

Chapter VI

Political Life

In last chapter, I discussed socio-cultural life of Dheyant-Rajbanshi. But in this penultimate chapter, I make an effort to study and understand political life of the community including its gradual shift from Dheyant to Rajbanshi, issue of language, assertion of identity relating to demand for ST status and other burning issues it presently confronts with etc. to develop an adequate or comprehensive knowledge about the community.

Koch-Rajbanshi-Dheyant-Rajbanshi Journey Unended

Shift in identity and certain other covert and unresolved question in Assam caused enough turmoil in past and seems further percolated down and destined to cause more worry or concern during present life career of a community and social structure in general. The community in its entire process of life seen and experienced such a major upheaval in identity owing to factors out-side and within themselves. This is, partly due to incapacity of various ethnic groups to appreciate reality in isolation- neither protection nor emancipation possible due to rigidity in Indian nation-state to accommodate

and address rising expectation of small ethnic groups like Dheyant-Rajbanshi. Problem of identity and participation get surmounted as complexity arises among them. The table represents the community's present state of political participation at village and gaon-panchayat level.

Table VI.1
Participation Level of Dheyant-Rajbanshi and Gaon Panchayat

Sl. No	Participation in GaonPanchayat	No. of Respondents		Total	Percentage
		Male	Female		
1	Participate	98	74	172	57.33
2	Do not participate	52	76	128	42.67
3	Grand Total			300	100.00

The table highlight most Dheyant-Rajbanshi (57.33%) participate in gaonpanchayat activities which include largely socio-cultural, welfare, family and community oriented and less than half (42.67%) do not show interest to participate in such activities. They represent mostly aged women, school going children and a very limited number of youth

Similarly, Dheyant-Rajbanshiin Barak valley is well represented through their long struggle of community aspiration. Such movement and struggle express, among others, value, belief, hope and aspiration and voice of protest

and resistance, which is getting consolidated among in their everyday existence.

When asked about reason to shift from Dheyman to Rajbanshi, quite some members expressed their views that thy name Rajbanshi will help them to broaden horizon of the community and help them establish cultural affiliation with mainstream society.

After independence and with emergence of a new state of affair, members of the community still feel uncertainty about them. To most of them ‘It was a moment of interesting trajectory in history of the community in Barak valley under late Biswanath Rajbanshi of Japirbond village when capital of Assam was at Shillong under chief minister of Gopinath Bordoloi. The community was not internally strong and faced myriad problems in every front. Some influential people of the community went to meet the then chief minister and purpose of such meeting was to bring to in his notice about plight of the community in a different region. After listening to the delegate the chief minister was surprised to know about a good section of Assamese living in Barak valley for years (since Dheyman-Rajbanshi considered them as part of Assamese society). He expressed concern about safety of such handful people who shared different surnames like Koch, Borkoch, Dheyman, Singh,

Roy, Barman¹, titles which are even today retained by Koch-Rajbanshi of mainland.

After listening and sharing his feeling, the chief minister suggested their group leader late Biswanath Rajbanshi to retain single surname 'Rajbanshi' that would make community internally strong to fight any external force. Such kind of suggestion of the chief minister offered them a ray of hope, and since political atmosphere at that period was different, for some time the community maintained silence but continuously raised their demand not only for Rajbanshi surname but more seriously to carve out separate state in different forums. They also immediately considered advice of chief minister worthwhile and resolved to express themselves as Rajbanshi to keep pace with rest of the community living elsewhere. Though during initial phase it was difficult for many members of the community to give up their old title Dheyman, but gradually they get acclimatised and adopted the surname of Rajbanshi. At the end, late Biswanath Rajbanshi was honoured for his effort to uplift name and fame of the community as people felt that it was his major initiative and contribution for what members of the community are able to get Rajbanshi surname.

¹. S.S. Tunga, Bengali and Other Related Dialects of South Assam, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1985, P.29.

