

## Culinary Quest for Authentic Foods in Modern Popular Taste Culture: A Study on Ethnic Ancestral Food Culture in West Bengal

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**Abstract:** Trending exploration of culture through the taste of modern pop food is a new equation of identity politics which were deeply rooted in ancient past. Racial distinction based on many components is a part of India's hardcore political reality. One of these components is food which is not merely a means of nourishing human body for survivalism but also it has diversified dimensions of assimilation of many groups of people. As predecessor of fusion foods, several ancestral foods are taking new shapes with its rareness. While one individual take food in any outlets, he/she does not ask questions- Who prepares food? What we consume? How we consume it? and Who eats first by sitting on whose table does not matter? People from different cultural backgrounds are having different foods prepared in multiple ways and have become glocalised one. Foods whether modern or traditional helps us to rediscover our habits, practices, attitudes, rituals, and identities surrounded by it. Both cultural resurgence and aggrandizement of modern pop food culture may not be offensive until and unless it is imposed upon others, because that will violate the democratic norms of one racial group. Sometimes this cultural distinctiveness creates some sort of socio-cultural exclusion which may become harmful to the national integrity. To find out the rationale behind the craze for fusion foods with some probable prospects are the main objectives of this article. Data has been collected from primary and to some extent from secondary sources for getting in-depth information of this fusion food culture. A descriptive and exploratory case study method of Rajbanshi food culture of West Bengal has been followed by a conceptual framework of cultural inclusion. The role of government, civil society and many others are documentary to restore their cultural uncommonness along with adoption of modern food cultures.

**Key Words:** Fusion foods, Culture, Resurgence, Cultural exclusion, Rajbanshi etc.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Racial distinction based on many components is a part of India's hardcore political reality. One of these components is food which is not merely a means of nourishing human body for survivalism but also it has diversified dimensions of assimilation of many groups of people. After entering into the restaurant, no one ask questions like- Who prepares food? What we consume? How we consume it? Who eats first by sitting on whose table does not matter? People from different cultural backgrounds eat different foods prepared in their own ways and means and are gradually becoming a glocalised one. Food helps us to understand our habits, practices, rituals, attitudes, and identities surrounded by it. Both cultural resurgence and aggrandizement of modern pop food culture may not be offensive until and unless it is imposed upon others, because that will violate the democratic norms of one racial group. India, as a wide-ranging melting pot of different ethnic folk cultures, allowed minority racial groups to enjoy equal opportunities to develop and recognize them as a part of the modern fusion food culture. All the migrated peoples like- Aryans, Mongoloids, Dravidians, Austric, Turkish, Jews, the Persians, Kushans, Khens, Sakas, Huns etc. brought with them their own food habits, religious rituals, sculptures, music, artist's impression, wedding rituals, festivals, dresses, and more specifically their own cultural habits and maintained their own cultural identities and distinctive values. But in many times this cultural distinctiveness create some sort of socio-cultural mobilizations which may become harmful to the national integrity. This ethnic cultural mobilization tries to rediscover their past cultural practices and distorted histories which have become irrelevant in the age of glocalised world.

Trending exploration of culture through the taste of modern pop food is a new equation of identity politics which were deeply rooted in ancient past. As predecessor of fusion foods, several ancestral foods are taking new dimension with its distinctiveness. In this scenario, the idea of social inclusion which is considered to be the most trusted antidote to the century-old history of discrimination and inequality of racial minorities has come out. Today, an inclusive society has become a synonym for human progress. In the light of a significant excluded community in North Bengal i.e. the Rajbanshi community, the present study intends to explore the nature and extent of the degradations of the century-old ethnic food culture. Governmental initiatives are there which had a mixed impact on the Rajbanshi community. On the one hand, a section of them felt empowered as the governmental initiatives had included them into the national mainstream. On the other hand, a sizable selection of the Rajbanshi community interprets that the governmental inclusionary initiatives are as a ploy to destroy their racial specificities. Apart from the above two views, another section of the Rajbanshi people who known as secessionists like- KLO and others wanted a powerful separatist solution to their problem. Therefore, a rights-based conceptual framework of social inclusion of the Rajbanshi community can be the probable stepping stone towards the principle of social equity. So that modern pop culture along with ethnic folk culture can exist simultaneously.

