

Rai Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma and Surjapuri Rajbanshis : A Case Study in Transferred Area of Uttar Dinajpur District

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***Abstract:** It is inevitable that every Nation in the world has a history. The existence of any Nation in the world survives in the history of the Nation. The present work attempts a detailed study of the Rai Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma and Surjapuri Rajbanshis in the Uttar Dinajpur district with special reference to Transferred Area. Although the Rajbanshi living in North East India and Surjapuri Rajbanshi living in the Transferred area have similar origins , yet linguistic and cultural differences can be observed. The Rajbanshis here like to identify themselves as " Surjapuri Kshatriya Rajbanshi ". They carry the term " Surjapuri " as their Motherland. Long ago this area was part of Surjapur pargana. Hence the people living here call themselves and the language of communication as " Surjapuri Language ". The Surjapuri Rajbanshi living in the transferred area were also deeply influenced by Thakur Panchanan Barma like the Rajbanshis living in North East. Many of Surjapuri Rajbanshis from the Transferred area participated in the Upanayana Sanskara organised by Thakur Panchanan Barma. On 1913, more than two lakh Rajbanshis from a total of 192(On the other hand 252) to Milan Sansadas had received the Kshatriya Yajnopavit and about 89,512 rupees had been collected in the Kshatriya Samiti. After the Upanayana Sanskara in 1913, the Kshatriya youth developed Kshatriya energy and strength, for that various types of physical strength practices such as - Stick games and Dagger games etc. were started. Many people of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya community put forward themselves as warriors. The Surjapuri Rajbanshi of Surjapur Pargana also dedicated themselves to ending the British rule in India. Surjapuri Rajbanshi actively participated in the Movement led by Gandhiji.*

***Keywords:** Freedom Movement, Kshatriya, Surjapuri Rajbanshi Upanayana Sanskara, etc.*

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Introduction

Surjapur pargana was created during the Mughal period. Surjapur pargana was formed with Habeli, Dulalganj, Kishanganj, Udrain, the present Islampur subdivision and small part of

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undivided the Dinajpur. Surjapur Pargana was under Tajpur government. During Emperor Akbar's time it was full of dense forests. Naming is a important issue . A place is named after rulers, population and mythological events etc. But there is no historical evidence. It is not easy to find out where this 'surjapur' nomenclature came from. However , it is assumed that the first King of Surya dynasty was Ikshaku. Or at other times some other Surya dynasty king ruled this Area. It may also be that the kingdom of Aditya Sur expanded here after the rule of the Sur dynasty began in the Gour country. It is believed that from that time the people here started calling themselves ' Surjapuri '. Similarly , Language are named after a place or people. When the majority of people in a place speak the same language, the Language is named after the place. The language spoken by Surjapuri people is called " Surjapuri Language ". In 2000, the late parliamentarian Priyaranjan Das Munsii addressed the parliament on this language and culture and in 2009 , UNESCO registered the naming of the language 'Surjapuri'. About Surjapur Pargana professor Dr Partha Sen said- " Buchanan's information shows that one Syed Ahmed Khan Dastur helped Emperor Humayun, when Humayun was busy recovering his lost Kingdom in 1545 AD. As a reward, Emperor Humayun gifted Surjapur Pargana to Syed Ahmed Khan Dastur ". Surjapur Pargana had a total area of 484020 acres. Of this, Bihar had 197977 acres and Bengal (Present day Islampur subdivision and 19 Mouzas of Fansi dewa) had 286043 acres. On November 1, 1956 AD, on the recommendation of the " State Re-organization Commission " a total of 906 villages of Islampur, Thakurganj, Chopra, Kishanganj, Goal Pokhar, Karandighi police stations of Purnea district were Marged from Bihar to West Bengal. This area is known as " Transferred Area ".

The Purushsukta of the 10 mandala of Rigveda mentions- " Brahman arose from the mouth of Brahma, Kshatriya arose from the arms, Vaishya arose from the thigh and Shudra arose from the feet ". This was the " Varna system " of ancient India. The four varnars had separate works, which they performed as duty. Brahmins indulged in the worship of their Gods and Goddesses. Kshatriyas kept themselves engaged in war. Vaisiyas engaged in trade and the Sudras in the service of the above three varnas. Kshatriyas are second Verna of vedic age. Later castes were formed on the basis of work. Although the Rig Veda mentions- " Members of the same family were engaged in different occupations ". The scriptures state that, a person of one Varna can be considered another Varna, if the qualities of that Varna are fulfilled. Such as- Vishwamitra Muni was born in the Kshatriya clan and considered a Brahmin. The person who gave joy of all became famous as "Raja" . Those protected the Brahmins from all kinds of harm, they were called " Kshatriyas ". Therefore Rajan, Raja and Kshatriya are identical words and the word Rajbanshi means " Lineage of kshatriyas ". In Rajasthan, Rajput means Kshatriyas only. Rajput means son of Kshatriya. India was ruled by kshatriyas for a long time. Mahapadmananda ruled India from 366 to 338 BC. Mohabbatmananda was of shudra descent. He assumed the title of Parshuram-II and indulged in the killing spree of kshatriyas. As a result, Kshatriyas hide themselves to save their lives. At that time, many Kshatriyas hide themselves in Punradesa under

