Caste Movements in Bengal – It's Roots and Relevance: A Historical Assessment

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There are many debates regarding the structure of the Indian society. It is well known to all that the Indian society is a fusion of multi – castes, races and religions which is consolidated in different phases of evolution through the ages. N.K.Dutt writes, "The most important factors in the development of caste were the racial struggle between the fair-skinned Aryans and the dark- skinned non-Aryans; the division of labour leading to the formation of occupational classes; and the tribal differences, especially among the non-Aryans, which survived the spread of common Aryan culture."[1] Dumont argued that the structure of Indian society was constructed around a single true principle expressed through religious idioms .[2] T.N. Madan argued that any search for secular elements in Indian cultural tradition is a futile exercise, because in this culture the power of the king is supposedly subordinated to the authority of priests.[3]

A major feature of caste system is that it had important functional significance too, as each caste was associated with hereditary traditional occupation indicative also of a social division of labour. It is here that caste could perhaps be compared with class which can be best defined in terms of the focus and relations of productions and ownership of property.[4] Gail Omvedt argued that Indian caste feudalism was consolidated through an alliance of Brahmanism and state power. Colonial rule used this caste structure, transformed it and to a large extent strengthen it to its own benefit.[5]

The word 'Varna' is found in the Vedic literature, but there is a debate   on the meaning of the Varna. To Layman it means simply the division of Hindu society in to four orders, viz. Brahmana (Brahmin, traditionally priest and scholar), Kshatriya (ruler and soldier), Vaishya (merchant) and Shudra (Peasant, labourer and servant). The first three castes are 'twice born' as the men from them are entitled to don the sacred thread at the Vedic rite of upanayana, while the shudras   are not. The untouchables are outside Varna scheme .[6]

Layman's view is criticised by different scholars. According to M.N. Srinivas Varna, which literally means colour originally referred to the distinction between   Arya and Dasa.[7] Professor Ghurya writes, '............... in the Rg-Veda word ' varna is never applied to any one of these classes. It is only the Aryan varna or the Aryan people that is contrasted with the Dasa varna. The Satapatha Brahmana on the other hand, describes the four classes as the four varnas. 'Varna' means 'colour' and it was in this sense that the word seems to have been employed in contrasting the Arya and the Dasa, referring to their fair and dark colours respectively. The colour connotation of the word was so strong that later on when the classes came to be regularly described as varnas, four different colours were supposed to be distinguished.[8]

Social structure of Bengal was, more or less, as like as other parts of India though it hads some distinctive character. It is relevant to mention here that prior to the penetration of Aryan culture or Sanskritization in Bengal it was divided into several Janapadas such as Pundrabardhana , Varendra, Samatat, Harical, Banga, Rarh etc. And the society of these Janapadas was out of four- fold caste system of the Aryans, divided into several professional groups. It is very interesting to note here that all these people like the pundras, the vangas, the vagadhas etc. belonged to the non- Aryan primitive tribal communities. Besides these peoples are also to be placed in the border lands of the Aryavarta or Madhya desa, i.e. in East, West and South. Of these peoples again, only the pundras and the savaras are found elaborately described is both literary and epigraphic records   as peoples par- excellence of Bengal. Again in the Aitareya – Aranyaka   there is a list of peoples who were guilty of transgression and who have been compared with birds.[9]

It is well known that the Aryanisation or Sanskritization took place in Bengal in delaying unlike other parts of India. Actually, the Aryanisation actively started in Bengal from the Pala period and it was consolidated during the Sena period. Naturally the caste system as a product of Aryanistion or Brahmanisation   was fabricated in Bengal during the Sena period, particularly during the reign of Ballal Sen. Sekhar Bandyapadhyay writes, A rigorous resurgence of Brahmanism really took place during the

subsequent period when the Palas and the Chandras , the two indigenous Buddhist dynasties of Bengal, were replaced by the two immigrant orthodox Brahmanical dynasties , the Senas fron Karnatic and the Barmanas from kalinga . It was during this period of Sena- Barman hegemony (c.11th to 13th century A.D.) that Bengal witnessed the formalisation ,as its behaviral norms were now rigorously structured by a member of Brahman, Smritikaras, beginning   from Bhavadebabha of the late Pala period, down to Jimutabahana, Aniruddha Bhatta and the Sena king Ballal Sen himself in the late twelfth century.[10]

