



## **RAJBANSHI SOCIETY AND CULTURE OF COOCH BEHAR ON THE PATH OF CHANGE: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

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### **Abstract:**

The Rajbanshi community is a significant community in the whole district of Cooch Behar. However, it is a difficult task to determine the ethnic identity of the Rajbanshi of Cooch Behar. According to 1981 census, the population of the Rajbanshi community of Cooch Behar is 40.96% and the census of 1991 come and went 39.86%. The only majority community in Cooch Behar and greater North Bengal is the Rajbanshi people. Especially the Rajbanshi are in the eastern part of India like the northern part of west Bengal (Cooch Bihar, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, plain areas of Darjeeling, Alipurduar, Malda), lower part of Assam, they live in some parts of Meghalaya and some parts of Purina district of Badarpur Bihar in Nepal. There is considerable debate among historians as to the origin and development of the Rajbanshi. However, the ancient history testifies that despite the controversy, the Rajbanshi community played an important role in the governance and socio-cultural life of Cooch Behar during the Dynasty. The Rajbanshi community of Cooch Behar has its own society and culture which is different from other community. This culture especially helps to unite and consolidate their society. Rajbanshi society and culture occupy a significant place in India united in diversity. But recently it has been noticed that under the influence of modernity and globalization process the own and basic culture of Rajbanshi community of Cooch Behar is losing its identity and moving towards change. In this paper researchers would like to identify the culture and its problem, how it's changes.

**Key words:** Rajbanshi, globalization, culture, generation gap, identity, changes.

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**Introduction:**

If we look at any society, we can see that it has a specific social and cultural identity, but at present, the process of urbanization, modernization and above all globalization has led to changes from culture to society. Similar changes were observed in the Rajbanshi society and culture of Cooch Behar. According to 1981 census the population of the Rajbanshi community in Cooch Behar is 40.96% and the census of 1991 came and went 39.86% (census of India 2001, series 20, west Bengal). It is noteworthy that in this article the word culture has been taken in a broad sense. That is to say, culture refers to the entire way of life of the individuals of the society. The knowledge, beliefs, language, art, symbols, customs, music etc. of the individuals of the society belong to the culture. But at the present time we have tried to discuss the impact of the globalization process on those cultures. And that is why I have tried to highlight how far the Rajbanshi society and culture of Cooch Behar has moved towards change. That is, we will discuss the impact of the globalization process on the Rajbanshi society and culture of Cooch Behar. And in this age of globalization, we will discuss the changes that have taken place in the Rajbanshi society and their culture of Cooch Behar. That is, they need to know before we know what globalization is? Discussions on globalization began in the 1960 and 1970. Through globalization the people of the world are rapidly gaining the opportunity to interact with each other in a social and cultural way, and as a result, the whole world is being transformed into a single world order. According to Anthony Giddens (2006) "Globalization refers to the fact that we all increasingly live in one world, so that individuals, groups and nations become interdependent" (Sociology, 50). At present, the globalization process has had a profound effect on the Rajbanshi society and culture of Cooch Behar. We also see that through globalization, the people of the Rajbanshi society are rapidly becoming culturally interconnected. The local culture of the Rajbanshi society has lost its identity as a result of the globalization process. The Rajbanshi culture of Cooch Behar in general is associated with a variety of rituals, symbols or past experiences in such a way that without them one cannot find their separate existence and this is basis of local culture. The process of globalization has played an effective role in breaking down the local cultural boundaries of the Rajbanshi society of Cooch Behar and has created a hybrid culture. According to Holton (2000) "hybridization thesis focuses on the intercultural exchange and the incorporation cultural elements from a variety of sources with in particular cultural practices" (Globalisation's Cultural Consequences, 148-152). However, there is no denying that the spread of electronics media and tourism has led to the spread of Rajbanshi culture in the world. The current media is looking for a Rajbanshi culture to inspire people by reaching out to diversity. So it can be said, that just as the process of globalization has destroyed the Rajbanshi culture of Cooch Behar on the one hand, on the other hand this globalization process has created many opportunities for the people of Cooch Behar Rajbanshi society to restore their own culture or build alternative identity. According to Cesarotti (2009) "Many ethnic groups in Mexico have tried to take advantage of the globalization process to overcome their underdevelopment" (Globalisation's impact on indigenous peoples in Mexico and Bolivia). As a result the Rajbanshi culture has brought to the world its creative potential like its cultural, customs, arts, techniques, music etc. and through this the people of the Rajbanshi culture have tried to reclaim their own culture. According to Y. Singh (2000) "the new means of communication also argument and empower the local communities, local cultures and minority sects by extending the reach of their interaction. Their cultural and emotional bonds are strengthened due to their global reach through new tele communication linkages' video-meetings tele discussions etc.... apart from such empowering impact inspired by the new tele communication media to reassert their cultural

