

ROY SAHEB PANCHANAN BARMA: 'FATHER OF THE RAJBANSHIS'

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ABSTRACT:

The Princely State of Cooch Behar gave birth many famous personalities who dedicated their life for the welfare of the people. Among them one of the renowned personality was Thakur Panchanan Barma. He is regarded as the 'Father of The Rajbanshis'. He was a reformer like Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. He obtained the M. A. and B. L. degree but did not get any government service in his own state. Panchanan Barma was deeply respectful to the Indian tradition and culture. The miserable condition of the Rajbanshi community hurt the heart of Panchanan Barma. He took the leadership of the Rajbanshi community .He introduced the Kshatriya Movement through the Indian philosophy, tradition and culture. He was unanimously elected the secretary of the 'Kshatriya Samity'. As a result of the earnest effort and dedication of Panchanan Barma, the Rajbanshi community had restored their lost tradition and secured their position in the society. Panchanan Barma's greatest achievement was the inclusion of the Rajbanshi community in the 'Scheduled Caste'. Panchanan Barma was a great scholar. He became the Editor of Rangpur Sahitya Parisad Patrika and wrote many books such as 'Rangpurer Rupkatha'. In 1919 Panchanan Barma awarded 'RAI – SAHIB' and M. B.E. The young generation was very much influenced by the dedicated personality of Panchanan Barma. He also fought for the emancipation of the women and made an effort to save their dignity in the society. Panchanan Barma was not only a social reformer but also a great economist. He thought for the betterment of the peasants.

He established 'Kshatriya Bank' and introduced 'Micro Credit System' which became famous at present as 'Micro- Finance'. Nobody considered such financial upliftment policies among the Indian social reformers before.

Key words: Rajbanshi, Kshatriya, Emancipation, Kshatriya Bank. Micro Finance etc.

Panachana Barma, the leader of the Kshatriya Community was born on 13th February, 1866 at Khalisamari village of Mathabhanga Sub Division of the former Native State of Cooch Behar. His father was Khosal Chandra Sarkar and mother was Champala Devi.

Panchanan Barma had completed his first education in the village Pathsala which was situated near his house. After the completion of Pathsala education, he got admission in the Middle English School of the town of Mathabhanga. Panchanan Barma was a meritorious student. In the Middle School Examination, the merits of boy Panchanan came out clearly. In the Cooch Behar Gazette of 1885-86, Kalidas Bagchi, the Superintendent of Education, wrote in his report: "Pnachanan Sircar, a native of Cooch Behar 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.¹ For his meritorious performance in the Middle English Examination, Panchanan Barma received a government stipend. He passed the High English Examination from the Jenkins School. From Victoria College Panchanan Barma obtained the B.A. Degree. In 1897 he obtained the degree of Master of Arts in Sanskrit from Calcutta University. In 1899 Panchanan Barma passed the Bachelor of Law from Victoria College. He was the first M. A., B. L. in the Rajbanshi society of not only the State of Cooch Behar, but of the whole of North Bengal, Assam and Bihar.

Panchanan Barma was the 'Gifted Son of Cooch Behar'. Panchanan Barma did not get any government service in his own state. He dedicated his whole life for the betterment and development of the Rajbanshi community.² He expressed the need for establishing the rights of Rajbanshi community in the society, regarding education, basic economic development, politics and various other aspects of life. Not only the Rajbanshi community, as a whole Panchanan Barma dedicated his life for the new awakening of the people in this region. As there was no insurgence of social or political movement, the people of the Cooch Behar State were in the dark. Panchanan Barma mentally was the bearer of new thinking though he was born in an ordinary family. But the royal power of the Cooch Behar State disfavoured the movement under the leadership of Panchanan Barma. At last he was expelled from Cooch Behar State.³

In 1901, he went to Rangpur and started legal practice. At that time the 'Uttarbanga Sahitya Parishad' or the 'North Bengal Literary Society' was founded in Rangpur. Panchanan Barma appointed one of the Editor of the 'Rangpur Sahitya Patrika'. This journal showed the scholarly skill of Panchanan Barma through his various research articles which were composed on the Rajbanshi language. His explanatory notes of the poetic work "Chandikabijay" of Dwija Kamal Lochan may be mentioned in this regard⁴. The writings of Panchanan Barma

acquired the fame among the scholars. Nagendra Nath Basu, the famous Oriental Scholar regarded the scholarship of Panchanan Barma as a “Bright Lamp of North Bengal”.⁵

