



RESEARCH ARTICLE

RAJBANSHI WOMEN ART, BELIEF, RITUALS AND VALUED PRACTICES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NORTH BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

Rajbanshi women belong from the royal community of Kamrup-Kamata Dynasty, which is presently known as North Bengal, Lower Assam, Bihar, Bangladesh and Nepal. Women played important roles as family heads and decision-makers, in agriculture, such as uprooting seedlings and cutting ripe paddy plants, engaged in the education system and practiced with indigenous culture. Rajbanshi women are involved in various cultural practices, such as Padmapuran, Bratas, Tistaburi, Mangalchandi, Kati Puja, Hudum Gaan and many more are interrelated with their daily life. They have their own rituals, beliefs and customs which are practiced for the social welfare. In the present time, the traditional arts and practices of the Rajbanshis have been disappearing from society day by day. Now a day, educational institutions included art and culture in the curriculum to promote local heritage, where women takes an important role. An art in education helps to create a supportive environment where students can explore the experiment and express themselves freely. It fosters curiosity, strengthens emotional resilience and encourages teamwork. It helps teacher nurture essential skills that shape students into future leaders, because art and education are deeply interconnected. The qualitative approach will be followed by interview techniques used. The study found that, there is a significant impact of Rajbanshi women's art, beliefs on educational institutions in North Bengal. This enhanced teamwork developed a sense of we-feeling.

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INTRODUCTION

The traditional art forms have been practiced for many years across various rural regions of North Bengal, taking place throughout different seasons—winter, summer, and monsoon. This cultural tradition is especially prominent in the northern part of West Bengal and has also extended to parts of lower Assam and Bangladesh. The Rajbanshi community forms a significant portion of the population in this region. Rajbanshi women in particular have played a vital role in preserving and transmitting these art forms through music, dance, and drama, often with a focus on social welfare. These art forms have long served as tools for learning, expression, and community engagement. This research paper explores some of the most important traditional art forms of the region, including *Hudum Gaan*, *Saitol Gaan*, *Macheni Gaan*, *Shuvochani Gaan*, and *Bhawaiya Gaan*. It also examines how these forms are being incorporated, both directly and indirectly, into educational institutions today, and its extent of their impact. This article will highlight the significant contributions of Rajbanshi women in sustaining and promoting these traditions through their active involvement and practice.

Objective of the study

- To know about Rajbanshi women art and culture.
- To study Rajbanshi women's contribution in art and culture.
- To identify the impact of Rajbanshi women's art and cultural contribution in educational institutions of North Bengal.

METHODOLOGY

"A qualitative approach used, utilizing focus group discussions and face-to-face interview techniques." Data: Data has been collected in the area of North Bengal.

About Rajbanshi: The history of the origin of the Rajbanshi sit is said that they belong to the great Bodo family that entered India in the 10th century B. C., from the east and settled on the banks of the Brahmaputra and gradually spread over Assam and the whole of North Bengal. "Risley" -