## 2. Statement of the Problem:

The present article intends to examine the root causes of cultural exclusion of the Rajbanshis community in order to understand the real issues involved with and whether the modern popular food culture is the successor of ethnic-regional food cultures or not? This study will help us to identify the actual causes of food alienation of the excluded groups, like-Rajbanshis of West Bengal. So, socio-cultural exclusion is the problem in the process of social inclusion.

## 3. Review of literatures:

Some of the literary works of this area i.e. socio-cultural exclusion have been reviewed here. D.P. Moynihan's 'Beyond the Melting Pot' (1963) was perhaps one of the first such publications which focused on the question of cultural-racial identity and mobilization in the USA. Another work of Nathan Glazer and D. P. Moynihan is 'Ethnicity, Theory and Practice' (1975). According to both Glazer and Moynihan, if cultural-racial mobilization demands national sovereign states, they should be known as ethnic movements. They also argued that 'ethnicity is a distinct category of social process and social differentiation, articulation, and social mobilization will naturally follow ethnic lines.'

J. Hutchinson and A.D. Smith in their 'Ethnicity' (1996) have divided various conceptual works of ethnic movements into two categories: one is Primordialist and the other is Instrumentalist. The Instrumentalist focuses on the problem of cultural-territoriality of ethnic mobilization from a different angle. They viewed that ethnic mobilization is an instrument for achieving political and economic goals. For instance, D. L. Horowitz, in his 'Ethnic Groups in Conflict' (1985) tries to search for the connection between ethnic-cultural movements and political-economic interest. According to Horowitz, sometimes ethnic mobilization is a convenient instrument for establishing a monopoly over resources.

Urmila Phadnis's 'Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia' (1989) or S.A. Schermeshorn's 'Ethnic plurality in India' (1978) may be referred to as an example of examining the problem of ethnicity from nationalistic perspective. Similarly, Myron Weiner's 'Sons of the Soil' (1978) explains the issue of a territorial cultural movement in Assam from the perspective of Ethnicity. M. Weiner viewed cultural nativism as the result of conflict between migrants and natives over resources. Keeping in mind the resource competition, he characterizes such movements as the result of Ethnicity.

Some of these works portrayed the origins of the Rajbanshis, their food habits, religious rituals, language, and different kinds of folk songs, fishing, cultivation, household scenario, social stigmas, and physical outlooks, which are different from all other communities in the society. The following works are mentionable; Dr. Rajat Subhra Mukherjee in his important article 'A Note on Cultural Background of Kamtapur Movement in North Bengal' is also shows the sociological aspect of the campaign. Later on he examines Kamtapur movement from a cultural perspective of North Bengal. In the last article of 2005, he tried to provide the prevailing cultural separateness and conflict between the Rajbanshis and the alien community of people.

'The Rajbanshis of North Bengal: A Study of a Hindu Social Group' by Charu Chandra Sanyal is just like a historical, sociological and cultural deed on the Rajbanshi community. This book portrayed all sides of a Rajbanshi people which covered not only the origin of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal but also put forward the pictures of socio-cultural and religious practices of Rajbanshis of the said area. This book consisted of house building procedure, religious practices, food habits, dress up, different kinds of Songs whether it is marriage song, cultural song, love song, puja song etc. of the Rajbanshis including their separate linguistic terminologies, shlokas etc. It is a live 'Dalil' in the Rajbanshi community. But, one thing was not mentioned there in the book i.e. political aspects of Rajbanshi people, though it was not a book on the political account of the Rajbanshi community.

### 3. Research Gap:

On reviewing the existing literature on socio-cultural inclusion and exclusion, one can identify a noticeable research gap. Some scholars and researchers have identified various aspects of inclusion and exclusion of the downtrodden sections from the point of view of ethnicity, ethno-nationalism, culture in general, inclusive role of the state, empowerment, etc. But there is hardly any study on the true nature of cultural inclusion of Rajbanshi people with special reference to Rajbanshi food practices in West Bengal. The present article is a humble attempt to fill this research gap.

