



Education Of Rajbanshi Community In North Bengal: An Ethnographic Study

Ananta Roy

Academic Counsellor, Department of Education, NSOU, Cooch Behar College Study Centre, Cooch Behar, West Bengal.

ABSTRACT:

This Study was conducted to examine the Education of Rajbanshi Community in North Bengal. The present study explores the educational conditions and experiences of the Rajbanshi community in North Bengal through an ethnographic approach. The Rajbanshi community, recognized as a significant indigenous group in this region, has historically faced socio-economic marginalization, which has had a direct impact on their access to and participation in formal education. This research seeks to understand how cultural practices, economic conditions, social structures, and institutional factors shape the educational trajectories of the community.

Using ethnographic methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and informal interactions, the study captures the lived experiences of students, parents, and educators within the Rajbanshi community. The findings reveal that despite increasing awareness about education, several challenges persist, including poverty, lack of infrastructural facilities, language barriers, early marriage, and limited parental literacy. At the same time, the study also highlights the role of government initiatives, local institutions, and community efforts in gradually improving educational participation.

The research further examines the intersection of traditional knowledge systems and modern education, showing how cultural identity, both supports and sometimes conflicts with formal schooling. The study concludes that while progress has been made, there is a need for culturally sensitive and inclusive educational policies that address the specific needs of the Rajbanshi community. This ethnographic insight contributes to a deeper understanding of education in marginalized communities and offers recommendations for enhancing educational equity and social inclusion in North Bengal.

Keywords: Rajbanshi Community, North Bengal, Ethnographic Study, Educational Marginalization, Socio-economic Barriers, Cultural Identity.

❖ INTRODUCTION:

The Rajbanshi community, an indigenous group primarily residing in the northern regions of West Bengal, has a long and rich cultural history. With their roots stretching across the plains of North Bengal, the Rajbanshi people have been historically tied to agriculture, often living in rural and remote areas with limited access to resources and opportunities. Despite their significant presence in the region, they have faced persistent social, economic, and political marginalization for centuries. One of the most pressing challenges the Rajbanshi community faces today is the issue of education.

Education, universally recognized as a fundamental right and a powerful tool for social and economic upliftment, remains out of reach for a large portion of the Rajbanshi population. This can be attributed to a complex interplay of socio-economic factors, cultural barriers, geographical remoteness, and a lack of institutional support. The illiteracy rate in the community is disproportionately high compared to the state and national averages, and educational attainment among Rajbanshi children, especially girls, remains significantly lower than their peers in more privileged communities.

This research intends to examine the current educational status of the Rajbanshi community, focusing on the barriers to education, the effectiveness of existing interventions, and potential strategies for reform. By gathering both quantitative and qualitative data, the study will explore the root causes of the educational gaps and propose practical, community-driven solutions that take into account the cultural, social, and economic realities faced by the Rajbanshi people.

In addition to shedding light on the specific educational challenges of the Rajbanshi community, this research aims to contribute to a broader discourse on educational equity, particularly for marginalized indigenous groups in India. The findings will not only have implications for policy and practice within the Rajbanshi community but also offer valuable lessons for other indigenous populations across the country, paving the way for more inclusive and culturally responsive educational systems.

Ultimately, the goal of this research is to provide evidence-based recommendations for creating an educational environment that is not only accessible but also meaningful to the Rajbanshi community, enabling them to fully participate in and contribute to the social, economic, and cultural life of North Bengal and beyond.

❖ REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

An extensive review of the related literature revealed that various studies have been conducted in this area. A summary of some of those studies has been presented here:

Goswami, Biswajit (2024) This article focused on the educational status and society-related objectives of the Bhumij community in West Bengal and Jharkhand.

Mathew & Kasi (2021) This article focuses on the Birhor, an exceptionally vulnerable indigenous community residing in the Chhattisgarh state of central India.

Basumatary (2020) This study focused on Assam tribal issues that hinder improvement. This article applies and uses primary and secondary data. book, magazine, and interest source secondary sources. Nations' initial occupants are tribes. Other groups are affected by their culture, traditions, values, and inheritances. Of their unique customs, beliefs, and traditions. Dynasty socioeconomic conditions were poor. Many issues arise during development. But their contribution to economic progress is significant.

Chakraborty (2019) This study examines the educational status of Paschim Medinipur District in West Bengal. Paschim Medinipur, often referred to as Jangalmahal or Red Corridor, has been under the governance of Mousiest for the past thirty years.

Mahato & Mondal (2019) This study investigated the socio-economic condition of indigenous tribes living in Bhumij hamlet on Nafar Ganj Island in Sundarban, which is situated in the south 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. This study examined the recent temporary displacement of the Bhumij community from their houses, which was caused by the current economic challenges they are experiencing.

