



## **Role of Panchanan Barma as an Intellectual of North Bengal**

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### ***Abstract***

*Panchanan Barma was one of the leading intellectuals of Colonial North Bengal. He was born at Cooch Behar Princely State in a Rajbanshi Jotedar family, but the main centre of his literary and social activities was Rangpur. He was expelled from the Cooch Behar State. He was the first M.A., B.L. of the Rajbanshi community. By profession, he was a leader and he became a familiar face in the intellectual society of Rangpur. He was a founder member of 'Rangpur Sahitya Parishad' and he was the editor of 'Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika' for 7 years. He attended many literary conferences and his research papers were published in the 'Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika'. Later on, he engaged himself in the social activities of the 'Kshatriya Society' of Rangpur. He was a big thinker, scholar, essayist and folklore researcher. He also participated in political activities and he became a Member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly. He was a figure of the North Bengal study.*

**Keywords:** Cooch Behar, Rajbanshi, Intellectual, Kshatriya, Rangpur, Patrika, Pleader, Panchanan.

### **Introduction**

Panchanan Barma was one of the leading intellectuals of the Colonial mufossil North Bengal. He was a notable face of the intellectual society of Rangpur. He was born in Cooch Behar Princely State in a Rajbanshi Jotedar family. Cooch Behar State was a Princely State in Colonial India. Before entering into details of the discussion, it will be better to mention some few words regarding the birth place of Panchanan Barma, Cooch Behar State and the title of this paper. The main aim of this paper is to highlight the role of Panchanan Barma as an intellectual. He was one of the pillars of the North Bengal study and one of the great figures of the intellectual society of North Bengal.

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## **Cooch Behar State**

The land, Cooch Behar has its own history and this land was the witness of many historical events from the ancient times. This territory was a part of ancient '*Prag-Jyotishpura*' or '*Kamrupa*' kingdom. Later on '*Kamata*' or '*Kamatapur Kingdom*' of the Khen dynasty and '*Kamata-Koch Kingdom*' was established here. Again '*Kamata-Koch Kingdom*' lost his freedom in 1773 by the '*Anglo-Koch Treaty of 1773*' and it became a Native State or Princely State. In the Colonial phase there were above 6 hundreds Princely States in Indian sub-continent. Cooch Behar was one of them. The Western education spread in the Cooch Behar State so fast. It is well known to all that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the century of renaissance or new awakening in respect of India. Panchanan Barma, a great man was born in the Cooch Behar State in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Panchanan Barma at Rangpur**

It was Panchanan Barma, a by-product of the renaissance in Rangpur, played an important role in the literary and social activities. He has gained a reputation as a scholar and a litterateur. Although he gained more name and fame as a social reformer. He engaged himself in the activities of '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad*' and engaged in literary pursuits. He was a great figure of the North Bengal study and therefore the title of the paper is given as '*Role of Panchanan Barma as an Intellectual of North Bengal*'.

## **Birth Place and Education**

It can be mentioned here that some few words regarding the birth place, education and family of Panchanan Barma. The surname of the family of Panchanan Barma was Sarkar. He was born on 13 February, 1866 (1 Falgun, 1272 B.S.) in a jotedar family at the village of Khalisamari of Mathabhanga Sub-Division of Cooch Behar State. The name of his father was Khosal Chandra Sarkar and the name of his mother was Champala Sarkar. It is to be noted here that Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, the father of modern Cooch Behar, was three years elder than Panchanan Barma. Khosal Chandra Sarkar, a jotedar, was a worshipper of Lord Shiva. Panchanan is a name of Lord Shiva. Khosal Chandra Sarkar named his son Panchanan Sarkar.<sup>1</sup> Panchanan was a meritorious student. He passed M.E. in the First Division from Mathabhanga M.E. School in the year 1885 and he obtained first position in the General List of Rajshahi Division. It has been noted in the Gazette of 1885-1886 that "Panchanan Sircar, a native of Cooch Behar, who passed the M.E. Examination in the first division from Mathabhanga School succeeded to secure the first place in the general list of Rajshahi Division".<sup>2</sup> He was the first person of the Rajbanshi community who obtained M.A., B.L.<sup>3</sup> His childhood, students life, professional life and the editor of '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika*', in around he was Panchanan Sarkar.