### 4. Objectives of the Study:

Interacting with the highest number of stakeholders' i.e. common people at the grassroots level (Gram Panchayat), the present study attempts to examine the root causes of socio-cultural distinctiveness concerning Rajbanshi community of West Bengal. It focuses on the process of inclusion that can ensure the socio-cultural development of all ethnic racial groups. The specific objectives of the article are: i) to explore the paths through which the cultural degeneration of Rajbanshi community has been started;

ii) to find out the relationship between modern fusion food cultural and ethnic ancestral food practices;

iii) and also try to analyze various socio-cultural and economic factors that have been contributed to the growth of modern popular food culture and treat ancestral food practices as predecessor of it.

### 5. Methodology:

To reach the objectives, data has been collected from different primary and secondary sources to get detailed information about the taste of popular culture as a whole and racial folk culture of familiar Rajbanshi people in specific. An extensive study has been conducted on a questionnaire-based descriptive and exploratory method. It has been adopted to get elicited information regarding food practices, food culture, food habits, etc. of Rajbanshi people as well as of non-rajbanshi people and at the same time, the role of the popular food culture which unite all ethnic ancestral food practices in a common basket by using the methodology of social inclusion.

#### • Technique of the Data Collection:

A simple random data collection technique has been used in this study. In some cases (variables), 5 points Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree in many cases Strongly Yes, Partially Yes, Indifferent, Partially No and Strongly No) has been used to get in-depth data on these fields. Though the Rajbanshi community has been incorporated into the Scheduled Caste list, respondents were not Rajbanshi alone. People from different communities, like- Mech, Rava, Kiratas, Khens, Brahmin, Namadas, Muslims, Sahas, Oreos, Mundas, etc. are bracketed here as 'Others.' Some electronic gadgets have been used in the study.

#### • Universe of the study:

As a melting pot, Cooch Behar district has the highest proportion of different ethnic communities as mentioned above, two Rajbanshi dominated separate gram panchayats- namely, Chhoto Sal Bari gram panchayat of Sitalkuchi community development block and Pachagarh gram panchayat of Mathabhanga-I community development block of Cooch Behar district have been purposively selected as the universe of the study.

Table no 1: Sample Size

| Sample Size                   |               |      |                         |     |
|-------------------------------|---------------|------|-------------------------|-----|
| Chhoto Sal Bari GP            | 5% of Total = | 1168 | 5% of Rajbanshi Total = | 632 |
| Pachagarh GP                  | 5% of Total = | 1244 | 5% of Rajbanshi Total = | 580 |
| Source: Census of India, 2011 |               |      |                         |     |

This table portrays the universe of the study of two selected Gram Panchayats, out of which 5% of the total population (23359) of the Chhoto Sal Bari GP i.e. is 1168 and at the same time, 5% of the total population (24880) of the Pachagarh GP is 1244 have been selected and interviewed for this study. In both cases 5% of the total SC population (12644) of Chhoto Sal Bari i.e. 632 and in case of Pachagarh GP (11600) i.e. 580 have been selected and interviewed for this study. Compared to the Rajbanshis in both cases, STs are negligible.

#### • Hypotheses:

Socio-cultural, economic and political factors lead to the process of cultural exclusion of the backward sections of the society. Rajbanshis of West Bengal and Bengali speaking populations from other communities of this region are equally facing the same problems mentioned above. Hypotheses suggest that incremental growth of the modern popular food culture may further lead to the process of ethnic cultural degeneration.

#### • Research Questions:

This study tries to inter-relate all the socio-cultural and economic factors responsible for the growth of deprivation among Rajbanshis. In this study, through the process of inclusion, the emancipation of Rajbanshi cultures along with

other backward communities has been discussed. Keep all these considerations in mind, this study attempts to find out some rational answers to the following questions- 1) Why are the traditional food practices of marginalized sections of society abolishing and losing its importance? 2) Why has been the modern food culture become more popular? 3) How far are the socio-cultural, linguistic, educational, and economic factors responsible for the degradations of ethnic food practices with the advent of Rajbanshi community?

