

CHAPTER -IV

**Traditional Socio-Economic Status of the Rajbanshis :
A Contemporary Historical Perspective**

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TRADITIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE RAJBANSHIS: A CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

The Rajbanshis are considered the most important indigenous group inhabiting at the northern part of West Bengal, comprising the districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling North and South Dinajpur and Malda. According to Census report 1981, the Rajbanshis constitute 19% of total of Scheduled Caste population of West Bengal. Out of the total Rajbanshis of North Bengal, about 74% lives in Cooch Behar, 32% in Jalpaiguri, 13% in North and South Dinajpur and 8% in Darjeeling and Malda districts. Therefore, the major concentration of the Rajbanshis is in the districts of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. The sex ratio of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal is 952 females per 1000 males (1971 Census). The Rajbanshis is one of the major Scheduled Castes in West Bengal. ¹ Out of total 2258760 Rajbanshis in West Bengal, 77.19 percent of them are found to live in the northern part of the state known as North Bengal. Some scholars believe that North Bengal is the homeland of the Rajbanshis and since long as a local community, have been dominating the ethnic situation of this climate. ²

I

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the social mobility movement of the Rajbanshis in their claim of *Kshatriya* status brought important changes in their population size and growth. Their steadily changing identities through different Census, which was essentially associated with their claim of superior status in *Varna*

hierarchy, make it difficult to trace exactly the trends of socio- economic changes in the Rajbanshi community. ³

Since mid forties, as an effect of various endogamous and exogamous forces, some noticeable changes have been taken place in population structure of northern part of West Bengal. After independence, the widening disparities between the Rajbanshis and the people belonging to other social groups in socio- economic opportunities had shaped their interpersonal relationships to a considerable extend. The present feeling of relative deprivation among the Rajbanshis and their somewhat antagonistic towards alien population can partially be understood from a comparative analysis of socio- economic data available from census. The following tables may show the growth of Rajbanshi population in India, Bengal, and North Bengal.

Table 4.1:Growth of Rajbanshi people in India(1901-1991) ⁴

Year	Total population
1901(a)	937291
1911(a)	1218346
1921(a)	1165141
1931(a)	1209612
1941(a)	826640
1951(a)	742619
1961(b)	1201717
1971(c)	1353919
1981(d)	2258760
1991(e)	2982280

Source: (a) Castes and Tribes of Bengal, Census of West Bengal, 1951, pp.95-114

(b) Census of India, 1961, Vol-I, India Part V-A(i), pp.286-92.

(c) Census of India, 1971, Series I, Paper -I of 1975, pp.89-92.

(d) Census of India, 1981, Series 23, Part IX(i) ,pp.8-62.

(e) Census of India, 1991, exclusively compiled in Surajit Kumar Chatterjee, *The Scheduled Castes in India*, Vol. 3, N.Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, Pp.1159-1160,

Table 4.2: Growth of Rajbanshi population in West Bengal (1872-1991) ⁵

Year	Total population
1872	290584
1891	30508
1901	939291
1911	1210346
1921	1165141
1931	1209612
1941	826640
1951	742619
1961	1201717
1971	1353919
1981	2258760
1991	2839481

Source: Census records, Government of India.

Table 4.3: Distribution of the Rajbanshi population in North Bengal by the Census years

District	1951	%	1961	%	1971	%	1981	%	1991	%
Darjeeling	15894	3.00	31887	3.50	31505	3.06	62770	3.60	96745	7.44
Jalpaiguri	172710	32.68	316020	35.19	329191	32.03	514174	29.49	656073	23.42
Cooch Behar	252069	47.7	418839	46.63	481304	46.84	714221	40.96	865622	39.86
W. Dinajpur	67489	12.78	93371	10.40	134976	13.13	369015	21.16	489642	15.65
Malda	20294	3.84	38443	4.28	50693	4.94	83463	4.79	114697	4.29

Source: Census of India, 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991.

The Rajbanshi people of Nepal predominantly live in Jhapa and Morang districts in the southeastern corner of the country. In 1991, census of Nepal gives the total number of Rajbanshi in the country as 85558. In the district Jhapa, there was reported to be a total 66224 Rajbanshi, where as in Morang district, the census records the Rajbanshi population as 18,243. This leaves only 1091 Rajbanshi spread throughout other districts of Nepal, not restricted to Jhapa, Morang and it's neighbouring districts. The 2001 census of Nepal gives the total number of Rajbanshi in the country as 129883. The Rajbanshi people also live in

Bangladesh. In 2000 the Rajbanshi language speaking people in northwest region of Bangladesh in numbered is as 12,912⁶

In order to understand the traditional socio-economic status of the Rajbanshis of north eastern part of India, the social organization, cultural practices, educational status, and economic position of the Rajbanshis need to be discussed. This exercise would help us in identifying the different strands that existed among the Rajbanshis. All these factors would be discussed in four parts in this chapter.

II

4.2.1: SOCIAL ORGANIZATION:

Family is the units of the Rajbanshi community and they normally live in joint families. The family is matrilineal and paternal with recognition of social relations with the kin or both sides (father and mother) and generally the eldest male member was regarded as the head of the family.⁷ The house hold contains the dependent members from the father's side and sometime from mother's side also. Rarely a married son breaks away from the family and lives elsewhere. If it is so, it is due to economic means when the son goes away either to till some one else's land or to seek a job. Recently tradition of joint family in Rajbanshi society is being segmented due to socio-economic factors and non-cooperative relation among the family members.⁸ In addition to this, with the expansion of new education where a single individual becomes the sole earner because of his occupation, big joint families are breaking down gradually. The educated people are shifting to distant towns and

other places to earn their livelihood. In many cases, they have abandoned their ancestral house and settled in their places of earning.⁹

Rajbanshi community has a simple retinal structure and the concept of sub- caste absent among them.¹⁰ They are not divided into exogamous clans or *gotras*, but constituted a single endogamous group. They have only one *gotra* i.e. *kasyap*, and marriage within the same *gotra* is, therefore, a common practice.¹¹

A majority of the Rajbanshi live in village, which are thinly populated and have developed around the house of a *jotedar* or *giri*. Villages are scattered and in every villages there are various habitats and each group is called a *tari* (hamlet). A *tari* consists of a few kin or non-kin household.¹² Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal says a Rajbanshi village consists of comparatively a bigger house of a landholder and a group of smaller and nearer house of his sharecropper (*adhiars* or *borgadars*). A Rajbanshi village, therefore, consist of several dispersed groups of habitations. Each group called *chatal*, *chator* or *tari* has the house of a *jotedar* and several smaller houses of his *adhiars*. A small cultivator owing five to ten acres of land and paying rent for the same to his superior property owner is called *mulandar*.¹³ He also builds his house on his own plot of land. There are some *mulandars* engage in cultivation of their own land and *adhiars* on other's land. Such *mulandar* cum *adhiar* built his house on his own land. Several such groups of houses (*chatal*s), *chators*, *taris*) form a village. Each *catal* contains twenty or twenty five houses and village about one hundred and fifty houses but the number of houses of a village are being increased day by day. The name of the villages are generally named after –(i) the type of inhabitants living there, (ii) the nature of the soil and cultivation of the land, (iii) the previous

owner of the village (iv) some incidents that occurred long ago and (v) the name of the deity.¹⁴ Thus-

- 1.i. *Dakuapara, Pundibari* : Some robbers are said to have lived there.
 - ii. *Bamanpara* : where some Brahmins used to live.
 - iii. *Gidal para* : Some singers used to live and are living there.
- 2.i. *Dangapara* : High land.
 - ii. *Jhar Altagram* : A jungle grown on fresh alluvium.
 - iii. *Gorgoria ghat* : A deep stream with steep bank passing through this area.
- 3.i. *Naharipara* : One Sri Lahiri coming from the south was the owner of the village.
 - ii. *Bosepara , Prodhan para* : Bose ,Prodhan etc people used to live there.
4. i. *Bhutijhora* : Long ago a wild boar tore open the intestines of a person at this place.
(Bhuti-intestines)
 - ii. *Debi-jhora* : This was jungle where people come for hunting on the last day of Chaitra (Bisoba day) .Now there is no jungle but the village has grown up.
 - iii. *Voispara* : Where buffaloes used to be herded.
- 5.i. *Kalirhat* : There is a temple of goddess of kali.
 - ii. *Bhandani* : There is a temple of goddess of Bhandani.
 - iii. *Dhapgunge* : There is a temple of goddess Dhapchandi.

