

## Panchanan Barma: A Social Reformer's Crusade for Women Empowerment and Dignity

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**Abstract--** Panchanan Barma, i.e. Manishi Roy Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma, was a legend in all walks of life in the Rajbanshi society and the society of that time. Among his social reform work and continuous activities for the development of education in various regions of North-East India and Bangladesh, a significant and important social welfare and society-building work was the protection of women, the education system and the dignity of women. Among his many notable works, it can be said that he is unforgettable even today for his efforts to remind us of social development, educational development, awareness, the conscious initiative of the Kshatriyakan of the Rajbanshi nation and self-glorification. His role in the formation of society was very relevant for that time, which is beyond dispute, today it can be said that the impact of his works at that time has enlightened the society a lot and among the advanced projects of the present society, several of his works can be considered as a path to follow. The instability of the regime of that time, the unstable political situation and the adverse social conditions - oppression, deprivation and marginalization of women - contributed greatly to the awakening of women's consciousness and empowerment. History and mythology say that when the dignity of women is violated in society, the society collapses, the family breaks down and the order of the country naturally breaks down. Panchanan Barma understood this and for the protection of women, the development of women's consciousness and women's power, Panchanan Barma took several social reform initiatives for women and it was reflected in the unstable society of that time. These historical works are still worth following today.

**Keyword:** Panchanan Barma, Social Reformer, Women Empowerment, Dignity



### I. THE CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The concept of women's empowerment first emerged from the International Seminar on "Women's Empowerment" in 1985 (**S, 2006**). Education not only imparts knowledge but also develops and improves skills which greatly help in maintaining the existence and dignity of women in society (**Deb, 2024**). Illiteracy is a major obstacle to women's empowerment. Education can help every woman to educate her children to be good teachers of the family and human society (**Sen, 2008**).

The Indian Constitution has taken several initiatives to empower women, including reservation in education, politics, and employment. Expanding women's education in SC-dominated areas of India has played a significant role in transforming their daily lives. (**Deb, 2024**)

## II. PANCHANAN BARMA AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

In contemporary North-East India, Manishi Raisaheb Tagore Panchanan Barma actively campaigned for women's empowerment through the "Nari Raksha Committee". With the restoration of independence, Indian women distinguished themselves as teachers, nurses, flight attendants, booking clerks, receptionists and doctors. In the 19th century, Rammohan and Vidyasagar showed their interest in increasing women's empowerment through women's education and social reform activities and like them, Panchanan Barma also played a similar role for women in Bengal in the first half of the 20th century. According to Panchanan Barma - both men and women are entitled to equal dignity. Panchanan Barma emphasized the participation of women in political, socio-cultural and economic spheres through his various political and social activities. He argued that the cultural empowerment of women could only be realized when women were treated equally with men. In 1921-23, the abduction and rape of women in the Rangpur region took a horrific turn. In 1923, a woman named Barada Sundari was forcibly abducted and raped. After that, several women including Tadhamani Barmani, Geetkumari Vaishnavi, Kanduri Barmani were raped one by one. Panchanan Barma raised the voice of protest against this kind of torture. In 1921, Panchanan was the first to speak about women's suffrage in a debate in the Bengal Legislative Council (**Barman**). In 1863, Shri Brajmohan Mallick's report gives an idea - according to the 1911 census report, only 51 royals out of thousands of people were educated. At that time, Rai Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma was very shocked to see the extreme neglect of education among the people of that time in his contemporary times and he told the mothers as well as the royal family, educate your sons, educate your sons even by begging from house to house.

## III. INITIATIVES OF PANCHANAN BARMA FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Thakur Panchanan Barma was a great social reformer, who, without relying only on law or administration, took practical steps on his own initiative to rescue and rehabilitate distressed and abused women.

