

Social Philosophy of Manishi Panchanan Barma :

A Brief Study on Historical Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Panchanan Barma was the father of the Rajbangshi Community of Undivided North Bengal. He sacrifices his life for the society of the Rajbangshi Community. He had taken many reformation works for the recover the lost dignity of the Rajbangshi Society. He was shocked contemporary social discrimination and economic exploitation. Zamindars and moneylenders had crippled the rural economy by the rampant exploitation. In order to protect the exploited peasant society, he founded the rural agricultural Bank, namely "Kshatriya Bank". Keep in mind that it was the first rural Agricultural Bank for the farmers.[1]He was thinking about the formation of Kshatriya Bank for the ventures of rural development.

Keyword: - Father, Social Thought, Philosophy, Society, Economy, Political, Colonial Motive, Reformations.

1. Introduction:- Panchanan Burma is the father of the nation Panchanon Rajbangshi. Disadvantaged and marginalized communities in the north-east of India, a prominent personality. A learned scholar of Sanskrit literature, being the society did not have any value. The British colonial government, local state and Western-educated group of gentleman he did not have to decide. Especially the British, under the rise of the so-called educated uccasrenira backward mentality and behavior in class pancananake was shocked. Neglected for a long period of conservation and the development of disadvantaged nations Rajbangshi have thought. For the development of their socio-economic, political and educational reforms did. He took part in active politics of the nation Rajbangshi reformed. Rajbangshi the nation ahead of the start of the task, but the north-east of India had benefited jatigosthira Backward Class.

1.1. Birth and Education:-

Cooch-beher was a feudal Kingdom which lying at the bottom of the Himalayan region. Before 1950 A.D, it was a tributary state under the Colonial of British India. Subsequently, with the eclipse of the feudal rule, it became a district of West Bengal. The largest subdivision of the district is Mathbhanga. Two miles away from the spot and beside the *Kutch Street* lay the village Khalisamari, where Panchanan was born in the Bengali year 1272. His father was Khosal Chandra Sarkar and mother Champala Devi. Panchanan imbibed these virtues of his parents and later acquired fame through his own work.

Panchanan received his first instructions in the *pathsala* near his house. After the completion of *pathsala* education, his father sent him to the Middle-English School of the town of Mathabhanga. Panchanan Sircar, a native of Coochbiher, who passed the M.E. Examination in the first division from Mathabhanga School, succeeded to secure the first place in the general list of the Rajshahi Division. After passing the Middle-English Examination, boy Panchanan got admitted into the Zenkins High School and pursued his learning while residing at the school-boarding. Having passed the High English Examination, young Panchanan got admitted into the Victoria College and studied there as a boarder of the college hostel. Being a meritorious student, Panchanan gradually passed the Entrance, F.A, B.A, and M.A (Sanskrit) Examinations. By this time, the course for the study of Law was introduced in the Victoria College, and he passed the B.L (Bachelor of Law) Examination as well. As a matter of fact, he never failed in any examination and was the first M.A.B.L in the Rajbangshi society of not only the state of Cooch-beher, but of the whole of North Bengal, Assam and Bihar.[¹]

1.2 Panchanan Barma's Views towards Contemporay Society: Before going to discussion on social thought of Panchanan Barma, it is necessary to have an understanding of the larger social and historical perspective, because any type of history is written from some specific outlook. Now what needs to be thought is whether the events described and facts supplied in the work on history is correct or not. Hence it is extremely necessary to check one's emotion and to restrain one's devotional mood while writing the history of a region or an individual. That is why a discussion of Panchanan Barma's social thought requires caution, for the people at large may think of Panchanan Barma's thoughts as those of the Rajbangsi community, while the Rajbangsis may consider Panchanan Barma's thoughts as their own.

