

Rai Saheb Panchanan Barma: A Reformer from the Margin

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Abstract

Panchanan Barma was intellectually hurt at the outrage at the hands of the dominant discourse as well as the overall social expatriation. Panchanan Barma led Kshatriyazation is an interesting development to save the community from disorientation, disturbance of direction and insignification. This awareness of the subject position in a way allowed Barma to have a cultural positivity of the third space to strike at the tyrannical histories of domination and misrecognition. What Barma could trace was a threatened culture in the relation to self and the other. In the early years of his life he could feel that his community or the Rajbanshis have the right to signify from the periphery of authorized power against the persistence of tradition offered by the power of 'otherness' to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are in the minority.

[Key Words: domination, misrecognition, dominant discourse, disorientation, social expatriation]

Panchanan Barma(1866-1935) was a Rajbanshi leader and reformer from Cooch Behar. He established Kshatriya Sabha in view of enkindling the Brahminical values and practices among the people from Rajbanshi community. Panchanan Barma being an intellectual an enlightened representative of the rajbanshi community was undergoing the pangs of dislocation and marginalization under upper cast domination through social oppression. In the early years of his career, he started practicing law at Rangpur court. In Rangpur he was shocked by the refusal of a high cast lawyer to use a 'toga' (lawyers gown) previously used by him. This early jolt gave him the idea of a borderline community and had the feeling and experience of 'othernesses'. He was then trying to come out of the trap of the illusory society which could offer an Indian unity as a whole to stop such

marginalization and hegemonic oppression. On the first day of the school year in 1942, Derrida was also expelled from his *lycée* by French administrators implementing *anti-Semitic* quotas set by the *Vichy* government. Derrida's anti-centric discourses on human sciences was to a great extent influenced by his early experiences of anti- Semitic racial discrimination.

The border was well defined and he stepped out to blow the racist confines of the society. He became intellectually hurt at the outrage at the hands of the dominant discourse as well as the overall social expatriation. Panchanan Barma led Kshatriyazation is an interesting development to save the community from disorientation, disturbance of direction and insignification. According to Bhabha

“ the move away from the singularities of class or gender , generation , institutional location, geopolitical locale , sexual orientation – that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world”(Bhabha-2)

This awareness of the subject position in a way allowed Barma to have a cultural location of the third space to strike at the tyrannical histories of domination and misrecognition. What Barma could trace was a threatened culture in the relation to self and the other. In the early years of his life he could feel that his community or the Rajbanshis have the right to signify from the periphery of authorized power against the persistence of tradition offered by the power of ‘otherness’ to be re-inscribed through the conditions of “contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are in the minority” (Bhabha-3).

His Kshatriyazation movement among Rajbanshi community of Bengal is in fact a movement towards identity assertion in the mid of social and political domination. This assertion is very vital for destroying racial inertness and subjugation. Edward W. Said says how such inertness may work if:

“We are an immobilized people. We are unlearned. We are unmotivated. We have not been able to concentrate our minds and hearts on the problem, which is nothing less the robbery of our land.”(Edward W.Said-291)

Panchanan Barma was very clear about his position and tried to resist the same ‘robbery of the land’. In order to be respected and accepted by the upper caste Bengali , Panchanan realised that the Rajbanshis must

be re-grouped and get organized and educated which he tried to achieve through the Kshatriyas with a royal lineage, suggesting a historical link with Bhashkarvarman, the king of Kamrupa. In support of this claim the movement involved a ceremonial Kshatriyaisation process – brahminical rituals were performed to convert thousands of Rajbanshis to Kshatriya Rajbanshis in the villages of North Bengal.

Rai Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma had enormous academic excellence. In 1885-86, gazetteer, the report prepared by the then Superintendent on education matters Bablu Kalidas states that:

“ It is indeed very gratifying to note that Panchanan Sircar, a native of Cooch Behar who passed the M.E Examination in the first division from the Mathabhanga School succeeded to secure the first place in the general list of the Rajshahi Division” (The Cooch Behar Annual Administrative Report: 1885-86). He grew up from a state which was quite pessimistic towards education and from an Illiterate society to achieve the first lesson of education. However, after his H.S. Examination Panchanan was admitted in Jenkins’ School and having stood first in the Middle School in the Rajshahi Division he did not require paying fees of the school for four years as he was awarded with the Medal Scholarship of the government of Rs 4/- per month.

In spite of being the first M.A.B.L in the entire Rajbanshi community he returned the native state of Cooch Behar in search of respectable job and having a brilliant academic career he could only secure the

post of Hostel Superintendent of Cooch Behar Jenkins' High School. In fact the rejection of Panchanan Sarkar to Panchanan's application for job by the Cooch Behar state proved to be a blessing in disguise as it was the step towards the transformation of Panchanan Sarkar to Panchanan Barma hailed as the father of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya community. As stated by Bhabha:

“What is theoretically innovative and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the

articulation of differences. These in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood –singular or communal –that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself.”(Bhabha-2)

As a social intellectual Panchanan Barma initiated the new signs of identity. From margin and from being other Barma tried to assert the subaltern voice in the process of social transmutation to a new historical location.

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