## **Kshatriya Movement**

He engaged himself completely in the Kshatriya Movement after the foundation of the '*Kshatriya Samiti*' by him. He adopted the surname '*Barma*' on Magh 27, 1319 B.S.<sup>4</sup> Now he became Panchanan Barma from Panchanan Sarkar. Although he was M.A., he did not get high post or prestigious job in the administration of the Cooch Behar State. He became Hostel Superintendent of Jenkins School and he carried on his duty for few days. He resigned from

this post.<sup>5</sup> He became a candidate of Sub-Divisional Officer in the royal administration. But he did not get job.<sup>6</sup> It is true that Bengalinisation came in the administration of the Cooch Behar State. Kalika Das Datta, Dewan of the state, opposed Panchanan Barma to get prestigious post.<sup>7</sup> Even Panchanan Barma was expelled from the Cooch Behar State. He left his mother land and he took shelter at Rangpur, the frontier District town of the then Bengal Presidency. His birth place was Mathabhanga (Khalisamari village), but his work place was Rangpur. Professor Ananda Gopal Ghosh is one of the views that “If he was not expelled from the State or he did not take shelter in Rangpur, he cannot become Panchanan Barma”.<sup>8</sup> However he took the profession of a pleader in 1901 at Rangpur and Rangpur was his work-place.

### **Father of Rajbanshi Community**

Panchanan Barma is a model of the Rajbanshi community and he is the father of this community. Rajbanshi community was backward community in respect of education, economic condition and government service. He worked for the development of the Rajbanshi community till his death. His economic thought, thought on society, thought on women emancipation, thought on education and his liberal approach made him as ‘*Thakur*’, ‘*Manishi*’ and ‘*Roy Saheb*’. The Rajbanshi community has got her identity after his social reforms movement or Kshatriya Movement. Panchanan Barma was a writer, scholar, thinker, philosopher and an intellectual.

### **Rangpur Sahitya Parishad and Panchanan Barma**

Panchanan Barma started his career taking the profession of a pleader at Rangpur Court. A well relation was formed between the intellectual society of Rangpur and Panchanan Barma. He became a familiar figure in the intellectual society of Rangpur. He devoted himself to the literary works as well as advocacy. ‘*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad*’ was founded in 1905 at Rangpur. ‘*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad*’ was the first mufossil district branch of ‘*Bangiya Sahitya Parishad*’ of Calcutta. Panchanan Barma was its founder member and Assistant Secretary. Surendra Chandra Roy Choudhury, zamindar of Kundi Estate, was its Secretary and Mahima Ranjan Roy Choudhury, zamindar of Kakina Estate, was its founder President.<sup>9</sup> The main aims and objectives of the ‘*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad*’ were-

- i. To conduct archaeological excavation works in North Bengal and Assam.
- ii. To discover the archaeological ruins and relics of North Bengal and Assam.
- iii. To carry on research on language of North Bengal and to obtain knowledge on agriculture and architecture.
- iv. To collect the historical sources on ancient dynasties, poet, social activist and welfare activities.
- v. To preserve the valuable and un-published books-manuscripts and to publish these.
- vi. To encourage the study of Bengali language and literature.<sup>10</sup>

### **As an Editor**

Panchanan Barma became successful one to establish him in the intellectual society as one of the big pillars. Therefore, he was elected the editor of the ‘*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad*