A Rajbanshi cultivator leads a very simple life. As agriculture was the basic means of livelihood most of the Rajbanshis started their daily work before the sun rises, either with ploughing or

transplantation and harvesting. They collected wood for cooking and sold agricultural products in the market. This importance of women in the family encouraged men to many more than one wife.²¹ The imposition of seclusion (*Parda*) is not very rigid among them. The flexibility of seclusion in Rajbanshi society has given the women more freedom than in comparison to other women of upper castes in their locality. Due to slackening of women's seclusion, the Rajbanshi women are free to participate in economic activities and contribute to family. The women who participate in economy enjoy more freedom and independence. In contemporary times many Rajbanshi women work as labour in agriculture, construction and other unorganized sector. However, their wages rate is much lower than the male labours. The lower wage rate denotes lower status of the Rajbanshi women.

The poor economic condition of the Rajbanshis created a social problem where women have been to adopt some lower skilled job is the informal sector. Recently a large number of Rajbanshi women are engaged in activities like- day labourer, domestic servants at rural, urban and semi urban areas.²² There are no restriction on the free movement of women and they enjoyed much more equality, than the women of the upper castes did. For example, smoking was common among Rajbanshi women and there was no taboo on their having free interaction with men within their own community. Although the Rajbanshi women enjoy certain freedom to participate in economic activities, smoking, interaction with men within same community, they have no strong voice on various societal restrictions. The men do not always consider their opinion on important family matters. They have no direct opinion in decision making about family affairs. Only the women get opportunity to exercise certain power in the family as mother and mother in-law. The mother has no

formal power of control on her sons, but has some influence on them. A responsible Rajbanshi woman very often exercises the power to control her lazy husband and this is so characteristic of a man in their society. She also has lot of say in domestic matters like the issues related to household work, selection of mates for her sons and daughters.

The social position of aged women in Rajbanshi family and society is not very problematic. An old woman continues to work for her family as best as her health permits. She looks after the small kinds and does such kinds of jobs for which she is capable. The old women are not under cared in her family. Among the Rajbanshis the old women who officiate over the family and other social matters, they continue to command respect by all even in their very old age. The women who have knowledge in folk medicine and expertise as witch doctor or *ojhali /gunia*, enjoy some special power and honour in the society.²³

Among the Rajbanshis, the women's position is rather not very important in political and organizational matters. They are excluded from the traditional political or caste organization as it is exclusively under the control of men. Owing to lack of education and isolation most of the women in Rajbanshi society are not much aware about the contemporary political situation, thus their participation in political matters are rather very limited. However, in contemporary times due to sincere efforts from the part of Government and political parties they are gradually coming to field of political arena.

At present the role and status of Rajbanshi women have also been gradually changing owing to the impact of various internal and external forces. Women belonging to microscopic section of well-to-do

Rajbanshi families nowadays participate in modern education and politics, take up jobs outside their homes, live in nuclear families, and enjoy more freedom. In very recent the Rajbanshi women took participation in the *Panchayet* and *Zilaparishad* election, they were given an important portfolio in *Gram Panchayet*, *Panchayet Samity*, and even they were given the portfolio of *Sabhadhipati of Zilaparishad* jurisdiction. In many respects, some important posts are reserved for the S.C. women. While the majority of Rajbanshi women of poor families are still far off from assigned domestic roles, experiencing taboos, and restrictions and thereby lacking the ambition of life. However, it is to be mentioned that the Rajbanshi women of both the rich as well as poor families are not free from certain impositions and exploitations on them, like other women of the country irrespective of castes and communities. The most typical examples in this context are the system of dowry, rules of seclusion, subordinate position, negligence, and dependent social position.

4.2.3: MARRIAGE IN RAJBANSHI SOCIETY:

The marriage customs and practices of the Rajbanshis have certain distinct features. Marriage within the same *gotra* is a common practice, though it is a deviation from the prevailing orthodox Brahmanical culture. Marriage is usually arranged through professional and unprofessional matchmaker who is popular by known as *ghotok*. The priest determines the marriage ceremony.²⁴ There are both regular and irregular forms of marriage in Rajbanshi society. Among the regular form of marriage is called *phulbiha*, in which a boy is married to a virgin girl. In this form, the marriage crown (*phul or sahera*) is tied on the bride and the bridegroom. A priest or *Adhikari* is essential in this type of

marriage.²⁵ Another form of regular marriage is known as *ghor-dzia-biha* in which a young man is received into a family with a view of being accepted as a son-in-law, in this respect he works as an assistant to the prospective father-in-law, is common amongst the Rajbanshis. In the alternative when the demanded bride price cannot be paid the new comers has to work under the prospective father-in-law to serve out a probationary period before he can claim to marry the girl. A salary is fixed to his work and as soon as bride price is covered, he is formally admitted as a son-in-law by proper celebration of a marriage. The period may extend from six months to seven years.²⁶

There were also irregular forms of marriages like-*Panichita*, *Chatrodani*, *Levirate marriage*, *Ghor Sodhani Bia*, *Danguani*, *Porkhetri Pachua*, *Gao-goch* and *koina-patra* etc. Dr. Charu Chandra Sannyal says when a young man could not pay bride-price, he approach the guardian of a girl to sprinkle, with the consent of the elders 'Some water with the twig of a mango tree on the head of the girl and the boy'.²⁷ They were allowed to live together like husband and wife, and this was known as *panichitya*. However, being as a Rajbanshi the author is well aware that *Panichhita* is not a form of marriage but one of the important parts of marriage ceremony by which a well-known person or relative became more close like father-in-law /mother-in-law to the bride and groom. In this *panichhita* ceremony, the guardian of both the bride and groom proposed to sprinkle water at the time of marriage by which the proposed persons are called as '*panichhita Bap O Mao*' (father-in-law/mother-in-law). In this occasion, the proposed person takes some water with the twig of a mango tree and sprinkles it on the head of the bride and groom. The main purpose of this *panichhita* ceremony is to come more close to the relative. When the *panichhita* father-in-law/mother-in-law dies the

son-in-law/daughter-in-law has to perform *ashuch* of three days. *Chatrodani marriage* is a marriage of married women, even when her husband is alive, may be married to another man. Such type of marriage has been occurred where the first husband has hardly any means to maintain his wife or when he remains absent from the family or a pretty long time more than two years or when he is subsequently found to be constitutionally weak or sometimes the greedy father refuse to send his daughter to her husband's house and gives her in marriage to another man from whom he gets a fairly large sum as the bride-price. In this case, the status of the girl is reduced to that of a commodity. In this respect, formal divorce is automatically accepted by the society, former husband is simply paid back the bride-price.²⁸ Levirate marriage, *Ghor-sodhani Bia*, *Gao-goch*, *Danguani*, *Parakshetri Pachua* are the commonest form of widow remarriage in Rajbanshi society. When a man married his deceased elder brother's wife is called 'Levirate marriage'. When a young man and a girl to marry but the elders do not give consent probably because he or she would not be suitable, one day, of course by previous arrangement, the women suddenly enter the inner apartment of the house of the man and starts doing house hold works. In a day or two, she is accepted as the wife. In most cases a widow becomes a 'Ghor Sodhani', such a woman is called 'Pachua' or 'Pasua', and the man is called 'Songona'. A 'Ghor- Sodhani' woman is looked down upon by the society and the man loss his respectability. Although such marriage is accepted by the society and the children can inherent their father's property by the custom of the society. If a man brought a widow to live with him and to look after his house, it is called *gao- goch*; and if a widow owing property invited a man to live with her as a protector and to look after her property ; it is called *Dangua*.²⁹ The *Rajas*, big landlords and rich people used to keep an unmarried girl without marrying her, in

that cases the girl is called *Koina –patro*. The children are not legitimate and cannot inherit the property of keeper unless made legitimate by a subsequent marriage in *Panichita* or *Panisorpan* fashion ³⁰ *Porkshetri Pachua* is not the form of widow remarriage –when a widow has no one to look after her and she goes over to a man in his house to live with. She is then called *Porkshetri- Pachua*. (Wife coming after but living in another's house and land). Such woman is called *Dhemani* and as she is married with the consent of the elders she has a better position than a *Danguani* who of her own accord takes a man to live with.