● **Relevance of the study:**

Everybody has the right to know why and how their age old folk cultural tradition is gradually abolishing? In many cases, socio-cultural exclusion has become a threat to India's territorial and multicultural integrity. Under such circumstances, it is necessary to examine the root causes of cultural deprivations. By focusing mainly on the conceptual framework of social inclusion, all sorts of socio-cultural, economic and political evils can be identified and measures can be taken for right direction.

● **Rajbanshi Population in North Bengal:**

Cooch Behar region is a melting pot of many racial groups of people like- Palais, Bodos, Kacharis, Khens, Koches and Rajbanshis etc. who ruled over this area. This multidimensional nature is a historical product of relentless infighting and indecent behaviour of these groups. Since 1510, Rajbanshi people inhabited over Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda and Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district. But now they argued that they are culturally marginalized by the Bengalis from the southern district of West Bengal and Bengali refugees from East Pakistan (Bangladesh). Rajbanshis, therefore remain neglected in the Bengali-dominated state of West Bengal. Thus, a section of the Rajbanshi leadership feels that establishment of a separate state can effectively protect their socio-cultural and economic interests. For a better understanding of socio-cultural mobilizations of the Rajbanshi community, it is therefore necessary to examine their historical, socio-cultural, economic and political conditions. The emancipation of Rajbanshis from the curses of cultural discrimination, inequalities is needed along with proper education, awareness, and capacity building.

**Table no 2: Decadal Growth of Rajbanshi Population in North Bengal**

| District Wise Rajbanshi Population in North Bengal |               |             |             |             |
|--|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| SL. No.  | District      | Census 1971 | Census 1981 | Census 1991 |
| 1  | Cooch Behar   | 481304      | 714221      | 685622      |
| 2  | Jalpaiguri    | 329191      | 514274      | 656073      |
| 3  | Darjeeling    | 31505       | 62770       | 96745       |
| 4  | West Dinajpur | 134976      | 369015      | 489642      |
| 5  | Maldah        | 50693       | 83462       | 114697      |
| 6  | North Bengal  | 1027669     | 1743642     | 2222779     |

Source: Census of India- 1971, 1981, 1991

This table also demonstrates the total number of Rajbanshi population in North Bengal district wise from three Census reports of India- 1971, 1981 and 1991. Through this table we can also see the decadal growth of the Rajbanshis of North Bengal of 1971, 1981 and 1991.

● **Socio-Cultural Status of Rajbanshis:**

Sailen Debnath in his book argued that "North Bengal is the best example of pluralistic culture representing the cultural diversity of the whole of India in the form of a many India. The Bengalis of the southern delta often ignorant of the pluralistic nature of North Bengal invariably commit mistakes emphasizing much on so-called 'Bengali culture' even in the case of North Bengal." (Debnath) Thus a new kind of overwhelming interaction has created between the sons of the soil and the alien population in Cooch Behar. The demand for a separate social identity that is not new and which we have seen in the history of separate state demands from Kshatriya Samiti to Kamtapur People's Party. Nevertheless, based on different Census reports, it has been seen that they have their four separate identities- 1) From Koch to Rajbangshi (1971); 2) From Rajbangshi to Bratya Kshatriya (1981); 3) From Bratya Kshatriya to Kshatriya Rajbangshi (1911 and 1921); 4) From Kshatriya Rajbangshi to only Kshatriya (1931). This continuous changing process of identities of the Rajbangshis leads to a million dollar question- What is the actual position of the Rajbangshi people in the caste system of the present society during the age of globalization?

● **Cultural traditions of Rajbanshis:**

It has already been mentioned above that the Rajbanshi community is culturally different from other communities such as Bengalis (Hindu), Muslims, and *Bhatias* (the immigrants from *Bhati desh*, which means East Bengal, are called

*Bhatias*). There is a massive gap between these two groups of people culturally. Some cultural aspects of the Rajbanshi populations in the district of Cooch Behar, particularly and North Bengal in general, are pointed out here. 1stly the material culture of Rajbanshi is different from other alien groups. In North Bengal, it is generally found that the naming of a village was made based on *Jotedars/jotes* and based on inhabitants living, based on land, the basis of deity, etc. For example, *Bhabani Jote*, *Kshirod Jote* (based on *Jote*); *Dakuapara*, *Gidalpara*, *Pandit para*, etc. (based on inhabitants); *Dangapara*, *Altagram Gorgoria ghat*, etc. (based on land); *Bhandari Kalirhat*, *Jalpaiguri*, *Kathalguri*, *Bigotari*, etc. (based on deity). (Jana)

- **Food habits of the Rajbanshis:**

There is a saying that the Rajbanshis are rice-eating people and eat three big meals in a day. However, some of the special dishes of the Rajbanshi community are illustrated here.

