

# Panchanan Barma and His Message upon the Contemporary Society: A Study on Historical Appraisal.

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## **Abstract**

*Panchanan Barma was a social reformer, a scholar, a philosopher, a patriotic politician. His works of reforms have rendered to his community a good turn to renaissance at the beginning of twentieth century occurring in Rangpur. The light of renaissance had actually been kindled by Harmohan Roy Khajanchi and others before Panchanan Barma went to Rangpur. But this light shone brilliantly with Panchanan's able fueling and torching. In ancient times Pragjyotisha or Kamrupa was a developed civilization; and Rangapur (Rangpur) was under this Kamrupa civilization. After a long period of darkness, in the early nineteenth century this early enlightened civilization kindled a light once again in Rangpur for a brilliant revival of the past. In this paper an attempt is made to study Panchanan Barma's activities towards the Rajbangshi society as well as entire society of undivided Dinajpur.*

**Keywords:** *Father of Rajbangshi, Messages of Panchanan Barma, Contemporary Society etc.*

**Introduction:** Panchanan Barma was born into an ordinary farmer's family and has been established as the father of the Rajbangshi society only through his efforts and expertise of action. He was living to do fight constantly with various adverse contemporary environments. He was an eyewitness to the plight and suffers of the ordinary people. His father Khosal Chandra Sarkar, was sent his son to receive higher education by hopes. After received higher education, Panchanan Sarkar will get a government job and his family will improve in economically. But that hopes of Khosal Chandra Sarkar was not fulfilled. His son did not get any government job as his choice, but he became Panchanan Barma. If he got a good government job, than he could not be Panchanan Barma. Contemporary socio-economic and political situation did not allow him to be a good employee. But the government several and natives were helped him from Panchanan Sarkar to Panchanan Barma by opposing through several spheres in his life. He opposed by the controller of the society in every moment under colonial rule in India and learns from it. He is just not only seen visually to other assault and deprivations, he realized those in his own life living. So, he did not expect happiness for himself. He has searched out for others address upto 1935. Thus, his works of philosophy has turned into the philosophy of life. In this way, the political philosophy of Panchanan Barma was formed by both of his philosophy. In fact, he was one of the active social worker. Political realism was not formed by any certain rules, rather, which was formed based on the principle of the problems of real-life and its source of solution. This political philosophy of Panchanan Barma, taught the people to living with constant fight and learned to them to take pail their rights. Barma's Political philosophy helps to the people to live in new live. This is the success of his political thought.<sup>[1]</sup>

**Society and Panchanan Barma:** His philosophy of the state and social philosophy were complementary to each other. He wanted to establish the foundation of the political philosophy to solve problems in the society. If Nripendra Narayana was the pioneer of the renaissance of North Bengal then Panchanan Barma was its result. He had been working for the society in uncertain circumstances. He has to do constant struggle against the British and the native state of Cooch-Behar to perform his goal for the society. Finally, he participated in politics in actively and able to receive benefits for the backward class people of contemporary society. No doubt, although there have been many such reformations implemented for the people of Rajbangshi community, but major portion of other backward class peoples were benefited.

After the advent of British government the Indian society had changed its nature, structure and formed new society by the influence of western education. The economic and political structure had changed as well as social composition. The British govern had adopted the native culture and policies from the Indian elites. Actually, the Indian elites were led to the British administrator for their own interests and applied their motive towards Indian society by the British. First time, the Indian literate persons were took service under the British Government. After that they used the British administrators towards the Indian especially to the people of backward society as their own. Thus the Indian society became divided into two classes, one is deprived and other is benefited. Not only that, the entire society had converted into colonial motive. The British authority had tried to increase their economic properties and the western educated Indian gentlemen were involved to develop their socio-economical and political status in the society. But the largest part of the society became deprived by them day by day. The greater part of the society was lived to do help the upper class people of the society as well as the British. They had no life to live in the society. The society and economy had first looted by the British and had first influenced by the western education. Calcutta was the main centre of renaissance in Bengal and it flourished in different parts of Bengal. But the entire part of Northern Bengal became out of Bengal renaissance. Most of the people were illiterate and the whole area was out of communicated Bengal. The Northern part of Bengal was under darken age. There were no any humanities or social worker, who have rescued the backwards and save them. Different castes, creeds and religious peoples were lived in Northern part of Bengal. Most of the people of different groups were socio-economically backward and no layout to come up from backwardness in front of them. Panchanan Barma was born in the second decades of the nineteenth century after the Sepoy Mutiny. He observed all the discriminations in the society in his own eyes. Sometimes he faced those discriminations by his own life. First time he protested against the colonial administrators to establish the social equality. But the British authority and upper class elites were not interested to save the backwards. Rather, they used the energy of the backwards for their own interests.

