that they had very little in common with the local upper caste Hindus. It was this cultural distinction which defined the boundary that separated the Rajbanshi community from the upper caste Hindu society of North Bengal²⁹". From the above discussion, we can conclude that the tribes like Rajbanshi maintained distinct semi-tribal characteristics due to strong socio-cultural diversity which continued up to 19th century. Clark (1969) aptly remarked that 'Panchanan Barma was only partly successful in the efforts to achieve orthodoxy³⁰.' Due to distance from caste orthodoxy up to 19th century, the women were able to protect their indigenous socio-cultural rights. But it was gradually faded by the elite higher castes movement.

In the colonial and post colonial historical study, there is no as such specific study about the Rajbanshi women but some administrative and socio-economic observations related with North Bengal indirectly help us to draw the socio-economic status of Rajbanshi women. We have already discussed about the economic involvement and status of women. In the beginning of 19th Century, the socio-cultural environment of North Bengal was more or less stagnant due to self sufficient mode of production. Even up to 1878 A.D, before foundation of Railways in North Bengal, there was no clear impact of industrialization in the society and culture of North Bengal.

In the Rajbanshi marriage system bride groom had to pay 'bride price' to the bride's father which was also known as '*Kanyapan*'³¹. Though, according to time and place the '*kanyapan*' was varied. In the beginning of the 20th Century at Coochbehar it was Rs.40-50, in the middle of 20th Century it increased as Rs. 50-100. In Darjeeling and Nepal it was comparatively high Rs.700- 1000³². The '*Kanyapan*' does not only mean price, the bride groom was also bound to pay ornament and food products like *chira* (flattened rice), molasses, curd and animals (generally cow and goat). That practice of '*Kanyapan*' prevailed because the women was treated as an asset to the family which was also supported by the stagnant mode of production and cultural environment. According to some observations, the deficiency of women might be the factor³³ but '*Kanyapan*' was not only in the Rajbanshi society, many tribal and semi-tribal societies in India practiced it³⁴. Adult marriage was also practiced by the marginal Rajbanshi people but gradually the marriage age of girl's decreased due to higher castes movement in the direction of Hindu orthodoxy³⁵. Charu Chandra Sanyal (1965) also noticed the huge age gap between bride and bride groom³⁶. He also observed the gradual degradation of bride's age of marriage³⁷. So, it should not be wrong hypotheses that in the beginning there might be the adult marriage system was practiced.

In the Rajbanshi society the widow was also treated as an asset because they play essential role in the production system. They were closely related with agriculture and small business like selling finished rice products: *muri* (puffed rice), *chira* (flattened rice) etc. They had no social obstacle for buying and selling goods in the market. According to Sanyal, 'Widow Remarriage is allowed in Rajbanshi society. There is no special ceremony. A verbal contract is made with the guardian of the widow regarding payments. The price of a

widow (*Kannyapan*) varies from Rs.20 to Rs. 100. The price of a childless widow may go up to Rs. 200. In addition to the cash value, clothing and ornaments are being given³⁸. M.O. Carter also elucidates that “among majority of the Rajbansis the *nika* system or widow marriage is common³⁹. The most important factor was that, the widow had the right of her late husband’s property which also supported by Carter, ‘a widow may retain her deceased husband’s home and property and take a man to live with her⁴⁰’. In the first half of the 20th Century the Colonial administrative historian like O’Malley observed that like general women, widow had the right to exercise ‘*Kannyapan*’ and they were also treated as an asset of the society⁴¹. It is notable, at that time Vidyasagar was struggling to initiate the widow remarriage in the society of Bengal. Unfortunately, the courageous attempt of Vidyasagar was almost failed due to strong protest of the Castes Hindu society⁴².