The Renaissance of the nineteenth century owes its genesis to the spread of western education. This Renaissance led to many events, but it failed to touch the larger sections of Bengalis, i.e. the greater part of the Muslim community and of the educationally backward people. On the other hand, the luminaries of those days did not pay much attention to the welfare of the people. But the impact of British rule and western culture on Bengal, or for that matter, the whole of India, and their various interactions with indigenous culture initiated a change in the mode of living of the people. Nevertheless, it was confined to the educated urban middle classes, who were limited in number. Subrata Dasgupta^[2] has mentioned two characteristics of this new consciousness and process of change. The first was ‘A capability to think, perceive and create in a manner that entailed the melding of two traditions which were seemingly unconnected and even contradictory--- one being the Indian cultural and philosophical past, the other the Western creative and intellectual tradition.’ He has termed it ‘a cross-cultural mentality’. The second was ‘a belief in, and perception of, a fundamental unity amidst diversity and difference, even in the seeming differences manifest between certain Western and Indian concepts, precepts and perspective.’ Subrata Dasgupta has called this belief and perception ‘universalism’. But the twin ideas, ‘cross-cultural mentality’ and ‘universalism’ could not enter the heart of the Indian society. The various processes of Renaissance had found their fruits owing to the rise of nationalism and the pull of the ancient Hindu religion.^[3]

The English too were active in perpetuating the Indian caste-based social stratification. This gave rise to various problems in the Indian society. On the other hand, various communities of different parts of India were trying to find ways of coming out of these problems. The ‘Kshatriya’ movement led by Panchanan Barma was the outcome of such a reaction. It was also one kind of Renaissance. The Renaissance came to Bengal mainly in the fin-de siècle decades of the eighteenth century and continued well into the nineteenth century. A good number of books and numerous articles have been written in various personages, who belonged to the first half of the nineteenth century. While searching for facts about them, it has been found difficult to accept many of the then prevalent notions. Hence it is not unjustified to throw light on Panchanan Barma’s social thoughts on the basis of newer facts. In truth, the concept of Renaissance is such that it can be applied to any culture and any phase of history.^[4]

The reform movement led by such a great scholar like Rammohun Roy hardly made an impact in the lessening of the strict nature of the caste system. This was the situation in urban areas, and hence the situation in rural areas can easily be guessed. The Indian nationalist movement too failed to fulfill the expectations of all sections of society. The British Government of India too, for political reasons, helped in increasing the distance between the upper castes and lower castes. That is why Swaraj Basu argues, “The political alienation of the upper castes from both the lower castes and the colonial government paved the way for the British to appear in the eyes of the lower castes as their true well-wisher. Most of the lower caste patronage seemed an easy way to salvation from the age-long upper caste domination and this perception was expressed in unambiguous terms in their literature.”^[5]

2. Concept of social Justice:-

There is social justice in a community if there are means available for equal social opportunities for the development of personality by all the people. No persons should be deprived of those social conditions which are essential for his development.^[6] Johari remarks about the social justice in his book ‘Contemporary Political Theory’ “...the ideal of social justice envisages to promote the welfare of the people by securing and developing a just social order.” Panchanan Barma wanted to apply his concept of social justice at all levels of the society, especially, in social, economical and political spheres. Every person should enjoy equal rights in the society. But the Vedic Hindu society does not believe in this principle, born is the measurement of the society. There is no value in the action. According to him, social justice is, to preserve the interests of minorities which refers to eradicate the disadvantaged, uneducated, poverty from the society. To solve different kinds of problems in the socio-economic justice are observed. In the case of developing countries like India, social justice refers to develop towards the weak and backward classes in the society. So, the vested interests should be closed from the society. In this type of vested and opportunities people of the society under the British colonial rule, all benefits of the society had monopolized in their hand. They were exploited by the largest sections of society. Upper class people were cherished and celebrated under the aegis of the British and western-educated gentlemen did not kept any information about backward sections of the greater society. A few scholars were kept news about the backward class; Panchanan Barma was one of them.

He received inhuman treatment from wider society, born in the family of Rajbanshi of his childhood. He was able to gain knowledge about the contemporary society during his education days. He has witnessed during his Rangpur career, how so-called upper class people were neglected and mockery to the lower class people. This can be seen not only in economic terms, it is divided on the basis of caste system of the Indian Hindu society. Those problems were involved not only socio-economic spheres in the society but also involved in mentality of the upper class people. ^[7] He felt that, if the people are given the right to act independently, he can develop his qualities in full. By this way the backward class people can be developed them in equal to the upper class of the society. Since the beginning of civilization is relatively disadvantaged have been exploited and deprived by the foregoing groups. Panchanan Barma himself was assaulted by so-called upper class people of the contemporary society. Therefore, he deeply realized those issues of social inequalities through his own life.