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The Identity of 'Rajbanshi'. Non- Kshatriyas mahapadmananda accepted that - " I have no problem being a Rajbanshi , because I am a non-kshatriya but a king ". The Rajbanshi survived that time. It was these absconding kshatriyas who came to be known as " Rajbanshi ". For a long time, they forgot kshatriya to give identity " Rajbanshi ". The became " Bratya Kshatriyas " according to the scripture. Kshatriyas who have forgotten their Kshatriyas are called " Bratya Kshatriyas" in the scriptures. This Rajbanshi caste lived in Purnea ,Jalpesh or Tarapeeth and other places of North East India. India was flooded with Buddhism except for the kingdom of kamrupa. The Chinese traveller Hien Tsang came to India in 630 AD. He did not see any sign of Hinduism anywhere in the entire Aryavarta. He found traces of Hinduism only in the Eastern Indian kingdom of Kamrupa. He described - " The people have no faith in Buddha and adored and sacrificed to the Deva. There were above 100 Deva temples; of Buddhist Sangamas there were none. The king was a Brahmin by caste, Vaskara Barman by name and had the title of Kumar ". These Rajbanshis were divided into four Sub-divisions. Such as - Rajbanshi, Poliya, Deshi and Koch. Known as Poliya because of being fugitives from the distant past. Those who stayed in this country with pain of separation are known as Desi or Locals. Only the Koches were controversial. However, everyone now prefers to be known as Rajbanshi. Rajbanshis lived in all these places even before the Kochs. The Kochs adopted Hinduism during the time of Koch King Vishva Singha. The transferred area of present day Uttar Dinajpur belonged to Surjapur pargana. According to Prof. Dr. Partha Sen - " Mughal emperor Humayun gifted this Surjapur Pargana to Saiyed Ahmed Khan Dastur ". The people living in this Surjapur Pargana prefer to call themselves " Surjapuri ". In the same sense the Rajbanshis living in this transferred area do not hesitate to call themselves " Surjapuri Rajbanshi ". It is not easy to find out where this Surjapur nomenclature came from. At other time some other Surya dynasty King ruled this area. It is believed that from that time the people here started calling themselves " Surjapuri". It is also not impossible that there was tribal influence in the region. These tribes worshipped the Sun and the Moon. Surjapur may be named from this Sun. The language of the people of this Surjapur Pargana also has a distinct expression. Much like the Kamtapuri language but with some differences. Rajbanshi living in this area called themselves " Surjapuri Rajbanshi " and the language is also called Surjapuri. Looking for the family of this language, we see that the language family of this language is- Indo- European>Indo-Iranian>Indo-Aryan>East Bengal - Assamese>Kamtapuri>Surjapuri. So this language has gained a social identity. Which was written in Kaithi script. However, Kaithi script is not used nowadays.

Socio-economic and cultural Life of Surjapuri Rajbanshis

Many caste people live in this transferred area and the used to fulfill various needs of the society. Despite this the Surjapuri social system was completely agrarian based. Agriculture was the

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mainstay of the people here. " It will be seen that the percentage of the cultivable land was 74.5 and that of uncultivable land was 25.5 ". Farming here was done with cows and buffaloes. A large part of the society was a Surjapuri Rajbanshi society. The Surjapuri Rajbanshi society here used to keep animals along with agriculture. Racism did not penetrate much into each nation as the language was almost the same. Later many Surjapuri Rajbanshi converted to Islam. Even though Islam entered Surjapur Pargana, there was no change in Surjapuri social system. Many Surjapuri Rajbanshi kept Ducks. Koches used to carry palanquins. Widow marriage was common in the Rajbanshi society. Women carried the children on their backs with cloths. Dowry system was prevalent and sometimes the groom used to give dowry to the daughter.