Besides the literary texts referring to Bengal in respect of Aryanisation or Brahmanisation , epigraphic records discovered so far from various parts of Bengal and her neighbouring areas also furnish ample materials regarding the gradual infiltration and settlement of the Indo- Aryan speaking peoples and their torch – bearers.[11] That the Vedic Aryans or the Brahmanas immigrated into Bengal and were endowed with free gifts of land for their settlements, primarily made by the kings and sometimes by the individuals as well, becomes evident from all subsequent inscription. At the initial stage, the infiltration of the Brahmanas into Bengal was very much encouraged by the allurement of obtaining free grants of land or even the villages were offered as gifts either to an individual Brahmin or to a community of Brahmins for their settlements.[12]

At the initial stage of the origin of caste system there were broadly two castes in Bengal namely (1) Brahman and (2) Sudras. In course of a few centuries Brahmans were divided into separate categories. The original seven hundred Brahmana families of Bengal were treated as 'Satsali' Brahmanas. Later on, according to their geographical location, they came to be divided into Rarhis Barendries etc. Apart from these, there was Vedic Brahman, Kamrupi Brahmans Agradani Brahman etc. in Bengal.

Details of caste systems among the Hindus have been shown in (1) Brihaddharma ,(2) Brahma Vaivarta Purana and (3) Jatimala which is a part of the Parsurama Samhita.[13]According to Brehaddharmapurana excepting the Brahmins all others are mixed castes and they all grouped as 'Sudra'. These mixed castes have been classified into three categories as fallows –

(1) Uttam Sankara (Higher mixed caste)
(2) Madhyam Sankara (Middle mixed caste)
(3) Adhama or Antaja Sankara (Lower mixes caste)

Besides these three mixed classes, there are other three classes as follows- (I) Mlechha (ii) Sat-Sudra (iii) Asat- Sudra.[14]
The following castes are treated as Uttam Sankar –

1. Karana – writer and scribe. They are regarded as Sat – Sudra, i.e., clean Sudra.
2. Ambas tha – Those who adapt the profession of medicine
3. Ugra – warrior.
4. Magadha – bards or courtiers .
5. Tantubaya – Tanti (Weaver),
6. Gandhabanik – spice dealer.
7. Napit – barber .
8. Gopa – dealing with milk or cow.
9. Karmakar – black smith .
10. Toulik – who weight Koyal.
11. Kumbhakar – pottery maker.
12. Kangsakara – Kansari – Utensil maker.
13. Sankhabanik – dealing with conch shells.
14. Dasa – cultivator.
15. Barujibi – cultivator of betel- leaf.
16. Modak or Moira – Confectioner.
17. Malakar – garland maker.
18. Suta - charan or gayak.
19. Rajputra.

20. Tambuli, tamli – betel leaf dealer.

MadhyanSankar castes –
21. Takshana – sculpture.
22. Rajak – washer man.
23. Swarnakar – goldsmith
24. Subarnabanik – gold dealer,
25. Abhir or Ahir – milkman, cattle keeper,
26. Tailakar or Teli – oilman,
27. Dhibar – fisherman.
28. Soundik – Sunri,
29. Nata – dancer and musician.
30. Shavak, sharak, Shavar.
31. Shekhar,
32. Jalik or Jalia or Jele – fisher man.
33. AdhamSankara or Antaja Castes –
34. Malegrahi or Malegrihi,
35. Kurava,
36. Chandala or chanral,
37. Baur – Bauri
38. Taksha – Takashankar – carpenter
39. Charmakar or chamar – leather maker
40. Ghattajivi – ferryman
41. Dalabahi – Dula Behara
42. Malla – Malo[15]

