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**A STUDY ON THE MIGRATORY PRACTICES OF THE RAJBANSHIS OF DARJILING DISTRICT: A PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER CHOICES FOR EDUCATION**

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**Abstract**

*Education, having a tremendous impact on our lives, leads the masses to move in search of even better-quality tutoring. An inspection on the education, the related migration of both the genders, and the challenges faced by the Rajbanshi community inhabiting the Darjiling district was administered. The Rajbanshis are an indigenous group residing in the northern parts of the state of West Bengal. Due to their inherent nature and bigotry practices against them, their education and financial condition have not improved significantly over time. The goal of the study was to investigate the literacy rates of the Rajbanshis, study the migration related to educational attainment, and the challenges associated with it, mainly for the females. For the evaluation, the educational, as well as financial details, were taken into consideration along with several other factors. The study is based mainly on primary data collected by survey through a structured questionnaire, followed by quantifying the results through software like ODK Collect, and SPSS. The study findings imply that the Rajbanshis are not very keen on higher education, and the education related migration among the community is crouched. Most of the people are not wealthy enough to migrate to a different city for their education. Only a small number of students migrate mostly after their graduation. It is also observed that the earlier generation of the populace was not fervent about getting themselves educated.*

**Keywords:** Education, Migration, Challenges, Rajbanshis, Literacy, Financial stability.

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**Introduction**

The movement of people from one place to another in search of higher living standards, better education, jobs, health care, etc., is known as migration, which involves both pull as well as push factors. Educational migration refers to the movement of students from the source to destination areas seeking superior quality education. Students might choose their extent of migration which can be either international or national (both intra-state and inter-state). The term “Rajbanshis” relates to the “royal lineage”. The Rajbanshis are an indigenous group residing mostly in the northern parts of West Bengal, eastern Bihar, and lower Assam and belong to the Scheduled Caste community. The Rajbanshis are mostly indigent and the literacy and related migration for both the genders of the community are typically low. Although in recent times, education is considered one of the most important factors of social mobility, the Rajbanshis in general do not show any signs of lucrative interest in getting educated.

**Rationale of the study**

Educational migration has gained momentum in recent years and as a result, hundreds of students

move from one place to the other for better educational facilities. But the Rajbanshis, even after having a comparatively large population, are lagging behind in most spheres of education and overall development. This study will help cater to the problems like education, migration, and gender bias as faced by this community.

**Objective of the study**

1. To study the educational migration and the challenges faced by the Rajbanshi population of Darjiling district.
2. To scrutinize the differences in migratory practices among both the genders within the Rajbanshi community.

**Study area**

Darjiling district is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas and is the northernmost district in the state of West Bengal. The district comprises the northern hills (300 to 12,000 feet above the mean sea level) and the southern plains (i.e., the Tarai) between the coordinates 27°02'N, 88°10'E and 27°03'N, 88°16'E. The total area of the district is 3,149.00 sq. km. According to the 2011 census, Darjiling district has a population of 1,846,823 among which 738,729 people are from the Rajbanshi community. 1,118,860 people live

in a rural setting while the remaining 727,963 live in urban areas. The district has a population density of 4,743 people per sq. km.

#### **Methodology**

To conduct the research and to collect the data, a standard questionnaire for the socio-economic background and educational details had been prepared. A sample size of one hundred (100) households of Rajbanshis had been taken, which was calculated keeping the confidence level at 95% and error rate at 9%. The households for surveying were selected through purposeful random sampling. The survey had been conducted with the help of the ODK Collect application on a smartphone. The results have been quantified using SPSS software. The analytical hierarchy process (AHP) has been used to form a relationship framework which helped to determine the correlation matrix, for the factors of educational migration.

#### **Major Findings**

**Literacy Rate and Highest Level of Educational Attainment:** Around 72.73% of the inhabitants are educated, i.e., have the basic ability to read and write, whereas the remaining 27.27% can be considered illiterate. Out of the educated lot, 18.75% concentrate in post-graduation, 62.50% in graduation, 6.25% each in primary, secondary, and senior secondary.

