

Upendra Nath Barman: The Rise of a leader from Regional to National Politics 1898 - 1988

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Abstract: *Rise of a leader is not a new phenomenon from ancient period to still today in the whole world. Like other parts of the world India also not lagging behind on it. In India various leaders came from an assortment of fields which might be for nations, territory, community or any other issues. In such cases Bengal also got many leaders from various issues. Like other political issues caste politics has also played a very crucial role in the politics of Bengal from colonial period to still today. In contrast northern part of Bengal also played very significant role, where some movements like Namasudra Movements, Rajbanshi Kshatriya Movement was held by some eminent caste leaders; among the leaders Upendra Nath Barman had played a very imperative role in the context of North Bengal as well as for the Nation. This paper is an attempt to observe the role of Upendra Nath Barman in circumstance of a Kshatriya Samity leader as well as a leader of a nation.*

Keywords: *Leader, Caste, Sanskritization, Rajbanshi, Namsudra, Colonial rule, Kshatriyahood, Scheduled Caste Party.*

Introduction:

Regional study has recently gained importance in the study of history, particularly to understand the foremost stream history. History of North Bengal has gained importance and its given attention by scholars in the recent times and they have tried to consolidate the historiography of North Bengal in the socio-cultural, economic as well as political perspective. The northern part of Bengal is a multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious region, for that explanation North Bengal is often called as the 'little India'. Many historians, social scientist and scholars considered that North Bengal was the homeland of Rajbanshi¹ community; numerically, they were the second largest Hindu caste in colonial province of Bengal as a whole according to the 1901 Census.² The origin of this caste is shrouded in mystery and the basic debate is around the question of their association with the Koches. Whatever might have been their actual origin, there is no dispute about the fact that the Rajbanshi's were the early settlers in northern part of North Bengal. They were a socially homogenous community in the sense that there was no sub-caste among them. Their socio-religious system is indicative of the existence among them of a culture and social organization different from the Brahmanical culture, which gave

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the Rajbanshi a distinct character.³ However, in the traditional social hierarchy of Bengal the Rajbanshi's were placed at a fairly low rank, if not the lowest along with the Namasudras and others. But the advanced sections among the Rajbanshi's aspired for equal social status with the upper castes. It was essentially from this sense of socio-cultural inequality and the consequent quest of higher social rank that the Rajbanshi caste movement originated. It is to be mentioned that social mobility, upward as well as downward, of individual castes was a common practice during the pre-British and the British period. Generally speaking, lower caste mobilization against upper caste hegemony demonstrates two major trends, either the emulation of upper caste culture, i.e. 'Sanskritization' or the rejection of the caste system. Nevertheless, the Rajbanshi community had organized a movement in the name of "*Rajbanshi Kshatriya Movement*" for rejuvenating the *Kshatriyahood* among the Rajbanshi under the leadership of Raisaheb Thakur Panchanan Barma and his disciples Upendra Nath Barman and others. Needless to say, the Rajbanshi's who had been identified by the British Government as 'Koch' revolted against their being considered a tribe or low-caste by the census officials; and under the leadership of Haramohan Khajanchi, Harikishore Barma and afterwards Thakur Panchanan Barma and Upendra Nath Barman organized *Kshatriyaization* movement and claimed '*Kshatriyahood*' for themselves. This movement had a great impact on socio-cultural-economic and political scenario of North Bengal and to some extent in parts of Bengal and Assam. Indeed, during the colonial period, particularly after the 1930s, when the British Government began to support such lower caste movements in order to legitimize India's colonial connection, and even later when the transfer of power became imminent in the 1940s, all sorts of realignments began to take shape. However, subsequent to the bereavement of Raisaheb Thakur Panchanan Barma, Upendra Nath Barman took the leadership and he was the capable leader who served the Rajbanshi community and for the nation throughout his life. Not much is known about the works and activities of Upendra Nath Barman to all round progress of Rajbanshi community as well as for the country. No serious attempts had been made by the scholars, researchers to evaluate the role and contribution of Upendra Nath Barman. Nevertheless, there are some stray papers and articles but academically it has been not so much highlighted. Thus, this study intends to take up the role of Upendra Nath Barman as a social reformer through his activities. It intends to access the transformation of a regional leader to a national leader. In fact, sketch of the life of Upendra Nath Barman is a reflection of the society and politics of North Bengal. But, it is also to be mentioned that for the lack of available sources this paper is more narrative than analytical in approach.

The background for the rise of caste leaders:

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century caste movement occurred in some states by the distinguished leader due to the ethnographic surveys and Census operations and the promise of institutional reforms held out by the Victoria's regime. However,

colonial rule created conditions and set progress in motions for the growth of a non-Brahman ideology and emergence of lower caste movements. Moreover, the western education also played a crucial factor for raising such movements because with the enlightenment of education some of them became educated and they got the idea of their community development. These movements were the results of economic prosperity and social ambitions of some upwardly mobile communities, or more precisely for their elite leaders who were looking for higher ritual positions in keeping with their newly improved secular status. In the first stage of their movements they aimed only at acquiring the symbols of high status. But in the second; their attention shifted to the more material sources of high status, i.e., education, employment and political power. For that reason we have found such lower caste movement which was led by different personalities namely, Jyotirao Phule's *Satyasadhak Samaj* (Truth Seeking Society), E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker's '*Self-respect*' movement etc. From such background the lower caste people of Bengal as well as North Bengal also made a distinctive movement for their own community. Like Jogendra Nath Mandal, P. R. Thakur leded Namosudra Movement and Thakur Panchanan Barma led the Kshatriya Movement even in the 1930's and the 1940's the Rabhas had made attempts to establish themselves as *Sudras* within the Hindu fold and tried to secure the services of the Brahmin priests. Dhaneswar Bhattacharya who took the initiative for upgrading the Rabhas had to face social boycott by his well-to-do Rajbanshi clients (*jajmans*).⁴ This lower caste movement or ethnic movement's leader mostly started their political carrier from a regional level or from their own community, hitherto some leaders were make ar. massive contribution in their community as well as for the country men by their own individuality.