If we study the system of divorce in the Rajbanshi society, it would be clear that men and women equally enjoy the right of divorce and it was very common factor in the society⁴³. Not only that, the remarriage of divorcee was also common in both gender of the society. According to Charu Chandra Sanyal the causes of divorce were as follows⁴⁴:

- 1 .The husband and wife cannot agree to live peacefully.
2. The wife or the husband is guilty of adultery.
3. The husband or the wife is incapable of producing children for suffering from incurable or bad disease.
4. The husband cannot maintain the wife or run away.
5. If *Ghor-dzia* could not tolerate the rude behavior of his wife’s father or mother or incapable of doing hard labour allotted to him and might slip away to an unknown destination.
- 6 . The girl is not allowed to go to her husband’s house for more than two years.
- 7 . The girl is married again.

The above causes indicate that women had strong right to enjoy the liberty of divorce. It is possible because, ‘there is no question of maintenance allowance after divorce; in a cultivator’s family a woman is also an earning member and economically independent⁴⁵’. Presently, divorce is exceptional and not entitled by the society .In the form of ‘*Chtrodani* Marriage’ the “married women are allowed to remarry even if her husband is alive. When a female married a *Chotrodani* fashion and there is no issue by first husband and son is born by second husband and they live together as man and wife then first husband making no claim on her, then the divorce was automatic. There were cases when women marry five or six times in succession (*Bhatar chari* and *Bhatar dhor*). In such cases the husband also may leave of his wife without any formal divorce and marry another girl⁴⁶. Here the striking example is that, a woman may change her spouse for more than one time. Basically, it was possible due to the mode of production where women were economically independent and the socio-cultural environment also consents on it.

In this society women enjoyed complete freedom, they were equally allowed in weaving, fishing, and marketing and also in the agricultural field. Due to women based self sufficient mode of production the system of *purdah* was impossible. Rajbanshi women wear distinctive dress or *sari* of blue or purple colour which known as *fota*⁴⁷. There was no practice of

Ghomta or *purdah* and the head was always uncovered⁴⁸. According to Sanyal, 'the women do not use any head dress nor do the males have any. The Rajbanshi women never observe 'purdah'. They move about freely'⁴⁹.

II

Asset to Burden

The picture of Rajbanshi women was no longer the same. Social degradation of Rajbanshi women approximately started from the late decades of the 19th Century. It is striking that within a century, the women almost lost her social dignity and they were treated as a burden of society. In the first part of this article, I have discussed how the mode of production and the socio-cultural environment helped to keep up the social status of women. Now, I would like to portray the changing state of the mode of production and socio-cultural environment which helped to degrade the status of the Rajbanshi women.

Table-1
Migration in North Bengal (1891-1921)

Year	Migration at Coochbehar(1891-1921)		Migration at Jalpaiguri (1891-1921)	
	From adjacent districts		From other districts	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1891	12,997	15,192	12431	7641
1901	9165	12531	65272	48636
1911	11000	13000	15000	10000
1921	9000	12000	5000	4000

Year	Migration at Dinajpur(1891-1921)		Migration at Dinajpur(1891-1921)	
	From adjacent districts		From other districts	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1891	22670	18819	9308	5894
1901	13901	13319	60243	34871
1911	19000	16000	12000	6000
1921	12000	13000	10000	7000

Source: A. Mitra, West Bengal District Hand Books, Calcutta, 1951, Cooch Behar, P.xxxvi, Jalpaiguri, iii, West Dinajpur, p.xii.

In the beginning of the 19th Century, the agricultural land of North Bengal was basically under the indigenous castes like *Koch*, *Rajbanshi* and *Mech*. Village economy was self

sufficient and also stagnant, and was no question of identity crisis. Although, few commercial crops like jute and tobacco were produced as well as the rice had common market, but there was no as such impact in the village economy of North Bengal. Introduction of plantation industry at Darjeeling and Duars had also same impact in the rural economy of North Bengal. In 1878, the introductions of Railways in North Bengal open up the door of North Bengal, as well as due to available of vast fertile land, prospects of trade and high rate of food productions because of First World War, were the factors behind the huge migration and direct investment in agricultural land. Owing to above mentioned reasons, large numbers of higher caste Hindu even *Marwari*, *Kabuli* traders invested their money in the land⁵⁰ which caused the price hike in land.