Society cannot progress without social justice, in socio-economic and political spheres of the society.^[8] But the nationalist leaders of the time did not mean it. Even upper class people were opposed towards the activities of

Panchanan Barma. The greater sections of people of the backward society were drifted away from upper class Hindus due to their mentality and behavior to the backwards. For this same reason, the Muslim community was isolated from upper Hindus in the greater society. Various political parties and movements in India, the castes were formed on the basis of the contemporary society. The minority and disadvantaged castes were united for the sake of his own existence and the movement for the realization of their demands. No exception was made in case of Panchanan Barma. At first the leaders of the National Congress was discussing the issue of backward class. He was participated to the session of the Provincial Congress. He gave them suggestions for searching alternative ways to solve their problems. The upper class Congress leaders were so busy to do high their social position under the British rule. The cries and crises of the backwards did not reach to the heart of the Congress leaders. Being compelled, Panchanan Barma had started hi developmental activities towards the Rajbanshi society of North Bengal. But contemporary Rajbanshi society was full of problems like, illiteracy, socio-economic and political backwardness etc, despite those items development, the Rajbanshi society will never improve equal to the contemporary society. Then, he adopted several developmental measures for the Rajbanshi community. Gradually, those developmental programmes were spread towards the other backward communities. Thus, his thought of social justice wide spread among the entire society. As a result, he did not a representative of a particular group of people; soon he became the representative on behalf of the whole backward society.

3. Women Empowerment and Education:-

The worth of a civilization can be judged by the place given to women in the society. One of several factors that justify the greatness of India's ancient culture is the honorable place granted to women. The Muslim influence on India caused considerable deterioration in the status of women. They were deprived of their rights of equality with men. Raja Ram Mohan Roy started a movement against this inequality and subjugation. The contact of Indian culture with that of the British also brought improvement in the status of women by their imperial policy .[⁹] The third factor in the revival of women's position was the influence of Mahatma Gandhi who induced women to participate in the Freedom Movement. But in the contemporary of North-eastern India Panchanan Barma actively exellerated the empower among the women through "The Naari Raksha Committee". As a result of this retrieval of freedom, women in Indian have distinguished themselves as teachers, nurses, air-hostesses, booking clerks, receptionists, and doctors. They are also participating in politics and administration. But in spite of this amelioration in the status of women, the evils of illiteracy, dowry, ignorance, and economic slavery would have to be fully removed in order to give them their rightful place in Indian society.

Women in the present day society—wives and mothers and working women—are ready to accept an inferior position in the family, society and polity. They were in the forefront and actively participant in the social and economic life of the county. Their status was reduced to a lower level and were treated inferior to men. Due to this, the social and economic situation of the nation also deteriorated. But Social reformation in the nineteenth century by the light of renaissance women's society of Bengal had been benefited.[¹⁰] By the nineteenth century, Rammohan and Vidyasagar had showed their interest to grow the empower among women through women-education and activities of social reforms, like them Panchanan Barma played the same role for the women in the first half of 20th century Bengal. The main stream of social reforms movement in the 19th century was to develop the social statue of women.[¹¹] According to Panchanan Barma both men and women are of equal rank, but they are not identical. They are peerless pair, being supplementary to one another, each helping the other so that without the one the existence of the other cannot be conceived. The concept of self is the most important factor affecting the behavior of women. Self-realization of the potential of women was severely restricted in the pre-independence period due to various socio-cultural conditions and conditioning. Panchanan Barma stressed women's participation in political, socio-cultural and economic shere through his various political and social activities. He argued that the c ultural empowerment of women can be a reality only when women are treated on par with men, through all the differences that are part and parcel of being a different gender. There should be a change in the mindset of society on a fundamental level. Above all, women's economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women's rights and enabling women to have control over their lives and exert influence in society. It is about creating just and equitable societies. It is true that women often face discrimination and persistent gender inequalities, with some women experiencing multiple discrimination and exclusion because of factors such as ethnicity or caste.¹²