*Patrika*'. A patrika sub-committee was formed to publish the '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika*'. The members of this sub-committee were mainly Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay, Bhabani Prasanna Lahiri Kabyatirtha, Surendra Chandra Roy Choudhury, Panchanan Sarkar (later on Barma) and Har Gopal Das Kundu. Panchanan Barma became its editor and Har Gopal Das Kundu became its sub-editor.<sup>11</sup> In this connection a remark of Sushanta Chandra Khan, the biographer of Surendra Chandra Roy Choudhury can be mentioned here. He wrote: "*Surendra Chandra had a deep connection with the brainy and scholars of the Rajbanshi Kshatriyas. Among them Panchanan Barma was a founder member and patrika editor of the 'Rangpur Sahitya Parishad'. Many writings and collections of Panchanan Barma were published in this journal*".<sup>12</sup>

Panchanan Barma served for seven years as the editor of the '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika*'. This was 1313 B.S. to 1319 B.S. (1905 to 1912 CE). During these years 7 Bhags and 20 Sankhyas of the '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika*' were published under the editorship of Panchanan Barma. A chart has been mentioned below regarding these Bhags and Sankhyas.

Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika<sup>13</sup>

Year (B.S.)	Bhag	Sankhya (Total)
1313	Bhag-1	2
1314	Bhag-2	4
1315	Bhag-3	4
1316	Bhag-4	4
1317	Bhag-5	3
1318	Bhag-6	3
1319	Bhag-7	4

### As a Writer

Panchanan Barma has made a brilliant contributions as the editor and a writer. Barring this regular monthly literary sessions of the '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad*' were held and Panchanan Barma read out his research papers in these literary sessions. It is to be noted that Panchanan Barma was a pioneer of North Bengal study. A new chapter was opened for the study of folklore, folk literature, regional history and culture. He was an essay writer, well author and folk-lore researcher. His main writings were-

- i. '*Katha O Chhilka*'. It was written on myths, story, proverbs and folk-culture of Rangpur and it was published in the '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika*'.
- ii. '*Nata Manik Banda Kanta*'.
- iii. '*Baha Se Bandhab*'.
- iv. '*Nadim Paramaniker Patha*'.
- v. '*Jagannathi Bilai*'
- vi. '*Gobinda Mishrer Gita*'. Three articles were written on '*Gobinda Mishrer Gita*' by him and these were published in the Sankhya 1, Sankhya 2 and sankhya 3 of Bhag-2 of the '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika*'.<sup>14</sup>

- vii. 'Kamata Bihari Sahitya'.
- viii. Footnote on 'Mahila Brata' of Girindra Mohan Maitreya.

A list has been mentioned below on the writings of Panchanan Barma that were published in the 'Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika'.

#### Writings of Panchanan Barma

Year (B.S.)	Sankhya	Title of the article
1314	2	<i>Katha O Chhilka</i>
1315	2	<i>Uttar Banger Puratattanusandhan</i>
		<i>Prachin Mudra</i>
1316	1	<i>Nadim Paramaniker Patha</i>
1317	2	<i>Jagannathi Bilai</i>
1318	2	<i>Nata Manik Banda Kata</i>

A notable instance of the literary works of Panchanan Barma was 'Kamata Bihari Sahitya'. This article was read out by him at the Third Session of the Uttar Banga Sahitya Sammelan which was held at Gouripur of Assam. He had a deep interest to history writing. The language of the peoples of Kamata Bihar or Koch Kingdom has been mentioned by him as 'Kamata Bihari Sahitya'.<sup>15</sup>

#### As an Organizer

Panchanan Barma was a well skilled organiser. He has shown his skill in the activities of the 'Rangpur Sahitya Parishad' and the publication of the 'Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika'. He recommended many names of the Princely State of Cooch Behar to become the member of the 'Rangpur Sahitya Parishad' and they became the members. In this regard a list has been mentioned below about the members of the Princely State of Cooch Behar and their respective address.