Thus, in Rajbanshi society marriage is mainly viewed as a union between man and woman and there is not much complexity in marriage practices. As there is no clan organization among the Rajbanshis, matrimonial alliance is determined by kinship and marriage is arranged within their cultural –groups.³¹ Marriage outside the Rajbanshi community is not objected to but they seemed to have a marked preference for marriage with the upper caste Hindus, rather than with the Mech, Koch, Rabha etc. ³² Divorce is permitted among them and regarded as simple offers for which there is no compensation. ³³ However, incidence of divorce is very low among the Rajbanshi. Amongst the educated Rajbanshi, divorce is a rare occurrence. Child marriage or pre-puberty marriage is a traditional practice among the Rajbanshis, but post puberty marriage is the order of the day. Marriage is obligatory for a girl, remaining unmarried woman or maiden is beyond their social norms. Negotiation is the ideal form of marriage among them. They are usually monogamous; however, polygamy is also very common among them. In a well-to-do Rajbanshi household sometimes there are many wives regularly or irregularly married. In contemporary time Rajbanshis have come under the influence of Hinduism, thus their values,

attitudes, and patterns of behaviour are largely governed by the customs of their neighbouring Hindu castes and these in turn regulate their women's ascribed role and status.

III

4.3.1: CULTURAL PRACTICE IN RAJBANSHI SOCIETY:

The religious practice of the Rajbanshi society is differentiated than from the other upper caste Hindus of Bengal though in some cases they are adherents of Hinduism. *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism* are popular among Rajbanshi. J. A. Vas has observed, "The Rajbanshi who form the bulk of the Hindu population, profess to be *Vaishanava*, but the religion they practice is not free from rites. Thus, one of the forms in which *Sakti* is worshiped as *Chandi*. Unlike, *Durga*, *Chandi* is painted red and may be worshipped throughout the year. This form of *Sakti puja* is peculiar to the district of Rangpur".³⁴ Though they were the worshippers of nature, as represented in the form of *stupa* or *Munda*, which were worshipped for their welfare of the community, they also worship various *devis* and *devas* like upper caste Hindus.³⁵

The Rajbanshi people of Nepal worship *Bisto Thakur* (the Water god), *Barma Thakur* (protector from fire), *Pawan Thakur* (protector from storms), *Basanti Thakurani* and *Mahakal Thakur* (God of the mountains and forests). There are deities of Rajbanshis in Nepal such as; *Shiva Thakur*, *Dharma Thakur* and *Laxmi Thakurani*, *Sarawamangola*, *Bisahari*, *Dulai Chandi*.³⁶ But it may be noted here that the Rajbanshis have no particularly place or locality for deities and there is any of the

minor deities.³⁷ Some of the goddess like *visahari*, *kali*, *sitala*, are placed at house compound. Sometimes they build temple for those deities.

The Rajbanshis have their own priests popularly known as *adhikari*, *deos*, *deodha* etel. who officiated in their religious ceremonies. The *adhikari* enjoyed a special status in society. He was the village priest and officiated in all ceremonies in the village live. They are categories into two sections- *chakrodhari* and *pad-dhari*, or *kantulsi*. *Chakrodhari* *adhikari* possessed copper *chakro* or is authorized to prepare a *chakro*. He can initiate disciples. He conducts marriage, *sradha*, *seva*, *puja*.

Kantulsi or *pad-dhari* works an assistant to a *chakrodhari*. When the *chakrodhari* is satisfied that he has acquired some proficiency, his teacher puts a sacred basil leaf (*Ocymums*) on his ear. Then he is allowed to work independently and may perform rituals in the shrine in the absence of *chakrodhari*.³⁸ *Deosi* performs the worship in the temple and at *Charaka* festival. *Deori* works as an assistant in a temple. The *deodha* used to perform fire sacrifice or *homa* and other *tantric* rites belonging to *Tantrism*. Sometimes he performs as media through whom god is supposed to prescribe remedies for various problems. *Vouria* also performed *tantric* rites and works as same as *deodha*.³⁹ *Kirtinia* is another group who perform the death and attendant ceremonies. They performed *kirtan* from the date of dead body to the cremation until the *sradha* ceremony is over. They are known as *kirtonia* based on their performance.⁴⁰ Thus Rajbanshi cultural practices distinguish their religion from other upper caste Hindus. However, in course of time, there is assimilation of Rajbanshi traditional deities, rituals, and beliefs into those of the orthodox Hindu culture.⁴¹ The most important features of this acculturation were the worshipping of clay images and the induction of

Brahmin priests for performing religious rites all of which they adopted a later stage from the orthodox high caste Hindus. In this period, a process of *sanskritization* was being adopted in Rajbanshi society. It is due to this *sanskritization* process that led to another crisis in cultural field of the Rajbanshi society.

IV

4.4.1: EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF THE RAJBANSHIS:

Although literacy is a best index to judge the level of socio-cultural advancement of any community, the Rajbanshis are very backward in compares to other community in Bengal. If we discuss the educational position of the Rajbanshis based on different census reports, it would be cleared that how the Rajbanshi society of North –Eastern part of India is lagging behind from educational progress.

The Census Report of India, 1911 shows that only 51 out of 1,000 Rajbanshis were as literate , where the male –female ratio was even worse as 97:2 respectively out of 1000.⁴² A comparative analysis of literacy rates (Table 4.4) among the Namasudras, the Pods, and the Rajbanshis who belonged to the same ritual rank, shows that there was little improvement in the rate of general literacy among the Rajbanshis, whereas the Namasudras achieved significant advancement . In case of the Pods the trends was even downward what is, however, important is the fact that the Rajbanshis showed significant improvement in literacy rates in English as compared to the other two castes. This suggests that the general progress among the Rajbanshis was very slow, there was a

definite trend of improvement among the already advance section of the community.

Table:4.4: Number of literates among the Namasudras, the Pods and the Rajbanshis in Bengal⁴³

Name of Castes	Total Population	Literate	% of Total Population	Literate in English	% of Total Population
1911 Census					
Namasudra	1860705	91625	4.92	4161	.22
Pod	415880	58582	14.09	1275	.31
Rajbanshi	1454173	73686	5.07	1221	.08
1921 Census					
Namasudra	2004911	150548	7.51	13891	.69
Pod	575994	70548	12.17	3510	.61
Rajbanshi	1663948	96140	5.78	5151	.31

Source: Census of India, 1911, Vol. V, pt. II Bengal, Table IX, Page, 84

If we consider the Census Report of India 1921 (Bengal), it would be cleared that in Tripura province the Rajbanshi population dominated in society in number and in education field than the Koch and other *kshatriya*. The table 4.5 shows the picture as follows. ⁴⁴

Table :4.5: Population on Caste basis and literary rate

Caste	Locality	Total population			Literate			Literate in English		
		Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Kshatriya (Hindus)	Tripura State	26116	13435	12681	2157	2039	118	188	166	22
	Whole Province	131272	67627	63645	4293	4242	51	83	82	01
Rajbanshi Kshatriya (Hindu)	ditto	1663948	864042	799906	96140	93889	2251	5151	5074	77

Source: Census of India 1921, Table IX, Education by Selected Castes, Tables or Races concluded, Vol.V, Part II, Page, 96.

In North Bengal, until 1981, the Rajbanshis had not given a fair account of themselves as far as the attainment of literacy and

education is concerned. Table 4.6 shows that only about 23.68 percent of the Rajbanshis in North Bengal were literates in 1981. The corresponding figures in 1961 and 1971 were 12.83 percent and 15.85 percent respectively.

Table: 4.6: Literacy rate of the Rajbanshis by Sex

District	Literacy Rate (%) *								
	1961			1971			1981		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Darjeeling	24.6	40.05	5.59	22.13	37.48	6.06	27.21	40.39	12.60
Jalpaiguri	9.23	14.67	3.00	15.62	23.81	7.71	23.18	33.55	11.91
Cooch Behar	17.52	28.71	5.23	16.93	24.07	9.28	25.90	37.50	13.57
W. Dinajpur	13.05	22.44	2.21	12.10	19.44	3.20	20.47	32.14	8.03
Malda	13.29	20.06	2.10	13.11	21.23	4.49	19.42	30.98	7.31
North Bengal	12.83	23.12	4.01	15.85	23.62	7.68	23.68	34.98	11.57

* N.B. Percent of Literates to total Population

Source: Relevant Census Report of India (Bengal).

Amongst males, the percentage of literates was 23.62% in 1971, and which has gone up to 34.98% in 1981. The female literacy portrays even a gloomier picture. In 1971, only 7.68 percent of the Rajbanshis females were literate and which has lazily creped to the figure of 11.57% in 1981.

