

‘Asset’ to Burden: A Brief History of Social Degradation and Transformation of the Rajbanshi Women (1875-1975)

Dr. Utpal Roy

*Assistant Professor,
Saheed Khsudiram College
Kamakhya, Aplipurduar
West Bengal, India
E-mail: utpalroy1976@gmail.com*

Abstract—The Rajbanshi is one of the dominant castes of the northern part of Bengal, in some districts of Assam and in Rangpur District of Bangladesh and even in some area of Nepal also. In the Rajbanshi society, the women were treated as ‘asset’ even up to the middle of the 19th century. It was possible because in the production system (mainly agriculture based) women participation was significantly strong. Though, according to property right society was paternal but some dominant maternal characteristics also prevailed in the same society. They were treated as ‘asset’ to the family due to strong women participation in the agriculture system as agriculture labourer and also as small traders. In this particular socio-economic condition, even up to the middle of the 19th century, there was no dowry system instead, the ‘Kanyapan’ (Bride Price) was continuing in the society. Widow marriage was a very common matter to the society. Polygamy and polyandry both were practiced in the society. There was no ‘parda’ system; instead the women were allowed to go open market and agriculture field. However, the same socio-economic status did not continue from the last two decades of the 19th century, rather some patriarchal characteristics (Dowry, Polygamy, Parda System and Child Marriage) were going to be prominent. Now, the question is why? This paper will try to reckon the factors responsible for the social degradation and transformation of the Rajbanshi women within a century between the years 1875 to 1975.

Keywords: Dowry, Kanyapan, Polygamy, Polyandry, Parda System, Child Marriage.