Upendra Nath Barman and Kshatriya Samity:

Upendra Nath Barman was born in a substantial peasant family of a village called Goalpara within the police station and sub-division of Matha Bhangra of Cooch Behar Districts in 31st March, 1898. He had a bright educational career which began from the Keshribari model school of Matha Bhangra and later High English School of Matha Bhangra Sub-Division town. He has got the 1st Division and Districts champion in Metric Examination and received the native scholarship.⁵ He also got 1st Division in B. A. Examination from Victoria College of Cooch Behar and studied law in Calcutta. In his school life he had affianced himself with the well known revolutionary association *Anusilan Samity*,⁶ but drifted away from it gradually due to the influence of Kshatriya Samity. He had also refused to engage himself in the Gandhian non-co-operation movement (1920-1922 A. D.).⁷ Raisaheb Thakur Panchanan Barma, the Rajbanshi leader considered as the '*Vidyasagar*' of the Rajbanshi community and the most imperative leader of Kshatriya Movement also called the father of Rajbanshi Community was his "*Guru*". He was very close to Raisaheb Panchanan Barma like Jyotirao Phule's close associate Gopal Baba Valangkar.⁸ For that reason he was attended the all India

'Kshatriya Sammelan' two times from Jalpaiguri which was held at Alwer and Indore respectively in 1924 and 1928.⁹ Upendra Nath Barman also too much dedicated for his community and kshatriya Samity, he has narrated in his autobiography how he joined in the Kshatriya Samity due to the charisma of Raisaheb Thakur Panchanan Barma's valuable vocalizations at Raichengi Taluk of Cooch Behar in a conference.

In this conference the dynamic leader of Kshatriya Movement Thakur Panchanan Barma gave his dialogue with great fanaticism near about two hours. But unexpectedly Panchanan Barma ordered him with the statement that –“*Upen ala tui ka*”¹⁰ (Upen (U.N. Barman), now you say), in that case Upendra Nath Barman address about Kshatriya Samity with the allusion of valuable speech of Thakur Panchanan Barma. It was the first attachment of Upendra Nath with Thakur Panchanan Barma and Kshatriya Samity. Later he joined with Kshatriya Samity activity while he was studied at Law in Calcutta. Needless to say, another reason of his joining with the Kshatriya Samity was the bitter experience of Caste humiliation in the Victoria College hostel like Panchanan Barma. In his autobiography Upendra Nath Barman has narrated his student days at the Cooch Behar Victoria College during 1916-20. In the college hostel there were two dining hall according to their liking. But one day the hostel superintendent in a notice declared that, one hall would be held in reserve for Brahmans and the other for the Kshatriya, while a separate arrangement would be made for the students of the other communities for taking their food. Upendra Nath Barman protested against this caste discrimination by the college hostel superintendent and complained to the state administration. Ultimately the matter was brought to the notice of the college principal, who made it clear to the hostel superintendent that “*Victoria College hostels not for those who observe caste distinction.*”¹¹ However, with the interaction of Panchanan Barma, Upendra Nath Barman made a divergent platform to express him as a leader and till the demise of Raisaheb Panchanan he remained with the associated person of him. With the advice of his 'Guru' Raisaheb Thakur Panchanan Barma, he denied the post of “*Naib Akilkar*” (a post equivalent to the post of today's a Sub-Divisional Officer, of a state), in the Cooch Behar state in spite of having a brilliant academic career like his Guru.¹² In 1925 after carrying out his education from Cooch Behar he was settled in Jalpaiguri as a lawyer and an active worker of Kshatriya Samity in Jalpaiguri with another leader Madhusudan Roy of Jalpaiguri. Upendra Nath stated that, Raisaheb Panchanan Barma advised him to settle Jalpaiguri as there was no active leader for Kshatriya Samity.

Formation of 'Kshatriya Samity' by Panchanan Barma (May 1, 1910) with the objective of all round development of Rajbanshi came to the realization that the intended social uplift was not possible by keeping himself associated with the caste-biased leaders of the National Congress, he converted the Samity into a political organization. The recommendations in the memorandum sent by Panchanan Barma to the chief secretary to the Government of West Bengal on 5th November 1917 in course of the collection of

views of the local leaders regarding Indian administrative reforms reveal his actual attitude towards the interest of small groups of communities. Conversely, Kshatriya Samity contested the election under the leadership of Panchanan Barma who owned the election with thumping majority and the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samity participated in all the four elections held in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1920, 1923, 1926 and 1929 under the Act of 1919 and achieved striking electoral success.¹³ On the contrary, with this Samity Upendra Nath involved himself not only in his munificent progress of Rajbanshi community rather he made a bridge of all round progress of different communities and the country men also.

