



Rediscovering Roots: An Anthro-Geographical Study of the Rajbanshi Community's Racial Identity

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Abstract: One of the most significant communities in the Indian subcontinent is the Rajbanshi. It covered a substantial portion of the eastern part of India in addition to our neighboring nations, including Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. They have lived in this region since the very beginning of civilization and are the local native people. However, they continued to be the most misunderstood group and dealt with several complicated issues that needed to be resolved. Their identity issue is the root cause of all the confusion and ambiguity. The concept of "identity" is very complicated yet essential to individuals and their societies. People with a defined identity can better make wise choices and speak up for their or their communities' goodwill. Language, caste, and politics are among the numerous identity-related problems they are currently facing, but above all, racial identity is the most important. This research endeavors to determine the Rajbanshis' racial identity and rediscover their origins. To determine which racial umbrella this group belongs, I applied the somatoscopy technique to assess its racial characteristics.

Keywords: Rajbanshi, Indian Subcontinent, Racial Identity, Somatoscopy, Anthro-Geographical.

Introduction: The concept of "**Identity**" is a very complex, multidimensional construct. It encompasses diverse factors that shape individuals' perceptions, sense of belonging, and group affiliation. Being aware of one's identity is crucial for each ethnic group. Having a clear understanding of one's identity supports cohesiveness within a community. It frequently includes cultural background, customs, and values. Maintaining these components is essential to preserving the community's distinct persona. Not only that, but people are also more inclined to voice their ideas, actively engage in decision-making processes, and strive for good change when they have a strong sense of who they are.

The "**Rajbanshi**" is one of the most significant ethnic groupings on the Indian subcontinent. The majority of this population is dispersed over all of North Bengal's districts, the entire lower Assam, the eastern portion of Purnia and Kishanganj districts in Bihar, as well as the adjacent districts of our neighbouring countries like Rangpur, Dinajpur, and Bogra districts in Bangladesh and Jhapa and Morang districts in Nepal (Wilson, 2012) (Roy, 2015) (Basistha, 2016) (Adhikary, 2017). They are the native population of this land and have existed

here since time immemorial. They are strongly tied to this region's ruling community, which is why Rajbanshi came from, which means 'having the royal ancestry' (Sanyal, 1965) (Banerjee, 2022).

Currently, this community is dealing with various identity-related issues, such as caste, Language, and even political identification. Furthermore, racial identity is fundamental, and it is closely linked to all problems and misconceptions. This research aims to identify the origins of this ethnic group and the reasons for the numerous misunderstandings regarding their race or ethnicity. Therefore, having a good understanding of one's race and ethnicity is very crucial.

Concept of Human Race: According to UNESCO, the word 'race' refers to a collective of individuals that has specific amounts, compared to the rate and distribution, of physical features or genetic particles that arise, vary, and frequently fade away over time due to cultural and geographical dispersion (Brattain, 2007) (Bangham, 2015). The idea of the "human race" classifies humans into different categories or subgroups based on several factors, such as bloodline, physical characteristics, Language, customs, and heredity (Mukhopadhyay et al, 2013) (Garn, 2017) (DeSalle & Tattersall, 2022).

Even though every human being descended from the same species—Homo sapiens, over time, several different ethnic groups formed from the same population (Templeton, 1998), (Molnar, 2015). The development of the human race has been a complex process spanning millions of years. There isn't a single factor that contributed to the development of humans; rather, several significant factors are involved, like Founder Effects, Genetic drift, Migration and mobility, climate and environment, etc (Qasim et al, 2018).

Anthropometrical techniques to identify the human race: The human race can be determined by applying two anthropometrical techniques, **somatometry** and **somatoscopy** (Singh & Purkit, 2006) (Patra et al., 2023). The somatometry method evaluates the numerical assessment of the human body (Neagu, 2015) (Yokoyama & Kakuta, 2007). It can be determined by precisely measuring the whole human body and its different body parts using different anthropometrical instruments. In contrast, Somatoscopy techniques are primarily determined by visible external factors like skin tone, hair texture, formation of eyes, body structure, etc (Karve et al, 1968) (Chandra & Nath, 1987) (Rębacz-MaRon, 2015).

The racial identification of the Rajbanshi community: Today, Rajbanshis are popularly known as 'Koch-Rajbanshi' and 'Rajbanshi Kshatriya' (Ray, 2007). Each terminology has an entirely different rational justification. And all the debate and movement in this community emanate from these two opposing philosophies (Barman, 2015). It is challenging to figure out which racial group the Rajbanshis belong to. Some scholars recognize Rajbanshi as a Mongolian Racial Group (Wilson & Bashir, 2016). Some researchers say it is a Dravidian race, and some also justify supporting the Austric racial group (Das, 2021) (Bhowmick, 2022). However, most of this community claims to be descendants of the Aryan race (Barma, 1991).

By applying Somatoscopy techniques, I have tried to identify which racial group the Rajbanshis should belong to.

- 1. Mongolian trait:** Scholars such as D.C. Sircar, Dr. Latham, S. Endle, Mr. Hodgson etc. give affirmation to the concept that Rajbanshi directly descended from Mongolians in terms of legitimacy (Malla et al., 1972) (Barman, 2013) (Barman, 2015).

On the other hand, researchers like Grierson, Swarthak Sengupta, and B.M. Das support Rajbanshis to have belonged to the Bodo tribe, which has been recognized as a racial category of the Mongolian community (Dikshit, 2014) (Barman, 2015).