In North Bengal, between the years 1891 and 1921 enormous migration changed the demography of this region (Table: 1). Simultaneously due to high price of land, the Rajbanshi *jotedar* began to sell their land, thus the control over land gradually transformed in to the hand of Non- Rajbanshi higher caste people⁵¹. In 1905, 205 *jote* were auctioned at Falakata, Jalpaiguri where many Non- Bengali Marwari and Kabuli traders invested their money in the land⁵². Huge migration of Marwari community indicates the prosperity of trade in North Bengal. In 1961, at Coochbehar, 1860 Marwari migrated from Rajasthan⁵³. *The Coochbehar Gazettes* also indicate not only the Rajbanshi *Jotedar*, huge number of higher caste Bengali and few Muslim also enjoyed *Jotedari* in Coochbehar State⁵⁴. The land in Coochbehar state was also under the Bengali higher caste migrant King's officials from South Bengal. Kings of Coochbehar, along with the Bengali doctors, lawyers, and teachers formed an exclusive social circle⁵⁵. Indeed in the colonial period the Bengali's dominated the socio-cultural scene of the native world in northern part of Bengal. At the same time, the community was agricultural and had no interest on other professions. Thus, self centric stagnant village economy was highly affected due to direct investment on land. In this changing mode of production, Rajbanshi community lost their unchallenged higher social status which continued before 20th Century.

In the changing mode of production Rajbanshi caste gradually became the subordinate of Caste Hindu people. The Rajbanshi *jotedars* were basically cultivator, after dividing the land to the *Adiar* or subordinate peasant, the rest of the land was directly cultivated by the *jotedar* themselves. The new Cast- Hindu or non- Rajbanshi investors or *jotedars* were not belonged to agricultural community and they conducted the agricultural activities by the rent cultivators which effect on the changing mode of production, consequently Rsjbanshi *jotedars* gradually detached themselves from direct cultivation which helped to increase the number of non -cultivator Rajbanshi *jotedar*⁵⁶. This is signifying, due to gradual impact of *Sanskritization* the direct participation of women in the production system was not appreciated. This helped to increase the hatred to the self –sufficient women, as a result the respect and the status of Rajbanshi women were gradually decreased. Yet, in the middle of 20th century, according to few observations even the wives of the Rajbanshi *jotedar*'s also took essential part in the cultivation system⁵⁷. However, due to strong impact of the *Sanskritization*, elite Rajbanshis removed their women from the production system.

Significantly, because of poor economic compulsion, even in the late decades of the 20th century, huge number of Rajbanshi women also participated as agricultural labour. But, after achieving economic solvency, women were kept in to the house. At the same time generally women were not allowed to open marketing, selling of finished rice product, weaving of cloth and fishing net. Due to 20th century's socio-economic environment and strong impact of *Sanskritization*, women were gradually displaced from the production system. Therefore, economically the society was transformed into a complete male dominated society. Presently, due to broader changed socio-economic environment and perspective; the women are gradually allowed to participate in the production system by following the main stream culture.

Before 20th Century, in North Bengal, there was no such impact of western education, and the condition of women was not satisfactory (see Tabale-2). According to Table-3, very few elite Rajbanshi obtained education where the percentage of the English educated person was few in number. In the middle of the 20th Century a small number of Rajbanshi elite send their daughters to school but they had no interest in higher education⁵⁸. Even in the Royal family, Suniti Devi took keen interest to expand women education in Coochbehar state, but instead of all facilities to the development of higher education, she restricted herself within the expansion of school education⁵⁹. At that time, there was no clear idea about the need of education and the women were nothing just waited for marriage, where literate women were given little priority by the elite Rajbanshi. Due to Caste Hindu association, the society did not allow women to work outside the home⁶⁰. Accordingly, from the early decades of the 20th century, the expansion of education basically failed to protect the self sufficient women and the women were not entitled for modern job. At the same time, the dowry was entitled and practiced by higher educated elite Rajbanshi boys⁶¹ due to close contact with Caste- Hindu Culture.