Rise of Upendra Nath Barman as a Political leader:

As earlier mentioned that Upendra Nath came from Cooch Behar in 1925 at Jalpaiguri, he got the position in politics in Jalpaiguri with his own magnetism. It was reflected when within six years of his coming to Jalpaiguri he was elected as a candidate of Jalpaiguri Municipal election in 1931. Jalpaiguri municipality election, reportedly on the contention from the representatives of the depressed class the Government nominated Upendra Nath Barman as a vice-commissioner of municipality.¹⁴ At the initiative of Nawab Musharraf Hoissen and Rai Bahadur Bipulendra Nath Banerjee, a mutter written by the European tea planters and a known loyalist Barman was also elected to the position of vice-chairman of the Municipality in the same year. During his chairmanship he took lot of munificent step towards the inhabitants of Jalpaiguri, besides it's with the help of Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal he has made Harijon Basti (colony) at Jalpaiguri. Later in the first election under the Government of India Act 1935, was held in 1937. In this election Upendra Nath Barman was selected as a Kshatriya Samity candidate. In this regard, it is to be mentioned about another leader Madhusudan Roy with whom Upendra Nath Barman started his activities in Jalpaiguri with the supervision of Panchanan Barma. Madhusudan Roy was a person who was also studied at Victoria College. He was little younger than Thakur Panchanan. For his enormous knowledge in English language he was prepared the '*memorandum*' of Kshatriya Samity.¹⁵ He was the first president of Kshatriya Samity and Panchanan was the Secretary. He took the initiative for established a branch of Kshatriya Samity in Jalpaiguri and for his tremendous contribution the 8th Annual Kshatriya conference was held at Jalpaiguri in 1927.¹⁶ On the other hand he was associated with tea garden and the only single manager of the tea garden among the Rajbanshi's. In Jalpaiguri Madhusudan Roy's social position was also prestigious. His daughter Bimola Roy was established '*Matrimandir*' for gave the women education among Rajbanshi Community, this school was also visited by Mahatma Gandhi while in 1925 he came to Jalpaiguri and gave her blessing for such kind of initiative.¹⁷ From this background Madhusudan Roy was entered in politics and got the position of Commissioner of Jalpaiguri Municipal Corporation. He was also the member of District Board but he was unable to present himself in politics in a victorious politician. Even in

1937's Assembly election he did not get ticket of an electoral nominee as a Kshatriya Samity candidate, though later he represented in election as an *Independent* candidate but he failed. Conversely, in 1937 election Upendra Nath Barman, the Kshatriya Samity candidate in Jalpaiguri-Siliguri Constituency claimed himself as a peasant representatives (*krishoker Protinidhi*) and stress on the deplorable condition of the peasant irrespective of their caste and community affiliation. He got the support of some caste Hindu also and succeeds the election very comfortably.¹⁸ In the election of 1937 Plough was the symbol and *Langaler Dabi* (the demand of the plough) was the pamphlet for Upendra Nath Barman. He spontaneously announced his intent of upholding the peasant's interest in the pamphlet. In course of his election campaign of 1937, he focused on the miseries of the poor peasants through his poem "*Langaler Dabi*"

After winning the legislative assembly election he emphasized on peasant upliftment and education among them. In this connection it is to be mentioned that, before independent Rajbanshi Community was mostly dependent on agriculture and it was the social prestige of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya. But a distinct change took place in the economy of northern Bengal with the migration of upper caste gentry into the traditional Rajbanshi areas. With the partition of Bengal, there was influx of huge number of refugees from East Bengal to the border district of north Bengal. These people coming from East Bengal and south Bengal i.e. the *bhatias* put tremendous pressure on the land based rural economy. Till the advent of the nineteenth Century most of the land in North Bengal was in the possession of the local people i.e. the Rajbanshi's, the Koches, the Meches etc. Unlike the upper caste gentry, these local people did not face the problem of status inconstancy if they themselves cultivated the land. Not only did they consolidate their position as non-cultivating gentry, they also came to form a middle class at the village level with holding a vast amount of land and gradually established their monopoly over the local administration. Taking advantage of the backwardness of the local cultivators or poor *riots*, they began to exploit them. As results, many of the Rajbanshi's were turned into sharecroppers in the lands which they once owned. However, Upendra Nath himself belongs to a peasant family, so he understood well the peasant troubles. Not only in the pamphlet, in the constituent assembly had he always protested the interest of the peasants. Upendra Nath Barman opposed the move when Bijoy Prasad Singha Roy, the revenue minister sought to increase the revenue on the land in Jalpaiguri and *dooars*. He said "*so far as people in the Dooars are concerned they are not at all prosperous... At a time when the agriculturists are smarting under the burden of economic depression and cannot clear their arrears, is just for the Government to increase the value of the tenures...?*"¹⁹ Through this valuable point of view it might be said that he was not take the peasants and his pamphlets as the weapon of election rather he always tried to cooperate and upgraded their socio-economic condition. A significant development in Jalpaiguri district during the period was the formation of the district Organization

Committee of the *Krishak Samity* on 23rd December, 1938 with Gurudas Roy of Manikganj, Dacca, as the Secretary.²⁰ The impact of *Krishak Samity* soon came to be felt on the political life of the region. The chief slogans of the Samity were abolition of the *Zamindari* system and land to the tillers. Stopping the collections of *Hat tola* or levy by *Hat* owners and *Ijaradars* from the middle and poor peasants, lowering of interest rates on *karja dhan* or petty loan taken by *adhiars* (sharecroppers) from *giri*. Large numbers of poor peasants, *adhiars* and other sections of rural population attended the district *Krishak Samity* Conference at Maidan Dighi in Boda where the office of the Samity was constructed on a 4 Bigha plot of land donated by Nandeshwar Barman, a small peasant. In response to *Krishak Samity*'s call, many volunteers marched into the hats with red flags and *lathis* (sticks). The victory of no-*tolas* (tax) campaign in Maidan Dighi enthused the peasants of Bodo, Debiganj and Pachagarh police station areas. The movements led to the stoppage of collection of *tolas* in hats of the area. On the other hand he mainly emphasized on the education of the people to the cabinet government of Fazlul Hoque (1937-41).