Daripa (2018) defines tribes' socioeconomic status. The study was done in Purulia, West Bengal. The report concludes Tribal culture and heritage are quickly diminishing and extinction. The postcolonial sewer crisis in Purulia is obvious from the previous explanation.

Majumdar (2018) This article examines the Bhumij tribe's low literacy and education in Jharkhand, India. The article discusses the Bhumij tribal community's educational attainment, government programs, and education and development. Despite many programs and strategies, few have reached and benefited tribe children.

Negi (2018) In this study, has directly focused on the tribe and their cultural background in disease and health, which is a better-known fact. Tribes across India follow several traditional standards regarding their health and illness, regardless of their region or religion. This study examines Indian tribes' health and wellness attitudes. A system A literature review examined tribal health and beliefs in healthcare in India and their healthcare practice patterns and faith.

Barla (2017) briefly discussed social mobility in tribal life as one of the effects of globalization. Mobility doesn't come by itself; it must come through struggle and difficult work. Although the attribution method of portability is there, the accomplishment of occupational or instructive versatility is continuously achieved through difficult work and determination.

❖ **RESEARCH GAP AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:**

After reviewing the related literature, the future researcher will identify a considerable research gap in the field of Rajbanshi education in North Bengal. To address this gap, the researcher will select the title: **“Education of Rajbanshi Community in North Bengal: An Ethnographic Study.”**

❖ **OPERATIONAL TERM AND DEFINITION:**

- **Socio-economic status:** In this study, the socio-economic status of the Rajbanshi community will be defined as their occupation, monthly income, other income sources, House pattern and condition and land property.
- **Culture Context:** In this study, the culture context of Rajbanshi community will be refers to their food habits, dress code, language, marriage – birth -death, untouchability in their society and religious belief and practices.
- **Socio-Political Empowerment:** It will be refers to their awareness towards main frames politics and participation in Panchayati raj system, their own judicial system and awareness regarding their Democratic rights.
- **Educated Rajbanshi:** It will be does not pre- setting any academic degree for knowing educated Rajbanshi people. Here educated means maximum level of education in Rajbanshi community of sample survey Area. educated not a specific degree level but it related to education and economic condition.

❖ OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The present study will be undertaken to meet the following objectives:

- ✓ To explore the historical and socio-cultural background of the Rajbanshi community in North Bengal in relation to education.
- ✓ To examine the present status of educational attainment among the Rajbanshi community (enrolment, dropout, gender differences).
- ✓ To identify the socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic factors that affect access to and continuity in education.
- ✓ To assess the impact of government policies, welfare schemes, and NGO interventions on the educational development of the Rajbanshi community.
- ✓ To document the challenges (such as poverty, early marriage, migration, or discrimination) that hinder educational progress.
- ✓ To assess the availability and quality of educational infrastructure in Rajbanshi-dominated villages.
- ✓ To know the educational status of Rajbanshi Community in Cooch Behar, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling district along with compare the educational status of Rajbanshi community in North Bengal.

❖ RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What is the historical and socio-cultural background of the Rajbanshi community in North Bengal, and how does it shape their approach towards education?
- What is the current status of enrolment, retention, and dropout among Rajbanshi students, and how do these vary across gender and socio-economic groups?
- Which socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic factors influence access to and continuity of education among Rajbanshi children?
- What roles do government policies, mid-day meal schemes, scholarships, and NGO interventions play in improving or limiting educational development?
- What are the major barriers (e.g., poverty, migration, early marriage, discrimination) that hinder Rajbanshi children from completing their education?
- What is the condition of educational infrastructure (schools, teachers, facilities) in Rajbanshi-dominated villages?
- How can ethnographic insights about Rajbanshi educational life contribute to designing more inclusive and culturally sensitive educational policies in North Bengal?

❖ **DELIMITATION:**

Considering the circumstances, the proposed study will be delimited to the following areas - Cooch Behar, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts in North Bengal, only 20 blocks in North Bengal were chosen from their respective districts.

❖ **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:**

The significance of this study lies in the need to preserve the cultural and traditional heritage of the Rajbanshi community. These traditions are a vital part of our identity, and if we neglect them, we risk losing a valuable aspect of our history. It is essential to allow the Rajbanshi people to flourish in their own unique ways without imposing external influences on them. Encouraging their traditional arts, culture, and respect for their land and forests should be a priority. Self-administration by tribal communities is crucial, and efforts should be made to limit outside interference in the name of development. The progress of these communities should be measured based on their own standards of human development. This study aims to analyse the effects of the rules in the Indian Constitution that are designed to enhance the circumstances of Rajbanshi community. Specifically, it focuses on the influence of these laws on the Rajbanshi people residing in several districts of North Bengal. This study focuses on examining the daily life, cultural traditions, social relationships, and activities of Rajbanshi community. It consists of case studies focusing on cultural changes due to modernization in North Bengal. The study could be beneficial for the future development of this community. This present study focuses on the development and current situation of education among the Rajbanshi community, emphasizing the challenges faced by Rajbanshi students and their parents. It sheds light on the educational related issues of Rajbanshi community in North Bengal. This study has been highlighting the socio-cultural aspects, social mobility and socio-political empowerment of said community.