- *Formation of Volunteer Groups And Rescue Activities:* Thakur Panchanan formed his own volunteer group to rescue raped and abused women without completely relying on the police. The main objective of this group was: a) Rescue of abused women. b) Take measures for rehabilitation. c) Empowerment through self-defense training. He believed that only social activism can ensure the real liberation of women (**Pal, 2011**).
- *Establishment of 'Women's Education Department' in Kshatriya Samiti:* With the aim of empowering women, Tagore Panchanan established a 'Women's Education Department' under Kshatriya Samiti. For the women of this department: a) Training in the use of sticks and knives. b) Teaching self-defense techniques. c) Arrangements were made for education and skill development. This initiative was an exceptional step towards making women self-reliant. 'Dangdhari Mao' - Spreading the message through literature (Barman G. N., 2019).
- *Built up an organization named 'Nari Rakhsa Upasamity' (Committee for the Protection of Women):* 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 (**Pal, 2011**).
- *"Dangdhari Mao" (mother, with the power to protect):* 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 (**Barman G. N., 2019**).
- *Introduced the worship of Goddess "Chandi" for inspiration and respect of women:* To increase, awaken and stimulate women's power, Raisaheb Thakur Panchanan Barma gave the message of women's power through religious reforms. He introduced the worship of Goddess "Chandi".

Because 'Chandi' is considered as the symbol of 'Mother Power' everywhere. Before every annual conference of Panchanan Barma Mastiska Prasuta Kshatriya Samiti, worshipping Goddess Chandi (Goddess of Power or Shakti) became a regular practice and ritual of the Samiti. Even today, her practice is regularly followed in various Kshatriya Samiti. For example, Girindra Nath Barma, a Panchanan enthusiast teacher, Mathabhanga, Kuchbehar has kept the tradition of worshipping Goddess Chandi (Goddess of Power or Shakti) every year ([Adhikary, 2018](#)).

- *To make women aware, Barma wrote a poem:* For a few years after 1330, there was a particular increase in the rape of women in Rangpur district. Here and there, almost everywhere, these hair-raising stories of torture and the cries of raped and abducted women shook the sky and the air, showing the horror of anarchy in everyone's hearts. It felt like there was no king, no rule, no justice. Social life was plagued by the tyranny of heretics, humanity was gone. Women were wailing all around. Seeing this dire state of society, Panchanan Barma's heart wept with sorrow. There was no rule, no justice at the royal court. How could society survive? Unable to get justice at the royal court, he began to preach, relying on his own strength, that is, the power of the Kshatriyas. "Brother Kshatriya, wake up, do not sleep anymore, and listen to the cries of women. The cries of women oppressed by the wicked are setting the sky, the underworld, and the earth ablaze. And you are human beings, Kshatriyas among humans; you are effortless! Brother Kshatriyas, wake up, all of you, unite to protect the motherland; move forward in work. Brave young men, wake up; leave sleep, leap into work. Kshatriyas are not born with material desires. Kshatriyas are born to protect their subjects, to protect religion, for the benefit of the cowherds, to protect their mothers and to give them joy.

"Through these poems, he highlighted the courageous and heroic role of Kshatriya women. Explained the importance of women's empowerment in society. Called for taking inspiration from the ideals of Kshatriya religion. The great & dynamic poem is –

"চম্কি উঠিল ভুক্রণ শুনি, ডাংধরী মোর মাও।  
 দিশাদুওর নাই খালি কোঞ্চহার, দেখে সংসারের ভাও।।  
 সোয়ামীর কোলা, বাপ ভাইর ঘর, আর যেইটে নারী থাকে।  
 জোর করিয়া নুচ্ছাণ্ডায় নিয়া যাইতেছে তাকে।।  
 বেটা ছাওয়াগুলা উঠিয়া আইসে, ফ্যাল ফ্যাল ফ্যাল চায়।।  
 ডাংধরী মাও, কোর্দে হাকি, গাইন ধরিয়া ধায়।।

*Summary:* Hearing the cries of the women, everyone was shaken—there was wailing and suffering everywhere. The thugs were forcibly taking women away from their husbands' homes or from the homes of their fathers and brothers. It was then that Ray Saheb Thakur Panchanan Barma gave the message: "Men, rise up! Women, take up sticks in your hands!"

