

# ECONOMICAL ASPECTS OF RAJBANSHI WOMEN OF NORTH BENGAL: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT-** Human Civilization has reached this state through evolution. In the impact of this evolution, on one hand various customs have been developed. Similarly on the other hand various clan, community, class, religion and caste have also been developed. Rajbanshi is such a caste as well as a community. The Rajbanshi community is the largest community in the northern part of West Bengal. The districts where they have been living are Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Alipurduar North and South Dinajpur and Malda. Besides this the Rajbanshi people are found in the state Assam, Bihar even in the state Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Although they are scattered in different places, their lifestyle is almost the same. From ancient times the women of Rajbanshi society possessed a special dignity. They assumed an important role in Economics through the participation of various economical activities. This paper analyses the various economical aspects of the women of Rajbanshi society in North Bengal.

**Keyword-**Community, Rajbanshi, Women, Economics, Activity

**Introduction-**The majority of the population of North Bengal is Rajbanshi. They have a rich culture and also they have their own language. The Rajbanshi were the ancient tribe and their origin came from the Koch kingdom. Although there was a debate about the origin of Rajbanshi. However most of the historians, academicians and the British officials have shown that the Rajbanshi originated from the mongoloid race. Since ancient times women had a special dignity in this society. In addition to housework, the role of women was significant in the field of religion, economic responsibilities, and cultural activities. Though the father takes the main role of the family the mother plays an important role in doing all the work of the family. Although the father is the head of the family, in the absence of father, mother or elder son or elder daughter accepted the family responsibility according to the situation. The women of Rajbanshi society play a vital role in the overall family development. Along with men, they participate in various productive activities of the family as well as the society. From house work to animal husbandry, various factory production works and also in business the Rajbanshi women take a vital role. According to Charu Chandra Sanyal a Rajbanshi woman is the wealth of the family. Generally the Rajbanshi society was called patriarchal but so many features of matriarchal were found in this society.

Objectives-The objectives of the study –

- i. To examine the role of the Rajbanshi women in the various economical activities
- ii. To understand the contribution of the rajbanshi women in the economic field.
- iii. To analyze the various economic aspects of women in Rajbanshi society.
- Iv. To assess the area of economical activities where the Rajbanshi women were actively involved.

Methodology-In this study primary and secondary both data sources were used. Primary data collected through personal interview observation structured and unstructured questionnaires. Secondary data collected from various published and unpublished written documents.

Discussion-Rajbanshi women participate in both remuneration and without remuneration works. In the Rajbanshi society the women were all in all in house work. In this house work, their opinion was more very important than the other members of the family. From dawn to night they do various work. With cleaning the yard early in the morning they begin their work. Cooking, taking care of children, animal husbandry, collecting grass for these animals, collecting necessary materials for cooking, guest entertainment etc. were included in their housework.

The economy of the Northern part of West Bengal is also dependent on agriculture. The majority of the people of North Bengal are Rajbanshi whose main livelihood is agriculture, irrespective of men and women, the people of the Rajbanshi community participate in agriculture for their livelihood. Most of the Rajbanshi families are found in an open space in the middle of their farm for the advantage of farming. They used animal dung as a fertilizer in their agriculture. In farming they used various machinery such as –KODAL (spade) Nirani, Langol (plough), Moi (ladder), Kachi (Sickle) etc. In the economic sector of India, especially in agriculture the rural women play multiple roles. Although they have an important role in rural economics, they are deprived from many fields. Their labour is not given proper value and dignity. The women of Rajbanshi society in North Bengal are deeply involved in agriculture. They play an important role in every stage of agriculture. According to Charu Chandra Sanyal, "the women never till the land with the plough, But they help man to weed jute, paddy or tobacco, to prepare and sow paddy seeds for nursery of winter paddy (amandhan), to transplant 'aman' seeding in the fields (oa-gara) and help cutting the paddy plants when the paddy is ripe". Many times with the involvement of various economical activities the Rajbanshi women pick the major role in family management. The important agricultural crops of North Bengal were Paddy, wheat, corn, jutes, potato and many kinds of vegetables etc. In every crops production the women of Rajbanshi society were deeply involved. From seed preservation and sowing to planting irrigation, harvesting even in the marketing the women of Rajbanshi society take a vital role. On one hand in modern Civilization the invention of various Agricultural machinery has become men's work easier and less. Similarly on the other hand has increased the participation of Rajbanshi women in the agricultural activities of North Bengal. Though the women of the Jotdar/ Zamindar class were not directly involved in farming, they were involved in farming care, labour management, payment of the wages of workers etc. On one hand the poor class women cultivate in their own land, similarly on the other hand they were employed as an agricultural labourer in the houses of well- to-do-farmers.