As such, it is observed further that earlier people of the community used Dehan title in Barak valley, and surname Rajbanshi is newly added since the titles are not found among other communities including 'Rajbanshi' living elsewhere. Again the new title ought to offer them a new sense of identity and make them internally strong with formation of 'Koch-Rajbanshi Samaj Unnayan Samati'- apex body- of the community in Barak valley. It also provides a platform to hear their voice. Notwithstanding the entire process being very clumsy and cumbersome; in due course of time Dheyan to Rajbanshi consolidates identity of the community in a broad perspective.

Language Conundrum Conformity and Annoyance

Benedict Anderson (1991) observes 'Imagined Communities' spread out to every conceivable contemporary society² and language is an important tool of such spread. In his words, languages appear rooted beyond almost everything else in contemporary society. At the same time, nothing connects us affectionately dear more than language³.

². Benedict Anderson, *The Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, 1993, P. 157.

³. *Ibid.* P. 145.

Language is thus an important marker of a community and society. Arup Jyoti Das (2009) in his book ‘Kamatapur and Koch-Rajbanshi Imagination’ with a stanza from Koch-Rajbanshi poet Gobinda Chandra Roy says:

Mora chahinaartha, chainamaan,
Chahinabidya, chainajnyan,
Mora chahishudhujatirpratistha,
Mora chai sudhujatirpran⁴.

(We do not want money, nor do we want prestige, we do not want education, nor do we want knowledge, we only want recognition of our nationality to be alive.)

This summarises Dheyani-Rajbanshi die-hard struggle for language. But another dominant community living close to them or side by side never undertook such a radical path and fought for their language (Dimasas living in Cachar plain), though they outnumbered Dheyani-Rajbanshi now. While former clung to its mother tongue, latter could not stick to its own original dialect and committed linguistic suicide⁵. It is language that sticks to identity of Dheyani-Rajbanshi in Barak valley. S.S.Tunga (1985) observes

⁴ Arup Jyoti Das, Kamatapur and the Koch-Rajbanshi Imagination, Guwahati, Montage Media, P.3.

⁵ S. K. Chatterjee, A Socio-Economic History of South Assam, Joypur, Printwell, 2000, P. 136.

Dheyan language is midway between Bengali and Assamese⁶ and maintained a wonderful identity over year, resisting Cachar Bengali pressure to any great extent⁷. Rajbanshi language has its distinct feature and the language has been constantly in use among them for a long time, but in Cachar it did not develop as it could have developed during the erstwhile Koch rule that spanned for nearly one hundred and eighty five years.⁸ Tunga also observes change in their speech form:

‘The Dheyan-Rajbanshi adopted Bengali and Assamese custom and tradition as well as their speech, language as current in Cooch Behar in 16th century. This language had, however, considerable amount of Koch elements in it. When they came to Cachar they carried with them mixed dialects which was more Bengali-Assamese than original Koch. Gradually as their power and prestige waned and they faded out into insignificance, they were overwhelmed by Bengali who surround them. Their number also decreased considerably. It is not possible for a small, weak band to retain a speech form undiluted. Probably they felt imperative to get adapted with their present place of stay and language commonly used. This is what has happened to Dheyan-Rajbanshi uphold language. Nevertheless, speech has

⁶ S.S. Tunga, Bengali and Other Related Dialects of South Assam, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1985, P. 78

⁷ Ibid. P. 77.

⁸ D.N. Bhakat, Rajbanshi Bhasa Sahityar Parichaya, Dhubri, Center for Ethnic Study and Research, rpt. 2004, P. 88.

maintained all these years a wonderful identity of its own, resisting Cachar Bengali pressure to a great extent. Its background is still characterised with language of North Bengal’⁹. Quoting Madhab Chandra Bardalai, Tunga adds: ‘The language of Koch country in 16th century was neither Bengali nor Koch nor Assamese. It was language of Cooch Behar which afterwards gave birth to Assamese as well as North Bengal dialects. These speeches have wonderfully similar feature even today.....Assamese feature in Dheyani are not therefore Assamese but Assamese-North Bengal combined. Language has also many other characteristics akin to other Bengali dialects such as Chittagong Bengali, Western Bengali but no Assamese’¹⁰. Present scenario of language of the community in Barak valley mentioned rightly

Table VI.2
Rajbanshi Language spoken by Dheyani-Rajbanshi

SL. No	Use of Rajbanshi Language	No. of Respondent		Total	Percentage
		Male	Female		
1	Yes	19	18	37	12.33
2	No	131	132	263	87.67
3	Grand Total			300	100

Above table, reveal majority of Dheyani-Rajbanshi (87.67) do not know their mother tongue and only 12.33% know Rajbanshi language.