**Female population:** The disparity in the literacy rates, as well as the highest level of educational attainment, is quite wide. Female literacy stands at a mere 44.27% which is not even half of the female population of the district. Thus, a large part of the illiterate population of the district constitutes women.

**The Domain of Study and Type of Organization Enrolled in:** Of the total literate population, 71.43% study humanities, 14.29% study science, and 7.14% study some professional course. 12.50% are enrolled in central universities, 43.75% in state universities, 25.00% in private universities, and the remaining are enrolled in schools.

**Female population:** Most of the female students i.e., around 91.62% study humanities, 3.21% study science with no females enrolled in any professional courses. Again, no females are enrolled in any private or central universities. Out of the total, 94.83% of the female students are enrolled in state universities, and the remaining 5.17% are in schools.

**Location of Institute and Distance from Origin:** 56.25% of the educated Rajbanshis have either stayed in their hometown or have relocated inside the state (25.00%). Only 18.75%

have moved to other states (more than 900kms). There are no international migrations.

**Female population:** More than 90% of the literate females have stayed back in their hometown to complete their higher education, a handful of them have moved to the state capital and there are no inter-state or national, or international migrations among them. This clearly brings out the soft gender disparity prevailing in the Rajbanshi society.

**Number of Migrations and Duration of Stay:** 56.25% of the inhabitants have not migrated even once. Out of the population who have migrated for education, 18.18% have two or more migrations and 81.82% have migrated only once in their life. There are no long-term migrations and most of the population have migrated for a maximum of 5 years.

**Female population:** Only 9.87% of the female population have had the privilege and permission to migrate to a different city for their education which is a very insignificant number. No females have more than one migration for education.

**Number of Literates and Education Related Migration in the Family:** 40.91% of the surveyors do not have even a single educated member in their family other than themselves. 36.36% of them have at least two and 22.73% have three educated members in the family. 27.27% of the population have at least one family member who has migrated for education, and 15.82% have at least two. The remaining 56.91% of surveyors do not have even a single member in the family who has migrated somewhere else for education.

**Female population:** 83.23% of the surveyors do not have even a single educated female member in the family, 11.65% have only one, and the remaining 6.12% have at least two educated female family members, which distinctly brings out the gap existing from the earlier generations. There are no female migrations in the earlier generation of Rajbanshis, thus pointing out the subjacent status associated with female education.

**Educational Opportunities for Rajbanshi Females:** 38.53% of the general population feel that females ought not to be given more education since they feel that the privilege of education is mainly for the males of the society. The remaining 61.47% of the population feel that the girls of the Rajbanshi society do not have equivalent rights and that they ought to be given more education opportunities. Most of the people who have voted for better education facilities for females are mostly women, whereas more than

half of the male population feel that girls do not need equal rights to education.

**Discrimination Faced:** Over 90% of the population have accorded to have faced discrimination during their life, mostly gendered or racial. It is because the so-called upper caste people of North Bengal discriminate against the Rajbanshis based on their race, for their mongoloid origin. Although racial discrimination comes from the members outside the community, gendered discrimination is rooted in the community itself. The whole female population agreed to have faced gender discrimination at some point in their life.

### Conclusion

The conducted research gives an insight into the literacy, education related migration, and the gendered choices of the Rajbanshi community. It can be concluded that the Rajbanshis do not pay much heed to education and would rather relocate for financial sustenance than education. Also, the consistent poverty among the Rajbanshis does not leave them the option to migrate to different cities for education. Not to mention, even after considering this, the female literacy and related migration are negligible as compared to their male counterparts. In most cases, they are not even left with the privilege to pursue higher education (mostly due to marriage), leave alone migrate for the same. This discloses to us that there is a soft nature of gender bias present in their society, which may not be readily discriminating but which affects the female population in the long run.

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