Like Panchanan Barma he also realizes very effectively that without education the depressed class people were unable to improve themselves. He also argued that education can only be an agent for social mobility if it can provide equal opportunity to all. He was painfully aware of the existing backwardness of the community as well as of the fact that without an improvement in the educational standards the community would not realize the value of social reform. He always emphasized the education among them and it has a perceptible thing that he spoke much about free and compulsory primary education for the depressed classes of which the Government had no earnest desire as because he knows that in the socio-economic perspective they are not ready for taking higher education as much as primary education. For that reason he raised the proposal in the Bengal Legislative Assembly in the year 1937 that "*It seems that this question of free and compulsory primary education is going to be agitated over and over in this house and that without any result... it is duty of this house to see that the agricultural population of Bengal who are producing 90 percent of the province must be given their just due.*"²¹ Alongside he also inspired the people for establishing various schools in the different regions of North Bengal even he himself uphold the duty of a president and secretary of many schools namely, Jalpesh Lakhikanta High School, Dhupguri High School, Helapakri High School etc. For the education of the villagers he always encourages the villagers like Raisaheb Panchanan Barma. Nevertheless, with the spread of education the aspiration of the Rajbanshi youths also increased progressively.

On the other hand after winning the 1937 election Upendra Nath Barman was invited to speak on the "*Ideal and Thinking of the Kshatriya Samity*" at the first special session of the congress study circle held on 12 December 1937.²² As the political life in Jalpaiguri and the adjacent districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur was the *Kshatriya*

Movement influence of which among the Rajbanshi Hindus, as shown by the election result was considerable. Some of the congress leaders were too keen interest on having a dialogue with the Kshatriya Samity and in finding out areas of common understanding. Nonetheless, Upendra Nath Barman in his speech at the congress study Circle also spoken of the links that the Kshatriya Movement had with the rest of the polity.²³ In the speeches and writings of Barman and other leaders and activist of the movement during this phase, the stalwart demonstrated earlier was watered down, if not abandoned altogether. The movement, in fact continued to exhibit considerable ambiguity which was partly a result of a change introduced by the Act 1935. It provided for seat reservation for the Scheduled Castes and thus conceded a major demand of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya and other 'Backward' and 'depressed' castes movement.²⁴ In this regard it should be mention that, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was pleading at the Round Table conference in Landon for the provision of a separate electorate for the depressed classes. The Government accepted this proposal and announced the "Communal Award", in 1932. Accordingly a Scheduled of the backward classes was prepared and in Bengal 15 seats were reserved in the proposed Legislative Assembly for such Scheduled Caste candidates, whom only the Scheduled Caste votes would have the right to elect. The Kshatriya Samity wholeheartedly supported this proposal.²⁵ It has to be mention that, after the passing away of Panchanan Barma in 1935, Upendra Nath Barman of Jalpaiguri in collaboration with Nagendra Narayan Roy of Rajpur represented the Rajbanshi's in the Bengal Legislative Council and endeavored for their uplift and interest. Their hearts were aroused after the Poona pact in 1932 and maintained correspondence and contact with the depressed classes of India. It was this continuity of contact that brought dividend in long run. Though there was some reservation within the community about the sub-caste status, but the Kshatriya Samity convinced them with the agreement that scheduled implies included in a 'Scheduled' for electoral purposes and has no relation with the social status of any caste Kshatriyas, thus obtained the status of Scheduled Caste and this recognition was mentioned by F. W. Robertson in his address on 15th and 16th conferences of the Kshatriya Samity held in Jalpaiguri on July, 1935.²⁶ Thus the Rajbanshi led a movement, first to become Kshatriya and then Scheduled Caste in order to safeguard their social position and dignity in one hand and economic interest and prosperity on the other hand.²⁷ Nevertheless, in the 1937 election Pushpajit Barma, Kshatranath Singha from Rangpur, Upendra Nath Barman from Jalpaiguri and Premhari Barma, Shyama Prasad Barma from Dinajpur succeed the election as Kshatriya Samity candidates. For the first time such number of Rajbanshi leaders could be successful the election.²⁸ After 1937 the congress leaders were tried to pursue them to join the congress for prevents the Muslim league in ministerial power. Even in 1938 when Gandhi came to Calcutta, Gandhi requested them to join the congress in order to strengthen it, because he thought it was the only national organization. But they opposed to join the National congress because like Sir Saiyad Ahamed Khan they also thought that congress was an organization of the Upper Caste

Hindus and they will not give them much preference. However, Upendra Nath Barman and other Kshatriya MLAs initially supported the Muslim-league dominated coalition government. Out of 36 sub-caste MLAs, 31 including 6 Kshatriya members formed the Independent Scheduled Caste (a legislative group) with Upendra Nath Barman as a leader and Jogendra Nath Mondal as Secretary.