⁹.S.S. Tunga, Bengali and Other Related Dialects of South Assam, New Delhi, Mittal Publications,1985, P. 77.

¹⁰. Ibid. P. 78.

Only a few people who know Rajbanshi language use occasionally. Because they are of the view that other people misunderstand and take Rajbanshi as Assamese in Assam, and Bengali as in West Bengal because of their shyness. It is personal and sacred communion, which they share within fellowship. Thus contradiction lies very much at their level to choose which language they like to speak. Whatever may be the reason Rajbanshi language is gradually weakening from their society in Barak valley, which in turn giving rise to non-Dheyran-Rajbanshi language among them. This is presented in the table below:

Table- VI.3
Dheyran-Rajbanshi using non-Rajbanshi Language

Sl.No	Language	No. of Respondents		Total	Percentage
		Male	Female		
1	Assamese	102	119	221	73.67
2	Assamese mixed Bengali	34	24	58	19.33
3	Assamese mixed Manipuri	7	2	9	3.00
4	Rajbanshi	7	5	12	4.00
5	Grand Total			300	100

The table data indicate most Dheyran-Rajbanshi for example 73.67% use Assamese language. In addition, a little less than one-fifth i.e.19.33% use Bengali mixed Assamese, only 4% believe their language is neither

Assamese nor any other mixed but Rajbanshi. On the other hand, only a small segment that is 3% speak Manipuri mixed Assamese language.

In light of earlier analysis and present language condition of the community, Tunga further views that Dheyman-Rajbanshi words as well as sentence structure are cent percent Indo-Aryan having not much dialectical variation. Educated Dheyman-Rajbanshi use a standardised form close to Assamese. But, speech of ordinary villager is free from Assamese influence and hence it can be called only representative of this language¹¹.

A committed effort combined with seriousness to allow continuity of language in oral form was noticed since 1940's when the community collectively decided to give up their different surnames in favour of Rajbanshi. This effort of language preservation was noticed in 1910 when Upendra Chandra Guha listed many Rajbanshi words currently in use among members of the community in Barak valley¹².

The community has also rich store house of epithets and they regularly use those to articulate and express their distinctive tradition. A Dheyman-Rajbanshi

¹¹. Ibid.P. 78.

¹². U.C.Guha, KacharerItibritta, Guwahati, 1971, Pp. 28-42.

proverb usually expresses popular collective experience. It arises as part of everyday discourse. The proverbs are descriptions that propose an attitude or a mode of action in relation to a recurrent social situation. They are handed down from one generation to another by way of mouth. In every walk of life – marriage, birth, health, religion, agriculture such proverbs are being in use.

Most proverbs popular in Rajbanshi villages have similarity with other languages. They must be studied within groups which use them if we are to understand why so many diverse people have been attracted to such sententious inventions. Some such proverbs with their English rendering are mentioned below though it is very difficult to translate culture specific words.

Aam Kathal eh mah

Kotha thakei baro mah.

(Season of mango and jack fruit last for a month while word uttered last for year together)

Mukhor koth atbothatevirai

Likhi likhi kotha juge juge thaki jai.

(Words unwritten are short lived, words written last for generation)

Such proverbs, besides their legitimising function, like that of declaring a verdict, show oral status of Dheyman-Rajbanshi language in Barak valley. Since they are product of a community, they reflect wisdom based on everyday experience of community and at same time, they enrich oral literature of community.

Assamese Language Acceptance or Denial

Politics of language has often been haunting and becoming everlasting power of dynamics among the Dheyman-Rajbanshi in Barak valley quite for some time. It could definitely strike to attain a serious matter of concern why Dheyman-Rajbanshi in Barak valley has chosen Assamese medium in their schools for their children in a place where majority of schools are in Bengali medium. In fact Assamese medium schools establishment are very recent and materialised at initiative of local people and support received from Assam. Because of politics of language and power equation between dominant and dominated. Once Assamese medium schools come up, Dheyman-Rajbanshi are keen to invite teachers from other places of Assam like Nagaon, Jorhat, Sibsagar and Barpeta. Teachers appointed in their schools contribute for their sustenance vis-à-vis language.