With respect to variation in the literacy of the Rajbanshis of different districts had been considerable. In the Darjeeling district, the percentage of literates among the Rajbanshis was 27%. Next in ranking were Cooch Behar 26% and Jalpaiguri 23% on the lower side, the Rajbanshis of Malda and West Dinajpur had regularly low literacy rate with only 19 to 20% of them being literate. Here mention may be made that between 1971 and 1981, the Rajbanshis in all the districts of North Bengal have recorded an increase in the proportion of their literates at

varying rates.⁴⁵ The rural –urban differential in literacy among the Rajbanshis of North Bengal was very much pronounced. The table 4.7 shows the different literacy among the Rajbanshi in North Bengal in rural and urban areas.

Table 4.7: Percentage of literacy among the Rajbanshis in rural and urban areas

District	1961		1971		1981	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Darjeeling	24.68	22.56	22.10	-27.44	26.89	-44.93
Jalpaiguri	9.13	12.87	15.24	28.64	22.93	-27.80
Cooch Behar	17.42	50.97	16.70	35.13	25.57	55.62
W.Dinajpur	13.01	15.77	11.98	36.90	20.15	-38.47
Malda	-11.26	-22.89	13.05	36.30	19.24	-39.50
North Bengal	14.07	18.10	15.60	34.70	23.40	-35.26

Source: Relevant Census Report of India (Bengal).

As per 1981 Census, in rural areas, 23.40 % of the Rajbanshis were found to be literate. In the case of urban areas it was 35.26%. Between 1971 and 1981, the population of literates amongst the Rajbanshis of rural areas has marginally gone down. Such an unfavourable progress in literacy amongst the rural Rajbanshis had many social and economic consequences.

The education level also indicates the pattern of progress of the Rajbanshis in literacy. Table 4.8 shows this level of education of the Rajbanshis in North Bengal. According to 1981 Census, in North Bengal as a whole, majority (54.55) of the Rajbanshi literates were, educated up to primary and middle level of school education. However, the proportion of Rajbanshi graduates and postgraduate including technical degree

holders was only 0.66% .Thus it appears that up to 1981, the Rajbanshis of North Bengal were less privileged or responsive to higher education. In 1981, only 0.13% of the Rajbanshi literates of North Bengal had technical diplomas. It is to be noted here that even among the urban Rajbanshi literates, the number of person's degrees in engineering, medicine, agriculture and veterinary sciences were only 12%. Overall, the participation of the Rajbanshis in various technical and professional educational steams was quite poor.

Table 4.8: percentage distribution of Rajbanshi literates various levels of education by sex

District	Census	Literates without Educational levels			Level of education primary/ Junior Basic/ Middle			Matriculation and above		
		Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Dajeeling	(a)	77.78	78.84	68.32	20.90	19.72	31.30	1.32	1.44	0.38
	(b)	26.53	30.51	2.22	23.27	63.75	96.40	5.30	5.74	1.38
	(c)	43.67	41.33	51.94	50.26	51.96	44.22	6.07	6.71	3.84
Jalpaiguri	(a)	68.68	68.47	69.83	29.46	29.53	29.01	1.86	2.00	1.16
	(b)	2.27	12.37	11.97	82.60	81.72	85.22	5.13	5.91	2.81
	(c)	39.60	38.14	44.09	53.98	54.72	51.69	6.42	7.14	4.22
Cooch Behar	(a)	65.35	64.14	72.68	33.48	34.52	27.22	1.17	1.34	0.10
	(b)	25.14	33.60	1.70	72.91	63.92	97.85	1.95	2.48	0.45
	(c)	7.53	35.27	44.17	55.68	57.00	51.80	6.79	7.73	4.03
W.Dinajpur	(a)	66.36	67.30	55.37	32.70	31.70	44.32	0.94	1.00	0.31
	(b)	14.78	14.11	19.68	82.12	82.55	79.45	3.10	3.34	0.87
	(c)	40.48	38.70	48.06	53.46	54.56	48.77	6.06	6.74	3.17
Malda	(a)	68.52	68.26	71.06	30.07	30.21	28.68	1.41	1.53	0.26
	(b)	24.73	26.45	16.06	72.00	69.96	82.26	3.27	3.59	1.64
	(c)	38.05	36.06	46.97	55.55	56.71	50.36	6.40	7.23	2.67
North Bengal (Total)	(a)	67.03	66.52	70.72	31.59	32.01	28.87	6.51	7.31	3.91
	(b)	20.08	24.29	6.48	76.66	71.85	92.20	3.26	3.86	1.32
	(c)	38.94	37.04	45.10	54.55	55.65	50.99	6.51	7.31	3.91

N.B. a=1961; b=1971; c=1981 Censuses

* For easy comprehension, the figures of literates in all other levels of education above matriculation in urban areas have been merged in to this category.

As may be seen from the table 4.8, in 1981, amongst the Rajbanshis of North Bengal, about 7% of their male and only about 4% of female literates had education up to matriculation and above of it. The majority of their male 56% and female 51% literate were educated up to primary /Junior Basic/ Middle standard. The proportion of Rajbanshi

female literates without any formal education was 45.10 % as opposed to 37.04% in the case of males. In all the districts of North Bengal, 52-57% of Rajbanshi male and 44-52% of the Rajbanshi female literates had education up to primary /middle standard.

The decade 1971-81 recorded a substantial decrease in the proportion of Rajbanshi literates with primary /junior basic/ middle standard of education. The rate of decrease was from 71.85% in 1971 to 55.65% in 1981 for males and from 92.20% to 50.99 for females. In contrast, there was significant increase in the proportion of people (both male and female) is literate without any formal education. Amongst the Rajbanshis, only about 1% of their male and 0.41 % of female literates were matriculate in 1961. The corresponding proportion increased to 7.31% and 3.91% in 1981. In North Bengal as a whole, the proportion of Rajbanshi matriculates and other higher educated persons increased from 1.33% in 1961 to 6.51% in 1981 recording a rate of variation in the order of only +5.18% points. Between 1971 and 1981, the Rajbanshis of Cooch Behar, West Dinajpur, and Malda districts had shown a relatively better progress in attaining education upto matriculation and above of it. In the remaining two districts, the rate of progress of Rajbanshis in this particular level of education was marginal. During the decade 1961-71, there was only 1% increase in the number of Rajbanshi literates holding university degrees. Less than 1% of the Rajbanshi literates had degree in Medicine/Engineering /Agriculture etc. Till 1971, in various technical and non-technical university education the performance of the Rajbanshi was extremely disappointing.⁴⁶ Under this discussion, it is cleared that during the decade of seventy and eighty, though the literacy rate of the Rajbanshi has been increased, overall situation regarding education of the

Rajbanshis is marginal rather than upper caste Hindu. Normally causes may be shown behind marginal in education of the Rajbanshis;

(a) The Rajbanshis had a lack of interest on the education.⁴⁷

(b) The Rajbanshis generally lives at villages' compound. Initiative to spread modern education is mainly confined to urban and its surrounding areas. Therefore, there were limited opportunities to spread education in rural areas. In this connection, we can mention here the urges of *Kshatriya Samiti* like "We live in rural area named the village-Lishamari. Education has been come in town. We have no living place in town. We cannot expect education from this remote area. Though many of us have money and will, due to the lack of living place in town education is being impossible to us. Therefore, hostel or boarding should be established to overcome this situation."⁴⁸

(c) Economic problem was one of the most vital issues of the Rajbanshis for backwardness in educational field. Majority of them were financially not in a position to send their children to schools, because after the age of ten, the young had to provide helping hands for the family.

(d) In addition to these, those who could afford in education for their children also shared a belief that if their sons were educated, they would take to white-collar jobs and abandoned cultivation, their family occupation.⁴⁹

(e) At the earlier stage, some of the Rajbanshis hold plenty of lands to cultivate. They were reluctant to take education for other professions.

