
Roy Saheb Thakur Panchanan **Barma(1866–1935)**



Roy Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma

(1866–1935)

Birth and Education:

Roy Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma was born on ১লা ফাল্গুন ১২৭২সন (14 February 1866) at Khalisamari village, Mathabhanga Sub-division, in erstwhile Princely State of Cooch Behar, to Mr. Khoshal Sarkar and Mrs. Champala Sarkar. Panchanan Barma received his first instructions in the *pathsala* near his house. After the completion of *pathsala* education, his father sent him to the Middle-English School of the town of Mathabhanga. Panchanan Sarkar, 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 the Rajshahi Division. After passing the Middle-English Examination, Panchanan Barma got admitted to the Zenkins High School and pursued his learning while residing at the school-boarding. Having passed the High English Examination, young Panchanan Barma got admitted to the Victoria College and studied there as a boarder of the college hostel. He graduated from Bangabasi College, with an honours in Sanskrit, in 1893. He later privately completed his M.A. in Mental and Moral Philosophy in 1896 from the University of Calcutta, and later took his L.L.B. degree from Ripon College, Calcutta, in 1900. In the early years of his career, he started practising Law at Rangpur Court. In 1921, he was elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly after winning the general election for three consecutive times for BLA. Panchanan Barma died in Calcutta on 9th of September, 1935. He also known as **Thakur Panchanan** and **Roy Saheb**, a Rajbanshi leader and reformer from Cooch Behar.

Rural Development and Kshatriya Bank:

As far as the ideas on rural development are concerned, Panchanan Barma has a specific similarity with Rabindranath Tagore, although Tagore preferred the term “rural reconstruction” to rural development. Panchanan Barma was of the opinion that there is a collective strength in the villages, which has enabled the villagers to sustain themselves for more than 2500 years. He was a social reformer and a renowned educationist. He had taken many steps for the recovery of the lost dignity of the Rajbanshi Society. Under the leadership of Panchanan Barma, well-coordinated clusters of villages (gram mandali) grew up in Rangpur, and the number of such clusters exceeded 300. The Kshatriya Bank’s impact on these clusters was very much discernible. Here too, one can find a similarity between Tagore and Panchanan Barma. In Tagore’s opinion, there was no alternative to the release of the villagers’ latent energy, and all the villages of the country were to be reconstructed in such a way that they would be able to meet all their needs.

In fact, the economic reforms formed one of the most remarkable activities of Panchanan Barma. He set up 'Barma Company' that operated within the region now known as Bangladesh. The real objective of the company was to free the rural poor peasants from the exploitation by landowners and money lenders. He founded the rural agricultural bank, namely "**Kshatriya Bank**", the first rural agricultural bank for the farmers in the undivided India in 1920-21. The core objective was to free the peasantry from the clutches of the landowners and money lenders and provide them with easy credit facilities to build up a bright future of their own. Today his method is known as 'micro-finance', but earlier it was known as 'micro-credit'. In order to protect the exploited peasant society, he tried to develop villages with economic reformation by the scheme of 'micro-credit' or 'micro finance'. This 'micro-credit' system conducted through the Kshatriya Bank benefited many peasants.

He was also the Members of the following Committee:

- Bengal Tenancy Act (1885)
- The Board of Economic Enquiry (1930-31)
- The Bengal Money Lender Act
- Debtor Settlement Board etc.

Women Empowerment and Education:

He also worked in the field of literature, women empowerment and education, rural development. Panchanan Barma raised the voice of protest against the abduction and rape of women in Rangpur region (presently in Bangladesh) in 1923. In his poem "Dangdhari Mao" (mother, with the power to protect), Panchanan Barma exhorted the youth to stand up against wrongs and injustices. He built up an organization named **Nari Rakhsa Upasamity** (Committee for the Protection of

Women). He gave shelter to the abdicated women to make them self-reliant by giving proper education and training in stick-play, sword-fight and wrestling. Panchanan Barma was a leader of Rajbanshi Community and a reformer from the entire North-Eastern India during the later period of British rule in India.

Literary works:

He wrote different short stories and poems. A few of them are *Naadim Poramaniker Patha*, *Jagannathi Bilai*, *Kamatabihari Sahitya* etc. He started a monthly magazine *Kshatriya* for the Rajbanshi people. In order to protect women, he also wrote an inflammatory poem named '*Dangdhorimao*'. He was also the editor of 'Rangpur Sahitya Patrika' –mouthpiece of Rangpur Sahitya Parishad.

Social works:

Like other social reformers of Greater Bengal, Panchanan Barma too realized that social advancement of the society was impossible without spread of education. One focal point of Panchanan Barma's activities was the dissemination of women's education. He wanted to uplift the women folk from the utterly humiliating and degrading conditions and to establish them on the foundation of their own rights. In the nineteenth century, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar had launched his vast programme of education by setting up schools. In the twentieth century, Panchanan Barma motivated the *zamindars* of North Bengal to set up schools. By setting up a students' hostel himself, he raised this work to a great height.

Panchanan Barma was a leader of Rajbanshi Community and reformer from entire North-Eastern India during the later period of British rule in India. He established Kshatriya Samiti (1910) in order to inculcate Brahminical values and practices among the people from Rajbanshi community. He led a *kshatriyanization* movement among the people of Rajbanshi community of Bengal. This

movement assumed the shape of a social upheaval in today's North Bengal, and in North-Eastern India as a whole. Like Raja Rammohan Roy and Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Panchanan Barma also played a pivotal role for empowering women in the first half of twentieth century Bengal. He did not believe cast discrimination and preached universal brotherhood. He says-

**“Hindu Musalman Bichar Naire Manus Jan to Nay Bhin,
Ulsi Dhaya Arter Uddhar Ei Kshatriyer Chin.”**

**“হিন্দু মুসমান বিচার নাইরে মানুষ জন তো নয় ভিন,
উলসি ধায়া আর্তের উদ্ধার এই ক্ষত্রিয়ের চিনা”**