Assamese schools in Dheyman-Rajbanshi villages are initially established by villagers at their own cost, but subsequently their efforts were rewarded by ruling class in Assam. In order to impart education, teachers have been invited from Brahmaputra valley. Sacrifice of teachers are not less in any way. Some are in service for over twenty five years serving at a nominal honorarium. Act of acceptance of schooling for children in a place of Bengali majority can be seen a voice of protest in state of affair. So, behind acceptance of Assamese language as a medium of instruction for coming Dheyman-Rajbanshi generation, a collective consciousness is at work which could be a silent protest against prevailing system and medium of instruction.

At same time, it could be politics of education when one village old man says, 'we are in Assam and we need to make our children learn Assamese which could offer them a certainty'. Over years, members of the community realised that decades of independence had made no difference in their life. Bengali schools could not offer them any prospect to their children. Their political right to cast vote is never taken into account since the villages are spread across several assembly constituencies and in each segment Dheyman-

Rajbanshi voters are seen in good number. Even having constitutional right and fulfilling all other criteria, in reality, voice of our people is getting marginalised and suppressed. Therefore, most of us show least interest to vote. The table highlights voting behaviour of people

**Table –VI.4
Voting Behaviour**

Sl. No	Casting of vote	No.of Respondents		Total	Percentage
		Male	Female		
1	Cast vote	148	132	280	93.33
2	Do not cast vote	8	12	20	6.67
3	Grand Total			300	100.00

The table shows majority (93.33%) of them cast their vote regularly and only (6.67%) do not cast vote. From above data, it is clear that most have interest in casting their vote. Thus, it can be said that majority of Dheyant-Rajbanshi are politically conscious about their right of voting. Among those who do not cast vote are of the view that they have no faith in democracy, only few of them are of view that due to long distant voting centre they do not feel like going to cast their vote.

In addition, they say that their political aspiration through present vote or election of candidates will never help them to have autonomy and therefore they often take Assamese language not only to keep themselves safe from other, but also show indifference or opposition to local-Bengali hegemony. That is why probably late Biswanath Rajbanshi strategically adopted an alternative method to popularise Assamese language among people of the Dheyan-Rajbanshi in Barak valley. He initiated dialogue with political leaders of Brahmaputra valley and invited them to visit their inhabited villages in Barak valley. Due to his incessant efforts and contribution, most high officials posted at that time in Barak valley were Assamese speakers from Brahmaputra valley, who also provided leadership to community and interacted with them on burning issues¹³.

But contrary to this, Dipak Kumar Roy offers a different interpretation saying members of the community gave up their title like Barman, Singh etc. in favour of Rajbanshi to retain a different identity since Dimasa people too used such title¹⁴. Whatever may be the reason, at one point of time the community collectively took a decision to retain Rajbanshi title to show a new identity, which reflects politics of affirmation and convenience.

¹³. Dipak Kumar Roy, RajbanshiSamajAroSanskritir Katha, Kolkata, Sopan, 2012,P.31.

¹⁴ Ibid. 29.

It is also said that to strengthen Assamese solidarity in a Bengali dominated land, leaders like Nilmoni Phukon and Gopinath Bordoloi arrived in Cachar and paid visit to their villages in particular. Gopinath Bordoloi expressed utter surprise to learn that Assamese people are living in this part of Assam (Dheyman-Rajbanshi are considered integral part of greater Assamese society) which was beyond his belief. With their persuasion and motivation the community in Barak valley collectively accepted Rajbanshi title enmasse and today each and every member of nine village is known as Rajbanshi village. The community has shown a great challenge to take this collective decision to achieve greater involvement in process of attending a new identity.