#### Members recommended by Panchanan Barma

Name	Address
Munsi Pasar Muhammad Mia Saheb	Mathabhanga, Cooch Behar State
Amir Uddin Ahemad	Pleader, Mekhliganj, Cooch Behar State
Mahendra Nath Adhikary	Qanungo, Dinhat, Cooch Behar State
Padmanath Das	Mathabhanga Boarding, Mathabhanga, Cooch Behar State
Debiprasad Sarkar	Naodabas, Baramaricha, Cooch Behar State
Kedar Nath Das	Rajgan Boarding, Cooch Behar State <sup>16</sup>

Panchanan Barma proposed many names for the membership of the 'Rangpur Sahitya Parishad'. Surendra Nath Sen seconded these names for the same. The proposed name are given below:

Members proposed by Panchanan Barma

Name	Address
Choudhury Amanat Ullah Ahmed	Member of Cooch Behar State Council, Cooch Behar
Moulabhi Muhammad Halim	Teacher, Jenkins School, Cooch Behar
Kumar Gajendra Narayan	Bar-at-Law, Cooch Behar
Kumar Jatindra Narayan	Cooch Behar
Kumar Amindra Narayan	Cooch Behar
Dinseh Chandra Chakraborty	LMS, Cooch Behar
Upendra Nath Sarkar	Mukhtiar, Tufanganj, Cooch Behar
Shyama Charan Roy	Cooch Behar
Kashikanta Pramanik	Shikarpur, Mathabhanga, Cooch Behar
Gopal Chandra Das	Cooch Behar
Kumar Dharma Narayan	Cooch Behar
Rebati Ranjan Nag	Jotedar, Munsirhat, Gobrachhara, Cooch Behar <sup>17</sup>

Again Panchanan Barma seconded five names for the members of the '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad*' at the sixth monthly meeting of the fifth year of the parishad which was held on December 19, 1909 (Aghrahyon 27, 1316 B.S.). The proposer of these names was Purnendu Mohan Sehanabis. A list has been given here regarding the names and their address.

Members seconded by Panchanan Barma

Name	Address
Mukunda Chandra Das	Putimari, Dinahat, Cooch Behar
Mahichandra Narayan Das	Putimari, Dinahat, Cooch Behar
Hari Mohan South	Putimari, Dinahat, Cooch Behar
Harish Chandra Mandal	Dinahat, Cooch Behar
Kumud Kanta Adhikary	Dinahat, Cooch Behar <sup>18</sup>

**Literary Conferences**

Panchanan Barma attended many literary conferences. He attended the Third Session of the Uttar Banga Sahitya Sammelan or the North Bengal Literary Conference was held at Gouripur of Assam. The delegates from the Cooch Behar State who attended this session were Mahamahopadhyay Pandit Raj Jadabeswar Tarka Ratna, Choudhury Amanat Ullah Ahmed, Moulabhi Muhammad Abdul Halim, Mahendra Nath Adhikary and Kumar Jagadindra Deb Raikat. The Fourth Session of the Uttar Banga Sahitya Sammelan was held on 9-10 January, 1911 (25-26 Poush, 1317 B.S.) at Malda. Panchanan Barma attended this conference as a delegate of Rangpur. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, a renowned historian, presided over this conference. There were eight delegates from the Cooch Behar State for Guahati Session of the Uttar Banga Sahitya Sammelan. Panchanan Barma and Choudhury Amanat Ullah Ahmed were of them.



