



Similarities between Nashya Shaikh Muslims & Rajbanshi Hindus in religion & customs

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Abstract: Since in the eyes of the Islam, every person is equal as a human being, there is no high and low. The ideology of high and low in Islam is based only on their good deeds, Piety and piousness. Inspired by this ideology of Islam, The Hindus consisting of Rajbanshi, Poliya, Koch and Deshi from North Bengal and its adjoining districts started accepting Islam, due to with the oppression of upper caste Hindus, and this series continued from the time of Sen dynasty to the time of British rule, and those converted to Islam began to be known as Nasta Shaikh and later Nashya Shaikh. Despite being Muslims, these people have not been able to abandon the customs and practices of their Hindu ancestors till date. Therefore, Hindu customs and traditions can be seen in their marriage ceremony and other things. So, the Muslims of Malda and Murshidabad call them half Muslims. This present paper attempted to prove that how much Nashya Shaikh Muslims are affected by their Hindu ancestors in the matter of religion and customs.

Keyword: Nashya Shaikh, Rajbanshi, Poliya, Deshi, Koch, North Bengal, Assam, Purnea, Nicknames.

Introduction: After the advent of Islam, inspired by the Islamic ideology people of all castes converted to Islam but the people of lower castes who were appressed by the upper castes, converted to Islam in a large number. And this happened in every district and every province of India. So, the Hindus consisting of Rajbanshi, Poliya, Deshi and Koch from North Bengal and its adjoining districts converted to Islam because of the appression of upper castes people. And this series continued from the time of Sen Dynasty to the time of British rule. And they called Nashya Shaikh Muslims; these Nashya Shaikh Muslims despite being Muslims have not been able to abandon the customs and practices of their Hindu ancestors. However, in the eyes of violent Muslims, it is very wrong. But in the eyes of liberal Muslims these things are a source of Hindu Muslim brotherhood that is why it is seen that the area which is not dominated by Brahmins and upper castes the Rajbanshi Hindu and Nashy Shaikh Muslim live there as brothers, and by practicing in each other's festivals they increase their affection and love.

Significance : The matter of conversion to Islam of Nashya Shaikh Muslim and their customs remain explored in earlier studies. This study highlights the similarities between Rajbanshi Hindu and Nashya Shaikh in religion and customs even their respect of each other's festivals, which will develop the mutual respect and will strength the social, political and cultural relationship between Hindu and Muslim.

Objectives:

- 1) It aims highlight the matter of converted Nashya Shaikh Muslims.
- 2) The article highlights the similarities between Rajbanshi Hindu and Nashya Shaikh Muslim in religion and customs.
- 3) The article seeks to highlight the Rajbanshi's nicknames which adopted by Nashya Shaikh Muslims.
- 4) The paper aims to highlight how Rajbanshi Hindus and Nashya Shaikh Muslims respect each other's festivals.

Data Collection: The study based on secondary data, the data has been collected from secondary sources, like books, journals and websites for conducting the study.

Scope of the study: This study is restricted to some districts of North Bengal, Bihar and Assam of India only.

Interpretation :

The majority of Mongoloid population are present in many districts of India and Bangladesh i.e. Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Jalpaiguri, Cooch-Behar, Darjeeling of North Bengal (India). Purnea of Bihar (India), Goalpara of Assam (India), Rangpur and Dinajpur of Bangladesh, and Rajbanshi society is the main centre of the Mongoloid population. There are four divisions in this society, namely, Rajbanshi, Koch, Paliyas and Deshi. The Purnea Bihar Gazetteer of 1963 states, "*The fact appears to be that there are four sub-cast viz Rajbanshiya, Palia, Deshi and Koch*".⁽¹⁾ People of the four sub-cast converted to Islam due to Brahmanical exploitation and administration, social instability, political and economic reasons. This process continued from the time of Sen dynasty to British rule. The converted Muslim community loved to identify themselves socially as Deshi, the reason is that the people of Rajbanshi society, considered Deshi as dignified in the society. Bihar Gazetteer has said in page-141 "*The Rajbanshis are said to claim decent from the Koch Rajas, and the Deshi from the higher Koch family, though they also after claim to be Rajbanshis. The paliyas and Koch are both inferior to them in social status and differ from them not in feature. But very widely in colour, being generally of dark complexion, while the Rajbanshis and Deshis are fair*".⁽²⁾

As a result, the converted people kept their Deshi identity not only alive, but also they formed a circle of their own, this circle has remained in the local Muslim society even today. Upendranath Barman admits that most of the converted Muslims in North Bengal have converted from Koch, Poliya or Rajbanshi. He said that there was no doubt that the Siliguri, Jalpaiguri, Kooch Behar Rangpur and Dinajpur of North Bengal, north-east of Purnea district of Bihar and Western part of Goalpara district of Assam are mainly Rajbanshi inhabitants. The Muslims have mainly converted from among the Rajbangshi.⁽³⁾

This converted Muslims society could not completely break blood relation with their ancestors, because the main reason for conversion was to save them from social discrimination only. The influence of Brahmanical ideology is not found in the early Rajbangshi society. So, both these societies have traditionally performed social activities regularly, the converted Muslim society has not lost its status in all previous social and cultural spheres.