describes that Koch, Koch-Mandi, Rajbanshi, Palliya and Desi belong to a large Dravidian tribe of Northeastern and Eastern Bengal amongst whom there are grounds for suspecting some admixture of Mongolian blood. 'They are thoroughly 'Koch' under the name 'Rajbanshi'. There is no historical foundation for the claim of Rajbanshi to be a provincial variety of 'Kshatriyas'. The original nucleus of 'Rajbanshi' was certainly Dravidian. "Grierson" comments, there can be little doubt that the original 'Kochs' were the same as the 'Bodos'. The Koch, Mech and Bara or Bodo all connoted the same tribe or at most different sets of the same tribe. Rajbanshi's are the Hindu Kochs of Rangpur and Goalpara'. "Gait" - describes the Rajbanshi of North Bengal as a synonym of Koch, this represents a real caste and, in this sense, only it may be entered in the schedule. Gait also describes the Dhimals of Darjeeling and Nepal Terai as Rajbanshi. They often call themselves Rajbanshi. Their title is Maulik (Mallik). The Koch is cultivators and the same as Rajbanshi. According to the Legend Padmashri Dharmanarayan Barma, 'The father of the Kamtapuri language', the Austrian people entered the Kamrup-Kamta-Cooch Behar kingdom many centuries before the birth of Christ. These people gradually settled in the Brahmaputra River valley and the newcomers used to make a living by hunting, farming, and raising livestock in the region. However, this trend was later disrupted by the Mongolian population. The remaining populations assimilated with the Mongolian population. After the Austic Flood, the Mongolians entered all of Northeast India. This Mongolian population is called Kirat. 'Aka', 'Dafla', 'Missing', 'Chingkou', 'Khamti Nga', 'Karbi', 'Boro', 'Mech', 'Aham' etc. belong to the Mongolian population. The 'Aryans' were the last of the newcomers to North-East India. It was during the Rig-Veda period that the Aryans entered North East India by crossing the Karatoyariver. References are found to the pre-Aryan kingdom of that period. Later Ghatak 'Kirat' dominated the region. According to historians, this Ghatak was the descendant of 'Ghatkasur', 'Sambarasura' and Ratnasur. The name of ancient pre-Jyotishpur is mentioned in 'Ramayana-Mahabharata', 'Kalikapurana', 'Agnipurana', 'Garudapurana', 'Matsyapurana', 'Vishnupurana', 'Bayupurana', 'Harivansha', 'Brihasamhita', 'Yoginitantra', etc. Ramayana describes that 'Amurtarajan', who was the son of 'Kush', founded the country of Pragjyotishpur. This 'Amurtarajan' is said to be the sage, Vishwamitra's grandfather. The name of Pragjyotishpur is mentioned in the Ramayana (Barma and Manta, 2005). (Syanyal, 2002).

Rajbangsi women's: Rajbanshi cultural tradition is inherited in folk belief, vow and worship. The tradition of royal women's vows, worship, festivals and beliefs is still going on today. According to Jogesh Chandra Roy, "The women of the Rajbanshi society played important roles in the various fields of activity. Most interestingly, with the coming of modern education, the women of this community became educated, and they came in contact with the issues related to the administration of domestic affairs as well as schools and other fields. (Roy, 2018).

Traditional art and culture practiced by the Rajbanshi women in North Bengal: Hudum deo, Bisohori, Mecheni, Bhawaiya, Kati, Tistaburi, and Dangdhorai Mao, etc. These are the Rajbanshi female-centric folk-art form, which has a socio-cultural significance in society. This art form is an element of rural life dependent on beliefs, systems of values, social relations, and the natural environment, which arises from the

sense of rhythm, harmony, and symmetry inherent to human beings. The paper wants to highlight the impact of the Rajbanshi art form in educational institutions of North Bengal.

Hudum Gaan: Deo is the god of rain. If there is drought during the rainy season, the people of the Rajbangshi community of North Bengal think that Hudum Deo should be worshipped. The people of this region think that if Hudum Deo can be appeased by worship, the drought will be eliminated. This folklore is completely women-centric. Men are not allowed to participate in this worship, even to see the rituals. Place of worship, agricultural land outside the locality. Women perform this puja naked.

Mecheni Gaan / Teesta Buri: Rajbangshi women worship Teesta Buri in the area adjacent to the Teesta River in Jalpaiguri district. It is a woman's religious ceremony. Regarding the description of Teesta Buri, Dr. Girija Shankar Roy has said that the old woman, wearing a white sari, all the hair on her head is white like jute, a stick in her hand, a little bowed posture to lean on the drink stick, a smile on the toothless face – this is the idea of the Rajbanshi that the image of Teesta Buri is the form of the statue. The greatness of this form is comparable to the intensity of the Teesta flood. The song is:

Dhorati ason dharati boson
Ei dharatite bosu Jabo joto deb

Teesta Buri is worshipped on any day in the month of Baishakh. This puja is mainly done to protect from natural disasters. (Roy D. N., 2019).

Othai Pathai Puja: This simple puja is celebrated by the Rajbangsi women, usually by a young girl on the day of 'Rathayatra' in the month of Sraban (July-Aug). The real word is 'Rothai', which is pronounced as 'othai'. The word Roth means strength of body. This puja is done to acquire sufficient strength of the body and mind by the grace of God so that one can move about on the road (probably over the road of life) without any hindrance. The common village folk think of bodily strength only. The worship is done on a road. A clump of binna grass is placed under an open umbrella, and all other articles are arranged. There is no priest and no incantation (Roy, 1970; 167). A little vermilion is put on the plant, a lamp is lighted, the incense burnt, and flowers are showered on the Binna and the foods. (Syanyal, The Rajbanshis Of North Bengal, 2002).