Chieftainship Dilemma Continuity and Contradiction

Institution of chieftain is prevalent in the Dheyman-Rajbanshi community from its early evolution. Each of the nine Dheyman-Rajbanshi villages possess one chieftain. The chief is called 'Mukhtiyar' or *Gaobudaby* its community members. He is regarded as head of the village. He holds final decision on social, political, administrative and religious affairs. Chieftain guides

political life of his village. He arbitrates dispute and decides case of civil or criminal within village and also organises developmental activities. Villagers are not free to move on their own when a matter concerns the whole village without the sanction of chief.

The chief has right and power to dispense punishment to offender found guilty of committing murder or theft. Chief is not only judicial head but also prime executive of the community. It is his primarily responsibility to ensure non-occurrence of quarrel, dispute and threaten in community life. He is considered defender of his village against outside attack.

Thus, institution of chieftainship is perennial in Dheyani-Rajbanshi custom and tradition. It also maintains unity and integrity among them. For Dheyani-Rajbanshi culture and identity which can be substituted by no other institutions. Their political life too is based on chieftainship. It is pivot around which their administration and life evolve. They believe that their chief is able to protect interest of community more than others. He plays unifying role in society by providing leadership and solidarity. Despite of penetration of modernity, institution of chieftainship still exists among Dheyani-Rajbanshi.

Dispute Settlement Intra-Community Amiability

Village disputes are very rare in among community members, and if so happen, that get settled by villagers in presence of a village headman called ‘Muktiyar’. Muktiyar takes lead role to settle village dispute amicably and another man designated as Hanjaba is entrusted to negotiate any problem.¹⁵.

Prevalence of caste in the community is given in the following table:

**Table VI.5
Participation in Caste Programme**

Sl. No	Participation in Caste Panchayat	No. of Respondents		Total	Percentage
		Male	Female		
1	Participate	138	120	258	86.00
2	Do not participate	20	22	42	14.00
3	Grand Total			300	100.00

The above data indicate majority of Dheyman-Rajbanshi (86%) know about their caste leader. While less than one fifth of people(14%) being simple do not have idea about the same.

Many personalities from Dheyman-Rajbanshi community participated in freedom struggle and in order to escape police atrocities, they had to remain

¹⁵. Tanuj Kumar Dey, Role of Folklore in Constructing Identity, NERO,Guwahati,Assam, 2011, P.66.

hidden for days together but their names and sacrifice were never taken into history writing, not even name of Barak Keshari, Biswanath Rajbanshi. Second important figure of the community is Khelendra Rajbanshi of Dewan basti in list of local hero, but their contribution is never realised by other non-Dheyman-Rajbanshi communities in the valley.

Rajbanshi who expired in 1987 at age of eighty seven was instrumental in shaping Rajbanshi identity. He realised that without a written record, the community in Barak valley would soon fall to oblivion. It was a shame for the community and whatever exists in oral form would soon perish. His first book was written in Bengali as Koch Rajbanshi Dheyman Itihas in 1963. His second book was Kacherar Koch Rajbanshi Itihas. So he took immense pain to write a chronicle on community way back in 1968 but till this day the book remained unpublished and it is partially lost. Both books remained traceless and a glimpse of it can be had in Hussain's account. (2008)¹⁶. He took part in freedom struggle under leadership of Sanat Kumar Das and Arun Kumar Chanda and remained homeless for days together.

Alongside these developments, storytelling re-emerged as a method with which people might begin to challenge dominant social discourse through

¹⁶. Ismail Hossain, Barak Upatyakar Asomiyar Itihash. Gauhati. JyotiPrakashani. 2008, Pp. 130-132.

their assertion of non-dominant cultural construction, personal identity and world view in public sphere.

The community further raise a voice of protest since they experience a high degree of social exclusion in different spheres of their life. It is not just economic exclusion from where they could adopt abilities to cope up it has been seen in way they have made their presence felt in different metro cities. It is more a political exclusion, a general and pervasive inability to exercise political power by influencing public discourse. They fail to draw political mileage because of distribution of population pattern spread across several assembly segments.