Whatever, may be the causes, the Rajbanshis are lagging behind in the educational and other professional field in practical. However, the Rajbanshis were confined with their own socio-cultural practice. The gradual settlement of the caste Hindu' in North –Eastern part of India disturbed the autonomy of the domain, bring the Rajbanshi

closer to the orthodox Hindu culture, which was also the culture of the dominant social group. This resulted in the growth of a tendency among a section of the Rajbanshis emulate the orthodox Hindu cultural practices. Moreover, a gradual appearance of line of distinction within the Rajbanshi community has been grown up. The well –off Rajbanshis begins to migrate to towns, sends their children for higher education, and takes up subsidiary occupations besides the family occupation of cultivation. Rajbanshis gradually felt the urge to change their existing cultural practices and life style⁵⁰ discarding their traditional clothes, both men and women dressed in the fashion of the upper castes in society.⁵¹ In this group, there were now also restrictions on the movement of women. The women were not allowed to work in the field, or go to market to sell goods nor were they permitted to talk freely to unknown men neither at home nor outside. They started to follow idolatry in their religious ceremonies.⁵² All these emulative tendencies of the Rajbanshi advance group distinguish them from more backward sections of the community and as a result ,social equality which had previously existed among them gradually disappeared and was replaced by system of status differentiation.⁵³ These advanced group of the Rajbanshis even suspended social relations with these relatively backward caste brethren, leading to a clear socio-cultural division within the community.⁵⁴

This differentiation in terms of cultural practice and social values within the Rajbanshi community is important as it help us in understanding the genesis of the identity crisis of the Rajbanshi society. Economic position of the Rajbanshis will provide us to clarify the point of identity crisis.

4.5.1: ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE RAJBANSHI SOCIETY:

Economically the Rajbanshis are more dependent on primary sector, i.e. agriculture. The agricultural structures prevailing in different parts of Bengal varied widely. The Mughal land revenue system, the British land revenue reforms, the customary practices of different areas, and the ecological conditions largely determined the patterns of agrarian relations in different parts of Bengal. We may distinguish the Bengal agrarian structures into three categories-i) peasant small holding system in Eastern Bengal, ii) the prevalence in Bengal and Central Bengal of vast personal demesne of lands cultivated by landless labourers and iii) rich farmer-share-cropper system of Northern Bengal. Sugato Bose also frames the same structure of agrarian system of Bengal.⁵⁵ In the present section of our study the agrarian structure of North-Eastern India will be focused in which the Rajbanshis as a cultivating community are to be situated.

The *Jotedari-adhiari* system was dominant pattern of the agrarian relations in North-Eastern part of India. However, there are different parts of the region like –Dinajpur, Rangpur, parts of Jalpaiguri, which were permanently settled areas, and where *zamindari* system existed. There was no *zamindari* system in the Western Duars of Jalpaiguri and in Cooch Behar. The land was given to *jotedars* or rich farmers by the government in exchange of some undertaking to pay annual rent in these regions.⁵⁶ There were also variations of position and privileges enjoyed by the *jotedars* and other under tenants in different part of northern part of present West Bengal.⁵⁷

In pre-British time, there were vast stretches of uncultivated lands which were given to rich men at very low rents in order to motivate them to bring waste land under cultivation. This rich men gave the lands to poor cultivators, initially for no or minimum return. However, once cultivation started regularly the cultivators paid, generally in kind, $\frac{1}{2}\%$ of produce to the original titleholder. Thus, the cultivators who reclaimed the wasteland become the sharecroppers and the rich men by virtue of their economic supremacy became the landlords.⁵⁸ During the British rule, this system of agricultural structure became much more popular among the substantial landholders.

The sharecropping system became popular in this region due to the scarcity of labour compared to the availability of land. It results that land is being less precious than labour.⁵⁹ Under this circumstance, the wastelands are attributed to a want of farmers, and common workers or porters cannot be procured without the utmost difficulty.⁶⁰ There were also other causes like rise in prices, purchase of land by money lenders, and merchants, effects of the war, and the depression- all contributed to the expansion of the share-cropping system. Landlords, particularly those who had no link with land, like traders, and moneylenders or upper caste gentry, preferred share-cropping because it ensured good returns without any direct involvement in the agricultural process. Thus, because of this gradual extension of the sharecropping system a highly stratified and complex agrarian structure developed in North Bengal.⁶¹

If we follow the agrarian structure of this region, we will find that the *Zamindar* was the top of the hierarchy. He got land from the government, subject to the payment of a fixed amount of revenue. Next to

the *Zamindar*, there was the *jotedar* who got land from the *Zamindar*, subject to the payment of rent at prevailing rates. The rent paid by the *jotedar* was subject to enhancements.⁶² Though the *jotedars* formed an exclusive group of landlords, there were differences among them in terms of amounts of land hold. There were very big *jotedars* as well as a good number of small *jotedars*. A. Beteille has observed that *jotedars* were not an economically homogenous group and there were both rich and poor *jotedars* owing or cultivating large as well as small lands.⁶³ There were enormous sizes of *jotes* in different parts of northern part of present West Bengal.⁶⁴

There were different categories of land holders in northern part of present West Bengal.⁶⁵ However, the classes which were eventually recognized in law and by sufferance were four i.e; *jotedar*, *Chukanidar*, *Dar-chukanidar* and *Adhiar*.

Jotedar:

A *jotedar* is a person who holds land directly of Government. He is a tenant with a heritable and transferable title in his holding vested in him by the fact of possession with power to transmit this title to those to whom he sublets. He has the right to resettle of the land included in his *jote* on the expiry of the term of the settlement, but subject to an increase of rent .⁶⁶ His title to possession of the land included in his *jote* is, however, always subject to the superior right of government as proprietor to resume any portion required for public or other purpose or proportional abatement being made in the rental and compensation allowed for any payment improvement. A *jote* may be acquired by direct settlement, by purchase and by inheritance.

Chukanidar:

The tenant immediately below the *jotedars* is the *chukanidar* or *mulandar*. The rent payable by him is fixed. His title to his holding is heritable and transferable. He is not allowed under the provisions of the *jotedar's* lease to sublet the whole or any portion of the tenure under pain of immediate forfeiture of such tenure. But he is permitted to employ *adhiars*.⁶⁷ *Chukanidars* can not be ousted from his holding, except by order of a competent court, notwithstanding the fact that he may not have been twelve years on a *jote*. There is an unwritten law between him and his *jotedar* that he cannot be ousted from his land as long as he pays his rent.⁶⁸

Dar-Chukanidar:

This class of tenants hold direct from the *Chukanidars*. The tenure rights of this class of tenants were neither found relevant by the Bengal Government nor approved by it. In a letter sent by the Revenue Department to Mr. Sunder, the settlement officer, it was stated, "The Lt. Governor approves your proposal that the newly created under-tenure of *Dar-chukanidar* in the Duars estate should be absolutely ignored, as much as these tenures have been made contrary to the express order of the government".⁶⁹ The *dar-chukanidar* was the under tenant of *chukanidars*. All these under tenants had occupancy rights in Cooch Behar, but not elsewhere.⁷⁰

Adhiar:

Adhiars or *Prajas* are holders on the *metayer* system. They cultivate land immediately under the *jotedars*, *chukanidars* or a derivative

chukanidar, but whatever the designation or status of the *adhiars* immediate superior be, he is known as the *adhiars giri*, half the produce of the land. The *giri* usually makes an advance of seeds and cash to the *adhiar*, which is adjusted when the produce is divided. The cattle and plough sometimes belong to the *giri*, sometimes to the *adhiars*. The legal status of various classes of *adhiars* unfortunately remained uncertain.⁷¹ As the *adhiars* had to pay half of his produce, he was in a chronic state of debt and had very little means to improve his position. He had to take advance from his landlord to survive, and this the landlord realized with heavy interests during harvest time.⁷² There were no doubt variations in the position of *adhiars* in different areas of North Bengal. However, it was in this section of the local peasantry who had to bear the major burden of exploitation by the state and the landlord.⁷³

From the above discussion, it is cleared that the *jotedars* constituted the most dominant group in local agrarian social structure. An important to add in this context is the absence of non-cultivating upper caste gentry in this region under study. Some parts of Bengal there was a class of upper caste gentry who owned substantial amounts of land. They did not cultivate themselves, as manual labour was a matter of disrespect in society. They, however, enjoyed maximum power in society by virtue of their social and economic position. There was another situation in northern part of India. Till the advent of the ninetieth century most of the land in North Bengal was in the possession of the local people i.e.; the Koches, the Rajbanshis, the Mechs etc. Unlike the upper caste gentry, these local peoples did not face the problem of status inconsistency if they themselves cultivated the land. However, the situation began to change from the late ninetieth century with the migration of people in this region. They not only consolidated their position as non-cultivating

gentry, but also came to form a middle class at the village level, as it was from the group that the majority of the *Zamindari* agents and the staff of the local *cutchery* were recruited. Taking advantages of the backwardness of the local cultivators or poor *rayots*, they began to exploit them. In this respect we may refer from the Rangpur settlement report as follows-⁷⁴

“These men, of whom one or two are to be found in almost every village, are the leaders of the local factions who by a smattering of legal knowledge and ready wit have gained the confidence of their co-villagers. Often they are retained by the *Zamindar*'s staff and in return for land at favourable rates of rent or even rent free they watch their interest”.