- **Bhorta or Makha:**

After entering into the Restaurant or Dhaba people orders 'Chicken *Bharta*' – is a new trend which is a part of the modern food culture, but this concept of *Bharta* is not a new one to the Rajbanshis. It is as old as the Rajbanshis community exists. When boiled or roasted vegetables are used and made into a lump or paste with salt, chilies, onions, or garlic, it is called '*Bhatta*.' They usually take it in the morning with their *Basi bhat*.

- **Snails and Oysters:**

Supposedly, you have gone Malaysia to travel as a tourist and you are roaming sea beaches. Suddenly, you want to eat seafood, like- Snails and Oysters, is a new trend which is a part of the modern food culture. Rajbanshis are the people who frequently collect Snails and Oysters from the local river and taken Oysters (*Jhinuk*), small and big snails (*Takoa* and *Samuk*) as their common food named as *Horpa*.

- **Bhapa:**

Is there anybody who doesn't want to eat *Ilish Bhapa*. No one is there. Everyone wants to have it which represents modern food. After cleaning up of the tiny fishes collected from the local river, put them into the turmeric leaves with salt, chilies, onions, and garlic and bind them together. After that put it into the fire and take it out from the fire once it boiled enough. Then smash it all together with mustard oil- it is called *Bhapa*.

- **Grilled Fish & Fish Fries:**

*Masan* is a most dangerous horrible male spirit who generally lives on the cremation ground, bathing *ghat*, or road. These spirits may also reside in trees like- bamboo, plantain trees, etc. There may be different kinds of *Masan*, such as *Barika Masan* who lives in bamboo; *Ghather Masan* stays at bathing ghat; *Tisila Masan* who lives in water; and *Kal Masan* who lives in the cremation ground, etc. *Masan* can attack any person at any time and place and take possession of him, known as '*Chutsia Dhora*.' Symptoms of an affected person by the *Masan*, likewise – the person may eat burnt earth, burnt wood charcoal, all fish fries (common Snake head/Snake head Murrells or Mud fish known as *Latha/Taki/Sati mach*), roasted cereals, etc. At the same time, the affected person may suffer from diarrhea, dysentery, weakness, passing urine unconsciously in the bed, and the affected person's family members worship him for a cure. (Sanyal 162) So, put this common Snake head/Snake head Murrells or Mud fish known as *Latha/Taki/Sati mach* in to the burning fire and take it out from the fire once it boiled enough. Then smash it with salt, chilies, onions, and garlic all together with mustard oil- it is called *Sati Macher Pora*.

- **Cheka-sak:**

'*Cheka-sak*' (some leaves of young jute plants are collected from the field, or some dried Jute leaves (*Sukati*) preserved in the house for a long time in a tightly closed earthen jar. They are washed clean of all dirt. A cast-iron pan (*Korai*) is placed over a burning oven, and when it is hot, the Jute leaves are poured into the pan with a few chilies. The whole thing is stirred with an iron ladle; as soon as the leaves are lightly fried. Some salt and enough water are poured into the mass to boil the leaves. After a few minutes, '*Cheka water*' which is prepared separately, is poured into boiling water for some time and then taken out of the oven. The curry is called '*Pata Saker Cheka*' or '*Sukatir Cheka*'. This *Cheka-sak* can also be made from *Nafa-sak*, *Kochu-sak*, etc.