**His Life Living in Rangpur:** Panchanan Barma was a man of humour and always engaged for serve to others. He received higher education and could not get any government job for the antipathy of the British and the official's personnel of the tributary Coochbehar state. He escaped from Coochbehar and took shelter at Rangpur as a lower. But he did not keep continue his practice in Rangpur Judge Court for continuing oppose from the so-called upper class gentlemen's in the contemporary society. In the mean time, Bratya Kshatriya movement was developed led by Harimohan Khajanji at Rangpur due to humiliate to the Rajbangshi Kshatriyas in census 1891 and in the census of 1901, the British authority failed to acquire the real identity to the Rajbangshi. Above all, H.H. Riseley had reported about the Rajbangshis by the census report of 1901 that "The great majority of Koch, inhabitants of Jalpaiguri, Rangpur and part of Dinajpur now invariably describe themselves as an outlying branch of the Kshatriya of Hindu tradition although there has been no mixture of blood and they remain thoroughly Koch under the name of Rajbangshi." [2] After the death of Harimohan Khajanji, all responsibilities of Bratya Kshatriya movement borne by

Panchanan Barma and the movement became large in its shape and size. Gradually he involved with the Kshatriya movement as well as to the movements of other backward class people in the contemporary society. He established Kshatriya Samiti at Rangpur Natyamain in 1910 for several goals of the movement.<sup>[3]</sup> He wanted to organize all the Rajbanshis of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Assam, Bihar and Princely state of Kochbihar for the developmental benefits of the Rajbanshi society. The Rajbanshis of North Bengal were the third community of the all the communities. But, unfortunately, most of them were illiterate and socio-economically backward at the same time. Panchanan Barma was the first higher literate person among the Rajbanshi society then.

**Associate with Kshatriya Movement:** The origin of the caste movement among the Rajbanshis could be located in the ill treatment and humiliation meted out by the upper caste Hindus. Census Authority in 1891 gave instructions to the effect that the Rajbanshis is the same as Koch and as such the Rajbanshi Kshatriyas be returned with the Koch Community as had done in the previous Census of 1872. A movement against the Census authority had started under the leadership of Sri Haramohan Roy (Khajanchi) a local zaminder of Shyampur (Rangpur) who was a Rajbanshi Kshatriya by caste. He had also formed a Samity called “ Rangpur Vitya Kshatriya Bidhayani Sabha” for the Rajbanshis of Rangpur with the view to improve the conditions of his Community.

On February, 1891 Rajbanshi Kshatriyas of Rangpur openly demonstrated against the order of F.A. Skyne the then District Magistrate of Rangpur who had asked the local Superintendent to enroll the Rajbanshi Kshatriyas under the head of Koch. On 10 th February, 1891, a protest letter was lodged with the District Magistrate F.A. Skyne urging him to recognize Rajbanshi as a separate caste from the Koch and also allow them to enroll as in the census. The District Magistrate sought the opinion of Rangpur Dharma Sabha which was the mouthpiece of Hindu religion and an association of Pundits. Mahamahopadhyay Pandit Yadaveswar Tarkaratna was authorized to give his opinion on behalf of the pundits or the Sabha.

The Dharma Sabha called a meeting as a convention on the 15 th March, 1891 of Brahman Pundits, sastrakars, Naiyayiks and influential of the Hindu religion from Navadwip . The convention was held in Rangpur town and was presided by Prasannanath Choudhury. It was attended by more than 400 representatives of Pundits Samaj of Hindu religion and after a long time discussion it was concluded that the Rajbanshis of North Bengal had Kshatriya decent and were Hindus. The Rajbanshi Kshatriya had fallen as degraded from the Kshatriya position because of non observance of Vedic rites and rituals and should be considered as Vratya Kshatriya.<sup>[4]</sup>

The decision of the convention was conveyed to the District Magistrate on the 18 th March 1891. Accepting the opinion of the convention the District Magistrate F.A. Skyne made a strong recommendation on April, 3, 1891 to the Superintendent of Census to permit the Rajbanshis to be enrolled a Vratya Kshatriya against the Caste status. On the 18 th May, 1891 he issued a circular that from 1 Jaistha 1298 B.S Rajbanshis may write themselves as Vratya Kshatriya in official papers and matters. All the efforts of the Rajbanshi leaders and movement had not returned any results and the recommendation of F.A. Skyne in 1891 were not accepted. Again in 1901 the Kshatriya movement gained the momentum.