The people belonged to Adham Sankara or Antaja have no position in the Brahmanical caste system. They were treated as Mlechhas or untouchable. There were no traces of Kshatriya and Baishayas in Bengal. Kshatriyas were treated as professional group and they were involved in the administrative and official work as a minister and clerk of the Royal King. Since the 9th and 10th century A.D. Kayasthas were treated themselves as separate caste and it is assumed that since then the caste system in Bengal was originated. M.N. Srinivas writes, "In fact, in peninsular India there are no genuine Kshatriyas and Vaishayas. In this area these two categories only refers to the local castes which have claimed to be Kshatriyas and Vaishayas by virtue of their occupation and marital tradition, and the claim is not seriously disputed by the others."[16]

In the process of caste system in Bengal Brahmanas gradually became powerful and established the honorable position in the society, culture and polity. They had been granted lands for their livelihood and religious activities, sometimes they had been granted village or gain, in accordance with the name of villages the Brahmanas used their title such as Bhatta to Bhattacharja, Chatta to Chattapadhyay or Chatterjee , Bandhya to Bandyopadhyay or Banerjee.[17] In the wave of time Brahmanas extended their right and orthodox dogma over the general people of Bengal. They created various social criterions or norms, customs and ritual rites to impose over the separate caste.

In course of time in the evolution of caste system of Bengal like other parts of India people belonged to lower professions became untouchable or Antaja. They had to live out of the ambit of the so called civic society .they had been deprived and hated by the higher caste people though they were the indigenous people of Bengal. On the other hand Kayasthas occupied the dominant position in the society of Bengal treated them as the higher caste placed after the Brahmanas. N.k. Dutt writes, "In Bengal we find the Kayasthas well-established in society in the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. From the inscriptions of the period it is learnt that the kayasthas formed a large percentage of the officials in the country and that no transfer of landed property could take place without their knowledge and permission.[18] Like the Kayasthas , the Vaidhyas were in honourable position in Bengal. On account of various factors the development of caste

took a peculiar turn in Bengal and one of the results was the formation of the Vaidya caste in its present shape. From its birth it fell under the category of Ambastha as defined in the law of books. There is no doubt that Brahmanas ,Kayathas and other castes have contributed their blood to the formation of the Vaidya caste in Bengal . The name Ambastha of the Dharmashashtras was found a suitable appellation for the new-born caste with its mixed blood and profession of medicine, though the name Vaidya also remained side by side. The close relationship between the Vaidyas and the Kayasthas in Bengal up till recent years is revealed in the genealogical records of the Vaidhya community.[19]

Caste system was proliferated in Bengal like other parts of the country in the medieval age getting more new criterions in new forms in the society by the orthodox Brahmanas. During the period three distress social customs namely (1) Kulinism (2) Burning of Sati and (3) Slave trade were originated. As a result of it, Hindu society was divided into numerous castes, sub-castes and groups. The upper castes enjoyed most of the privileges, land and wealth; on the other hand lower caste people were more deprived and oppressed. The agriculturists, the labourers, artisans all belonged to this class.

Beside the rigidity of caste system among Hindus led by Brahmanas and creating distance between Hindus and Muslims for imposing the dogmas by the orthodox Hindus and Muslims , there raised lot of movements in the medieval India in persuasion of the philosophy of Sufi and Bhakti to maintain social and cultural synthesis in India . Both the preachers of Sufi and Bhakhti denied the caste system and division of men. They believed all men are originated from the same creator or Almighty. Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay writes, "An organized protest against caste disabilities had first appeared in Bengal in the shape of the orthodox, protestant Bhakti movement between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. It was led by Sri Chaitanya and his disciples whose avowed goal was the social and spiritual upliftment of the oppressed sections of the society."[20]

Caste system got a new shape in the colonial period. It is known to all that the colonial government brought the modernization in India from Europe and introduced it in the different field of their reign such as social reforms, education, economic sector and administration. Naturally British Government wanted to abolish many superstitions and evil customs for reforming the society; on the other hand they used caste politics and communal politics for the convenience of their administration. To Shekhar Bandhopadhaya, " On the one hand , The colonial government through all these executive and constitutional measures, were perhaps seriously trying to redress the existing social imbalance in Indian Society. But on the other hand, by encouraging self-awareness and political aspirations of the lower caste, they tried to keep the nation divided and weak, at a time when anti-imperialist agitation was gathering momentum all over the country."[21]

Since the first half of the 19th century western education was introduced by the British, as a result a renaissance took place in Bengal, and then other parts of India. Ram Mohan Roy was one of the social reformers in the history of Bengal, nay India. In spite of being a Sanskrit educated pandit he demanded to introduce western education to the government because he knew that without the western education or modern education salvation of the society could not be possible. His famous contributions were to abolish Sati practice, the age old devastating evil practice. After a long duration of movement Governor General Lord William Bantinck abolished the practice of Sati.

