

Book review

**RAJBANSHI FOLK TALES AND FOLK SONGS BY SUKHBILAS
BARMA**

Kamal Chandra Sarkar¹✉

Book Detail

Title: *Rajbanshi Folk Tales and Folk Songs*

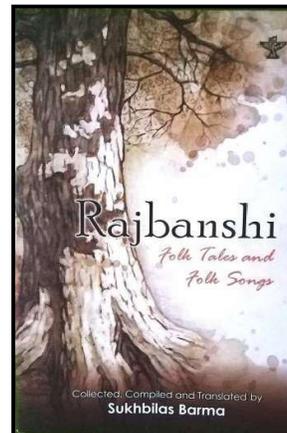
Author: *Sukhbilas Barma*

Publisher: *Sahitya Academy*

Year: 2017

ISBN: 978-81-260-5341-4

Length: 183 pages



¹ [First Author] ✉ [Corresponding Author Kamal Chandra Sarkar, Independent Research Scholar, University of Gour Banga, Malda, West Bengal, INDIA E-mail: kamalsarkarhrp@gmail.com

© 2021 consortium Journal



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article History:

Submitted on 10 June 2021

Accepted on 20 June 2021

Published online on 25 June 2021

The book for review is comprised of eight chapters. Each reverberates around the existence of the Rajbanshi community with their own history, socio-cultural behaviour, and moreover, folktales and folksongs – an oral literature associated with them. As the book is titled the “Rajbanshi Folk Tales and Folk Songs”, the focus is much on that subject matter only rather than on the history of the Rajbanshi community. But unless one gets acquainted with the history of the Rajbanshi community and its own separate socio-cultural identity, one cannot understand the essence of these folk tales and songs associated with this community. So, the author has wisely included a few chapters related to history, location, identity, and language of the Rajbanshi community at the end section of the book.

The author of the book is Sukhbilas Barma, a writer, and an IAS Officer (rtd), born in 1946 in a Rajbanshi family of Cooch Behar, West Bengal. As a member of the Rajbanshi community he cherishes great interest in the study of history, anthropology, and socio-cultural issues related to his community. He is also a vocal performer of Bhaowaiya, a of form folk songs of the Rajbanshis. He has written several books on Bhaowaiya both in English and Bengali which are used as reference books in the Universities. He has been awarded Honorary D. Litt by the University of North Bengal for his valuable contribution to folk culture. This book is the outcome of an assignment on “Rajbanshi Folk Tales and Folk Songs” entrusted to him by the Sahitya Academy.

The first chapter deals with the Rajbanshi Folk Tales. This is the most important chapter which is dealt with much focus in the book. This chapter explains that the Rajbanshi is an illiterate social group, hence, the Rajbanshi folk tales are full of superhuman, supernatural, unworldly imaginations and feelings. But the inherent mood of these tales reflects the rural social life of the Rajbanshi community and Rajbanshi psyche. There are thirty seven folk tales described in the book. These tales are collected, compiled, and few are written by the author himself out of his own memory.

The subject matter of the Rajbanshi folk tales ranges from common animals both wild and domestic to mythological gods and goddesses. Among the animal tales, “Nadim Paramaniker Pantha”(The He-Goat of Nadim Paramanik), “Burar Syagalu Gara” (An Old Man Planting Sweet Potato Seeds) are very popular. On the other hand, among mythological tales, “Bhagabaner Nam Mahima” (Glory is the Name of God), “Badote Bado Achhe” (There are Greater Than the Greater Ones), “Dharma Karma Vicar” (The Judgements on the Religious Rites and Work) are worth mentioning.