Table: 2
Development of Women Education at Coochbehar

Year	Percentage of Education
1901	0.40
1911	0.06
1921	0.90
1931	1.20
1941	1.76
1951	4.78
1961	9.00
1971	11.90
1981	19.90

Source: Census of India 1901-1981, Chakraborty, Chhanda, *Kochbehare Nari Sikshar Bibartan*, Madhuparni, Bises Coochbehar Jila Sankha, August 1990, Ed. By Ananda Gopal Ghosh, Chief Ed. Agitesh Bhattacharya, Balurghat, W.B., pp.203-211,

According to Sanyal (1965), 'It is interesting to note that amongst the modern educated boys there is a tendency to demand money or some other dowry from the guardian of the

girl and in fact some marriages have recently taken place where the father of the girl had to give costly dowry to the bride-groom instead of receiving the bride-price. This reversal of position is probably due to the close association with the Caste-Hindus where heavy dowry is often demanded from the guardian of the girl⁶². Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,p.91'. In fact the introduction of modern education in the early 20th Century, was like as a lamp, which brought both, the light and black smoke for the Rajbanshi women. Although, at the end of the same century, the more lights became bright, the more smoke became clear.'

Table-3
Educational Status of the Rajbanshi

Year	Total population	Literate	Percentage	Literate in English	Percentage
1911	14,54,173	73,646	5.07	1,221	0.08
1921	16,63,948	69,140	5.78	5,151	0.31

Source: Census of India ,1921, Vol. V,Pt.II,Bengal,Table,IX,p.84

In the changing socio-economic condition Rajbanshi lost their indigenous dominance and gradually became the subordinate of higher caste and were treated as untouchable and lower caste⁶³. That was also supported by Charu Chandra Sanyal. According to him the caste system was strictly followed at Jalpaiguri District⁶⁴. Due to strong neglect from the higher caste people and also after losing of socio- economic control over the society of North Bengal, few educated elite Rajbanshi realized the necessity of social up gradation or *Kshatriya* movement to establish the higher social status as a *Kshatriya*. No doubt the caste movement had essential impact on the socio- economic improvement of the Rajbanshi but, at the same time the social status of women was highly affected. To set as a *Kshatriya* status, the leader of the '*Kshatriya Movement*' appealed to stop the widow and adult marriage. As well as, like higher caste culture, they rejected the open marketing and agricultural activities by the women⁶⁵. From the beginning of the 20th Century, due to upward social mobility according to caste orthodoxy, the women, lost their status in the marriage system which helped to initiate the reversal of '*Kanyapan*' or modern dowry⁶⁶. In the middle of the 20th century due to strong impact of *Sanskritization*, except *Phul-biha* (regular form of marriage) the other form of marriage were discarded and the widow remarriage was strictly restricted in the educated society of the Rajbanshis⁶⁷. It is remarkable that the degradation of the women status was initiated by the upper strata of the society and gradually extended to lower strata through downward movement. Without filtration, they accurately try to imitate the Caste Hindu Culture which allowed few evil social practices like; child marriage, *pardah* system, dowry etc. Although, the *Kshatriya Samiti* strongly protested the introduction of caste Hindu dowry system but they failed⁶⁸. Unfortunately, women did not have the enough socio- economic condition to save their indigenous rights from the male dominated elite caste movement. In the changing mode of production and socio-cultural environment, women were not allowed to participate in the production system

and were kept in to the house, which indicate the introduction of Caste-Hindu 'purdah' system thus, the Rajbanshi women also began to use 'ghomta'. According to Sanyal (1965), 'A large number of those women are observing *purdah* and do not expose themselves to public view⁶⁹.' Women were nothing just for sex and household work like as a family slave. As well as due to gradual increasing of marriage cost as a dowry culture, the born of girl child was not blessing for the poor people. After losing every socio-economic privilege, Rajbanshi women completely transformed as a burden of society.