Although the diet of the Surjapuri Rajbanshi is similar to that of the Bengalis , some peculiarities can be observed in their diet. 'Pelki or Pelka' prepared by mixing the leaves of the Sajina tree (Moringa tree) and the leaves of the Kachu (Elephant Ear) is the favorite food of the Surjapuri Rajbanshis. Also 'Shidol' is one of the favorite dishes of the Surjapuri Rajbanshis. Which is made by mixing the stems of the Mana tree(Giant Taro) (Similar to the Kachu tree but larger than the Kachu tree) with dried small fishes. Surjapuri Rajbanshis love to eat 'Panta Vaat'(Fermented rice) during Summer season.

The culture of Surjapuri Rajbanshis and other castes living in Surjapur Pargana was very similars. From the birth of a child to its Tomb, various reforms were similar which can still be seen today. After birth, the baby's nurve is cut and buried in the ground. Apart from saving the child's head, the hair and nails of other family members are also cut. Turmeric was used in weddings and women singing in the Same language. During the month of Bhadra (Bengali month) , the bride stays at her mother's house for one month, which is known as " Bhadar Katani ". The dead body was buried and observed for 3 days, 13 days. As many Surjapuri Rajbanshi are involved in agriculture, they perform the ritual of " Gari Guri or Sero Sero " in the hope of some worldly gain. Several days before Kojagari Lakshmi puja , Goddess Lakshmi is worshipped in paddy field. They sang to the rhythm of the song-

" Hanser Dima Kachur Futi
Aay maa Lakkhi hamar Bhiti".

Shiva was worshipped and many Hindu Gods and goddesses were also worshipped which is still present today. Cattle were bathed, oiled and vermilion applied during KaliPuja (Dipawali), which is known as " Garu Chumani" (Gow worship). " Jitua or Jimut Bahun" is worshipped several days before Durga Puja. This Brata is observed by staying awake all night. Any work or desire is done for success. Janmashtami (Lord Krishna's birthday) is celebrated with great Joy by the Surjapuri Rajbanshi community in the Bengali month of Bhadra. Which is known as " Dadhi Kado " . Numerous such rituals were observed in the Surjapuri Rajbanshi society and are observed event today .

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Panchanan Barma's contribution to Surjapuri Rajbanshi's Achievement of Kshatriya

Mahapadmananda, a Buddhist, fortunately occupied the throne of Magadha. When he indulged in kshatriya killings, many Kshatriyas disguised themselves as "Rajbanshi" in many parts of North East India. Kshatriyas were identified as Rajbanshis and lives were saved. Because Mahapadmananda used to kill kshatriyas. Thus the Kshatriyas forgot the kshatriya religion as they had long been accustomed to call themselves "Rajbanshi". As a result, the 'Rajbanshis' were being exploited and oppressed by the so-called pioneers in the vast Kamtapur dominions. In Malda, Purnea, Katihar, Kishanganj, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Bihar, Goalpara, Neogaon, Sillhar, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Nepal Rajbanshi kshatriya people were neglected and Persecuted in several districts. For the most part, the Rajbanshi people became a mass of labourers homeless and disoriented in the darkness of illiteracy. Thakur Panchanan Barma's revolutionary spirit established the Rajbanshi society in the "Kshatriya Caste". When Rajbanshi and Koch were shown as the same caste in the 1891 census, the movement started with the formation of the "Bratya Kshatriya Jatir Unnati Bidhayani Sabha" under the leadership and Presidency of Rangpur Zamindar Harmohan Roy Mahashaya. An situation of agitation was also created in Purnea district. The movement stalled when the Rajbanshis got a promise to write "Bratya Kshatriyas". It was written again in the 1901 census - "Rajbanshi the same as Koch". This created deep despair and anger in the society. A few Rajbanshi student staying at Rangpur normal school boarding entered the Kitchen. The result was that the cooked rice was impure and was fed to cows. When the boys told everything to Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma, he was tragically sad. As a result, he built many 'Kshatriya Chhatra Nivas' by collecting subscriptions. From then on Thakur Panchanan's only meditation and prence became "Preservation of Nation". Thakur Panchanan Barma along with his companions called for the "unity of the entire nation" throughout North Bengal, Goalpara of Assam and Purnea of Bihar. Along with Rajbanshi CharanKabi Govind Pandit Sang-

"Mora Chahina Artha, Chahina Maan-
Chahi Bidya, Chahi Jnan,
Mora Sudhu Chai Jatir Pratistha -
Mora Sudhu Chai Jatir Praan "

On May 1-2, 1910, in Rangpur, the first Central organisation of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya race "Kshatriya Samiti" was established and held its first session. Thakur Panchanan Barma was elected as Secretary and lawyer Madhusudhan Roy as President. In the second session of the Kshatriya samiti on 20-21 May, 1911, the "Braty Mochan" agenda of the Rajbanshi was adopted. Thakur Panchanan Barma preached - "we are Kshatriyas, but there are no Upanayana Sanskara.