Apart from animal and mythological characters the Rajbanshi folk tales are full of the common characters like Bura and Buri (Old Man and Old Woman) and Zola and Zolani (An Idiot and His Wife) etc. The word ‘Zola’ has two meanings – one is weaver and the other is idiotic. He is a hero in quite a number of tales. In almost all Rajbanshi folk tales, Zola is initially depicted as idiot but with the help of fate he becomes the winner. The story “Zola

Zolanir Pushnar Pitha” (Making of Rice Cake by Zola Zolani on the Occasion of Pous Sankranti) is a fine example based on Zola Zolani characters.

The second chapter in the book statistically presents the analysis of the type and motif of the Rajbanshi folk tales. This kind of analysis of the Rajbanshi folk tales is certainly a pioneering endeavour. The objective of this type of analysis is to trace the mindset of the human society and to know the position of the Rajbanshi folk tales throughout the world.

The third and fourth chapters shortly describe the general introduction of folk songs and Rajbanshi folk songs in particular. These chapters further go on saying that folk songs or music as means of expression and communication often transcends language because it sometimes transmits emotions which language is incapable of.

The fifth chapter is about the historical past of the Rajbanshi community. The Rajbanshis of North Bengal trace their past historical identity with the king Bhagadatta of the Mahabharata days and the 7th century king Vaskarbarma of the then Kamrup. Then in 15th century the Koch-Rajbanshi king Biswa Singha crowned himself as Kamteswar king. Thus, Koch-Rajbanshi rulers ruled the region till 1950 until the merging of the state of Cooch Behar with West Bengal. These Koch-Rajbanshi rulers and the common people have undergone the process of Sanskritization and Hinduisation. Supposedly, the Rajbanshis are the direct descendants of those Koch-Rajbanshi rulers of Kamrup/Kamtapur. The Rajbanshis are now presently residing in the entire region of the erstwhile Kamrup/Kamtapur which was consisted of all the districts of North Bengal, the districts of Western Assam, and the Northern districts of Bangladesh. The purpose of this chapter is to inform the past history and the location of one of the most single largest ethnic groups – the Rajbanshi community.

The sixth chapter focuses upon the Rajbanshi identity. The uncertainty has been expressed in this chapter about the actual origin and identity of the Rajbanshi people. It further puts forward the debate whether the Rajbanshis differ from Koch or not. It is described that the Rajbanshis claim that they are the direct descendants of the earlier kings, whereas the Koches are the hinduised groups from different lower tribes. The Rajbanshis also believe that they possess Kshatriya status on the basis of some mythological references. This Kshatriya claim got momentum with the movement led by Panchanan Barma, a Rajbanshi social reformer in 19th century and ultimately the Rajbanshis are agreed to record their status as Rajbanshi officially by the census authorities of India.

The seventh chapter is a very short one that explains that Rajbanshi language is also known as Kamrupi or Kamtapuri. This language differs from literary Bengali in many aspects especially on the tendency of using nasals on some common words. The aim of this chapter is to manifest the uniqueness of the Rajbanshi language.

The ninth and also the last chapter is a very compelling chapter that talks about the various Rajbanshi folk songs that relate to every aspect of the Rajbanshi community. Several divisions of the Rajbanshi folk songs namely, Shaitol Pujar Gan, Maynamatir Gan, Satyapirer Gan, Madankamer Gan, Kushan, Payar, Bishahara, PalaGan, Bhaowaiya and so on, discussed in this chapter with examples. One of the most popular forms of the Rajbanshi folk songs is Bhaowaiya. Among the Bhaowaiya songs “Phande Pariya Baga Kande Re” (Being Entrapped Unknowingly the Heron Starts Crying) is one of the most highly popular examples explain keenly in this chapter. This chapter presents the unique quality of the Rajbanshi folk songs which are being admired by not only the Rajbanshis but others also throughout the centuries.

This book provides an overall picture of the Rajbanshi community. The socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions of the Rajbanshi community are reflected through the Rajbanshi folk tales and folk songs. There are very few books about the Rajbanshi community written in English with such amount of research based information. This worth reading book certainly possesses academic quality. So this book is very much prescribable for the interested readers.