Panchanan Barma the “Father of the Rajbanshi Community” came forward for the upliftment of the Kshatriyas. He gave up the Editorship of ‘Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika’ and associated with the work of the Kshatriya Samity in various ways. The Rajbanshis claimed that they were originally to the Kshatriya Varna. In 1891, the District Magistrate of Rangpur, directed the Superintendent In Charge of Census Work to record every Rajbanshi’s identity as ‘Koch’ which resulted a vehement protest from the Rajbanshi community throughout the State. In some places, the situation broke into riots. Rangpur became the centre of Kshatriya Movement. In the census of 1901, The Rajbanshi Kshatriya were categorized as ‘Rajbanshi only.’⁶ This created deep disappointment and a strong sense grievance in the Rajbanshi society. In this critical situation Panchanan Barma who was then an active lawyer in Rangpur took up the leadership of the Kshatriya movement. Under the leadership of Panchanan Barma, the Kshatriya movement had been got a new impetus. He had started his campaign with the contention that the Rajbanshis were different from the Koch who were a degraded caste and the Rajbanshis were of royal lineage or Kshatriya status. In this way Panchanan Barma took up the leadership of the Rajbanshi community. This is the turning point in the life of Panchanan Barma and he became Thakur Panchanan Barma in subsequent period.

Like Gandhiji the ‘Father of Nation’ in South Africa, Panchanan Barma the lawyer in Rangpur had to encounter similar opposition and personal insult. Some humiliating events against the Rajbanshi community created a burning sense of injury in the mind of Panchanan Barma. He dedicated himself completely to the task of uniting the Rajbanshi society and to recover its lost glory. As a result of his earnest efforts the ‘Kshatriya Chhatra Nibas’ (Residence of Kshatriya Student) was founded in Rangpur in 1909. Panchanan Barma took the main initiative in the collection of donation. He was appointed the superintendent of the Kshatriya Chhatra Nibas.⁷

Panchanan Barma took the initiative for the union of the whole Rajbanshi Community. Panchanan along with his associates spread their presence over the whole of North Bengal, Goalpara of Assam and Purnea of Bihar with the mission to unite the whole community. Panchanan Barma and others decided to form a platform of the Kshatriya movement. As a result of the efforts of Panchanan Barma the first assembly of Kshatriyas (Pratham Kshatriya Sammilani) took place on May 1, 1910 in Rangpur town at Rangpur Natyamandir which resulted in the foundation of the ‘Kshatriya Samity’ (Kshatriya Association). Panchanan Barma was unanimously elected to the post of the Secretary of the ‘Kshatriya Samity’ He had to carry the burden of leadership till the last day of his life. He said “The betterment of the society is our common desire”. The function of the Kshatriya Samity required a

lot of money which resulted the formation of 'Kshatriya Fund' by collecting 12000 rupees from the dignitaries of the society and about 1000 rupees were obtained from the assembly itself.

Mahamohapadhyay Jadaveswar Tarakaratna expressed the view that "Koches and Rajbanshis constitute two separate identities and the Rajbanshis are Poundra Kshatriyas with Aryan origin. They become 'Bratya Kshatriya' due to their depressed status. The rituals of 'Upanayana' can remove the sin of degradation. Panchanan Barma tried his best to reform the Rajbanshi Society through the 'Upanayana'.⁸ Provision of the Upanayana along with evidence of Kshatriya status must be had from the Hindu scriptures. Panchanan Barma went to Kolkata, Nabadwip, Mithila and Kamrup to discuss the scripture with the Brahmin Pandit and succeeded in securing their approval. Deviganj on the bank of river Karotoa was selected as the venue of the 'Great Union'. On 27 Magh of the Bengali year 1318, the celebration of Upanayana had completed and Panchanan Barma received the alms from his mother Champala Devi. Wearing the Upabit, thousands of Rajbanshi Kshatriyas of Cooch Behar performed the expiratory rites and wore the sacred thread for getting rid of the outcast status. The great task like the celebration of Upanayana was succeeded due to the firm determination and kind co-operation of Panchanan Barma. He became very sad to see the miserable condition of the society. He went to bring change the Rajbanshi society. As a result of the earnest efforts of Panchanan Barma the worship of God Chandika as a symol of mighty was introduced.⁹ It is reasonable to give the epithet ' Panchanan Barma's Era' to this period in the history of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya race.

To decentralize the 'Kshatriya Samity' Mandal Samity were set up at various places throughout the state. Its main objective was to enrich and spread the Samity with branches and to make it strong and fruitful. One or two or more villages constitute the space of Mandal or Mandali. The Mandalies or Mandal Samities enhanced the comradeship among the members of the society. Various kinds of exercises like stick play and dagger play were introduced to grow the Kshatriya like strength and vigour in the heart of Kshatriya men.

One of the most important heroic work of Roy Saheb Panchanan Barma was the imparting of military training to the young Rajbanshi men. The year 1914 was the year of change of the world. In this year World War-I broke out in Europe. As India was then under the British rule, Indians were forced to participate in that war. Thakur Panchanan Barma took the opportunity to show the self- respect of the Kshatriya community. He summoned: "Oh ! Brother Kshatriyas, Come, You have a chance, do not lost it in negligence. Woke up ! , you are the Kshatriyas, You should remember the performance of fore-father, Woke up! Woke up!".