One focal point of Panchanan Barma's activities was the spread of modern education, particularly that of women's education. He wanted to lift the womenfolk from the utterly humiliating and degrading conditions and to establish them on the foundation of their own rights. During 1921-23, abduction and rape of women assumed menacing proportions in Rangpur region. In 1923, a lady named Barada Sunddari was forcibly abducted and raped. Then a number of ladies, namely Tadamani Barmani, Gritakumari Baishnabi, Kanduri Barmani etc., were raped one by one. Against such oppression, Panchanan Barma raised the voice of protest. He built up an organization named *Nari Rakhsa Upasamity* (Committee for the Protection of Women). Through this organization, he sought to make women self-reliant by giving them proper education and by training them in stick-play, word-fight and wrestling. He did not receive any cooperation from English rulers, yet he persisted in his work. If this fact is taken into account, it will perhaps not be far out of truth to argue that Panchanan's success far exceeded that of Rammohan and Vidyasagar. It was Panchanan who first, in a debate in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1921, spoke of women's franchise. Here the thrust of his argument

was, "Our conception is not that the house is a house but that it is the women in the house who is really the house." That is why the Rai Sahib wanted to view women's freedom as 'not simply a case of politics.'^[13] At present, we come across a large amount of discussions about women's freedom and rights, but is it possible to establish this freedom and right unless the society becomes civilized and conscious. Women's freedom lies in the relation of mutual respect between men and women, and Panchanan's perception of this truth can be detected in his poem 'Dangdhari Mao'. In this poem, Panchanan Barma exhorted the youth community to stand up against wrongs and injustices. At that point of time, it acted like a tonic.

4. Rural Development and Kshatriya Bank:-

As far as the ideas on rural development are concerned, Panchanan Barma has a specific similarity with Rabindranath Tagore, although Tagore preferred the term 'rural reconstruction' to rural development. His opinion was that there was a collective strength in the villages, which had enabled the villages to sustain themselves for more than 2500 years. In order to use this strength effectively, Tagore advocated the formation of cooperatives or groups.^[14]

Under the leadership of Panchanan Barma, well-coordinated clusters of villages (*gram mandali*) grew up in Rangpur, and the number of such clusters exceeded 300. The Kshatriya Bank's impact on these clusters was very much discernible. Here too one can find a similarity between Tagore and Panchanan Barma. In Tagore's opinion, there was no alternative to the release of the energy of villager's latent in themselves, and that all the villages of the country were to be reconstructed in such a way that they would be able to meet all their needs.^[15]

In fact economic reform formed one of the more remarkable reformist activities of Panchanan Barma. He set up a concern named Barma Company that operated within the region now known as Bangladesh. The real objective of the Company was to free the rural poor peasants from the exploitation by landowners and moneylenders. The most remarkable of Panchanan Barma's economic reform activities was the formation of 'Kshatriya Bank'. In the areas then predominantly inhabited by Rajbansis, a change was noticeable. The people of the Rajbanshi community were trying to shift from the mainstream of their traditional economic system.^[16] Panchanan Barma understood that no social upliftment of the community was possible unless the community could be economically strengthened, and hence he set up the 'Kshatriya Bank in the Bengali year 1327'.^[17]

In order to understand the nature of functioning of this bank, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the banking system in greater Bengal. The sense in which the word 'bank' is used was absent in the pre-Plassey period. In the eighteenth century, the banks' functions were divided into three categories. One was the acceptance of deposits from the public. In those days, wealthy persons used to deposit their money in banks in lieu of interest. The second function was give short and long-term loans at interest. The third was to issue various types of *hundis* (bills of exchange) and realise their values, and to participate in the sale and purchase of imported and exported goods. Along with these, banks used to take part in the exchange of coins. In the pre-Plassey period, the House of Jagat Seth was the foremost banking institution of Bengal. The House of Jagat Seth was connected with deposit banking and credit banking, but they did not issue notes. This house may be compared with Germany's 'Phutzer' and Holland's 'Trip' families.^[18]