Subachani: Although the Rajbanshi community worships Subachani for any auspicious work, it is mainly worshipped for the auspicious results of the new couple's future life. Subachani puja is women-centric. Women do this worship. The ingredients for this puja are betel nuts, betel nuts and drums.

The song: sworgo hote namiya asuk namore mao kali
Mui sundori pujari boscicung nojor koro asi
Kolao disong sari re sari dimao dicong sari
Sworgo hate namiya asuk namore bisohari
Mui sundori pujari boscicung nojor koro asi
Telo dicong sari re sari sendoro sari sari

Saitol: There are two main reasons for Saitol/ Bishahari Puja. The first reason is that the newly married couple is worshipped

in the hope of happiness and a peaceful life. Secondly, to have a child in the life of the family and pray for the good sight of mother Manasa. Here, the auspicious vision of Manasa means that all domestic animals, including family members, should not be killed by snakes. Also, solve many problems in life, etc. Folk artists make idols of Saitol Bishahari from foam. The ingredients of this worship are Curd, Chira, Seed-banana, Fruits, Goat, and Pigeon etc. Although the materials are sometimes provided by men, women mainly know what and how much it will be used; here we find the women's contribution. (Bhattacharya, 2011).

Bhawaiya Gaan: According to Abbas Uddin Ahmed, the legend of Bhawaiya songs: "Bhawaiya songs are the property of North Bengal and Cooch Behar. "Before the 19th century, the unspoken words and feelings of women were expressed in Bhawaiya songs were sung by male voices. But in the mid-19th and 20th centuries, women began to enter this genre, and then they directly entered this song. As a result, society achieved eminent artists and legends as a female singer and performer. Like Padmashree Pratima Barua Pande, Rahima Kalita, Hamida Sarkar, Sunity Roy, Ayesha Sarkar, Bangaratna Fulti Gidaly, Padmashree Gita Roy as so on.

Importance of these arts and culture in society: The traditional art and culture is a mirror of a community. Religion, culture, history, food habits and lifestyles highlight a glimpse of a community. Through the above-mentioned art and culture, we also get to know how women are concerned for their family and their relatives as well as for society. They not only think for them rather they are also more dedicated towards others. Collective life, caste system, culture, auditorium attitude, sincerity, belief in culture, folklore, worship of folk gods and goddesses with devotion are very noticeable among the people of a group of women. (Roy N. N., Coochbeharer Sahitya O Sanskriti, 2019).

Contribution of Rajbanshi women's beliefs, rituals and value practices in Educational Institutions: The mentioned art forms have traditionally been practiced by Rajbanshi women. These regular practices have continued for a long time. Since Rajbanshi women are mostly involved in these practices, they are more knowledgeable in this regard, as they have contributed a lot of time to learning and preserving these art forms. In the society of North Bengal, Rajbanshi women acquire knowledge about these art forms from their parents and pass it on to the next generation orally and informally. This contribution can be described as a form of oral or informal education. Some Rajbanshi women have received higher education and are now working in educational institutions, though they still belong to the same community.

When they are involved and participate in school or institutional events, they consciously and unconsciously share their traditional knowledge with students. This transmission of knowledge is maintained through the inclusion of traditional elements. Each social ritual and practice has specific importance and benefits, and these practices are mostly led by women of this community. Social practices like rituals and social beliefs highlight a glimpse of a community, and contemporary times, history, and the position of women are also inferred. These practices directly and indirectly raise awareness and social education. Nowadays, the New Education Policy encourages the integration of local elements and the use of native languages in cultural contexts within a constructive curriculum, as mentioned in the official documents. Women teachers are following this guidance and incorporating these practices in both constructive and, at times, mainstream educational approaches.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the conducted study, it can be highlighted that the Rajbanshis are an ethnic group of the North Eastern region of India. The women of the community have their traditions and rituals, and these they practice respectfully. All of these have great importance, through which society gets benefits. It raises awareness in us and future generations, too. Because art and cultural heritage are the identity and path through which we can authentically exist in a society. It is a pleasure that the arts and cultural beliefs have a value which directly and indirectly included in educational institutions, causing women to practice it mostly.

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