Apart from this commencing the post 1937 election Upendra Nath worked to promote the unity of the Rajbanshi Community, he also attempt to unite from the Scheduled Caste Party (ISCP) in 1938. The Independent Scheduled Caste Members formed a separate group in the Assembly. Jogendra Nath Mandal, the general secretary, Hemendra Nath Barman was a member of the ISCP in the constituent assembly of Bengal.²⁹ From among the Rajbanshis, Upendra Nath Barman emerged as the leader of the Scheduled Caste Legislative party. Like Panchanan Barma he too understood that without protection and reservation in politics, education and administration a backward caste could not improve its social position merely by capitalizing on caste pride. Thus ISCP under the leadership of Upendra Nath Barman appeared as a political Identity with authority in Bengal. These members generally tried to voice in the assembly the grievances of the lower castes and sought to ensure government assistance for the advancement of these people through increased educational facilities and reservation of jobs. The Rajbanshi members also followed the same line in favors of their community. In the early 1940's being an articulate speaker and leader of the ISCP, under Upendra Nath Barman became a Minister-in charge of forest and exercise Department in the second cabinet ministry (December 1941 to March 1943).³⁰ This was the first time that a Rajbanshi and someone not from a landowning background, was made a minister. Local weeklies like *Trisota*, in its editorial, welcomed his appointment as a minister.³¹ The District Mahamedan association led by Jaharatullah Ahmed and the district unit of the Kshatriya Samity gives him a joint reception.³² Later, on 25th October 1942, the Calcutta District Scheduled Caste Conference took place, which the Chief Minister Fazlul Hoque had consented to inaugurate. On this occasion the Calcutta District Scheduled Caste Federation was constituted with the minister Upendra Nath Barman as the President.³³ However, the second cabinet Government by Fazlul Hoque suffered badly, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's resignation from the Governments on 20th November 1942, arrival of the Cripps mission for "*quite India*" movement and formation of the Nationalist Government of Tamluk, the famine in the 1943 and scarcity in the supply of food etc. made for the weakness of the second Government led by Fazlul Hoque. Finally, it collapses on 31st march, 1943. After the breakdown of the Fazlul Hoque ministry Khwaza Nazimuddin of the Muslim league formed the Muslim league Government (1943-45). Upendra Nath Barman refused the offer to join with Nazimuddin, he said that "*Sir, Nazimuddin requested me to join his Govt., I expressed my sorrow and said that I would not join the entirely Communal Ministry.*"³⁴ Though, he did not join but the other

Scheduled Caste leader namely, Premhari Barman, Pulin Bihari Mallik and Jogendranath Mandal joined with Naziamuddin Government. But surprising is that Premhari Barman, a representative of the Kshatriya Samity had joined this ministry with the same portfolio held previously by Upendra Nath Barman. This was a clear indication of the changing direction of the Rajbanshi caste movement and also of a division within its leadership.

Subsequent to that, Upendra Nath Barman became involved in the Hindu Mahasabha activities. The Hindu Mahasabha started to spread its politics and organization among the Rajbanshi Hindus, Santals, Meches and Christians through a variety of activities such as relief work among distressed peasants in Dhupguri and Falakata. *Suddhi yagna* for a Rajbanshi Women alleged to have been kidnapped by Muslim miscreants, *Suddhi* (pure) Ceremony for Santals, re-conversion of Christians into Hinduism to organize anti-Pakistan public meeting under the beau of Rajbanshi Kshatriya Organization.³⁵ By late 1944 the districts leaders left confident enough to convince the all Bengal Hindu Sabha Conference in Jalpaiguri. The Conference, held on 24th and 25th February 1945, was attended by all India and provincial leaders like B. S. Munje, Babaji Khaparde, Shama Prasad Mukherjee and Asutosh Lahiri. Nalini Ghosh, the Reception Committee Chairman, delivered the welcome address. Barman seconded the Resolution on Pakistan moved by Khaparde calling upon the People to resist the Pakistan proposal by all means.³⁶

By this time the next ballot vote was on 19-22nd march, 1946 after the suspension of the Nazimuddin Government on 28th march, 1945. During this period India and Bengal Government were in complex shape due to several factors. The demand of the congress for the complete liberty, demand of Pakistan by the Muslim league, the communist movement made for some of the difficulties of Indian politics. In 1946, election the Kshatriya Samity set up two candidates Upendra Nath Barman and Girija Singha but both of them were defeated by the congress candidates- Mohini Barman and Prasanya Deb Raikat.³⁷ It is very difficult to say why Upendra Nath Barman failed to win the 1946 election. He did not write despite which about his failure, but it is not to be wrong hypothesis if we mention about his failure reason was responsible for their internal-conflict in Kshatriya Samity. Though, the influence of the Kshatriya Samity was in the wane during 1940's partly because of the demise of Panchanan Barma in 1935 and partly by greater involvement of the Rajbanshi elites in the nationalist movement under the congress leadership. However, from this incident he started to move away from politics gradually and concentrated in his lawyer business, as a high profile knowledgeable person he realize if the people don't want him as a representative why he stay in politics? But at the sudden death of Prasanya Deb Raikat of Jalpaiguri constituency in December 1946, Upendra Nath Barman contested as a congress nominee and got the victory.³⁸ Though he was criticized by the other Samity leader but he was a practical idealist who knew how to combine what is desirable with what is possible. He knew that is the

political struggle there must be changes in strategy and tactics from time to time. However, he again came back in politics; this joining with Congress gave him a new platform to present himself as a capable leader of a nation. This was the turning point of Upendra Nath Barman's life, from this stage he turned from a Regional leader to National leader with combination in the Indian National Congress. It is also to be mentioned that, at the individual level, however, in spite of the Kshatriya Samity's official pro-British stand, many of the Rajbanshi elites were in alliance with the congress at different stages. An important example of this was Kshatranath, who supported the *Kshatriyaization* movement but at the same time joined the congress party as a supporter of congress he had intact in the annual conference of the Kshatriya Samity appealed to the Rajbanshi to join in the nationalist agitation against the British Raj.³⁹ Moreover, in the general election of 1946 many Rajbanshi contested the election with the support of the Congress against the official Kshatriya Samity candidates. These interactions between some of the Rajbanshi elites and the Congress leaders was perhaps because of the changing equation of power during this period which had enhanced the prospect of the Rajbanshi leaders' sharing power with the upper caste elites from within the congress.