❖ **METHODOLOGY:**

➤ **RESEARCH DESIGN:**

The researcher will be used Qualitative Research Design in this Ethnographic study.

➤ **POPULATION:**

All the Students, Parents, Teachers and community leaders of four districts in North Bengal would constitute the population for this study (Cooch Behar, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling).

➤ **SAMPLE AND SAMPLING:**

Purposive and snow ball sampling both techniques will be used to select the sample. The researcher will be selected 57 villages on 20 blocks at 13 sub-divisions in 4 districts of North Bengal. The researcher will be selected 255 sample from 57 villages. The researcher will be collected 165 sample from the

students, 50 sample from parents, 25 teachers and 15 community leaders through household survey, interviews and observation methods in North Bengal.

➤ **SOURCE OF DATA:**

The researcher will be collected data related to the present study from secondary as well as primary sources.

➤ **TOOLS AND TECHNIQUE:**

Following research tools and techniques will be used for data collection-

- Interview schedule
- Observation
- Check list cum interview schedule for household survey

➤ **DATA ANALYSIS:**

Collected data would be analysed through the Thematic analysis and another proper channel.

❖ **CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, the educational development of the Rajbanshi community in North Bengal remains a complex issue influenced by a combination of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers. Despite the efforts of both government and non-governmental organizations, challenges such as poverty, limited access to quality educational facilities, and traditional socio-cultural norms continue to hinder the educational advancement of this marginalized group.

This research aims to shed light on these issues and to provide a comprehensive understanding of the specific needs of the Rajbanshi community in terms of education. By identifying key barriers and assessing the impact of existing initiatives, the study hopes to contribute to the formulation of targeted policies and strategies that can address these challenges more effectively.

The findings will not only benefit the Rajbanshi community but also offer insights into how similar marginalized groups across India can be better supported in their educational pursuits. Ensuring educational equity for the Rajbanshi community will require a collaborative effort between the government, NGOs, and the community itself. With the right interventions, it is possible to create an educational ecosystem that is inclusive, culturally sensitive, and sustainable, empowering future generations to break free from the cycle of marginalization.

Ultimately, this research will provide a foundation for future initiatives aimed at transforming education for the Rajbanshi people, ensuring that their children, like all children, have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

❖ **REFERENCES:**

- Bagchi, A. K. (2010). *Education and society in colonial India*. Oxford University Press.
- Best, J.W. and Kahn, J.V. (2006) *Research in Education*. 10th Edition, Pearson Education Inc., Cape Town.
- Basu, A. (2015). Education and marginal communities: A case study of North Bengal. *Indian Journal of Social Development*, 15(2), 45–62.

- Barla, P. (2017). *Social mobility in tribal life in the context of globalization*.
- Basumatary, P. (2020). *Tribal issues of Assam: Challenges of improvement and socio-economic contribution*. [Study based on primary and secondary data].
- Choudhury, R. D. (2016). Marginalization and education: Problems of backward communities in North Bengal. *Social Change and Development*, 13(1), 101–118.
- Chakraborty, S. (2019). *Educational status of Paschim Medinipur (Jangalmahal/Red Corridor) under long-term Maoist governance*.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Ghosh, A. (2019). Identity, ethnicity, and politics among the Rajbanshi of North Bengal. *South Asian Anthropologist*, 19(1), 23–34.
- Goswami, B. (2024). *Educational status and society-related objectives of the Bhumij community in West Bengal and Jharkhand*.
- Kothari, C.R. (2019) *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. 4th Edition, New Age International Publishers, New Delhi.
- Koul, L. (2009) *Methodology of Educational Research*. 4th Edition, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.
- Mallick, B. (2017). Rajbanshi identity and educational backwardness in Cooch Behar district. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 22(4), 55–63.
- Majumdar, T. (2018). *Low literacy and educational challenges of the Bhumij tribe in Jharkhand: Government programs and development*.
- Mathew, R., & Kasi, E. (2021). *The Birhor: An exceptionally vulnerable indigenous community in Chhattisgarh, India*.
- Negi, R. (2018). *Tribal health beliefs and healthcare practices in India: A cultural perspective*.
- Sarkar, S. (2020). Rajbanshi dialect, culture, and education: An ethnolinguistic study. *Indian Anthropologist*, 50(2), 75–91.
- Singh, Y. (2012). *Modernization of Indian tradition: A sociological study*. Rawat Publications.