Change Question Scheduled, Invited or Imposed

Most communities of the Northeast with a Mongoloid origin are included in first list of scheduled tribe (ST). However, Koch-Rajbanshi, recognised as tribes by Assam Forest Manual, 1891 and allowed to remain within tribal belt too, somehow deprived of and missed the opportunity. Probably to contain damage, Assam government issued a circular directing all concerned to give special consideration to claim of Koch-Rajbanshi at time of filling up of Hindus (vide letter number APPTT/1130/7005-29 of July 1, 1940). Koch-

Rajbanshi of undivided Assam did not find a place in ST list, while their brethren in North Bengal districts secured special protection by being included in Scheduled Caste (SC) list.

Aggrieved Koch-Rajbanshi having majority, and not immediately Dheyant-Rajbanshi of the valley, of undivided Assam moved to Backward Class Commission, headed by Kaka Saheb Kalelkar, on whose recommendation they were notified as Other Backward Class (OBC) in 1953. Subsequently, Koch-Rajbanshi of undivided Assam were further divided into two categories – Koch-Rajbanshi of undivided Goalpara district who were recognised as More Other Backward Class (MOBC) while the rest in other districts remained OBC. Now the community is segmented into three categories – SC in North Bengal, MOBC in Goalpara and OBC in other district of Assam.

Koch-Rajbanshi Sammilani, which was established with a view to work for socio-economic cultural uplift of people made a concerted effort by placing representation and submitting memoranda. The table represents data about the *Koch-Rajbanshi samaj Unnayan Samity*

Table- VI.6
Dheyant-Rajbanshi Awareness of
Koch-Rajbanshi Samaj Unnayan Samity (KRSUS)

Sl. No	Awareness of KRSUS	No. of Respondents		Total	Percentage
		Male	Female		
1	Yes	110	88	198	66
2	No	32	70	102	34
3	Grand Total			300	100.00

The table indicates more than half Dheyant-Rajbanshi (66%) have knowledge about Koch Samaj Unnayan Samity and (34%) have no idea about their apex organisation.

Along with pressure exerted by the above organisation, now since much before they are unitedly fighting to get tribal status. In 1968, for first time, Koch-Rajbanshi demanded scheduled tribe status, though there was no clear indication of whether they performed ST or SC status. In 1969, above ambiguity regarding scheduled status was resolved and a categorical demand for SC status (as in North Bengal) emerged. In 1970, there was a strong articulation of resentment against recommendation of parliamentary select committee for inclusion of Koch of Meghalaya in ST list and earlier demanded for inclusion in SC list of Koch-Rajbanshi of Assam-Meghalaya

was reiterated. From initial ambiguity (till 1968) to demand for SC status (till 70), ethnic expectation of Koch-Rajbanshi of Assam graduated to a demand for scheduled tribe status.

It is obvious that Koch-Rajbanshi of Assam suffered from deep-rooted identity crisis, at one point demanding SC status and at another painstakingly asserting their Mongoloid root. However, this sort of identity crisis appears to be nothing new with Koch-Rajbanshi in general. In North Bengal district too, they were found to have passed through at least four district identities in different census—from Koch to Rajbanshi (1872), Rajbanshi to Bratya Kshatriya (1891), Bratya Kshatriya to Kshatriya Rajbanshi (1911, 1921) and Kshatriya Rajbanshi to only Kshatriya (1931).

Shift in realisation of Koch-Rajbanshi of Assam must be understood in context of political development around them. During seventies, there was spectacular advancement of different Mongoloid groups in Northeast. Through a re-organisation of Assam a number of separate hill states emerged. Ethnic assertion by plain tribal's and remaining hill tribal's of Assam, too, gained momentum. Demand for a separate land for Bodo Kachari began to catch imagination. Koch-Rajbanshi, though scattered, have

a sizeable presence in the area that also happens to be core of proposed land for Bodo and hence, not mere protection but an equal sky in decision-making process in Bodoland appeared necessary for them. In a tribal land, SC status could never provide anyone any guarantee for equal political say. Thus ST status was needed. And it is against this backdrop that shift in Koch-Rajbanshi realisation must be understood.