In the social stratification of North Bengal between last decades of 19th Century to the middle of 20th Century, the Rajbanshi caste gradually degraded their social status due to changing mode of production and socio-cultural environment. In the 19th century Rajbanshi society, we follow a stagnant mode, where the individual need as well as socio-cultural environment was very simple because of the absence of difficult characteristics by the modernization and commercial mode of production. Within one decade, the society failed to protect their indigenous even though modern characteristics like; adult marriage, equal right to divorce, widow remarriage and direct participation of the women in the production system⁷⁰. No doubt, at present, due to development of modern education, the Rajbanshi women have succeed to entry in the modern professions, but in question of women's right and liberty, they are far away from the 19th Century Rajbanshi women. Actually, the women's right and liberty were snatched away by the so called modernization of the Rajbanshi society in North Bengal, which appreciated by the elite Rajbanshi due to high sentiment of higher caste and also for the close association of Caste- Hindu culture.

References

1. *Gita*, ix, 32. Cited in *Perspective in Social and Economic History of Early India (Bengali)*, by R.S.Sharma: Orient Longman Limited, Kolkata, 1996,p.61.
2. *Agnipurana*,273. 18-19, Cited in *Perspective in Social and Economic History of Early India (Bengali)*, by R.S.Sharma: Orient Longman Limited, Kolkata, 1996,p.62.
3. *Manusmriti*, vii.413, *Sukranitisara*,iv.5. 295, Cited in *Perspective in Social and Economic History of Early India (Bengali)*, by R.S.Sharma: Orient Longman Limited, Kolkata, 1996,p.63.
4. *Manusmriti*, vii.413, *Yajnavalka*, 'achar' chapter,85. Cited in *Perspective in Social and Economic History of Early India (Bengali)*, by R.S.Sharma: Orient Longman Limited, Kolkata, 1996,p.64.
5. R.S.Sharma: *Perspective in Social and Economic History of Early India (Bengali)*, Orient Longman Limited, Kolkata, 1996,p.64.
6. Census Bengal, Calcutta, 1872, cited in Chakraborty, Chhanda, *Kochbehare Nari Sikshar Bibartan, Madhuparni, Bises Coochbehar Jila Sankha*, August 1990, Ed. By Ananda Gopal Ghosh, Chief Ed. Agitesh Bhattacharya, Balurghat, W.B., p.203
7. Charu Chandra Sanyal: *The Rajbansis of North Bengal*, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta,1965,p.31

- 8 . Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit, p. 32
- 9 . Interview with Karuna Kanta Roy, Date of birth:1343BS, son of a Rajbanshi Jotedar, vill & p.o.:Ambari, Coochbehar, interview dated on 28.02.2012
10. Interview with Manindra Nath Das
11. Interview with Amal Das, Primary teacher of the Rajbanshi Community, Vatibari, Alipurduar ,Jalpaiguri, dated on.20.02.2012
12. Interview with Puna Chandra Roy, Rajbanshi peasant, age:65, Vatibari, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Dated on:20.2.2012.
13. Dr. GirijasankarRoy: Uttarbange Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Puja-Parvan(Bengali),N.L. Publisher, Dibrugarh, Assam,1970,pp.132-33.
 ‘Thus completely nude they dance and sing (mostly obscene dance) abusing the rain god.’
 Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit, p.144
14. Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit, p. 32
15. Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit, p. 95
16. Das, B.M., *The Tribes of North East India*, Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd.Calcutta,1984,pp.39-57
- 17 .Sengupta, Swarthak, *Physical Anthropology of the Koch Population*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 1993, p.4.
- 18 “....Rajbansi are either Koches who though dark, have a distinctly Mongoloid physiognomy , or else a mixed breed , in which the Mongoloid element usually preponderates.”
 E.A. Gait : *A History of Assam*, 3rd ed., revised by B.K. Barua and H.V.S. Murthy, Calcutta Thaker Spink & Co.(1933)Pvt. Ltd.,(1963)p.48
19. Dr. S.K. Chatterjee: *Origin and Development of Bengali Language*, Part-I, Calcutta University Press, Calcutta,p.69
20. Robert Henry Clark: *A Study of the Religious Customs and Practices of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal*, Ph. D Theses of The Hartford Seminary Foundation , 1969,p.130
21. ‘Whichever of these rival theories can be adopted concerning the ethnological affinities of the Koch, there can be little doubted that people commonly known as Koch-Rajbanshi, Pali are very mixed race.’
 W.W. Hunter: *A statistical Account of Bengal Vol.X*, Landon ,1876, reprinted by Concept Publishing Company(p) Ltd.1984,2009,p.353
22. ibid

