

# Social Status of Koch Rajbongshi Women with Special Reference to Bongaigaon District, Assam

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**Abstract:** Since the time of human civilization, women have been an integral part of society, culture and tradition and also have been playing a very vital role in molding the society. But at the same time social differentiation and inequality has never left the side of women. Women who constitute 50% of the total population are the most victimized group in our society who are facing some social evils like gender inequalities and the notion of patriarchy. Contrary to this, one indigenous ethnic group inhabiting various parts of the world, including India (Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Bihar) Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan known as Koch Rajbongshi had a very bright history in giving an important and dignified status to women. Traditionally Koch Rajbongshi society was a matrilineal society, so from the decision-making process to represent the family, women had a very dignified position. Women were given high status in various cultural rituals, traditions in the community. There was no dowry system in Koch Rajbongshi society. However, due to the influence of other cultures and traditions, and the most importantly due to the process of globalization, Koch Rajbongshi women seem to have lost their dignity which they prevailed earlier. Through this paper the researcher has made an attempt to find the actual picture of the condition of the community and try to find out the actual status given to women within the community.

**Keywords:** Koch Rajbongshi, women, Assam, social status.

## 1. Introduction

*“Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate into very minutest detail in activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him.”*

-Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi Natesan, Madras, 1933<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Women In India

The women in India have remained a matter of joy and a source of amusement as such she was used and misused by men just to serve their evil ends. She has been used just like a machine for procreation. It has also been mentioned in Hindu Shastras that the woman is the bond slave of her father when she was young, to her husband when she is middle aged and to her son when she is a mother. Of course, all the epigrams, aphorisms, proverbs, platitudes and truisms bear necked truth about the stature of women in India.

### A. Koch Rajbongshi: A Glance of The Community

Koch Rajbongshi is an ancient tribe originally from the ancient Koch kingdom. The Rajbongshi tribe is referred to as Koch Rajbongshi, or Rajbanshi, or Rajvanshi. The word "Rajbongshi" literally means "royal community". They have a rich cultural heritage and their own language.

### B. Habitation

The homelands of this ancient tribe include West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and various North Eastern parts of India. The Great Kamatapur was divided into Bangladesh, West Bengal, Assam, Nepal, Meghalaya, Tripura, Bihar and Bhutan, during the British rule and after the independence of India. A large number of Rajbongshi people now live in North Bengal, West Assam, Meghalaya, Bangladesh and Nepal. A large number of political and non-political organizations of this community have been formed in West Bengal and Assam. Most prominent among them are Kamatapur People's Party, Greater Coochbehar Demanding Committee, All Koch Rajbongshi Students Union and Koch Rajbongshi Sanmilani, and these groups are demanding a separate Kamatapur state consisting of North Bengal and West Assam. Kamatapur.

### C. Language

The Rajbongshi/Rajbanshi language is spoken by one crore people, according to a 2001 census report for West Bengal (Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Malda and Murshidabad), Assam and Bihar) in India. The language is also spoken in Bangladesh and Nepal. Other names of the language are Kamtapuri, Rajbangsi, Rajbansi, Rajbongshi, Goalpariya and Tajpuri. The Rajbanshi language has a complete grammar.

### D. Dialects

The main dialects are Western Rajbanshi, Central Rajbanshi, Eastern Rajbanshi and the dialect of the Rajbanshi of the hills, also known as Koch language.

The Central dialect has majority of speakers and is quite uniform. There are publications in this language. The Western dialect has more diversity. Lexical similarity is 77% to 89% between the three dialects. But the dialect spoken in the hills

<sup>1</sup> [www.indiavisitinformation.com](http://www.indiavisitinformation.com) visited on 19-10-2019

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has some influence of the local tribal languages. Koch Rajbongshi Sahitya Sabha has given emphasis on bringing a unique identity of the Rajbongshi language.

#### *E. Religion and Beliefs*

The Rajbongshi were primarily animist, but later on they followed Hinduism/Sanatana (both Shaiva and Vaishnavite), A few sections of Rajbongshi people were also found to be followers of Christianity, both Roman Catholic and protestant.

#### *F. Royal History*

The Kamata kingdom appeared in the western part of the older Kamarupa kingdom in the 13th century, after the fall of the Pala dynasty. The rise of the Kamata kingdom marked the end of the ancient period in the history of Assam and the beginning of the medieval period. The first rulers were the Khens, who were later displaced by Alauddin Hussain Shah, the Turko-Afghan ruler of Bengal. Though Hussain Shah developed extensive administrative structures, he could not maintain political control and the control went to the Koch dynasty. The Koch Rajbongshi's called themselves Kamateshwars (the rulers of Kamata/Kamatapur Kingdom), but their influence and expansions were so extensive and far reaching that their kingdom is sometimes called the Koch kingdom. Under His Highness Maharaja Naranarayan the then King of Kamatapur, the Koch dynasty flourished to the highest extent and his brother Shukladhwaj Singha (famous as Chilarai) was one of the greatest heroes of that time and he prominently dominated the eastern part of Kamatapur which now known as Assam (Previously Assam is known as Pragjyotispur) now it is known as Asom which is an integral part of The Republic of India.

The Rajbongshi community has a rich heritage and culture which had been inherited from the ancient civilization. The Rajbongshi community has their own dialects, culture, and way of living. The culture reflects the humbleness, peace, unity and harmony with nature, as Rajbongshi are primarily animist.