## **Regional Study and Panchanan Barma**

Panchanan Barma was a pioneer of regional study or North Bengal study. '*Varendra Research Society*' was established at Rajshahi in 1910 and it was a replica of '*Asiatic Society of Bengal*' of Sir William Jones. The main pillar of '*Varendra Research Society*' was Akshay Kumar Maitreya. In the subsequent years '*Rarh Anusandhan Samiti*', '*Birbhum Anusandhan Samiti*' and '*Kamrupa Anusandhan Samiti*' were established. Panchanan Barma made a proposal at the seventh annual meeting of the '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad*' to form '*Kamata Anusandhan Samiti*' for the study of Kamata-Bihar or Kamata-Koch Kingdom. But it is not clear that the proposal has been accepted or not? '*Kamata Anusandhan Samiti*' was not formed.<sup>19</sup>

## **Social Activities**

Later on Panchanan Barma engaged himself in the social activities rather than literary activities. He founded '*Kshatriya Samiti*' in the year 1910 at Rangpur and he was engaged completely with it. The Rajbanshis were neglected by the upper caste Hindus. The upper caste Hindus treated them as lower caste, dalits or untouchables. In this regard one matter may be noted. Actually Panchanan Barma was a pleader of Rangpur District Court. One day he took the 'Toga' of Mr. Moitra. When he went to return it to Mr. Moitra, Moitra replied sarcastically to Panchanan Barma that "I hate to use a toga used by a Rajbanshi". No doubt it deeply hurt Panchanan Barma. He concentrated in the social activities. Upendra Nath Barman has remarked that the age of the Kshatriya movement was the age of the Panchanan.<sup>20</sup> He left literary works and regional study for the Kshatriya Movement. He went far away from activities of the '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad*' and he left editorship of the '*Rangpur Sahitya Parishad Patrika*'. He established himself as a saviour of the Rajbanshi society. He participated in the political activities, contested in the election and became Member of Bengal Legislative Assembly. He became successful to enlist the Rajbanshi community in the Scheduled Caste and Ranbanshi community was enlisted in the Scheduled Caste in the year 1933. He gave the identity and status of the Rajbanshis in the society through Kshatriya movement.

## **As a Thinker**

Panchanan Barma was a big thinker. His thinking on society is highly appreciated. Infact he was a humanist and a secular. Swaraj Basu has mentioned that "Referring to the Muslims, Panchanan Barma observed that it was not proper to differentiate between the Hindus and the Muslims, as their ancestors were the same. If due to certain circumstances they had adopted Islam that should not over shadow the fact that every morning they met and ploughed the land together, did the marketing, shared the pleasures and problems and participated in the same social ceremonies. So even though the Rajbanshis had adopted the sacred thread, they should not think of their caste alone".<sup>21</sup> His educational thinking, thought on agriculture, thought on female education and emancipation and political thought prove him as a front ranking intellectual.

## Bright Star in the Intellectual Society

Panchanan Barma was a star in the contemporary intellectual society of Rangpur. In spite of this the contemporary intellectual society of Bengal nothing writes about Panchanan Barma or his Kshatriya Movement. The issue demands deep research that why they were indifferent on Panchanan Barma? Panchanan Barma was familiar to the intellectual society of Bengal. The name Panchanan Barma was known to Rabindra Nath Tagore no doubt. Rabindra Natha tagore and Akshay Kumar Maitreya, a leading intellectual of Rajshahi, do not write anything about Panchanan Barma. Sir Jadunath Sarkar has given remarks on Choudhury Amanat Ullah Ahmed, but he also indifferent to Panchanan Barma. Pratul Chandra Gupta, a son of Rangpur, former Vice-Chancellor, Visva-Bharati University, writes nothing about Panchanan Barma in his memoirs '*Din Guli Mor*'. Nevertheless literary, politics and social works of Panchanan was Rangpur-centric. Even Abbas Uddin Ahmed, famous folk-singer of Cooch Behar, do not write any word in his autobiography '*Amar Shilpi Jibaner Katha*'.<sup>20</sup> The issue is really very wonderful.

## Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be said that due to Kashatriya Movement Panchanan Barma became failure to give time in the literary organization and activities. To bring the dignity of the Rajbanshi community from the anonymous, neglected and hateful by upper caste Hindus he engaged himself in the Kshatriya Movement. He also joined in the politics. Therefore he can not give attention in the literary works and does not get time also. It is true that he was one of the pioneers of the regional study or North Bengal study.

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