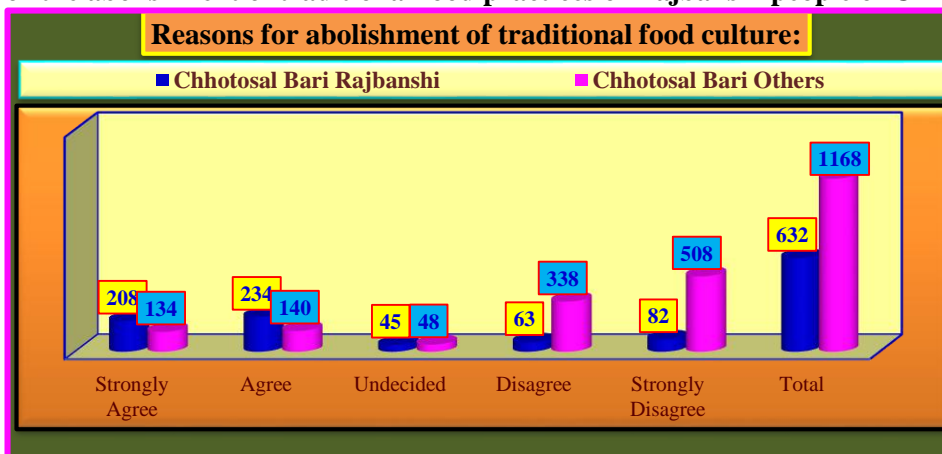
- **Pelka:**

'*Pelka*' is also prepared in almost the same way as '*Cheka*,' but green leaves and tender shoots of jute or leaves of the *Nafa* plant are used. In some cases, a few dried fishes (*Sukta*) are added. The prepared curry is more mucilaginous and softer; practically a viscous fluid than others like *Sidol*, *Phok doi*, etc. (Sanyal 46) Both *Cheka-sak* and *Pelka* have their medicinal values also. Modern food like- Marshmallow is a type of confectionery made from sugar, water and gelatin mixed solid and soft consistency. Just like marshmallows which traditionally were made from the extract of the mucilaginous root of the marshmallow plant, *Pelka* is made from the mucilaginous leaves of the *Nafa* plant (marshmallow), leaves of the *Sajne* plant (*Moringa Oleifera*), leaves of the *Kachu* plant (*Taro*) etc.

• **Co-relations between modern fusion food culture and ethnic food practices:**

It will not be foolish to say that in some cases there is a close connection between modern fusion foods and ethnic food practices. Many of the dishes are there which are nearly same. The traditional dishes like- Grilled fish & Fish fries came from *Macher pora*; Bhapa came from *Bhapa*; *Bhorta* or *Makha* came from *Sana*; and Sea food like-Snails and Oysters came from *Horpa*.

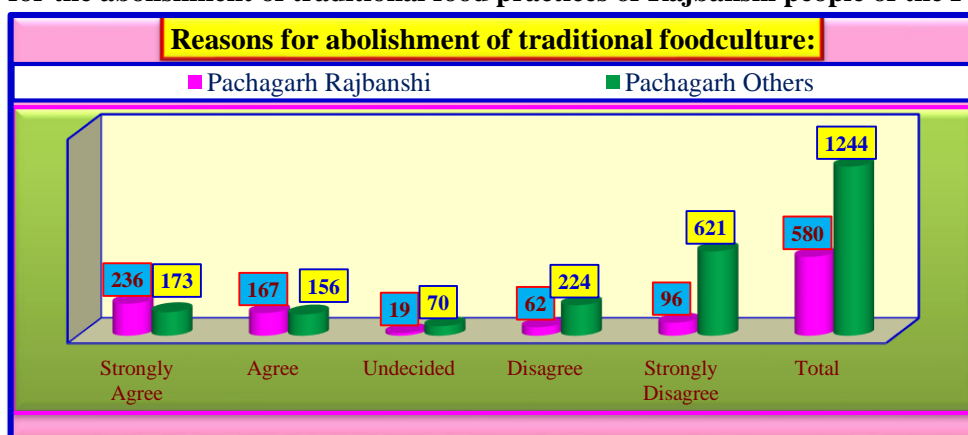
➤ **Reasons for the abolishment of traditional food practices of Rajbanshi people of Chhoto Sal Bari GP:**



Source: Field Data (Primary)