Vidyasagar was another social reformer of Bengal who started social movement for emancipation of the society. He fought for widow remarriage, abolition of child marriage, introduction of women education. Young Bengal party led by Derozeo played a significant role in the History of social movement of Bengal. They wanted to abolish all the superstition and bad practices and customs of the Hindu religion. Apart from all these, Keshab Chandra Sen, Bankim Chandra Chattapadhyay, Swami Vivekananda etc. all the intellectuals involved themselves in the social reform movement of Bengal.

It is true that all these social movements of Bengal had a positive role in the history of Bengal. In spite of that there were many limitations of these movements as because all most all the leaders of these

movements were coming from higher caste and elite class, they could not abolish the age old caste system and various superstitions of the society. V.N. Datta argued that Rammohan, who was not a radical, failed to break through the entire circle of customary ideas. He wanted to work within the framework of the system of ideas, and improve, but not innovate .[22] Nimai Sadan Bose writes, "Rammohan, we know, was sympathetic to the cause of widows and longed for the improvement of their condition. But he is not known to have done anything concrete towards legalising their marriage."[23]

Sumit Kumar Sarkar, a renowned historian raised many questions about the renaissance and the role of elite class intellectuals of Bengal. He writes, "The early research of Anil Seal and John Broomfield made it very fashionable for a time to consider the English educated as elite ' groups' defined basically by their upper – caste status. It is certainly true that the traditional 'literary castes tended to take move easily to the new education. Thus 84.7 percent of Hindu college students in Bengal come from the three bhadralok castes of Brahman, Kayastha, or Baidya in 1883 – 84'[24]

Caste Movements in Bengal:

With the introduction of Western education, social and economic reforms, development of communication under colonial rule a renaissance took place; some people belonged to lower castes accepted western education that wanted to mobilise their community from their degradation and hated condition. In these circumstances lot of caste movements started during the colonial period. It was in the 1920; however that dalits began to organize strongly   and independently throughout many regions of India. The most important of the early dalit movements use the Ad – Dharm movements in the Punjab, the movement under Ambedkar in Maharashtra mainly based among the Mahars which had its organisational beginnings in 1924, the Namasudra movement in Bengal, the Adi-Dravida movement in Tamil Nadu, the Adi-Andhra movement in Andhra which had its first conference in 1917; the Adi-Karnataka movement, the Adi-Hindu movement mainly centred around Kanpur in UP, and the organising oh the Pulayas and Cherumans in Kerala.[25]

Caste movements of the colonial period had broadly two distinctive characters in terms of their objective. Gail Omvedt has shown that the anti- Brahman caste movement in Maharashtra had two equal wave- one was orthodox which was organised by elite non- Brahmin groups who depended on the British government and wanted to upgrade themselves in the social frameworks of the traditional Hindus and other group was progressive led by Jyotiraophule and later on V.R. Ambedkar who wanted to abolish caste system and establish casteless society.[26] Ambedkar believed that the development of the country in the caste-based society is not possible. He writes, 'There is no doubt in my opinion, that unless you change your social order you can achieve little by way of progress. You cannot mobilise the community either for defence or for offence. You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation; you cannot build up a morality. Anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole."[27]

In Bengal also caste movements were started in the colonial period against the age-old devastating and harmful customs imposed by the higher caste people. There were many lower caste people namely Chandal or Charal, Dule, Chamar Mnchi, Methar, Dom, Byadh and many tribal communities, who had no rights in the society and many of whom had to live out of the society because they were untouchable and the higher caste people would become impure by touching of these untouchable people. The lower caste people were oppressed and hated by the higher caste people through the ages. So in the colonial period they protested against all sorts of oppressions.