Thus, the non-cultivating *jotedars* increased day by day in this region and secured a dominant position in the local agrarian structure. Based on the settlement reports, Amit Mitra has shown the ethnic composition of the *jotedars* of the Falakata *tahsil* in Jalpaiguri district between the year 1894 and 1905 where the Rajbanshis held 40% of the total *jotes* in 1894 and around 34% in 1905.⁷⁵ There, were however, subsequent changes in the pattern of land control in North Bengal with the result that the Rajbanshis were gradually pushed out by the non-Rajbanshi land holders from their position of eminence. In 1911, only 1.2% of the Rajbanshis who had any occupation derived their income from rent. In Rajshahi division, which contained the major concentration of this caste population, they constituted only 10.68% of the rent-receivers, while, the representation of the Brahmins in this category amounted to 25.26%.⁷⁶ Another example may be given here; one fairly big *jotes* (618 *bighas*) in the *paragana* Mekhliganj where Chunder Kishore Nandy was the proprietor of this *jote*. He leased out the entire

jote to one Chutiram Doss, who after retaining 335 *bighas* and his direct management (Nij Chukanidars) sublet the rest to 10 *Darchukanidars*. By title (or family names), these were 7 Dosses, 1 Nasya, 1 Doss Mali and 1 Singh Doss. Thus a caste from Bengal obtained this *jote* and sublet the whole to native inhabitants of Koch Behar, namely, a Rajbanshis (7 Dosses, 1 Doss Malli and 1 Singh Doss) and a native convert to Muslim (Nasya).⁷⁷

The changes that were taking place in the economic share because of war, depression, and famine in Bengal also severely affected the existing pattern of land ownership in the North Bengal districts. The rise in prices of food grains, and other necessities, following the World War II, also seriously affected the middle and poor peasants and this culminated in the great Bengal famine. The beneficiary's from this crisis were the merchants, moneylenders, and speculators- those who also invested their capital in land. The result of this development was the transfer of land from small *jotedars* and middle peasants to rich farmers, moneylenders, and speculators.⁷⁸ In the North-Eastern part of India, large-scale transfer of land from the Rajbanshis to this non-Rajbanshis, which had started, from the late nineteenth century was only accelerated further by these later developments.

Another important reason for land transfer to the non-Rajbanshis was the migration of a large number of outsiders to different districts of North Bengal. At the earlier stage, the attraction of this region were the abundance of land, possibility of good business, job opportunities in Government offices as the local people were not in a position to compete with them, opening of tea gardens which provide job facilities for both the 'Babus' as well as labourers.⁷⁹

Regular settlement work was undertaken and the Duars had been brought under regular administration providing security to the inhabitants. This administrative stability had particularly induced migration. However, most important factors that had encouraged the migration of the landed gentry were the land price of land and low rent compared to the situation in other parts of Bengal. Therefore, in the third settlement a large number of people who were not born to the soil could obtain lease could obtain lease from the Government as *jotedars* in the settled area.⁸⁰ Some ones acquired *jotes* through purchase. Escalation of land price caused by migration furthered transfer of *jotes* through sale to outside. In fact, the migrants were controlling many of the *jotes* paying revenue from Rs. 20 to 2000 per annum after the 1895 settlement in Western Duars.⁸¹ Comparing the population statistics of the 1881 Census with that of 1891 one finds an increase of 114277 in the population of the Western Duars. The break up of the increased population, who were migrants, can be studied based on the following table.⁸²

Table 4:9, Number, and place of migration

Place of Origin	Number
Darjeeling	1588
Dinajpur	505
Rangpur	10101
Kuch Behar	32224
From other District of B�ngal Proper	11364
Bihar districts	8491
Orissa	292
Chhotnagpur	20341
Other Province	29371
Total	114277

Source: Sunder's Report; Gruning, Jalpaiguri District Gazetteers; Census Statistics, 1881 and 1891.

This process continued as the 1901 Census shows that nearly one third of the inhabitants of Western Duars were foreign born and the

figure of the migrants rose to 188223. All the migrants i.e; 73946 persons after 1818 have settled in different *thanas* of Western Duars.⁸³ Most of the migrants from Darjeeling, Bihar and Chhotonagpur have been employed by the tea gardens as workers. People from Dinajpur, Cooch Behar have taken up land as *Jotedars*. The census figure on migration for the period between 1891 and 1921(table 4.10) in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts give us an idea of the volume of migration that was taking place in north eastern part of India.⁸⁴

Table 4.10: Migration to Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur from contiguous and other District between 1891-1921

Year	From contiguous District		From other districts to	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<u>Migration to Cooch Behar</u>				
1891	12997	15191	3262	1201
1901	9161	12531	12668	2255
1911	11000	13000	5000	2000
1921	9000	12000	10000	6000
<u>Migration to Jalpaiguri</u>				
1891	30920	27835	12431	7641
1901	24354	23856	65272	48636
1911	18000	15000	15000	10000
1921	21000	19000	5000	4000
<u>Migration to Dinajpur</u>				
1891	22670	18819	9308	5894
1901	13901	13319	60143	34871
1911	19000	16000	12000	6000
1921	12000	13000	10000	7000

Source: A Mitra, West Bengal District Hand Book, Calcutta 1951, Cooch Behar, P.XXXVi, Jalpaiguri, P.Lii, West Dinajpur, P. Xii.

This large influx of people not only led to a growing demand for land but also led to a rise in land prices. Local people, tempted by the spiraling prices soon began to sell their lands leading to the transformation of the local small and middle *jotedars* into under tenants,

subservient to a new class of immigrant landed gentry. In Rangpur and Dinajpur, the big *jotedars* and non-agriculturists brought the maximum number of *jotes*.⁸⁵ In Jalpaiguri, the number of *jotes* held by the Rajbanshis are decreased, while the *jotes* held by the Marwaris, the upper caste Bengali, middle –class people, others are increased sharply.⁸⁶ By 1872, in Cooch Behar 54% of the revenue paying land had passed into the hand of the outsiders.⁸⁷ Indeed all over North Bengal the phenomenon of transfer of land from the hands of the Rajbanshis to those of the non-Rajbanshis became a standard pattern and in course of time it generated a sense of grievance among the disposed Rajbanshi gentry.

Migration of population created demographic changes in an issue of concern while figures quoted by authorities are suspect it is pertinent to note that in the 20th century under British rule, immigration and migration, particularly into Assam, North Bengal and Tripura, was probably to the extent of about 30% of the population of which about 2/3 was from East Bengal (Bangladesh).⁸⁸ Unfortunately, after independence this trend was allowed to continue, with the majority of the migrants, being from East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). In 1971 again was a major refugee exodus from East Pakistan (present Bangladesh), the majority of who never returned owing to the situation, which leads to the Indo- Pak war. The population growth of North Bengal may show in Table 4.11 during 1951-1981.

Table 4.11: The growth of population in North Bengal from 1951-1981
(Population in Lakhs).