Being a rural person by birth and early upbringing, he was familiar with the economic conditions of the countryside. While living in Rangpur, he began to reflect on how to improve the lot of the peasantry and to bring prosperity to the village-centred economy. The changes brought about by the English-instituted land revenue system were not at all beneficial to the villages. This system gave rise to changes that did great harm to the rural people. The creativity of the villages was hampered, and they were made dependent on the outside world. The high rates of revenue extraction rendered the villagers helpless and destitute. To liberate them from this condition, Panchanan Barma set up the 'Kshatriya Bank'. Its objective was to free the peasantry from the clutches of the landowners and moneylenders and to provide them with the opportunity to build up a bright future by providing them with easy credit facilities. The new method he applied is today called micro-finance, but earlier known as micro-credit. This micro-credit system conducted through the Kshatriya Bank benefited many peasants. But he also understood that provision of easy credit through the Kshatriya Bank would not be enough to free the peasantry from usurious exploitation. For this reason he sought to establish the rights of peasants through land reform laws.^[19]

5. Idea of Nationalism:-

Common history of the people helps in the formation and continuation of nationality. It develops a spirit of oneness among the people. Common interests of the people, whether economic, political, social or cultural, help in uniting them together. Common race also helps in the formation and strengthening of nationalism. Generally, the people belonging to the same race have the same culture, history, customs, traditions, problems etc and these factors help the formation of national feelings among them. Nationality means the people who have same race, language, culture, religion, history, literature; economic interests and political aspirations, feelings of nationalism are aroused among them, inhabiting a territory of a geographic unity. It is a historically constituted stable community of people, formed into political body. Nationalism teaches us to love our motherhood. The nationalists love their motherhood, rivers, mountains, flowers, animals and birds very much and they say that motherland is better than paradise.^[20]

Nationalism is an idea-force which fills man's brain and heart with new thoughts and sentiments and drives him to translate his consciousness into deeds of organized action.^[21] According to Burgess and his followers, "Nationality is

a distinct socio-ethnic group within the state and ordinarily constituting minority of the total population.” [22] Professor Gilchrist, “ Defines nationality as a spiritual sentiment or principle arising a number of people usually of the same race, resident on the same territory, sharing a common language, the same religion, similar history and tradition, common interests with common political association and common ideas of political unity.” [23]

6. Conclusion:-

Panchanan Barma was a leader of Rajbanshi Community and reformer from entire north-Eastern India during the later period of British rule in India. He established Kshatriya Sabha in order to inculcate Brahminical values and practices among the people from Rajbanshi community. Panchanan Barma originally came from a jotedar. In the early years of his career, he started practicing law at Rangpur court. In Rangpur he was shocked by the refusal of a high caste lawyer to use a toga (lawyer's gown), previously used by him. In the following years, he led a kshatriyanization movement among the people of Rajbanshi community of Bengal. 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. For this reason, Swaraj Basu has remarked, “Panchanan Barma was the main ideologue of the Movement.” [24]

For an adequate discussion of Panchanan Barma's social thought, it is necessary to have an understanding of the larger social and historical perspective, because any type of history is written from some specific outlook. Now what needs to be thought is whether the events described and facts supplied in the work on history is correct or not. Hence it is extremely necessary to check one's emotion and to restrain one's devotional mood while writing the history of a region or an individual. That is why a discussion of Panchanan Barma's social thought requires caution, for the people at large may think of Panchanan Barma's thoughts as those of the Rajbansi community, while the Rajbansis may consider Panchanan Barma's thoughts as their own.

People of several castes and creed, religion and belief, live here peacefully maintaining one's own individuality. So Panchanan, for his society as well as for all, tried to develop culture and tradition. Indian economy is based on villages. So he tried to develop villages with economic reformation by the scheme of micro-credit or micro finance. For making proper use of money with the help of Banks he established 'Kshatriya Bank'. Thus he wanted to form strong country self reliant and self confident one. For this purpose he wanted to form co-operative groups. A woman is an important half of a man. With any development of one half another half can't be developed. So he did much for woman emancipation and empowerment.

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