In the family of Rajbanshi society one of the most important family income is domestic animals. Many Rajbanshi families earned their living by animal husbandry. The main domestic animals were cow, goat, duck, hen, sheep etc. Through all these animal husbandry this community becomes self-reliant by financial aspects. In domestic animal husbandry the women of Rajbanshi community take the main role. In this case men do not play such a role. To collect cow food, collecting milk from cows and carry this milk to the market etc were done by the Rajbanshi women by proficiently. In the houses of every rural Rajbanshi family goats were rearing. In most of the houses about 4 to 10 goats were kept. The Rajbanshi women play an important role in goat keeping. They take these goats to a particular field every day, take care of them appropriately and bring home these goats at a particular time. They were very conscious about these works. They do all this works along with by doing various house works. Besides this, the women of this community take a vital role in rearing duck and hen. The women also play an significant role in taking all these to the market, and it was thought that the women are the owners of all these domestic animals. In Rajbanshi society in the rearing of Cow, Goat, Duck, and Hen, there was "Adiar Pratha" was on. The women of rich families give this animal husbandry to the women of poor families. In return the women who take this "Adiar" give the half Share gained from the animal to the owner.

Besides agriculture and animal husbandry, the Rajbanshi women were involved in labour, business, various Govt. and non Govt. services. The very important agriculture crops of North Bengal is Tea. In Tea production various tribal women of North Bengal also with the Rajbanshi women have an important role. In this work the women's participation was much more than the man. The main income of many Rajbanshi families of North Bengal was dependent on the labour of tea-garden and in this case the women of all these families play the main role in the family economics field. The day begins at dawn of tea worker women. In the early morning they finished their house work and made necessary arrangements for their children, then went to the tea-garden. As a beedi worker the Rajbanshi women played an important role. One of the most important cultivation of North Bengal was tobacco. For making beedi tobacco leaf is necessary. A large number of Rajbanshi women involved as a beedi worker and it was their one of the important sources of income. There were so many Rajbanshi families who totally dependent on this beedi industry. They were involved in this work (beedi making) after managing their housework. Women of these societies also run small businesses. It was their duty to go to the market to buy and sell products. The women of these communities also work as labourers in various factories. Even they were also involved in various wood mills of North Bengal as day labour.

Conclusion-Women have a significant role in the economics of many developing countries including India. In this context the Rajbanshi women of North Bengal play an important role. The poor women of this community were involved in various economical activities along with housework. On one hand they were involved in their own family agriculture with various economical works without remuneration. Similarly on the other hand they participate in agricultural labourers, factory workers along with various productive work in return for remuneration. Besides this including various productive goods marketing, participates in many kinds of small and large businesses they were able to make themselves self-reliant. But there is no way to deny that like all other India women the Rajbanshi women deprived of appropriate remuneration as well as dignity for their hard work. In many cases they work equal to men even work more than the men but they get very low wages. Also in family matters though they play dual roles in house work along with participation of various outside activities but they do not get their appropriate dignity. Nowadays in effect of modern education the Rajbanshi women are involved in various government and non-government services and they are also involved in many self-employed businesses. Through this work they succeeded in increasing their own dignity.

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