District	Area sq km	1951	1961	1971	1981	% of decadal growth (1971-81)
Darjeeling	3,386	459.6	624.6	781.8	1,024.2	28.74%
Cooch Behar	3,075	668.1	1,319.8	1,414.2	11,771.8	25.27%
Jalpaiguri	6,224	916.7	1,369.3	1,750.1	2,214.8	26.11%
West Dinajpur	5,206	976.9	1,323.8	1,857.9	2,404.9	29.19%
Malda	3,313	937.6	1,221.9	1,612.7	2,031.8	26.19
West Bengal	21,625	3,959.7	5,549.4	7,418.7	9,447.6	22.96%

Source: Census Reports 1981

The table shows that the decadal growth of the population of North Bengal in every district is higher than the growth rate of West Bengal. Darjeeling and West Dinajpur is most high rate. However, there are certain causes of growth rate of population in North Bengal. It is situated at national and international boundary and the media for communication with Eastern India. This geographical situation helps to induce the migration problem. Besides, in 1960 the Tibetan refugees settled in the Duars of North Bengal, the Bengalese from Assam came to North Bengal due 'Bangal Kheda Andolan' in 1960-61, Nepalese from Meghalaya and Bhutan were driven away who took shelter in India and the extensive pressure of migrants for Indo-Pak war in 1965. This influx of immigrants' people created an extensive pressure and crisis in socio-economic structure in North Bengal.⁸⁹ Marcus Dam says, "Indian authorities continue to thwart attempt by Bhutanese refugees back to their homeland. The problem of these displaced people is expected to snowball into a major geographical crisis in North Bengal specially Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri because they are sandwiched between Nepal and Bhutan".⁹⁰

Demographic pressure and the introduction of land Acquisition Act (1953) give a new shape of socio-economic pattern of this region. A large number of *Jotedars* of North Bengal lost their lands in excess to the limit of seventy-five *bighas*. *Khas* (vested) land had been distributed to the landless cultivators. Although the victim *zotedars* were mostly of the Rajbanshi community, but their caste fellows were not sole beneficiaries. Hence, there was a strong voice for the distribution of the vested land to the Rajbanshis only. Naturally, land alienation to the non-Rajbanshis began with the first phase of land reforms in West Bengal germinated the seeds of deprivation among the pre-settled communities of North Bengal.⁹¹

Second phase of land reform was undertaken in West Bengal with the coming of the United Front (UF) Government in 1967. The UF Government during 1967-70 vested one million acre of land, which broken the backbone of social dominance of the landed aristocracy (*zotedars*) of West Bengal.⁹² The *zotedars* of North Bengal could not escape from it. However, third phase of land reforms called "Operation Burga" under the present Left Front Government was successful in vesting family land and recording 1.2 million of sharecroppers within three years (1978-81).⁹³ According to the official sources, 428179.95 hector vested land has been distributed among 2605432 beneficiaries. In North Bengal 170081.80 hector vested land was distributed among 671841 beneficiaries out of whom 301498 are SCs and 144181 are STs.⁹⁴

Land reforms and distribution of vested lands to the landless agricultural labourers by the UF and LF Governments had direct impact on the socio-economic pattern of the indigenous elites in North Bengal. Although SC/ST people were benefited by the land distribution process of

the Government, the anti foreigner feelings and feelings of deprivation of the indigenous people were capitalized. Under this situation, the Rajbansis were forced to migrate into the nearby urban areas and to the other province only to be absorbed into the marginalize section workers, domestic servants whose survival depended upon the selling of labour power. Alienation from their ancestral land and the transformation of Rajbanshi from land owing peasants to wage labour proletariats had various social connotations too and tension has been grown in North Bengal from time to time in respect of separate state and autonomous power in North Bengal. The self-sustain village community⁹⁵, however, began to change with the beginning of the commercialization of agriculture⁹⁶ particularly tea production, Jute, Tobacco production and the introduction of railways in North Bengal. The gradual penetration of moneylenders, merchants and middle-class service groups as appendages of the market economy, brought significant change in the existing agrarian social structure as well. However, the Rajbanshi who constitute the bulk of the *adhiars* in this region did not benefit from this transformation and they did not able to compete with the Caste Hindus.⁹⁷ There was also a tendency among the Rajbanshi *adhiars* to work under the *jotedars* of their own community and this is one of the causes of Rajbanshis economic depression. Another important causes of miserable economic condition among the Rajbanshis that they did not invest money in other economic fields than cultivation though the latter was not fit for modern cultivation system. As a result, it is to be mentioned here that after the abolition of *Zamindari* system in West Bengal (1953), the upper caste gentry would managed their economic crisis but the Rajbanshis could not.

The miserable condition of the Rajbanshis in the occupational field had been shown in census reports. From the table 4.12 we may get a general impression about the occupational patterns of the Rajbanshis. There are, however, ambiguities in categorization and classification of different occupations in the census reports. The table shows that a small section of Rajbanshis was rent receivers and their representation in other subsidiary occupations was insignificant. An over whelming majority of them were various kinds of cultivators, including a vast section of *adhia*rs and field labours. This makes one point adequately clear, that whatever be the magnitude, there was a vertical division within the Rajbanshi community along the economic lines.⁹⁸

Table 4.12: Occupational pattern of the Rajbanshis .^{99*}

General Field									
Income from labourers Rent of Land cutters		Cultivators off of all Kinds		Agent & Managers of landed Estates, Planters, Rent Collectors etc.		Field workers			
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
3767	537	414812	9110	482	1	23230	385		
Public Administration									
Traders		Gazetted Officer		Others		Lawyers, Doctors Teachers		Religious persons	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
3009	1863	18	(Not found)	116	2	497	2	610	39

Source: Census of India, 1911, Vol. V, pt II, Bengal ,Table XVI,PP.374-7.

Note: *Rajbanshis of Darjeeling, Cooch Behar, Faridpur and North Bengal are included.

The Table 4.13 also shows that the Rajbanshis of North Bengal mostly dependent on primary section.

Table 4.13: Percentage distribution of Rajbanshi workers into different occupational categories.

District	Census	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Darjeeling	a	87.77	6.42	0.23	0.85	0.23	0.07	1.17	0.16	3.10
	b	55.13	23.75	12.83	0.40	0.51	0.20	2.24	0.88	4.06
	c	47.30	39.03	0.67	0.30	1.89	1.13	2.16	1.58	5.88
Jalpaiguri	a	89.40	4.09	0.98	0.86	0.39	0.15	1.03	0.43	2.61
	b	68.85	13.05	9.97	0.86	0.81	0.20	0.08	0.90	5.28
	c	57.06	32.77	0.84	0.41	1.37	0.29	1.35	1.93	3.98
Cooch Behar	a	89.89	5.81	0.06	1.09	0.23	0.02	0.57	0.12	2.21
	b	78.58	16.77	0.17	0.53	0.44	0.03	0.56	0.27	2.65
	c	59.89	32.21	0.25	0.74	1.50	0.14	1.13	0.88	3.26
W.Dinajpur	a	73.64	19.63	0.84	1.71	0.39	0.11	1.05	0.14	2.49
	b	64.50	29.64	0.86	0.37	0.74	0.06	0.83	0.32	2.68
	c	56.27	36.17	0.84	0.83	1.45	0.11	1.44	0.58	2.31
Malda	a	69.88	13.78	1.16	6.62	0.96	0.05	0.67	0.47	6.41
	b	39.45	30.19	6.68	5.85	3.93	0.58	6.63	1.26	8.43
	c	59.13	27.96	1.58	2.18	4.68	0.16	1.25	0.92	2.18
N.Bengal	a	87.03	7.04	0.53	1.29	0.34	0.08	0.82	0.25	2.62
	b	70.73	18.57	4.01	0.85	0.78	0.12	0.65	0.53	3.76
	c	57.76	33.27	0.63	0.71	1.61	0.22	1.31	1.16	3.33

Note:a=1961,b=1971,c=1981Censu;Occupational,category:I=Cultivators,II=Agricultural laboureres, III=Mining, quarrying,livestock,fishing,plantation etc;IV=Household Industry;V-Manufacturing other than household industry,VI=Construction;;VII=Trade and Commerce;VIII=Transport, storage and Communication;IX= Other Services.

The Table 4.13 depicts that in 1981, 57.76 percent of Rajbanshi workers were cultivators, and 33.27 percent were agricultural labourers. Therefore, about 91 percent of the Rajbanshis workers were principally engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Among the Rajbanshi workers, although the cultivators outnumbered the agricultural labourers in all the districts, the ratio of latter to former was high in the districts of Darjeeling and West Dinajpur.

Only about 9% of the Rajbanshi workers were engaged in various non-agricultural pursuits. However, excepting in manufacturing, trade and commerce, transportation, and other services, the proportion of Rajbanshi workers in remaining categories of occupation was less than 1%. In 1981, about 2% of Rajbanshi workers were manufacturing industries and only 3.33 percent were in other services. Thus, it appears that up to 1981, the economic activities of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal were less diversified and they were dependent on agriculture.

In urban areas, about 59% of the Rajbanshi workers were dependent on agricultural activities. Little changes in the means of livelihood of the Rajbanshi who were otherwise urban by their residential background. The participation of the urban Rajbanshis in service was less 19%. The corresponding percentages were 32, 28 and 38 for the non-scheduled people, the other SC and the ST respectively.¹⁰⁰ In the manufacturing field the participation of the Rajbanshis of this region is insignificant than the other section of the people. Overall, it appears that urbanization among the Rajbanshis was not accompanied by any significant change in their employment pattern.