The caste movements mainly started after the census report was published since 1872 where different castes were shown separately. As the lower cases were insulted and hated by the higher caste people and these castes were specifically identified by the census report; so they protested against the inclusion in the census report as a lower caste. They demanded that they were not inferior; rather they had superior position in the social hierarchy of the traditional Hindus. Such type of caste movement was Chandal movement which was started during 1872-73 in Faridpur and Bakarganj districts of eastern Bengal. The movement started as the higher caste people refused to dine with them. They decided not to

serve the higher caste people, viz., to till their land, or to thatch their huts, and not again to partake of food prepared by any other caste other than Brahmans. Women were forbidden to visit the market places and appeals to government for discontinuing the old practice of engaging the Chandal convicts in scavenging work in jails. The movement continued for about four to five months, after which it began to breakdown as the poorer sections found it difficult to sustain without work. The Chandal movement again started in the late 19th century through a Vaishnsva sect called Matua. It preached the messages of complete social equality and spiritual salvation through the performance of worldly duties (hate kam, mukhe nam). Both these ideas were conducive to the developments among the depressed communities, who were attracted to this sect in large number during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. In the beginning of the twentieth century during the course of the movement the Chandals claimed themselves to be Namasudras.[28]

The Rajbangsis, educationally backward, were not conscious about the first census report and the writing of the English authors where Rajbangsis and the Koches were shown as the same community. But while the census work of 1891 was going on they demanded to write 'Bhanga Kshatriya' in the column of caste. But this demand was denied by the Government; as a result movement was started in Rangpur district and in some places riotous incidents occurred. In 1891 Rangpur Kshatriya Jatir unnati Bidhayani Sabha was formed by Haramohan Roy, the zamindar of Shyampur in the district of Rangpur and their movement was going on. In these circumstances, F. A. Skyne, the district magistrate of Rangpur sought the permission of Hindu pundits regarding the issue.

The president of Rangpur religious court Mahamohapadhyaya pandit Raj Jadabeswar Tarkaratna gave his views that the Koch and Rajbangsis were separate caste mentioning that Koches were inferior from all sides such as professions, food and nature etc. Everything of the Rajbanshis was superior to the Koches. After giving this view Mr. Skyne pointed out that the time of changing the report was over. So, in this situation he mentioned that the Rajbangsis might write 'Bratya Kshatriya' those who were willing. But by this order the Rangpuries including zamindars, advocates etc. were not satisfied and they protested against it. In these circumstances Mr. Skyne again placed the issue in front of Rangpur religious court.

Thereafter the issue was dispersed in the religious court of Rangpur in presence of zamindar Sri Prasanya Chowdhury, the president of the houses and nearly four hundred Brahman pundits. In the house they unanimously resolved that the Rajbanshis were Hindus and they were 'Bratya Kshatriyas'.[29]

All the issues were placed to the District magistrate and the magistrate recommended to the census superintendent to allow the Rajbanshis to write 'Bratya Kshatya' as their caste. In spite of that after publication of the census report it was found that the recommendation of Mr. Skyne had not been accepted meaning of which that the Rajbanshis were not treated as 'Bratya Kshatriya'. So, the Rajbangsis became hopeless.

In the 2nd half of the movement Thakur Pancahnan Barma appeared and took the responsibility to carry on the movement under his leadership. Thereafter the First National Conference of the Rajbanshi Kshatriya of North East India was held in the meeting hall of Rangpur Natya Mandir on the 18th Baisakha, 1317 B.S. Four hundred representatives of different places joined the conference. Kshatriya Samiti was formed that day and in the first proposal of the meeting Thakur Panchanan Barma was elected as secretary unanimously of the Samiti and he hold the post until his death.[30] He not only ended his duties by giving self confidence and self pride to the Rajbangsis, he devoted his last drop of blood in the welfare and benevolent activities of the mass people.[31] As a result of the movement government showed the Rajbanshis as a Kshatriya differing from Koch in the census report of 1911.