identity and rain force their resilience.” (Cultural Change in India,59-60) It’s clear that the globalization process had many effects on the Rajbanshi society and culture of Cooch Behar. However, there is no discussion in the text books about the changes that the globalization process is bringing to the Rajbanshi society and culture of Cooch Behar. But the process of globalization can’t be said to have influenced all these aspects of the Rajbanshi culture of Cooch Behar.

**Objectives of the paper:**

- A. Noticeable changes are also observed in many areas of the Rajbanshi culture of Cooch Behar.
- B. How far new generation are effect by this process of globalization.
- C. Present situation of Rajbanshi culture of Cooch Behar.

**Methodology:**

The source materials which are available in the form of books, research journal papers, primarily based on secondary data, interview and from other internet sources.

**1. Changes in the language of the Rajbanshi society of cooch Behar:**

The language of any community an important part of the culture of that community. Language and society are deeply interconnected. because if society are is considered a web of different relationships, then those social relationships are reflected through language. The people of that community communicate with each other through language. Also, if there is any change in the society then we find the impression of that change in the language. Through the language a community is also united. In other words, language is an important element of socio-cultural. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another through language i.e. language is the bearer of culture. The language spoken by the Rajbanshi people of Cooch Behar is Rajbanshi or Kamrupi. It is noteworthy that the Rajbanshi society and culture of north Bengal are mainly divided into Hindu society and Muslim society. The Rajbanshi, Koch and their sub-community have converted and left the Muslim community. That is why the people of the Muslim community in north Bengal speak the Rajbanshi language. According to Riesly(1981) “the Koch maintained links with the neighboring communities like, Hajong, Garo and Rajbanshi through joint participation in social and religious assemblies and economic interdependence”(The tribes and Caste of Bengal). The Rajbanshi people of Cooch Behar use Rajbanshi language in some cases when talking to people from different communities. Again, in many cases it is seen that they use their own language (Rajbanshi) while speaking among themselves. In other words, the use of standard Bengali language can be noticed in all those families. ProvatRanjanSarkar(1988)stated that, “the language spoken by the Rajbanshi people of North Bengal as “Rangpur Bangla”(Bangla O Bangali). Sankar Roy stated that,” many Bangladeshis (Bhatia) came to this country during the partition of Bangla. As a result, the influence of mixed culture with the Rajbanshi people can be noticed. However, when a Rajbanshi man speaks to other non-Rajbanshi people, in some cases some people use Rajbanshi language and some people use standard Bengali language. He also said that there are some words in the Rajbanshi language that the children of present generation can’t speak”(Sankar Roy, Personal communication,Oct.12,2021).

That is to say, as a result of merging with the culture of the Rajbanshi, the language of the Rajbanshi culture is on the verge of extinction. Even in many cases it has been seen that the new generation of Rajbanshi is using standard Bengali language instead of Rajbanshi language in their conversation. As a result of globalization, modern technology and mass media have become especially important, especially among the youth generation. Currently, the influence of social media can be noticed in the new generation. In this age of globalization, that Rajbanshi language is on the verge of extinction among the new generation of the Rajbanshi community of Cooch Behar. Bikram das stated, “New generation have learned Hindi and standard Bangla from smartphone, tv and social media. He also said that when he is at home, he uses Rajbanshi language and when he goes out of the house, that is, when he goes to college, he uses standard Bangla. Why don't you use Rajbangsi language? In response, he said that if the language had been taught or recognized in the school, collage, office everyone would have spoken Rajbanshi”(Bikram Das, Personal communication,Sept.19,2021). Can't wait to talk about this in the current era of globalization and modernity , the extinction of the Rajbanshi community's own language has put their own heritage culture and cultural identity in crisis. The influence of mixed culture can be seen by Cooch Behar among other language speaking people. Due to mixed culture , Rajbanshi new generation has moved away from its own language and is using standard Bangla .according to C.C Sanyal(2002)“the Rajbanshi spoke Bengali but it is a local dialect sometimes widely away from standard Bengali”(The Rajbanshis of North Bengal). Dhiren Dakua stated that, “Rajbanshi language may not be heard by Rajbanshi new generation in next 10-15 years unless this language is introduced in various school, collage in collaboration with the government. Otherwise the use of Hindi Bangla language will cause them to forget their own mother tongue”(Dhiren Dakua, Personal communication, Dec.14,2021).