Physical characteristics that support Rajbansi's Mongolian racial traits: Numerous physical characteristics are found in the Rajbanshis that support their Mongolian racial traits. Most of these people have Brachycephalic skulls, Broad, flat noses, fair to yellowish skin, and epicanthic folds on their top eyelids, which are highly prevalent physical characteristics shared by all Mongolian ethnic groupings. Hair is usually straight, black to brown. Typically, they have a medium build stature.



The images above support the theory that the Rajbanshi people do, in fact, share traits with the Mongolian ethnic groupings. Most of these people have a fair to yellowish complexion, epicanthic fold in their eyelids, straight hair, and less androgenic or body hair.

- 2. Dravidian traits:** Scholars like Oldham, Dalton, Mr. Henry Beverley, Rishley, Dalton, H.F.J.T. Maguire, etc, support the concept of Rajbanshis being part of the Dravidian community. (Borah, 2019) (Wilson, 2012).

Physical characteristics that support their Dravidian racial traits: Many physical characteristics support their association as a Dravidian race. Many have mesorrhine noses, dolichocephalic heads, and brownish-dark skin tones. Several of them even have curly or wavy hair, one of the most defining physical traits of the Dravidian ethnic group (Shrestha, 2009).



These images justify the viewpoint of their Dravidian racial characteristics. Their hair is curly to wavy and has a skin tone ranging from brown to dark. They are of average height and generally lean to medium build body structure. Though variations exist based on region and nutrition.

3. Aryan Traits: There is also the notion that Rajbanshi is an Aryan racial group (Sinha, 2024). Most Rajbanshi intellectuals, including Raisaheb Thakur Panchanan Barma, Upendra Nath Barman, Dharma Narayan Barma, etc, endorsed this notion (Roy, 2007) (Barma, 2020).



This picture demonstrates that a certain number of Rajbanshi also carry Aryan-like structures. They have comparatively sharp features, high-tenure body structure with light skin tone.

4. Mixed Racial Traits: There is also a concept of Rajbanshis as a mixed racial group. Scholars like Beverly, H.H. Risley, Suniti Kumar Chatterji, and others support Rajbanshi as a mixed-racial group (Borah, 2019) (Barman, 2022). And if we go through all the above pictures, it is very clear that this community has gone through a racial amalgamation.

Factors that influence how races change over time: There are some prominent reasons why the human race has changed or mixed. More than 99.9% of human DNA is identical, so race differences are minor. The characteristics frequently used to identify "race" are skin colour, hair texture, facial features, body structure,

etc. (Hooton, 1926) (Nkengne et al., 2008) (Feliciano, 2016). The conception of the human race is very complicated. Multiple factors can affect how a human race evolves. Determining which racial group the Rajbanshis originated from is now very challenging. Various anthropological factors like gene flow, hormonal changes, biological mutation, founder effect, and numerous geographical factors like environmental adaptability, Migration, etc, effect racial evolution over time (Lieberman & Lieberman, 2009) (Sohail et al., 2021). Some of these factors have discussed here.

1. **Biological mutations:** Biological mutations have significantly influenced the evolution of the human race. It promotes gene diversity, which affects adaptive and physical characteristics in many human populations across generations. It modifies the DNA structure caused by external factors or events that happen on their own. It affects the genes that define phenotypic traits like skin colour, hair texture, eye shape, and others commonly used to categorize human races (Graves, 2011) (Fuentes, 2021).
2. **Founder effect:** The founder effect is when a few people break away from an expanded population to form a new one. The descendants of the new group inherit a restricted gene pool, often with unusual features becoming more frequent only by chance because they only possess a small portion of the original group's genetic variety. The new group may have some absence of genetic traits prominent in the original group (Barton & Charlesworth, 1984) (Hunley & Healy, 2011) (Shirk et al., 2014).
3. **Environment:** environmental factors also have a significant influence on human physiology. Through natural selection and adaptation, the climate significantly impacts the structure and appearance of the human body across many generations. According to **Bergmann's law**, to retain heat, populations in colder areas typically have greater body masses because a bigger body mass has a lower surface area than volume, which aids heat retention (Foster & Collard, 2013) (Hagen, 2017) (Bogin & Scheffler, 2022).

According to **Allen's law**, populations in warmer areas tend to develop longer limbs and more exposed body parts for greater heat dissipation. At the same time, people in colder climates often have shorter limbs, ears, and noses to minimize heat loss (Murrill, 1960) (Mayr, 1956). Even though these groups of people are dispersed among almost identical climatic zones over a long period, the environment also influenced this group's racial growth and amalgamation.

4. **Migration:** Migration is another prominent factor for racial admixture and evolution. The racial mixture through Migration occurs when individuals from various racial and ethnic origins move from one area to another and frequently make contact, resulting in intermarriage, cultural exchange, and the mixing of their genetic and social characteristics (Root, 1995) (Templeton, 1998) (Lee & Bean, 2004).

Conclusion: It is evident from studying these factors that the Rajbanshi have since acquired every trait shared by these ethnic groupings. There is no denying that they have undergone racial change throughout time. They are now a group of mixed races. Their racial traits include Mongolian, Dravidian, Austric, and Aryan. Most Rajbanshi researchers disagreed with the notion that they were mostly descended from Mongolian ethnic

groupings, notwithstanding the belief held by sure experts. They wholeheartedly endorse the idea that the Rajbanshis are Aryan racial descended people.

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