Upendra Nath Barman's political activity from regional level to national:

However, the bereavement of Prasanya Deb Raikat enclosed the way for him being summoned in the congress and he was elected as a congress candidate in 1947 to enter the constituent Assembly. He was the only person who was selected from North Bengal as a member of the forming committee of constitution in 25th November 1949; while 252 members were nominated for making Constitution under the leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. On the other hand, in 1948 he became the member of Commonwealth Parliamentary conference and went to London as a representative of India. In the Commonwealth conference in his lecture he stressed on the Democracy, Parliamentary Government, Provincial Government, Panchayat system in India etc. He stated on Panchayat system with this point of view that, "*...the whole country should be divided into small units and modeling it upon our ancient usage in the past, there should be a village Panchayat consisting of 500 persons. The man who gives the best social service to the Panchayat will be elected by those 500 persons and the next stage will be that out of five Panchayat there shall be one head Panchayat who would be chosen for election purposes... In selecting our members in this way, we look at the matter from two points of view: (i) From the point of view of the services the man has rendered to the nation before he was elected, and (ii) from this point of view he is a person possessed of outstanding qualities. If we have men of this kind of elected, then we think the nation can safely trust the Legislature that is ultimately elected, and being committed to majority rule, we shall submit to what the majority think is fit and good for the nation.*"⁴⁰ In the course of his valuable lectures the argument about the implementation of Panchayat system became very popular among the leaders of India. And finally in the year 1952, the first Panchayat

election was held in Rajasthan. On the other hand he also gave an international message for all countries to develop their country with this statement, "...the masses not only of India, but of all countries, consist of that somewhat backward section of the community who are doing most for the benefit of the nation, namely the agriculturist and the industrial workers. We think this is the only system that can give them their rights and at the same time be beneficial to the country as a whole. It is not a case of catering for a particular class; but for each and every person in the nation. This is a system which can be adjusted to the rights of the different parties in the country, and it can evolve and develop without causing a revolution in any sense of the word. We have based ourselves upon this system of government and we are not going to have any kind of class rule. I think this system of government has a great future before it, and I believe the day will come when other countries will adopt this system."⁴¹ With this precious speech he proved that he was the leader of mass people not for the elite. His sympathy about somewhat backward section is really a high arrangement.

After that, at end of the month of January 1949 he was visited Kashmir as a representative of parliament for visiting the situation after independence during the Governor Generalship of Chakrobarty Rajgopalachari. Within nine members he was one of the most important members of the parliament. In this committee after visiting the Kashmir situation submitted the defense report to Delhi. In 1950 he went to Rangoon of Brahmadesh (now Myanmar) as a representative of India to join the meeting of International Rice Commission.⁴² Then he was the member of parliament and the standing advisory Committee of agricultural department with an expert Dr. K. Ramiah, Director of Central Rice Research Institute. However, in the IRC meeting he was deliberate his lecture and requested to the agriculturist scientist to explore the theory how the surplus paddy would be increase more according to the increasing of population. Subsequently, from 1950-1952 he was the provisional parliamentary member but in 1952 election he again elected from Darjeeling- Cooch Behar- Jalpaiguri Constituency and after that in 1957 he once more elected from Jalpaiguri-constituency and remained the Member of Parliament till 1961. During the Member of Parliament in 1959 he was the Chairman of Public Accounts Committee. Here he also contributed his valuable motion which was reflected while in 1971 in the Golden Jubilee of Public Accounts Committee. He was called for as a chief guest but for his poor health he could not attend there, then he send a views and Impression on Working and Achievements of P. A. C. for the humble request of Golden Jubilee organizer. With this dignitary position in the year 26th March 1964 he was elected as a member of West Bengal Legislative Assembly and 5th may 1965 he was elected as Deputy Chairman.

Besides these contribution, Upendra Nath Barman's another great involvement was made with the merger of Cooch Behar with the West Bengal. In this regard it has to be mentioned about the problem of merger with Cooch Behar State. In Cooch Behar there

was an organization in the name of *Hitasadhani Sabha*, it was an organization accelerated by the people of Cooch Behar and more or less all the Cooch Behari people were took the membership of this Samity. This Samity wanted Cooch Behar to remain independent of the Union of India.⁴³ However, the Cooch Behar state Government authorities had arrested and these anti-Indian feelings of the members of the State Council and the *Hitasadhani Sabha* have complicated the integration problem of the Cooch Behar State. On the other hand after the birth of Pakistan, the lions section of the Muslim members of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* deviated in their Muslim identity they have been inclining to the Muslim identity. The Muslim members of the *Hitasadhani Sabha* tried to materialize their dream known as “*turn Cooch Behar into Pakistan*”.⁴⁴ In this complicated situation the West Bengal Chief Minister Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray and Sardar Bllav Bhai Patel then home minister of independent India wanted the merger of Cooch Behar State with West Bengal and on the other hand, the Assamese Rajbanshi leaders Sarat Chandra Sinha, (later the chief minister of Assam) and Purnendu Narayan Sinha wanted the joining of Cooch Behar State with Assam. From this critical situation the chief Minister of West Bengal wanted to know the opinion of the most respected leaders of the Rajbanshi community as well as national leader Upendra Nath Barman. In such situation Upendra Nath Barman gave his argument in fervor of the merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal. As it has already mentioned he was very close to Panchanan Barma and a personality like him was clearly in favors of merger of the state with west Bengal for some definite reason. In his book ‘*Uttar banger Sekal O Amar Jivan Smriti*’ he has stated, “*When the tug of war on the issue of merger of Cooch Behar was going on, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray, Chief Minister of west Bengal met me in Delhi and asked for my opinion. I myself was a resident of Gopalpur village of Cooch Behar, although I was residing in Jalpaiguri and was elected a member of the council by the west Bengal Legislature. I told him unresistingly that we the people of Cooch Behar like to remain with West Bengal. I subscribed to this view for two reasons- (i) Education in Cooch Behar has been in vogue in Bengali for more than hundreds years (ii) Assamese’s and tribal language were in vague everywhere in Assam, except in Goalpara Districts, implying there by that our linguistic position will be concerned if we joined Assam. Besides, I told him that we went to remain with the development culture of West Bengal.*”⁴⁵ He expressed the same opinion to Sardar Ballav Bhai Patel the then home minister of India. However, in the 1st January 1950 Cooch Behar State, a so called independent state was declared as a district of West Bengal. At the instance of Dr. Ray, he represented before the *Kunjru* Committee, which was making an enquiry at Cooch Behar at that juncture and expressed the same opinion. Even in his speech at the parliament on 20th December 1955, he stated, “*I myself, is a resident of Cooch Behar should remain a separate state under the center or should be merged with Assam, I expressed my clear opinion to Dr. Ray that the Cooch Behar has been associated with west Bengal for centuries and as such Cooch Behar is much more intimate to west Bengal than to Assam.*”⁴⁶ However, the congress leaders including