**Social Condition of Rangpur:** The Britishers utilized this colloquial society system on caste and creed in India. On the other hand, traditional rites and rituals drove many men's social and individual lives to danger. Naturally creative personality of different communities on the background of contemporary situation tried hard to come out from the shackles of the collective life. North Bengal Kshatriya movement and the performance and social thinking of its makes Maharshi Panchanan Barma is the result of such reaction. It can be said in imitation of David Kopf that this changing process is one kind of Renaissance. Because Renaissance is such social and cultural process that is related with reawakening. It is such concept that free from historical time



and culture. Any one can apply this concept in any sphere of culture and historical period. According to Tapan Roy Choudhury-“a seed time rich in possibilities. These possibilities depend successful creation of the creative personality or community. On the contemporary period, Roy Saheb Panchanan Barma was the towering personality of the entire Rajbangshi Community not only for the North Bengal but also the whole North-Eastern India.[<sup>5</sup>] He grew the ethnic sentiment among the Rajbangshi society.

In India, it is basically around religion that the caste system, which is principally a custom-based structure of social hierarchy, has grown up. It is linked with the unequal distribution of power and wealth also. In essence, the caste system is a consequence of the socio-economic and political process rooted in history. One of its remarkable features was, “The constant rivalry between various communities for political and economic power which was reflected in their varying and conflicting perceptions of Brahmins and the Vedas.”[<sup>6</sup>] On the other hand the British, in order to prolong their rule, lent some credibility to the caste system in the administrative sphere. That is why Dirks says, “Under colonialism caste became a specifically Indian form of civil society, the most critical site for the textualization of social identity, but also for the specification of public and private domain, the rights and responsibilities of the colonial state, the legitimization consisting of social freedom and social control, and the developments of the documentation and certification regimes of the bureaucratic state.”<sup>1</sup> Susan Bayly too says, “The English word caste has come to be widely used in South Asia, even by speakers of vernacular languages, though many equivalent terms for human orders or ‘Communities’ exist in the sub continental regional languages.” Susan Bayly further says in elaboration of the concept of caste, “These usages include such regional vernacular terms as Quam, Sampraday, Samudi and Jati. Like other English terms made familiar through colonial administrative practice, ‘community’ is still widely employed in both English and the vernaculars. It is often a reference to ethno-religious particular communities. It is also a term for caste origin, often with an implication that such a ‘community’ shares an inherited moral mandate to promote common interests by coercive means.”

What these comments imply is that under the colonial rule of the British, the caste system became important in India in the cultural sphere on one hand, and similarly in the social, politico-economic and administrative spheres on the other. Because just as the feudal structure did not collapse with the fall of the Mughal Empire, its later transformation into a subservient political and economic entity in the colonial period is a historic event. In consequence, caste-based movements emerged in British India. It may be mentioned that such movements in different parts of India were anti-Brahminical in nature. In North Bengal and North-Eastern India, the Brahminical domination was absent, but other problems cropped up. It was against this background that the ‘Kshatriya’ movement led by Panchanan Barma was a remarkable phenomenon. This movement assumed the shape of a social mass upheaval in today’s North Bengal, and in North-Eastern India as a whole. Panchanan Barma gave able leadership to this movement.

**Conclusion:** Finally, under the leadership of Panchanan Barma, Rajbansis, in 1913, held a great union (*mahamilan*) festival in Parulbari village (P.S. Debiganj) on the bank of the Karatowa River. On the eve of the festival, Panchanan Barma said, ‘Rajbansis know themselves as Kshatriya, and they have all along declared themselves as Kshatriya sons and daughters.’ Here it should be mentioned that in 1910, at the time of the formation of the Kshatriya Samity, many wanted to retain the word Kshatriya only. But Panchanan Barma’s stand was unequivocal, “If the term ‘Rajbangshi’ is dropped, our mission will be defeated (*hamra hareya jamo*).” In a word, it can be argued that the decision, taken by Panchanan Barma, to build up the Rajbangshi Kshatriya identity through the Kshatriya movement was a historic one. Moreover, it was due to the protest of the

Kshatriya community led by Panchanan Barma that in the report published by O Maily, the then Census Superintendent it was said that Rajbansis and Koches are two different identities.<sup>[7]</sup>

The Kshatriya movement led by Panchanan Barma received widespread currency at that time on an all-India plane. It was due to this movement that the influence and power of the Rajbansi community grew enormously in today's North Bengal and North-Eastern India. He spread the public welfare activities of the Kshatriya samity to the all-India stage.<sup>[8]</sup> Swaraj Basu, professor of history at Indira Gandhi Open University, he remarked that Panchanan took the claim for Kshatriya status by the Rajbansis community to the all-India level through the Kshatriya movement and in this way he was able to transcend the bounds of regionalism and to achieve institutional success in the larger society. "It was perhaps through this channel that the Kshatriya movement of the Rajbansis hoped to enter the realm of modern institutional politics."

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