Demand for ST status was raised on August 2, 1980 and till date the issue remains unresolved in Koch-Rajbanshi agenda. During past two decade they transformed themselves from an apologetic group of people to an assertive community demanding a share indecision-making process. Bodo movement, too, have had its impact on changing nature of Koch-Rajbanshi assertion. Fratricidal clash between non-Bodo made them to sink or swim together. As a result, political capacity of Koch-Rajbanshi (in coalition with non-Bodo group) increased manifold. Today, mention of Kamatapur does not shock anyone – though it remains a mere game in political probability.

Koch-Rajbanshi drives to achieve ST status remains in hope and belief. Former Member of Parliament N.T. Das tabled a bill in parliament seeking inclusion of community in constitution (ST) order, 1950. However, due to

dissolution of Lok Sabha in 1970 that remained unmaterialised. Same fate awaited late Suraj Bhan's Bill in 1979. An ordinance is passed in 1996 to accord ST status. But this too, lapsed after being extended three times. An amendment bill to constitution (ST) order 1950 is introduced in 1997 and referred to parliamentary select committee that too is lost in wilderness.

In meantime, Koch-Rajbanshi received clearance from Tribal Research Institute, Assam Government, registrar-general of India, parliamentary select committee and National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Now, union ministry of tribal affairs need to be convinced to urge centre to allow ministry to move an amendment to existing act¹⁷. So either Koch-Rajbanshi in other place or Dheyani-Rajbanshi in Barak valley, all in entirety put concerted effort and struggle, to achieve their target.

¹⁷. P.S.Datta, *Autonomy Movements in Assam*, 1993 New Delhi. Omsons Publication. Pp.41-53.

Tribal Identity and Koch-Rajbanshi Present Scenario of Development

In Assam demand of *Janajatikaran* (Schedule Tribe status) of six communities, particularly Koch-Rajbanshi wherein Dheyman-Rajbanshi also took part, provoked any sensible person to think these identity related questions as to why government is declining their demand of tribal status. According to Registrar General of India these communities do not fulfil five criteria. According to centre, any community, which fulfils five criteria i.e. indication of primitive trait, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with community at large and backwardness –can be considered for Schedule Tribe status for which these communities do not fit and hence cannot be classified under schedule tribe status. But these communities make their self-assertive evaluation that they fulfil all aforesaid criteria which have been undermined by centre.

Indian constitution and government policy which are believed to be millstone of life cycle and rule of law often play superior role in classifying different communities through most of its inherited policies from ‘colonial masters’. Britishers based on their work used such criteria to determine Scheduled Tribe (ST). They however did not have any political expediency.

But after independence Indian state awfully have been politicising issue of ST for its political purpose and for which indigenous people are harassed, becoming hostile to each other and even developing heartedness amongst themselves. In Assam, before every election, whether it is assembly or general, political leaders' make promises (entirely for their political purpose) to scheduling these communities under tribal status. Subsequently movements for tribal status of these groups became silent. But as election passes leaders became silent stones and again these groups start their demonstration and protest march as they deem appropriate from time to time.

Koch-Rajbanshi or Dheyani-Rajbanshi socio-cultural identity has come across a long transition. Over time and space, it has taken different contour. It is perhaps one of the identities, which experienced temporality as well as spatial continuity since time immemorial. Identity of Koch-Rajbanshi remains like 'Alice in wonderland' which finding its space within multicultural social configuration of Indian nation-state that have been contained by other dominant cultural entities.

However, recent emergence of identity as well as ST movement in Assam shows its deep resentment against government as well as other dominant cultural entities that have for a long been paying no heed to its cultural and socio-political privileges as well as resisting its demand of ST respectively. Today demand of ST status by Koch-Rajbanshi in Assam has opened up a theoretical space for one of the most marginal and oppressed groups to confront and re-negotiate with identity like Bengali and Assamese that have for a long time been dual identity of this community¹⁸.