- 23 . *Before Kshatriya movement, Laws of marriage were very loosely followed by the Rajbanshi people and that circumstance helped to the growth of a mixed population.*
W.W. Hunter, Op cit pp.353-54
Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,pp.89-120
24. Mark D. Shriver, Michael W. Smith, Li Jin, Amy Marcini, Joshua M. Akey, Ranjan Deka, and Robert E. Ferrell, '*Ethnic-affiliation estimation by use of population-specific DNA markers*, Am J Hum Genet. 1997 April; 60(4): p.957-964.
25. 'Nashya' is popularly known as Rajbanshi Musalman or Muslim Rajbanshi. In Bengali, the term 'Nashya' is also signified as 'Nasta', those who failed to protect their religion and converted to Muslim.
S.R.Mondal, *Nashya Shaik of North Bengal, Ethnicity, Movement and Social Structure , Contested Cultural Identity*, Ed. By P.K. Bhadra, Mita Bhadra, Rawat Publications, New Delhi,p.315
26. Charu Chandra Sanyal: *The Rajbansis of North Bengal*, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta,1965
27. Robert Henry Clark: *A Study of the Religious Customs and Practices of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal*, Ph. D Theses of The Hartford Seminary Foundation , 1969, in Abstract.
28. Gail Omvedt: *Buddhism in India ,Challenging Brahmanism and Caste*, Sage Publication, New Delhi,2003,p.179.
29. Swaraj Basu: *Dynamics of a Caste Movement, The Rajbansis of North Bengal, 1910-1947*, Monohar, New Delhi,2003,p.45
30. Robert Henry Clark, in abstract page.
31. "In the formal marriages the cost is higher, because the bridegroom has to pay a dowry to the bride's father.."
M.O. Carter: "*Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Malda, 1928-1935*", Bengal Government Press, Calcutta , Bengal, 1938, page-43.
- 32 . Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,p.90
33. '*East of the Mahananda the population is largely of Koch origin and amongst these castes a deficiency of women is a well remarked phenomenon*'. According to Lambourn, it was 973 females out 1000 males.'
G.E. Lambourn: *Bengal District Gazetteers*, the Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta,1819, reprinted by N.L.Publisher,Siliguri,W.B.p.29.
Interview with Manindra Nath Das
34. Rochona Majumdar, Snehalata's death: Dowry and women's agency in colonial Bengal ,*Indian Economic Social History Review* 2004 41: 433DOI: 10.1177/001946460404100404,p.437

35. 'The more orthodox Rajbanshis burn their dead, and profess to marry their daughters as infants, and to forbid widow remarriage. Amongst the less orthodox the dead are burnt or buried as is most convenient, and adult marriage and widow remarriage prevail. All classes appear to recognize divorce'
- F.W. Strong, *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers, Dinajpur*, The Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1912, Reprinted: N.L. Publisher, Siliguri, W.B.pp.52,53
36. Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,p.90
Interview with Manindra Nath Das
37. Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,pp.89-120
38. Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit ,p.98
39. M.O. Carter, Op cit, page-43
40. ibid
41. The idea (where younger brother marries the widow of his dead elder brother) is that the widow is a valuable property for whom bride price have been paid and should not be allowed to out of family'.
- LSS O'Malley : *India's Social Heritage* .; Vikas Publishing, Kanpur, 1934, p. 150
42. Amiya Kumar Samanta: *Vidyasagar*, Progressive Publisher, Kolkata,2004,pp.60-64
43. " *Marriage and divorce both being very easy, the society goes on smoothly and is not overburdened with complications as in Caste Hindu or in some other modern societies*"
- 'Amongst the Rajbansis divorce is a simple affair as stated before.'
- Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,p.100
44. ibid.
45. ibid
46. Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,p.97
47. G.E. Lambourn, Op cit.p.31
48. L.S.S. O'Malley: *Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling*, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot,1907,Reprinted in 1985,199, Logos Press , New Delhi, p.47.
49. Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,p.3
50. Grunning, J.F, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers, Jalpaiguri*, Alahabad, the Pioneer Press, 1911.p.32
51. ' *According to his (Amit Mitra) calculation , in this (Falakata,Jalpaiguri) tahsil , the Rajbansis held 40 per cent of the total jotes in 1894 and around 34 per cent in 1905.*'
- Swaraj Basu, Op cit.p.51