## **2. Changes in the Food Habits of the Rajbanshi Society of Cooch Behar:**

Food habits are a very important element of culture. The role of food habits is very important in the Rajbanshi society and culture of Cooch Behar. The culture of the Rajbanshi community is reflected in their food habits. “As a Rajbanshi people become Hindus religion, so they eat everything in accordance with the Hindu religion , but some special food or items are eaten by the Rajbanshi of which “ChhekaShak” is one of the delicious food of the Rajbanshi which is cooked with different types of vegetables specially mixing with one kind of soda”(Bhowal, 2015).

Another delicious vegetable of the Rajbanshi “LephaShak”. Another delicious food is eaten by the Rajbanshi people locally known as SuktaAndSidal. Sukta means dry fishes and sidal is made by crashing of small dry fishes, spices, turmeric and chilly, all these are crushed in a husk locally called Chham and gain.”There is an also a tendency to eat Yoghurt and Chira [beaten rice] in the food of Rajbanshi society. This yoghurt and Chira was kept on the menu when any ceremonies were held at home. Pan-Supari was a custom of entering the relatives of the Rajbanshi society. Almost every Rajbanshi house has a container of this betel nut. Not to mention that that since Cooch Behar is a peripheral area, many Bangladeshi (Bhatia) people come to this region during the partition of India and as a result a mixed culture can be observed. In many cases it is seen that the people of Rajbanshi have adopted the food habits of the Bangladeshi's (Bhatia) people. Bimal Barman stated, “As the people of the Rajbanshi community interact with people of different cultures, a grate changes can be noticed in the food habits of the Rajbanshi people”(Bimal Barman, Personal communication,Nov.25,2021).

As a result of urbanization, modernization and above all globalization Rajbanshi youth are attracted to eat foreign foods of consumerist culture and If we look a little, it can be seen that food like fast-food has become popular among them from old Rajbanshi based food. According to SitangshuProsadChakrabarty(1995)"Relating food habits they also habited with modern food habits at present, Particularly, the educated Rajbanshi and the Rajbanshi's of urban areas use modern food instead of taking their traditional food habit such Pelka, Chheka, Sidal -Sukti"(Parivartanshil Jiboner Shrote Jalpaigurir Rajbanshi Samaj).

The new generation fast-food eating has to often made it inevitable far young people to crush with older members of the Rajbanshi family. In other words, the picture that has emerged in the field of food habits has almost taken the form of a melting pot.

### **3.Changes in the Entertaining of the Rajbanshi Society of Cooch Behar:**

The uniqueness of the culture of each community is reflected in the songs and dances. There is a special kind of dance and song in the Rajbanshi community that is hard to imitate. "the famous song of the Rajbanshi as well as of the indigenous Muslims of north Bengal and lower Assam is "Bhwaoiaya" which is written and sung in Rajbanshi language. The "Bhwaoiaya" songs are the themes of every aspect of the lives and hearts of Rajbanshi people. This song is divided into two categories namely" Chatka" and "Dariya". The songs are composed on the basis of every aspect of the society, economy, culture, custom, religion, love, joy and pain thinking place in everyday life of the Rajbanshi's. Other famous song of the Rajbanshi are "Dataradanga-Gaan" and "Kusan-Gaan". These songs are performed in different villages of North Bengal and lower Assam these are performed particularly in the season of different villages and festivals."15 Apart from Cooch Behar, these this "Bhwaoiaya" song is very popular among the Rajbanshi community of Assam and Bangladesh. But even their rare assets have changed dramatically. There are certain instruments in the music of that "Bhwaiaya" song but the use of modern instruments instead of those instruments can be seen at present. Chandra barman stated that, "there are some songs in Rajbanshi language but the instrument used in that song is completely modern , also the shooting of the song and many modern and modern instrument guitars can be noticed at the begging of the song"(Chandra Barman, Personal communication,Dec16,2021). In fact , the spread of modern civilization has gradually consumed the resources of their original songs. The use of smartphones among the Rajbanshi youth has attracted them to local and foreign Hindi, English songs. However, due to the internet, the type and nature of entertainment has changed in the end it can be said that as a result of the use of media in this modern age, i.e. in the age of internet, Rajbanshi songs have been able to spread to different parts of the country. In fact, in this age of globalization the entertainment of the Rajbanshi society of Cooch Behar has undergone great changes.