#### বেটা ছাওয়ার প্রতি - Written for men

ছিকো ছিকো রে মরা বেটা ছাওয়া, ধিক ধিক তোক ধিক  
 মাও বইনক তোর পরে নিগায়, তেঞ্চো থাকিস্ত তুই ঠিক।।  
 আরে মরদ মরদ কওলাইস রে তুঁগিঃ কেমন তোর মর্দানি।।  
 কেবল পাথার বাড়ি হাতে আসি, মাইয়ার আগত্ত কেরদানী?।।  
 লাজ নাই তোর, হিয়াও নাই তোর, বল নাই তোর ধড়ে।।  
 এই বাদে তোক টেপো বউ ছিকো ছিকো করে।।  
 কেবল দুষ্টাদমন মোকদ্দমায়, ফিরে না ধরম মান।।  
 ভাঙ্গি নুচ্ছার হাড়, মাও বইনের রক্ষা, বাপের বেটার কাম।।  
 রাখির না পারিস, মাও বইনক যদি আপন বাহুবলে।।  
 পাপের বোঝা বইছিল মাও তোর, এই দশা তার ফলে।।"

*Summary:* Addressing the men, he said: "Shame on you, you worthless fellows, I condemn you! Women are being taken away right before your eyes, yet you stay silent—how can you still call yourselves men? What kind of manliness is this? You show your so-called bravery only in front of women in the fields. Aren't you ashamed? Can't you even protect your own mothers and sisters?"

আয় আয় রে, ক্ষত্রিয়গুলা, তোমাক ডাকোঁ বারঘার।  
 তোমার কান নাই কি, অন্তর নাই কি কান্দন শুনবার?  
 হউক না কেনে দূর দূরান্তর, পর্বত নদী মাঝে।  
 ক্ষত্রিয় যদি ঠিক হইস্ত তুঁওঁ, তেঁগো শুনুবু কাছে।।।  
 আতুরা কান্দন ক্ষত্রিয় কানে আপনে আসি নাগে।,  
 হিন্দে উঠে হড়কা তুফান, শরীলে শক্তি জাগে।।।

*Summary:* The sleeping man did not wake up at the call of his mother, irrespective of caste and religion. If man does not wake up, then who will save the tyrant? Frustrated, he finally started calling out to 'Mother', the Kshatriya Shakti, which is a part of the great power.

"পাণ্ডে়ার ভারে পাহাড় ভাঙে, ফিরিয়া না চায় বীর।  
 দুষ্টাক মারি আর্তক তারি, তবে সে হয় রে থির।।।

*Summary:* What does the Kshatriya do then ! :- If you are a Kshatriya, if it is the duty of a Kshatriya to relieve pain, then wherever you are, a woman's scream will attract you like a magnet - her screams will reach your ears (**Barman G. N., 2019.**)

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The desperate call of the mother of the dragon was the source of some men and women were awakened and ready to defend themselves. The Kshatriya was awake that day but today he is asleep again. Panchanan Barma, from 1333 until the last day of his life, worked to protect women in the royal court.

He used his own strength and the strength of the society to protect women and as a result, Rangpur was at peace for a few days. The thought of protecting women drove him crazy in all his activities in his last life. Today he is no more. Due to the Panchanan Barma movement, rape of women had reduced a lot in Bengal, especially in North Bengal, but now it has reappeared on a large scale. The government has become particularly concerned about preventing brutal atrocities. But sin has penetrated so much that it cannot be prevented at all. To prevent these atrocities on the mother nation, social classes must make special efforts. Society must be reformed. Adequate arrangements must be made to protect self-respect, that is, the dignity of women. Volunteer groups must be formed in places. They will stand guard together and unite to prevent violence and assist the administration if necessary.

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