Nalini Ranjan Ray (2013) observes in Assam almost fifty percent population owes their origin to Rajbanshi community. They are in majority in number of districts of lower Assam, whom government cannot annoy. Demand of All Assam Koch-Rajbanshi Students Union is either grant of ST status to the community or else, statehood for community. If statehood is given for Koch-Rajbanshi, size of present Assam will almost decrease to half. Other majority communities or tribes have already their own political set ups by way of regional council under fifth and sixth schedule of Indian Constitution. Ahom, by whose name the state is known for majority in Assam, who also demand for ST status together with some more

¹⁸<http://www.coochbehar.nic.in>

communities having tribal affinity. Grant of such status to few more communities is going to create lot of political problems for government.¹⁹

Together with this community, other five tribal related communities such as Tai Ahom, Maran, Matak and tea tribe communities demand ST status. Their demand for such status is being vehemently opposed by all fourteen recognised tribals of Assam led by Bodo tribal organisation for reason that if such status is given to these six demanding communities, very idea of special right given to depressed tribals will be diluted. However, these tribes are not averse to other alternative of reservation for these six communities including Koch-Rajbanshi. Fully knowing precarious scenario, state government is in dilemma over the issue.

Koch-Rajbanshi Students' Organisation and Other

Most student organisations of Koch-Rajbanshi vis-à-vis Dheyman-Rajbanshi of Assam are demanding for inclusion of their community in scheduled tribes list. They are not happy with present status of Other Backward Caste; as such, arrangement neither created enough job opportunity for them nor given them political recognition like Bodo. Both Koch-Rajbanshi and Bodo

¹⁹.NaliniRanjan Ray, KoochRajbanshi and Kamatapuri The truth unveiled,Centre for Koch Rajbanshi Studies and Development (CKRSD) Guwhati, 2013.P. 119.

form absolute majority in lower Assam but do not get minimum job opportunity. For example in Bongaigaon district total population is almost equally divided between Bodo and Koch-Rajbanshi, but they hardly get job compared to their numerical strength. As of now, their share of 27% reservation as OBC gets further shared by other communities of the state. They demand for schedule their community to at least get 7.5% of job.

Thus, a serious flaw in reservation policy is observed including other reserved category of people in state. Hence, too being majority in numerical strength, the community is deprived.²⁰

All *Koch-Rajbanshi Kshatriya Sammelan* has a branch in Barak valley and the organisation has been working to relate the community to Rajbanshi living elsewhere. It is in contact with other members living outside Barak valley through Koch-Rajbanshi Kshatriya Sammalan. Cachar district branch of all Koch Rajbanshi Students Union is situated at Harinagar.

²⁰.NaliniRanjan Ray, KochRajbanshi and Kamatapuri The truth unveiled, Centre for Koch Rajbanshi Studies and Development (CKRSD) Guwhati, 2013.P. 88.

Barak Valley and Political Participation Koch and Non-Koch

Dheyant-Rajbanshi is not concerned with national and state politics. Political participation of the community is poor. After implementation of panchayat raj, Dheyant-Rajbanshi started to participate in local politics. But in three-tier panchayat raj system Dheyant-Rajbanshi is not able to make a representative from the community at Zilaparishad, anchalic panchayat or gram panchayat level till now. Only village ward member of Dheyant inhabited villages are from their own community. Ward members of the community are not well aware of policies and programmes provided by government for development of rural people. Therefore, government plans and policies do not properly getting implemented in Dheyant-Rajbanshi inhabited villages.

Government facilities like village road, housing, sanitation, electricity, supply of water, etc. are not properly available in villages of Dheyant-Rajbanshi in Cachar district. Poor people of the community do not get work under MGNREGA programme, BPL card and job card. Senior citizen and widowed women are not getting pension. But it is of utmost importance young generation of the community is trying to draw attention of political leaders at national and state level to retain their original tribal identity.

Conclusion

Political awareness and participation of Dheyman-Rajbanshi community is relatively poor in national, state and local politics. It is understood from the present study that they have somewhat apathy towards present kind of politics, but they find difficult to dissociate themselves from revolving political culture. Their annoyance vis-à-vis resentment is getting articulated in different forum of activity. Reason behind such kind of continuous political apathy is understood from deprivation to marginalisation unlike other people in the valley, because to most of them in Barak valley their voice is never taken into account even their number and villages are spread across several assembly constituencies and in each segment Dheyman-Rajbanshi voters are in good number too. The last chapter is all about conclusion.