In the recent times for entering the modern culture indigenous people gradually accepted it. They accepted Baul, Bhatiali, RabindraSangit, NazrulGiti, Adhunik songs etc. not only that now a days the young generation people like Hindi songs, adhunik songs , Hindi cinema instead of their traditional culture.

### **4. Changes in the Marriage System of the Rajbanshi Society of the Cooch Behar:**

Marriage rituals are an important and essential part of the Rajbanshi society and culture of the Cooch Behar. Marriage is an important and universal social institution. The overall marriage system of the Cooch Behar Rajbanshi is governed entity by Brahmanical customs. Nevertheless, it

can be said that there are some differences in the Rajbanshi style of marriage. In is considered a sacred rite in the dynastic society as religion is associated with marriage. In the case of other society some customs of the Rajbanshi society. The role of priests and relatives is important in establishing a marital relationship, such as blessing the bride and groom, fetching water from the water, Yellowing the skin, making the roof floor, exchanging good wishes. The role of the older members of the family is important in the selection of spouses in the Rajbanshi marriage system. And after choosing the bride and groom the date of the wedding is fixed. Some different features can be noticed in the Rajbanshi marriage system. “Among the local customs or rituals of the marriage ceremony among the Rajbanshi a “Mittar” or friend is to be selected at the time of marriage who remain as a friend or a relative of the bride in the whole life. Another custom is seen , a person who dropped water in the head of the bride and bride-groom at the time of marriage and related with them as their parents called “ PaniChhitaBaap” and “ PaniChhita Mao” In the case of Rajbanshi marriages, the elders of the house or the parents would choose the bride and groom from their own caste.in other words, the introduction of arrange marriage was more noticeable in the Rajbanshi community. But at present, the spread of women’s education, urbanization, industrialization etc. have brought about a major change in the marriage system in the Rajbanshi society. Needless to say, in many cases, the number of romantic, marriages in the Rajbanshi society of Cooch Behar is the rise. Another thing to note is that this romantic marriage is not only included in the intra caste, it is more noticeable in the inter caste. PritamBarma stated that, now caste does not matter, he himself is a Rajbanshi but is marrying a girl of other caste by love marriage”(Pritam Barma, Personal communication,Nov.19,2021). In other words, in the age of modernity, in the Rajbanshimarrying system. The idea of marrying a girl of one’s own caste, not a girl another caste, is almost non-existent at elders and relatives of the family do not play an important role in the selections of spouses due to the wealth of internet.

Naturally, it is noticed that the young generation of the Rajbanshi society are moving away from their families with the touch of modernity, no rules and regulations of the society can control them. So, it can be said that in the modern age, in the Rajbanshi society and culture, marriage customs are on the verge of extinction, but we can never say that they have completely disappeared.

### **5. Changes in the Dresses of the Rajbanshi society of the Cooch Behar:**

Dresses are an important part and essential part of the Rajbanshi society and culture of Cooch Behar. The drees reflects the culture of the Rajbanshi community. According to UpendraNath Barman (1981)“It is known that the women of Rajbanshi community wearied a drees called “Buki”(Bukali) and it was prevailing since ancient time. Apart from this the two parts of dress named Riya and Mekhla were used by the women. It should be maintained here that the men of poor family wearied small Dhoti from the upper side of knee and the very poor men wearied a piece of cloth called “Nengti”. At the time of continuing social reforms movementsthakurPanchananBarma propagated to wear dhoti instead of “Nengti” and sari of women instead of Buki.”(Rajbanshi Khsatriya Jatir Itihas)But in the present area of globalization there is a big difference between the young generation of the Rajbanshi society of Cooch Behar .In other words, the new generation has been attracted to modern dress .moreover ,T.V advertisements, Movies , Hindi Bangla serials show the imitation of the dress and outfits of the actors and actresses.