The reason is that Brahmanism could not lay the foundation in North Bengal not even in royal family. Due to which there is no atmosphere of social discrimination and hatred in Rajbangshi and Nashya Shaikh Muslim societies. Therefore, converted Muslim society could not be completely isolated from the special qualities of the Rajbangshi society. Due to their social and cultural isolation, there was no religious conflict between the two societies; rather a cultural relation has developed between the two societies. The converted Muslim was not deprived of their rights in this case. Proof of this, the Muslim community inaugurated the fair by swinging sticks around the fair at the opening ceremony of the Ras Mela in Cooch-Behar. They have been doing this work for generations. Not only Rasmela, but also there are thousands of fair in the villages of North Bengal,

where the presence of both the societies indicates the direction of harmony. As a result of this connection, the matter of harmony between Rajbangshi and Muslim community is very strong. So, there is no proof of ethnic riots in both these societies. It has been said in the Gazetteer of Purnea Bihar “As a class all four sub-casts are very true to their word and make good tenants, being punctual in payment of their rents”.⁽⁴⁾

The reason for saying Nashya Shaikh:

Due to their deviation from Hindu society and conversion to Islam, cast Hindus started calling them Nashta Shaikh. (That is those whose religion has been destroyed) later, the word Nashta changed in the word Nashya and this word has accepted by the state government and central government to provide them OBC certificate. H. N. Chowdhury said “By the majurity of Mohammadans are shekhs or as the popularly called Nashyes. They are like the greater portion of Mohammadans of India descended from the Hindu, converts of the religion of the Mohammad. The title Nashya, is significant. It is generally believed to be the corrupted from ‘Nashta, which means ‘fallen or degraded and thus appears to be the most probable nickname which the Hindus subject of the Hindu principally give their converted co-religionists’.”⁽⁵⁾ The Chowdhury’s comment is historical truth, judging the current society in the light of this fact, there is still a lot of evidence.

Language of Nashya Shaikh Muslims:

Since they have converted to Islam from Rajbangshi and Coch-Poliya. So, their language also is like those Rajbangshis and Coch-Poliyas, the Rajbangshis and Coch-Poliyas, say; “Mui bhat kham” (I will eat rice) “Tor Lakhadi Mui Kahak ni dekhu” (I have never seen anyone like you) Tui Jodi Mok Takata delehe Mor Kamta hain gelehe (If you gave me the money, it would be my job), the Nashya Muslim also say this.

Nicknames of Nashya Shaikh Muslims:

After conversion to Islam, many members of the Nashya Shaikh Muslims society are still using as their nicknames, just like the Rajbangshi Hindus use those names, like- Asaru, Maghu, Faghu, Choitu, Boisagu, Monglu, Budhu, Shukru, Shonu, Akalu, Debaru, Darbaru, Jhoru, Andharu, Jonaku, Jonglu, Rangalu, Kachalu, Dinkatu, Puchkatu, Palanu, Ponhatu, Raitu, Jhol khuwa, Pala Khuwa, Panta Khuwa, Laru Khuwa, Chura Khuwa, Samai Khuwa, Siyal Khuwa, Sinni Khuwa etc.

Nashya Shaikh Muslim’s Clothing:

Due to a small amount of education, advent of TV-movies and communications in modern age, the use of modern clothing has increased, nevertheless, the use of Bukani or Patani, Pajol, Gwaji, Kharagamcha and Kopni has remained among the Rajbangshi and Nashya Shaikh Muslim societies. Which has not been completely removed from both societies.

Eating habits of Nashya Shaikh Muslims:

There are many similarities between both Nashya Shaikh Muslims and Rajbangshi Hindus in the eating habits like – Sidol (dry fish with Arum stick), Rasa (Arum root), Khata (Soup of Sour Leaves), Pelka (Soup of drum stick leaves, Arum leaves and Malabar Spinach) & Chenka etc. the special food of Rajbangshi Hindus has been passed down through the generations in the Nashya Shaikh Muslims society.

Similarity of Rajbangshi Hindus and Nashya Shaikh Muslims in places of worship:

The way Rajbangshi Hindus built small temples, in the same way the Nashya Shaikh Muslims have built small mosques, it is not possible for more than three to four people to pray here, the only difference is that the temples are on the South side and the mosques are on the west side. However, with the change of era, they have started building big mosques, but the small mosques built earlier still remain and prayers are still offered in which as well as the old small mosques built by their ancestors were repaired with honor. Looking at the small mosques, one can understand where they learned to built such mosques.

Religion and Customs:

Until a few days ago, Nashya Shaikh Muslims were involved in many religion and customs of Rajbanshi Hindus, like Amait, Gariguri, Serosera, Goruchumani, Satya Peer, Bisohori etc. Although most Muslims have given up, but it is still practiced in some villages. Many Rajbanshi Hindu traditions regarding wedding ceremonies are still prevalent among Nashya Shaikh Muslims, like providing turbans to five persons (who are known as religious father or Dharambap), Kalaidanga, Geet or Hewra, Othra, Bhador Katani and Badhu Boron etc. The customs of shaving nails and hairs of elders a few days after the birth of the child can still be observed today. Worship of village Thakur is still practiced in many villages.

Conclusion:

There are millions of Muslims in India, the majority of them have converted from Hinduism to Islam from various reasons. Some of them strongly believe in Islam and have been abandoned all anti-Islamic customs, but the people who converted from Hinduism to Islam from various districts of North Bengal and its surrounding districts, they are still following the customs of their Hindu ancestors, whatever their actions may be wrong in the eyes of Islam, but their actions can be helpful in promoting the country's integrity and brotherhood within the country.

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