- 52 . Grunning, J.F, Op.cit p.32
53. Durga Das Majumder ,*Gazetteer of India, West Bengal*, Dist: Coochbehar,1977,p.46
- 54 . *The Coochbehar Gazette (between 1900-1945)*, Coochbehar State Press, Coochbehar
- 55 . Chhanda Chakroborty , *The Gorkhaland Movement, Ethnicity, Movement and Social Structure , Contested Cultural Identity*, Ed. By P.K. Bhadra, Mita Bhadra, Rawat Publications, New Delhi,p.304
- 56 . “*The prevailing practice of the ‘jotedars’ themselves cultivating their land was increasingly discontinued and a class of non- cultivating ‘jotedars’ expanded*”
Swaraj Basu, Op cit.p.50
57. Interview with Karuna Kanta Roy ,son of Rajbanshi Jotedar, vill+p.o.: Ambari, Coochbehar, W.B. dated on: 28.02.2012.
58. Interview with Manindra Nath Das
And
Charu Chandra Sanyal, Op cit,p.89-120
59. Chakraborty,Chhanda, *Kochbehare Nari Sikshar Bibartan*, Madhuparni, *Bises Coochbehar Jila Sankha*, August 1990, Ed. By Ananda Gopal Ghosh, Chief Ed. Ajitesh Bhattacharya, Balurghat, W.B., p.207
60. Interview with Manindra Nath Das
61. According to him ‘Rajbanshi jotedars started competition by giving secrete dowry to catch the modern educated bridegroom. Because, even in the middle of 20th Century it was not open, letter on gradually it transformed as a social status.’
Interview from Karuna Kanta Roy
Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,p.89-120
62. Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,p.91
63. Swaraj Basu, Op cit.p.63
64. Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,pp.96-97
65. *He (Chandreswar Roy) asked his caste brethren not to allow their women to roam around in the markets and the fields as the upper caste Hindus did not allow their women such freedom. Similarly widow remarriage was to be discontinued.*
Swaraj Basu, Op cit.p.68
66. “*The reversal of position due to the close association with the caste Hindus where heavy dowry is often demanded from the guardian of the girl*”
Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,p.91

“While historical evidence is suggestive of dowry’s preeminence among most castes in Bengal, in what follows I will be paying particular attention to its destructive effects among the so-called upper castes, or those that were overtly involved in the movement for upward social mobility along castist lines.”

Rochona Majumdar, *Snehalata’s death: Dowry and women’s*

agency in colonial Bengal, Indian Economic Social History Review 2004 41:
433DOI: 10.1177/001946460404100404,p.437

67. Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit,p.100

68. *“The Samiti condemned the caste Hindu practice of giving dowry by the parents of the bride .Strict adherence to the ‘sastric’ rituals and rousing of social awareness against the introduction of dowry in Rajbanshi society were also stressed”*

Sukhbilas Barma: *North Bengal and Its People, Socio-Political Movement in North Bengal*, V-I,Ed.Sukhbilas Barma,Global Vision Publishing House, New Delhi,2007,p.24

69. Charu Chandara Sanyal, Op cit.p.28

70. *‘the Desi rajbanshis claim to be better than the Paliyas, in that they conform more strictly to Hindu custom. The more orthodox Rajbanshis burn their dead, and profess to marry their daughters as infants, and to forbid widow remarriage. Amongst the less orthodox the dead are burnt or buried as is most convenient, and adult marriage and widow remarriage prevail. All classes appear to recognize divorce’.*

F.W. Strong, *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers*, Dinajpur, The Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1912, Reprinted: N.L. Publisher, Siliguri, W.B.pp.52,53