Upendra Nath Barman were in favor of merging Cooch Behar with West Bengal. On the other hand before 1955 Islampur was the part of Kishanganj under the state of Bihar. But in the year 1955, while the state formation was continued with the basis of linguistic categories in the meantime Islampur was merge with West Bengal with the strong opinion of Upendra Nath Barman in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. Though some Hindi and Urdu lingual people and leader like Shyamanandan Sahay, MLA of Kishanganj Constituency was opposed this proposal and gave the argument that since 1947 while Bengal was divided from that point of time the leaders of Bihar were demanded Islampur would be merge with Kishanganj. However, as a representative of North Bengal his view was considered very crucially in Bengal Legislative Assembly, for that reason the Bengali people of Bihar had got the opportunity to keep on the Bengali people of West Bengal.⁴⁷

Conclusion:

Upendra Nath Barman was the second man of Thakur Panchanan Barma. Intended for the social and political development he always tried to follow the philosophy of Panchanan Barma for his whole life activities towards the society and for the country. He involved in the Kshatriya Samity as a social worker and became a most important member of the Samity and he could make a new identity of *Kshatriyaisitation* movement and gave inspiration for his various writings like "*Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Itihas*", "*Thakur Panchanan Barmar Jivan Charit*", "*Rajbanshi Bhasar Prabhad Prabachan O Heyali*" etc. which helped uplifting the Rajbanshi society to a new horizon. His writings and activism succeeded in establishing the Kshatriya movement in a new profile. But besides it's, like Thakur Panchanan Barma he might also realize the importance of reservation for such socio-economic backward community and he has tried to promote their social and economic status. He joined in politics and became a most valuable leader and tried to develop the people's condition of Rajbanshi's and the people of other communities of North Bengal. Nevertheless, with the inspiration of Panchanan Barma, Upendra Nath Barman took various steps to strengthen of his community like improvement of peasant's status in the socio-economic perspective, development of educational status among Rajbanshi's, achieve political rights etc. Even he could realize that without such expansion any community is unable to develop in a proper way. For that reason after winning 1937s election he did not join Congress, rather he presented himself as a leading Scheduled Caste Leader because he wanted to build up these community from their own periphery. But later he joined the Indian National Congress for a new identity in all over India and abroad. This reflects the farsightedness as a politician. Though he belonged from an underdeveloped area like Goalpara village of Matha Bhanga Sub-Division under the districts of Cooch Behar and also from a backward community yet, for his leadership

he got the membership of constitution forming committee for making the Constitution. Alongside, he also represented as a well-organized leader and expert in various national and international committee and conference where he had shown his sincere responsibility and love for the country and for the lower caste community. This created uniqueness about him and the community also got lots of inspiration from him. At this juncture he has continued his *guru's* aspiration because Panchanan Barma wanted to give *Kshatriyaisitation* movement an all India platforms and take the Rajbanshi's in the national level. Upendra Nath Barman could prove himself in the national level rising from a regional socio-political background. In conjunction with as an occupant of North Bengal he also observed his duty towards the reconstruction of North Bengal in various aspects like merger of Cooch Behar, merger of Islampur from Kishanganj, raise of anti-Pakistan voice along with the representation of Kshatriya Samity representative of the Indian National congress special session with the title "*Ideal and Thinking of the Kshatriya Samity*" etc. But the leader received recognition lately as he was awarded D. Lit Degree from North Bengal University in the year 2001 posthumously. Conversely, the road from Jalpaiguri Municipality to *Jyogmaya Kalibari* is named as *Upendra Nath Barman Sarani* and a bridge has been constructed at Sithalkuchi upon Dharla River in his Name as *Upendra Nath Barman Setu*. However, it should not say wrong that Panchanan Barma has rightly chosen his successor and before his bereavement he remarked that, "*Upen mui to jang baki kamla tui korish*" (Upen the remaining work of mine should be completed by you). So, North Bengal should had leader and social reformer which gave a platform for the people of North Bengal towards creating a new horizon which helped to enriched the backward section people and remembers Upendra Nath Barman as a capable.

Notes and References:

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- ¹ Rajbanshi's of North Bengal are variously known as *Paundra Kshatriyas*, *Vratya-Kshatriyas* or *Bhanga Kshatriyas*. They claim *Kshatriya* descent which had been long ago recognized by the Pandit Samaj of various schools of the Hindu society including that of Banaras.
- ² Census of India, 1901, Vol. VI. Part I, pp. 395-396, 459, Vol. VI A, Part II, Table XIII, p. 246; Bandyopadhyay, S., 1998, "Changing Borders, Shifting Loyalties: Religion, Caste and the Partition of Bengal in 1947" in *Asian Studies Working Paper 2*, Asian Studies Institute, Victoria University of Wellington, p. 17.
- ³ Basu, S., 2003, *Dynamics of a Caste Movement: The Rajbanshis of North Bengal, 1910-1947*. Monahar, New Delhi, pp. 15-16.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.
- ⁵ Barman. U. N.. 1392 B. S., *Uttar Banglar Sekal O Amar Jivan Smriti* (in Bengali), Sree Durga Press, Jalpaiguri, p. 34.