The young generation both male and female is habituated with the modern dress they stared to wear pant, shirt, shoe etc. the girls and female wear churidar or salwarkamij, frok, sarees etc. Not

only that, presently, the female also wears the dresses of the male such as pant, shirt. The old men wear Dhoti, Panjabi also pant, shirts etc. now a days almost all the indigenous people have been wearing modern dress no difference are followed in terms of dresses between the indigenous people and the immigrated people.”It can be said that the advertisements and other programs displayed in the media have changed the attitudes and values among the new generation of Rajbanshi.

## **6. Changes in the Family Structure of the Rajbanshi society of the Cooch Behar:**

The most important transformation of the Rajbanshi society of Cooch Behar took place in terms of family structure and family relation. The joint families of the Rajbanshi community of Cooch Behar have become weaker and the family ties have been severed. In the other wards, it can be said that the family ties of the Rajbanshi community have broken-down. Whether in need of work or for any other reasons, the new generation of the Rajbanshi society of Cooch Behar is moving to the city. Binodini Barman stated that, “the attraction of city life has made them urban and as a result their relation with family has also weakened. At social festivals, all the members of the family do all the activities together.”(Binodini Barman, personal communication, Nov 22,2021) Nevertheless cannot be said that the Cooch Behar Rajbanshicommunity has some family ties and factionalism as before. The differences in mentality and attitudes between the different generations of the family have gradually developed and the present youth are giving importance to their likes and dislikes and the issues of personal privacy are easily visible among them.

The Rajbanshi family’s responsibility towards family members and family relationship are due to difference in the mentality and attitudes of the Rajbanshi community of Cooch Behar from one generation to the next, development of individualism, inclination towards personal happiness and self -sufficiency obligations that were seen in the past are not now extinct, but the foundations of those social bonds seen to be weakling in the tide of modernity.

### **Analysis:**

The impact of urbanization, modernization and above all globalization process has brought about a great change in the Rajbanshi society of Cooch Behar. But of this transformation or change has endangered their society and culture. Basically, the process of globalization has affected the language, food habits, dresses, marriage system, family structure etc. of the Cooch Behar Rajbanshi society and culture. The new generation of children is learning towards liberating themselves from the old domination. The use of mentality and attitude is going to be noticed in the new generation from the old generation. since Cooch Behar is a marginal area, many Bangladeshi (Bhatia) settled and settled in this area during the of India. As a result of the regular association of the people of Rajbanshi with those Bangladeshis the society and culture are facing a difficult challenge. Also, if we take a look it can be seen that among the new generation of the Rajbanshi of Cooch Behar, modernity and above all, their society and culture are facing a challenge due to the touch of globalization. The senior community of the Rajbanshi community of Cooch Behar is terrified will this Rajbanshi tradition survive in the near future? In other words, the gap between the new generation old generation of the Rajbanshi society of Cooch Behar is gradually being noticed. As a result, changes in family relationship can be accompanied by changes in social relationships. In the wake of this change, the survival of the Rajbanshi society and culture of Cooch Behar has become

increasingly complex today. It can also be seen in some cases that the society of the Cooch Behar Rajbanshi is today engaged in the struggle to preserve their culture.

A generation gap is found between the two generation the same Rajbanshi communities. But now the globalization has brought out a massive change among the new generation. Moreover, the new generation has come out from there limitation to cannot with the other culture and thus they have acquired the food habits, values, norms, dress etc. of outer culture through social networking site internet, mass media etc.

Is everything lost? Perhaps not. A particular cultural identity may be influenced by the effect of globalization so much but that does not mean that its own traditional identity is about to finish or abolish; somehow it has its own ability to held its norms. If by counting a documentation of Rajbanshi society by using the social networking sites new generation came clearly get a glimpse of what Rajbanshi society is.

### **Conclusion:**

Under the influence of urbanization, modernization above all under the impact of globalization, the Rajbanshi culture of Cooch Behar has changed today. Thanks to the supportive mediums of globalization, the exchange and acquisition of Rajbanshi society and culture counties unabated today. the influence of world culture can be noticed in food habits, dress codes, entertainment, daily recreational activities, change in peoples' taste etc. Presently Cooch Behar's Rajbanshi society is assimilated by Bengali culture in many ways. By keeping their own traditional norms, they are also capable of adopting the culture of Hindu society. Due to globalization people of Rajbanshi society are not losing their own cultural identity but they become so powerful to spread their culture throughout the world by using social networking sites.

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