Professor Tapas Kumar Raychoudhury observes that the Rajbanshis were always prone to static. As all primitive communities, they were tied to family profession (agriculture) and were normally disinclined to changes professions.¹⁰¹ He also says, when the tea gardens were opened the Rajbanshis never opted out to work as tea garden workers; this factor had compelled the planters to import labour from the tribal of Bihar and Chhotonagpur. The Railways too failed to induce the local people to work in railway construction programmes, though the wages were high. All the labourers used to come from the United

Province and Bihar. Even during season time when a labour could have earned as much as Rs. 1.00 a day in jute godowns, Rajbanshis labourers were not available.¹⁰² Total abstentions from the non-family professions was the basic norms of the Rajbanshis milieu until the externals caused some important changes to be introduced in their attitude towards new professions. As they contact with the new forces of the society, a sense of exclusives gradually developed among the Rajbanshi elites, which created status differentiation with in the community.¹⁰³ Ultimately this Rajbanshi elite class played an important role to whip up this community consciousness in latter period in order to mobilize social and political movement.

From the above discussion, it is to be mentioned here that in the late nineteenth and until the end of the twentieth century, some important changes had been taken place in the socio-economic structure of the region under review. One of the most significance changes was that the Rajbanshis who once dominated the local society and economy were gradually subordinated and alienated from land by the newly settled dominant upper caste Hindus (elites). This domination of an essentially immigrant gentry as well as the cultural differences between them and the Rajbanshis created a sense of community solidarity among the latter. The most articulate section of the Rajbanshi people, the elites took an important part to whip up the community consciousness in order to formulate socio-political organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They raised a new identity based on social, political and linguistic problem and how did they try to success would be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

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8. Being as a Rajbanshi ,the author has much experience about the matter.
9. C.C.Sarayal; *op.cit.*, p.125.
- 10.W.V. Schendal; *Peasant Mobility :The Odds of life in Rural Bangladesh*, Delhi,1982, p.69.

11. H.H.Risley; *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Vol. I*, rpt. Calcutta, 1981, p.494.
12. S.Basu; *op.cit.* p.41.
13. C.C. Sanyal; *op.cit.* p.20.
14. *Ibid*, p.21.
15. *Khakrabhat*- cooked rice kept over night without addition of water to it. *Pantabhat*- cooked rice kept over night with addition of water to it.
16. C.C. Sanyal, *op. cit.*p.29.
17. It is only in the transplanting of paddy season that the mid day meal is carried to the field when the cultivators have hardly any time to come back. It is done in July- August for about twenty days.
18. *Bhuti* is a thick and long rape made of paddy straw, which is kept slowly burning all day and night, used for lighting a *biri* or prepared tobacco in a *chillim*.
19. C.C. Sanyal, *op.cit.*pp.29-30.
20. Sekh Rahim Mandal ,Rokaiya Begum; *Status of Rajbanshi Women in West Bengal :Problem and Prospects*; Bulletin of the *Cultural Research Institute*, Vol. XIX, No. 3, 1997,pp.49-52.
21. D.H.E. Sunder; *Report on the Survey and Settlement in the Western Duars in the Jalpaiguri District, 1889-1895*, Calcutta, 1895, p. 48; J.Ray, *Economic and Social Customs of the Rajbanshis*, *Modern Review*, August 1954, p.133.
22. S. Rahim and Rokeya Begum; *op. cit.* p. 52.
23. *Ibid*, p,54; C.C. Sanyal; *op. cit.* p.173.
24. J.F.Gruning; *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Jalpaiguri*, Allahabad, 1911, pp,32-33; F.W. Strong, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Dinajpur*, Allahabad, 1912, pp. 34-43; Risley, *op.cit.*, pp.494-7.

- 25.C.C. Sanyal; *op. cit.*, p.91; W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. X*, 1876, rpt.1984, p. 374.
26. C.C. Sanyal, *op. cit.* p.88; S. Basu, *op.cit*, Says in *ghor-dzia- biha* an Orphan or a poor boy who could not pay the bride-price was kept in, the house of a girl and after sometime, it the girl's father was satisfied with the nature and behaviour of the boy, he was married to his daughter in a regular form of marriage.
- 27.C.C. Sanyal;*op.cit.*, p.95.
28. *Ibid*, p.96; S.Basu; *op.cit.*, p.43.
- 29.B. Mukherjee; *Socio- Economic and Religious Organization of the Rajbanshi*, pp.68- 9; M. Ray, *Economic and Social Custom of the Rajbanshiis*, pp.131-2; C.C.Sanyal, *op.cit.*, pp.95-8; S.Basu, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-3.
30. C.C.Sanyal; *op.cit.*, p.99.
31. B . Mukherjee; *op.cit.*, p.63; B.Dasgupta, *op.cit.*, pp.11-12.
32. C.C.Sanyal, *op.cit.*, pp.92-94 ; The author himself married with the daughter of a *Kayastha* family at Cooch Behar town and proves that there is no social barrier and also family affairs in his personal life.
- 33.C.C.Sanyal; *op.cit.*, p.99; Basu, *op.cit.*, p.43; S.R. Mandal and R. Begum, *op.cit*, p.52.
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- 35.Risley; *op.cit.*, p.498; Girijasnakar Roy; *Uttarbanger Rajbanshi Kshatriya Jatir Puja Parban*, First Edn. 1970,rpt.1991,pp.12-91; *Encyclopaedic Ethnography of the Himalayan Tribes*, pp.1344-1345; *Baitanik* (Bengali) (ed), Gautam Ray,pp.247-256, Siliguri, 2004. Some of the God and goddess among the Rajbanshi society are given bellow.

<i>Tista Buri</i>	: Goddess of the River
<i>Madar or Satyapir</i>	: Islamic deity adopted by the Hindus
<i>Haribhola</i>	: Vaishnava deity
<i>Sannyasi</i>	: Saiva deity
<i>Sona Rai</i>	: God of wild animal
<i>Hudum Deo</i>	: Rain God
<i>Madan Kam</i>	: God of Procreation; This was worshipped in every village is a place away from homes and goats and pigeons were offered as scarifies.
<i>Kali</i>	: Female Shakti energy
<i>Devi Chandi</i>	:Female shakti energy
<i>Vishari</i>	: Snake deity
<i>Bhandani</i>	: Mother goddess for good crop in the field
<i>Masan</i>	: Malicious sprit.

36. *Encyclopaedic Ethnography of the Himalayan Tribes*, p.1344.

37. Risley; (in Microfilm), Real No.5, NAI, Delhi; *Encyclopaedic Ethnography of the Himalayan Tribes*, p.1344.

38. G.S. Ray, *op.cit.*, pp.1-2; C.C.Sanyal categories the *adhikari* as *Pad-dhari* and *Kantulsi*, *op.cit.*, p.134.

39. G.S. Roy; *op.cit.*, pp.2-3; C.C.Sanyal, *op.cit.*, p.134; S. Basu, *op.cit.*, pp. 43-44.

40. G.S. Ray; *op.cit.*, pp.4-5.

41. C.C.Sanyal; *op.cit.*, p.123; Mukherjee, *op.cit.*, p.77.

42. L.S.S.O' Malley; *Census of India*, 1911, Pt-I, Subsidiary Table VI, p.373.

43. *Census of India*, 1911, Vol. V, Pt. II Bengal, Table-IX, p.84.

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49. *Sunders; op.cit.*, p.90; *Vas, op.cit.*, pp,131-132; *Gruning, op.cit.*, p.139; D.N. Sarkar, *Rai Sahib Panchanan (Bengali)*, Rangpur, 1391B.S. pp. 35-36.
50. Shib Shankar Mukhopadhaya; *Jalpaiguri Jelar Samajik Kathamo, Madhuparni (Bengali) Jalpaiguri Special Number*, 1987, p.153-154; M. Kabyabhusan, *Rajbanshi Kshatriya Deepak (Bengali)* Dinajpur, 1318 B.S. pp. 40-41.
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52. The author had taken an interview with Sri Ramoni Mohan Ray(78) Member of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Society, Head teacher of Kashaldanga Primary School, Falimari Gram Panchayet, Cooch Behar (26.12.2003)

53. Shib Shankar Mukhopadhyaya; *Cooch Behar Samajik Kathamo: Madhuparni (Bengali)*, Cooch Behar Special Number, 1990, p.110.
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55. Sugata Bose; *Agrarian Bengal, Economy, Social Structure and Politics 1919- 47*, Cambridge, 1986, p.33.
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