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Without Upanayana there is no right to study the Vedas. And we are marginalised in society. Upanayana must be accepted ". In the third annual session of the Kshatriya samiti at Rangpur on May 24, 1912, the decision of " Bratya Mochan" was adopted. On January 11, 1913, more than 2 lakh rajbanshis from a total of 192 (On the other hand 252) milan Sangsadas had received the " Kshatriya yajnopavit " and about 85,512 rupees had been collected in the Kshatriya Samiti. Many Surjapuri Rajbanshi from Purnea of Bihar also went to Upanayana Sanskara and did " Braty Mochan". The Rajbanshis people give up their previous title and accepted title like-Barma, Barman , Roy , Singha etc. The Pandit Society of Kamrupa, Kolkata, Cooch Behar, Nabadwip , Bikrampur, Kashi and Mithila gave the proposal of upanayana. Since then the Rajbanshi came to be known as " Kshatriya Rajbanshi".

Background of The Surjapuri Rajbanshis in Freedom Movement of India

On 1913, more than 2 lakh Rajbanshis from a total of 192 (On the other hand 252) milan Sangsadas had received the Kshatriya Yajnopavit and about 85,512 had been collected in the Kshatriya Samiti. After the Upanayana reform in 1913, the Kshatriya youth developed Kshatriya energy and strength, for that various types of physical strength practices. Such as - Stick game and Dagger game etc. were started. Rai Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma met Pulin Das , an accomplished Stick and Dagger wielder of the revolutionary era. and requested him to send one of his disciple to the "Kshatriya Samiti". As a result, Shri Ramesh Chandra Das, was sent to the Kshatriya Samiti and taught Kshatriya youths and Students various types of technique in wielding Stick and Daggers. In 1914, the alarm of World War-I rang out in Europe and Thakur Panchanan Barma decided to send a Battalion of Kshatriya youths to the war. Many Rajbanshi kshatriya youths participated in World war first for the British and many Rajbanshi youths contributed their lives to the victory of the British. Captain of many regiment praised these Rajbanshi kshatriya youths soldiers. The head of the Bengali regiment in Karachi wrote in the letter - " Men of this Kshatriya community make better soldiers than most of the others ". Thus inspired by Rai Saheb Thakur Panchanan , many people of the Rajbanshi kshatriya community put forward themselves as warriors. They participated in Freedom Movement and helped in achieving India's Independence. Purnea district (Present day transferred area of Uttar Dinajpur) was no exception. The surjapuri Rajbanshi of surjapur Pargana also dedicated themselves to ending the British rule. Surjapuri Rajbanshi actively participated in the movement led by Gandhiji. The influence of the Indian National Congress was profound on the Surjapuri Rajbanshis. Several Surjapuri Rajbanshi took charge of the National Congress in the area.

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Rajbanshis are seen as warriors in the first world war. During the first world war, Indians under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi came forward to help the British. Then Thakur Panchanan Barma formed the 'Rajbanshi Regiment' and many young man of Rajbanshi sent to World war-I. Thakur Panchanan Barma had a dream -"When the country becomes independent, they will devote themselves to the work of protecting the homeland". The Surjapuri Rajbanshis also became warriors under the influence of Thakur Panchanan Barma. The first phase of India's freedom movement did not see a large participation of the Surjapuri Rajbanshis. But the participations of many Surjapuri Rajbanshis in the movement of the second phase of independence can be observed. There is a discussion here on the contributions of the Surjapuri Rajbanshis to the Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement

Contribution of The Surjapuri Rajbanshis in Civil Disobedience Movement

The movement of the Congress in Surjapur pargana was not confined to the locality. This movement was able to assert its position and presence at the national level. In 1925, Gandhiji came to Kishanganj and held a meeting. "Mahatma Gandhi visited Purnea in 1925 and had addressed crowded meeting at various places including Kishanganj, Bishnupur, Araria and Purnea etc. At Bishnupur in Dhamdaha PS there was a large gathering and the people had presented a substantial purse for the Desh Bandhu Memorial Fund. Mahatma Gandhi's second tour from the 11th January, 1927 was in connection with the collection of money for Charkha and khadi". Not only Gandhiji, Rajendra Prasad, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and other leaders came in front of the freedom minded people in this area and gave their valuable speeches. Gandhiji started the Dandi Padayatra or Salt Satyagraha on 12 March, 1938 AD. The participation of Surjapuri people can be seen in the Civil Disobedience Movement. "There were several searches in Kishanganj and Araria Subdivision. The enthusiasm of the people to implement the dictates of the Congress could be estimated from the fact that arrests for breaking the salt law in Purnea district in the course of 6 months and Salt Satyagraha came to 716 in numbers". Inspired by Gandhiji, the people here sacrificed themselves for the freedom of their Motherland. Anath Kanta Bose was the President of Indian National Congress in Purnea district. He used to come to Islampur and held meetings with many Surjapuri Rajbanshis. Along with Anath Kanta Bose, they engaged in Anti-British activities. Most of the freedom fighters of this transferred area were Surjapuri Rajbanshis. Mention in Mr. Hunter's report published in 1876-"The Rajbanshi yesteryear were a mighty Nation". Surjapuri Rajbanshis also resisted the aggressive policies of the British by their prowess and love of Freedom. The Congress party was active in transferred area. During the Civil Disobedience Movement, Pradeep Narayan Singh used to go from haat to haat(Market) raising slogans of boycotting foreign goods and adopting indigenous goods. Chuhala Singha of Tunibhita village of Karandighi police station embraced

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Gandhiji's ideals wholeheartedly and jointed the Civil Disobedience Movement. Nichit Lal Singha of Jadavpur and Jeetu Lal Singha Chapaichandi stayed with Chuhahalal Singha and propagated Anti-British activities. The Surjapuri Rajbanshis of this transferred area intensified Civil Disobedience Movement by engaging in various Anti-British activities.

Contribution of The Surjapuri Rajbanshis in Quit India Movement

As this transferred area was a part of Bihar, the people here were associated with the revolutionary movement. When the Quit India Movement started on August 9, 1942 at the call of Gandhiji, Surjapuri people participated in large numbers. The contributions of the Surjapuri Rajbanshis were Undeniable. On August 8, 1942, the British Police arrested the main leaders along with Gandhiji at Midnight . However , this August Movement did not stop . Every man in India led this Movement in his own area."When in August, 1942, there was a mass arrest of the leaders throughout India including Gandhiji and an outbreak of a violent lawlessness against the constituted authority, Purnea district was also the scene of intense activities in which the different section of the people had participated. The student community and Congress workers throughout the district, mill and factory hands of Katihar and Kishanganj took the lead in the upsurge". Important leaders of all areas including Kishanganj were arrested in the movement. Some revolutionaries including Pradeep Narayan Singha joined the Anti-British program at Darivit Haat. When they raised slogan of boycotting foreign goods and adopting indigenous goods, they were arrested and severely beaten by the police. The Congress office at Kishanganj was occupied by the British rulers. On August 18, 1942, about 500 Surjapuri Rajbanshis mobs and many Surjapuri people rescued the office. Pradhan Chandra Singha led the movement for the Rajbanshi in this Movement. Later he was arrested and imprisoned for 6 months. Also , the names of Ashilal Singha of Chopra and Dayalal Singha of Islampur are particularly noteworthy. Khantalal Singha of Goalpokhar participated in this movement. Chuha Lal Singha and Sabu Singha and many others actively participated in the Quit India Movement at Karandighi police station. That Chuhahalal Singha went to Barsoi in Bihar and started destroying the railway. The police arrested him and kept him in Purnea jail for 6 months.

Conclusion

The Father of Rajbanshi Community ' Rai Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma' will be forever remembered in Rajbanshi and Surjapuri Rajbanshi Society. He gave a strong social identity to the Rajbanshi caste by enduring unbearable hardships and hard work. Thakur Panchanan Barma showed the path of emancipation to the entire Rajbanshi Community, when the Rajbanshi society accepted apartheid. Panchanan Barma started a movement against the humiliation of the

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Rajbanshi community. Rajbanshi charon poet Gobinda Chandra Roy awakened the Rajbanshi society through his songs. The Surjapuri Rajbanshis living in the Transferred Area participated extensively in the Kshatriya Movement by Panchanan Barma. After attaining Kshatriya status, the Surjapuri Rajbanshis forwarded themselves as warriors. The Surjapuri Rajbanshi devoted themselves to patriotism and participated in various Anti-British movement. On 15 August, 1947 AD, the Indian National flag was hoisted by Pradhan Chandra Singha at Islampur police station. Rai Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma was the source of the glorious history of Surjapuri Rajbanshi community. Panchanan Barma is honoured today for his immense contribution to the Surjapuri Rajbanshis.

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