A few rulers, kings, queens, princes and princesses of the Koch dynasty are His Highness Maharaja Naranarayan, Prince Chilaray, Maharani Gayatri Devi, (Princess Gayatri Devi later on married Prince of Jaipur - Jai Singh) which had helped a strong relationship between the two kingdoms. Maharaja Ajit Narayan Dev of Biddapur (a part of then Assam\*) Kingdom was also part of the Koch dynasty.<sup>2</sup>

#### *G. The Present Study*

In the present study an attempt has been made to have a holistic analysis of the status of women in a patrilineal society. The Koch Rajbongshis, a patrilineal community is selected as a subject for studying the status of women in the said society. The area of the project is in Bongaigaon district, Assam. The study has been conducted in two villages of Bongaigaon district, namely, the Mulagaon and Majgaon. Its aim is purely academic and it has been conducted from anthropological point of view.

In the study the researcher has tried to find out the position of women in the society, in domestic area, in economic

activities, in educational world and in marital life. For assessing the status of women, a number of criteria are adopted; such as women's right of decision-making, right on income, right to social assimilation and right on education.

#### *H. Objectives of the Study*

This research endeavor has the following objectives:

- To explore the status of Koch Rajbongshi women in the society if it is equal or lower to men.
- To find out the aspect of cooperation between husband and wife in domestic chores, caring and rearing of children.
- To search women's freedom to earn and spend money without the permission of husband or other members of the household.
- To examine women's participation in decision making and freedom of taking independent decision.

#### *I. Methodology*

In scientific research it is necessary to follow appropriate research methods and techniques. For this project also standard anthropological techniques were used. At the beginning a search for permanent settlement and villages of the community was selected to study the Koch Rajbongshi Community.

Most of the data were primary but secondary sources were also consulted for this study. For field work the researcher visited house to house to meet the reliable informants.

For reviews of literature a good number of books, journals, reports and articles were studied. For collection of correct data, the following methods have been used. These are case study, schedule, interview (both structured and unstructured questions were used), observation and group discussion.

The samples include both men and women of the community, whether educated or uneducated, irrespective of their occupation. Married men and women are selected for responding the questions of the schedule. The sample size decided for responding scheduled questions were 25 men and 25 women from the society and thus the total number of respondents to the researcher's queries was 50.

#### *J. About the Study Area*

In 2011, Bongaigaon had population of 738,804 of which male and female were 375,818 and 362,986 respectively. In 2001 census, Bongaigaon had a population of 612,665 of which males were 315,537 and remaining 297,128 were females. Bongaigaon District population constituted 2.37 percent of total Maharashtra population.

There was change of 20.59 percent in the population compared to population as per 2001. In the previous census of India 2001, Bongaigaon District recorded increase of 22.09 percent to its population compared to 1991.

##### *Bongaigaon Sex Ratio 2011:*

With regards to Sex Ratio in Bongaigaon, it stood at 966 per 1000 male compared to 2001 census figure of 942. The average national sex ratio in India is 940 as per latest reports of Census 2011 Directorate. In 2011 census, child sex ratio is 969 girls per

<sup>2</sup> <http://wbnorthbengaldev.gov.in/htmlpage/Rajbongshi.aspx>

1000 boys compared to figure of 972 girls per 1000 boys of 2001 census data.

Bongaigaon district has five number of revenue circles viz. Bongaigaon, Boitamari, Srijangram, Dangtol and Manikpur revenue circle. For the study purpose, the researcher has taken two villages namely

1. Mulagaon
2. Majgaon

### 3. Findings

After investigating the women's position in different parameters, the study has resulted the following conclusions:

- The responsibility of Child rearing and bearing is divided between both husband and wife. Both boys and girls support that responsibly has to shared by the both since the child belongs to both.
- Domestic violence cannot be ignored in the community. Some husbands get involved in the violence depending on the family conditions. It is mostly seen in the poor family where husband fail to maintain the family basic necessities. The drunken husbands are seen to make chaotic environment in the family.
- The community people especially male sections mostly disagree the strict control over girl children. They allow their child play outside with the boys and friends, but there some parents who are seen to maintain strict control over their girl child. And female section of the community completely disagreed the statement reflecting their desire to fly in the open air.
- In the community, the household activities are carried out by both male and female members. The male are also seen to work in the household activities like cooking, cleaning houses etc. They share their works depending on the situation of the work.
- Both male and female in the community are allowed for the income generating activities. The community is economically not so sound so to make their necessities some women are also getting involve in the other activities like selling vegetables, farming activities, clothing rearing etc.
- Widowed women are most neglected and vulnerable group of people. The present data shows the attitude of the male towards the cause is negative where only 8% of people allow a widowed to get remarried while in case of women it does not make any difference of the same. The respondent stated that if the widow is childless then they are remarried but the widow with children is never get remarried.
- Regarding the educational decision of Child, both

husband and wife have seemed played similar role. But for higher education their children's wishes also get preference

- Due to the traditional and social customs, the community people don't allow their girl child to go for higher education to abroad. The data is varied from the age group. The young generation prefers it while the old generations don't.

### 4. Summary and Conclusion

All over the world women are not treated equally as men. Her capacity to do any important work, to take any important decision is a matter of doubt among men. Her contribution to family as well as to society seldom gets recognition. Women throughout the life live under the subjugation of men. Majority of them enjoy little freedom or no freedom in their life. Women throughout the human history seen to be suffering from various social injustices, rules and restrictions of societies, specific to women only. Such conditions attracted the attention of many social scientists and has resulted in growth of women studies. In the present study an attempt has been made to highlight the status of women in Koch Rajbongshi community in two villages of Bongaigaon namely Mulagaon and majgaon. In the study women's position has been investigated mainly in domestic sphere of life, in economic activities, in education and in marital life

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