Like the Namasudras and Rajbanshis many other communities of Bengal wanted to uplift them in the social hierarchy of the Hindus. The Baidyas claimed a status just next to the Brahmans, while the Kayasthas demanded a position higher than that of the Baidyas. The Aguris on the other hand, liked to be grouped along with the Baidyas and Kayasthas. Among the Nabasakhs, the claimants for higher ritual rank were the Sadgops and Tilis, the trading castes like Gandhabanik, Tambulibanik and Barui, the functional castes like Kamar, Napit, Tanti and Mayra (Modak), along with a number of their dissident groups like

Madhunapit, Phulnapit and Aswani Tanti. Lower down the hierarchy, among those intermediary castes, which were jalacharaniyabut with degraded Brahmans, the most vigorous of all agitations was that of a section of the Chasi Kaibarta who wanted them to dissociate from the Jalia Kaibartas and to be returned as Mahisya, an ancient caste of much respectability. Below these intermediary castes, were the ajalachal castes, among whom the Sahas, the Subarnabaniks and the Jogis were most articulate in pushing their claims for a more respectable ritual status.[32]

Assessment of the Caste Movement

All the caste movements in the colonial period for up gradation mean acquiring higher grade in the social framework of the traditional Hinduism. It was not fruitful to the lower class people for their development economically, culturally or educationally. It is true that no nation or community could be developed without the economic and educational development. For any community or caste having the up gradation could not be the solution for their basic problems. Furthermore it is historically proved that the casteism in the Hinduism created the division and separatism among the Hindus which wasted the 'Unity in Diversity'. Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay writes, "Also successful were the Rajbansis and the Namasudras. But in none of these cases there was any major change in the ritual status........ This lack of success was also because these movements were supported by those people who had gained in wealth education and influence. Even the relatively more effective 'Rangpur Kshatriya Samiti of the Rajbansis had only about 300 members in 1912 and most of these were middle class jotdars."[33]

The Kshatra movement could not solve the problems of the poor peasants and sharecroppers of the Rajbangsi community. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay writes in this regard, "The problem of the under-raiyats and adhiars did not any more attract the attention of these caste leaders. Indeed many of these leaders themselves belonged to this rich peasant category and were so distressed by the depression that they really had no time and mood to think about the lesser peasants. And many of them, as the Rajbangsi leader Upendra Nath Barman himself acknowledged later, constitutional politics and council elections held out a promise for financial solvency.[34]

It is true that there were many Rajbanshi small peasants or sharecroppers bounded in a feudal system, had no rights or liberty on lands, cultivated lands only at the will of jotdars or zamindars and at any time they were evicted from lands. The Kshatra movement could not solve the problems of these sharecroppers as most of the leaders of the Ksahtra movement belonged to the jotdar and zamindar classes, whereas the erstwhile lower caste or depressed class or Dalit movements were organized against the feudal system. Ideologically, in spite of their very diverse origins, it is remarkable how many themes the dalit movements shared in common. Central to their thinking was the adi theme, a definition of themselves as the original inhabitants of the country, a claim that their own inherent traditions were those of equality and unity, and a total rejection of caste as the imposition of the conquering Aryans who used this to subjugate and divide the natives.[35] The dalit movements organized struggles in various ways over the rejection of all the forms of feudal bondage imposed on dalits.[36]

Following the general model initially such reference group behavior of different lower castes got expression through attempt to symbolize a change in their rank by adopting a new label, or by prefixing or suffixing labels of their castes in census returns, as in the cases of Sadgop, Tili, Madhunapit, Phulnapit, Mahisya, Satchasi, Rajbansi, Jogi or Namasudra.[37] Each of these castes resorted to some origin myth which associated them with one or the other of these varnas, and quoted Puranic slokas, sometimes spurious and sometimes incomplete, in support of these claims. Their pretensions were later validated through securing vyavasthas (religious judgments)