The invitation of Panchanan Barma created an enthusiasm among the young Kshatriyas. He decided to send one battalion Kshatriya young men to the war. Some Kshatriya youths forsook the happiness of domestic life and participated in the war with great vigour. The Kshatriya soldier fought with great heroic ability. After the ending of the war, the Commandar –in - Chief of Karachi wrote to Panchanan Barma: "The men of this (Kshatriya) community make better soldier than most of others".¹⁰

The creditable performance of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya young in the World War-I created quite sensation in the society. In honour of such great heroic deeds, the British Indian government awarded Panchanan Barma the title 'M.B.E'. It should be mentioned here that before he succeeded in the movement of the Kshatriya Samity, Panchanan Barma awarded the title 'Rai Sahib' in 1919.

Panchanan Barma was a social reformer also. Education is one of the essential parts of the society. He tried his best to give the light of education among the entire community. We must remember his achievement in the field of Bengali literature. It is true if he was born in Kolkata, he named one of the 'Great Literateur'. But unfortunately such renowned personality was born in an illiterate and undeveloped society of Cooch Behar. Panchanan Barma's most important literacy works are: Govinda Mishra's 'Geeta', 'Katha O Chhilka', 'Padatika'(Women Festival's rules) 'Rangpur Rupkatha', 'Jagannathbilai' etc. Panchanan Barma is no more but his invaluable writings are always in the mind of the people.

For the emancipation of women Panchanan Barma played an important role.. He believed that all men and women are equal. He tried his best to restore the former status and position of the women in the society which needed the change of the mind set up of the society and also the State . Panchanan Barma made an effort to save the dignity of the women. He wrote his famous Poem 'Dangdhari Mao'.¹¹ 'Dangdhari Mao' is an immortal creation of Panchanan Barma which has three parts such as introduction, Beta Chhaoyar Prati and Kshatriyar Prati. Protection of the female sex has been imposed upon the Beta Chhaoya or the male sex in general. The Kshatriyas the protector or warrior caste has the duty to protect the humanity. In a word, as a kshatriya one should protect all - both male and female. Panchanan Barma's real mandate was the protection of distress and worship of almighty.

He Utters:

"Bipod ghaniya jatoy aise tatoy ulsi chit,
Apon bole damay ar gay is ter git".

Free translation: So far as trouble may come,
his heart is replete with joy. With his own strength
he overcomes troubles and sings eulogy to god.

Panchanan Barma was not only social reformer but also an economist. He also did something for the development of the society in the field of economy. The most important economic scheme for village development like Micro-Credit Finance has been invented and implemented by Panchanan Barma through the establishment of village bank named 'Kshatriya Bank'. The Kshatriya Bank acted as supplier of capital to farmers and gave various loans at very low interest rates. The former Micro-Credit Finance is now known as Micro Finance. But such noble works of Panchanan Barma as an economist was not brought to light to be learned by the scholars for proper appreciation.

After reforming and organizing the society, Panchanan Barma took the initiative for the development of the society as a whole. He concluded that his racee would not prosper only by depending on agriculture. He wanted to secure their government service. Most of the Rajbanshis lived in the remote areas and they were also less interested in education. But no nation can prosper without proper education. Lack of interest in education, along with the miserable economic condition was the main hindrance of educational progress of the Rajbanshis. They forced to engage their child in the family works. They believed that if the boys and girls become educated, they will be the servants of the British.¹² According to the Census of India of 1911, only 51 Rajbanshis out of 1000 were literate and the ratio of the literate male and female was 57:2 out of 1000 persons.¹³

For the development of the Rajbanshi Community, Panchanan Barma formed a unity with the leaders of other backward classes. Panchana Barma and Upendra Nath Barman met with B.R. Ambedkar to organize more humanistic and progressive movement for social equanimity and to annihilate caste system. In 1926-27 the Kshatriya Samity of North Bengal joined hands with Ambedkar for enlisting the Rajbanshis as 'Schedule Caste' which they ultimately achieved.¹⁴ As a result of such combined efforts, the Government issued a Circular on 28 April,1931, by which 5% of clerical job in the Ministerial service was reserved for backward or underdeveloped societies. Roy Saheb Panchanan Barma's greatest achievement was the inclusion of the Rajbanshi community in the 'Schedule Caste': those who are educationally and economically backward.¹⁵ In this way Roy Saheb

Panchanan Barma dedicated his whole life for betterment and upliftment of the Rajbanshi community. Such renowned personality was died on 9th September in 1935.

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