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- ⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31; Ghosh, S., 2013, *Uttar Banger Sadhinata Sangramider Jivanalekha* (in Bengali) Part- I, Khudiram Smriti Raksha Committee, Coochbehar, pp. 102-103.
- ⁷ Barman, U. N., 1392 B. S., *op. cit.*, p. 35.
- ⁸ Dube-Banerjee, I., 2015, *A History of Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, Noida, p. 150.
- ⁹ Basu, S., *op. cit.*, p. 79.
- ¹⁰ Barman, U. N., 1392 B. S., *op. cit.*, p. 47.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, Basu, S., *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64.
- ¹² Barman, P. 2007, "Hitasadhani Movement" in Sukhabilas Barma (ed.) *Socio-Political Movements in North Bengal (A Sub-Himalayan Tract)*, Vol. 1, Global Vision Publishing House, New Delhi, p.77.
- ¹³ Dasgupta, R., 1992, *Economy, Society and politics in Bengal: Jalpaiguri*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp. 126-128.
- ¹⁴ Barman, U. N., 1392 B. S., *op. cit.*, p. 34.
- ¹⁵ Ghosh, A. G., 2002, "Upendra Nath Barman O Tatkaleen Uttarbanger Samaj Rajneeti", in Ichhamuddin Sarkar (ed.), *Aitijye O Itihase Uttarbanga*, N. L. Publishers, Dibrugarh, p. 461.
- ¹⁶ Barman, U. N., 1387 B. S., *Thakur Panchanan Barman Jivan Charit*, Sree Durga Press, Jalpaiguri, pp. 18-19.
- ¹⁷ Roy, D., 1989, *Uttar banger Dharma O Samaj Sanskar Andolon*, North East Publication, Malda, p. 32; Barman, T. K., 2015, "Social Transformation of Rajbanshi Women during 20th Century in North Bengal: A case Study of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar District" an unpublished M. Phil Thesis submitted to the University Of North Bengal, p. 21.
- ¹⁸ Barman, U. N., 1387 B. S., *op. cit.*, p. 69; Dasgupta, R., *op. cit.*, p. 146.
- ¹⁹ For details see *Assembly Proceedings, Proceedings of Bengal Legislative Assembly*, Alipore, Bengal Government Press, 1937, pp. 408-413.
- ²⁰ Barma, S. B., 2007., "Social and political tension in North Bengal since 1947" in Sailen Debnath, (ed.), *Social and political tension in North Bengal*, N. L. Publishers, Siliguri, West Bengal, p.85.
- ²¹ For details see *Assembly Proceedings, Lecture delivered by Upendra Nath Barman in the Constituent Assembly* concerning primary education on 26th August, 1937, p.637.
- ²² *Desbandhu* (Bengali Fortnightly published from Jalpaiguri), 6 Falgun, 1345 B. S., pp. 6-8.
- ²³ Dasgupta, R., *op. cit.*, pp. 158-159.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- ²⁵ Barman, U. N., 1387 B.S., *op. cit.*, p. 76.
- ²⁶ Debnath, S., *op. cit.*, p. 83.

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- ²⁷ Debnath, S., 2008, *Essays on Cultural History of North Bengal*, N. L. Publishers, Siliguri, West Bengal, p. 102.
- ²⁸ Basu, S., *op. cit.*, p. 97; Barman, U. N., 1392 B. S., *op. cit.*, p. 70.
- ²⁹ Bandyopadhyay, S., 2011, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872-1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 189.
- ³⁰ Barman, U. N., 1392 B. S., *op. cit.*, p. 98; Chattopadhyay, G., 1984, *Bengal Electoral Politics and Freedom Struggle 1862-1947*, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, p. 172.
- ³¹ *Trisota* (Local weeklies in Bengali published from Jalpaiguri), 11th January 1942, pp. 3-4.
- ³² Das Gupta, R., *op. cit.*, p. 205.
- ³³ Bandyopadhyay, S., *op. cit.*, p. 194.
- ³⁴ Barman, U. N., 1392 B. S., *op. cit.*, p. 84.
- ³⁵ Barman, T. K., *op. cit.*, pp. 54-56.
- ³⁶ For reports on *Mahasabha* activities see *Trisota* (Local weeklies in Bengali published from Jalpaiguri), 12th December, 1940, 10th March and 14th December 1941, 8th and 9th August, 17th May 1942.
- ³⁷ *Janamat* (Bengali Weekly published from Jalpaiguri), 24th February, 1945, pp. 4-6 and 5th March, 1945, p. 3.
- ³⁸ Das Gupta, R., *op. cit.*, p. 212.
- ³⁹ Barma, S. B., *op. cit.*, pp. 88-90.
- ⁴⁰ Barman, U. N. 1392, *op. cit.*, p. 171-172.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 172-173.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 193-195.
- ⁴³ Ghosh, A. G., 2007, "The Hitasadhani Sabha- Power Struggle by the 'Cooch Beharis'" in Sukhbilas Barma (ed.) *Socio-Political Movements in North Bengal (A Sub-Himalayan Tract)*, Vol. 1, Global Vision Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 102-104.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ Barman, U. N., 1392, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199.
- ⁴⁶ Ghosh, A. G., *op. cit.*, p. 359.
- ⁴⁷ Barman, U. N., 1392, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-229.

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