Not only the caste system in India, but also the caste movements for up gradation in the social structure of the traditional Hinduism weakened the National intergradations or 'Unity in Diversity' for which anti-imperialist movement against the English got a setback. In this context Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay writes, 'On the one hand, the colonial Government, through all these executive and constitutional measures,

were perhaps seriously trying to redress the existing social imbalance as Indian society. But on the other, by encouraging self awareness and political aspirations of the lower castes, they tried to keep the nation divided and weak, at a time when anti- imperialist agitation was gathering momentum all over the country. It had now become necessary to popularize the need for a continued British connection with India and in so doing maintain the stability of the British position.[38] B. R. Ambedkar writes in this context, 'An anti- social spirit is found wherever one group has "interests of its own," which shut it out from full interaction with other group, so that its prevailing purpose is protection of what it has got. This anti- social spirit, this spirit of protecting its own interests is as much a marked feature of the different castes in their isolation from one another as it is of nations in their isolations.'[39]

Another important point should be mentioned here that the devastating and harmful caste division among the Hindus like untouchable system which affected the Indian society, economy and culture in many respects and wasted the National Unity and the stability of the country, particularly the higher caste people never gave honour or respect to the lower caste people, rather the people of higher caste always neglected and insulted the lower caste people for which different anti- caste movements took place in the different parts of the country, whereas the Kshatriya movement demanded for the higher status in traditional Hinduism. Ranji Dasgupta pointed out in this regard, 'On the whole, the Rajbansi Kshatriya movement represented an endeavour to find social identity and status for the rajbansi Hindus in a situation of considerable flux and contained significant elements of dissent and opposition to upper caste domination. It exhibited Sanskritizing tendencies with an assertion of Aryan origin and striving for the higher social status of Kshatriyas by borrowing higher caste customs and rituals. .....Thus the movement was a conservative one with claim to a higher status within the existing caste hierarchy and there was no attack on or even a critique of the caste system. In contrast to some of the caste movement with a radical potential which rejected Brahman religious authority, the Rajbansi Kshatriya movement attempted to great recognition from Brahman pundits and sastric sanction.'[40]

Caste system in Indian society was a curse which harmed the country and the nation as a whole, it created many obstacles in the way of progress of the country. B. R. Ambedkar writes, 'The effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become, caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. Suffering as such calls for no response. There is charity but it begins with the caste and ends with the caste. There is sympathy but not for men of other caste."[41]

When different lower castes or depressed class or Dalit movements were going on against the oppressors of higher castes or higher classes to abolish the caste system and to emancipate themselves from different types of bondage imposed on them, the leaders of caste movements in Bengal for up gradation fought to establish themselves in the higher status of the social framework of traditional Hinduism. There were poverty, illiteracy, ill- health and many other problems among the lower caste people. There were many peasants or sharecroppers who had no rights on lands, worked in the lands without any rights or liberty only depending on the jotdars or zamindars like a slave. So in these circumstances caste movements could not solve the basic problems of the lower caste people.

There were ample evidences to show that in the 19th and early 20th centuries an awareness of the class difference among the Rajbansis, difference between the rich and poor was originated. In spite of that there was no attempt from within the society for a political mobilisation based on class, and not was there any concrete manifestation of this awareness.[42] It is relevant to mention here in this context that the leaders of the Kshatra Movement did not support the class difference, difference between the rich and poor and difference between the zamindars- jotdars and small peasants and sharecroppers who had no rights on lands, it can be also said that most of the leaders of the Kshara movement belonged to the zamindar- jotdar class. Ranjit Dasgupta stated that the movement remained confined in the main among the large

landholdars, jotdars and better off peasants. However, it would not be incorrect to view it as ' a distorted but important manifestation of socio- economic tension and conflict.[43]

It cannot be denied that most of the caste movements in Bengal such as Namasadra movement, Rajbanshi Kshariya movement etc. were conducted in the line of Sanskritisation, they fought for up gradation and seeking the position in the social hierarchy of the Hinduism, not to abolish the caste system. Naturally the problem of casteism has not been solved. Still now, the lower caste and lower class people are lying behind being neglected and deprived. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay writes in this regards, "As a result of this lack of change in the general consciousness of the people, the specific movements for social mobility also achieved very little success. In a secular context, in the ease of the chasi Kaibartas, their new designation, Mahishya won general recognition, both social and official. Also successful were the Rajbangsi and the Namasudras. But in none of these cases there was major change in the ritual status." [44]

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