This chart shows the gradual abolishment of traditional food cultures like- Chheka sak, Pelka sak, Sidol, Nafa saker jhol, Khakra bhat, etc. of Rajbanshi people at Chhoto Sal Bari GP. Out of 632 Rajbanshi people, 32.96% (208) replied strongly agree, 37.02 % (234) replied agree, 9.96% (63) replied disagree, and 12.97% (82) strongly disagreed. 7.12% (45) of them remained undecided when they were asked that modern pop food cultures are responsible for the gradual abolishment of traditional food practices of the Rajbanshi people of the Chhoto Sal Bari GP or not. People from other than Rajbanshi communities also responded unhesitatingly and agreed. Out of 1168 people from other communities, 11.47% (134) replied strongly agree, 11.98 % (140) replied agree, 28.93% (338) replied disagree, and 43.49% (508) replied strongly disagree, whereas 4.10% (48) remained undecided when they were asked the same question. Therefore, here it has been seen that there are two distinct arguments between these two groups of people about the gradual abolishment of traditional food practices of Rajbanshis due to modern food cultures. Nevertheless, the most worthy thing here is that 32.96% (208) out of 632 Rajbanshi people strongly agreed in favour of the motion, and 43.49% (508) people from other communities strongly disagreed with the motion. Only 11.98 % (140) from other communities appreciate this view.

➤ **Reasons for the abolishment of traditional food practices of Rajbanshi people of the Pachagarh GP:**

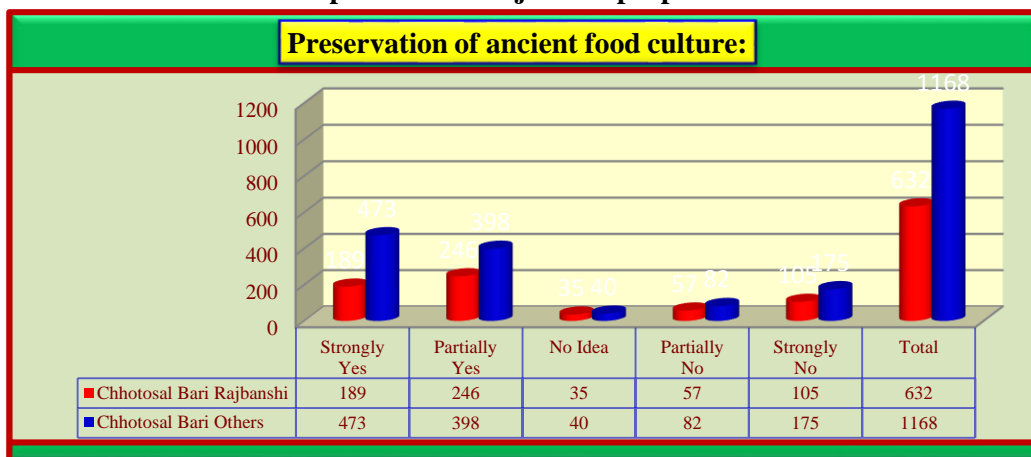


Source: Field Data (Primary)

This chart shows the gradual abolishment of traditional food cultures of Rajbanshi people at Pachagarh GP. Out of 580 Rajbanshi people, 40.68 (236) replied strongly agree, 28.79 % (167) replied agree, 10.68% (62) replied disagree, and 16.55% (96) replied strongly disagree, whereas 3.27% (19) remained undecided when they were asked that only modern pop food cultures are responsible for gradual abolishment of traditional food cultures like- Chheka sak, Pelka sak, Sidol, Nafa saker jhol, Khakra bhat, etc. of Rajbanshi people of the Pachagarh GP or not. People from other than Rajbanshi communities also responded unhesitatingly and agreed. Out of 1244 people from other communities, 13.90%

(173) replied strongly agree, 12.50 % (156) replied agree, 18.006% (224) replied disagree, and 49.91% (577) replied strongly disagree, whereas 5.62% (70) remained undecided when they were asked the same question. So, here it has been seen that there are two different pictures between these two groups of people about the gradual abolishment of traditional food practices of Rajbanshi people due to modern food cultures. However, the most noteworthy thing here is that 40.68% (236) out of 580 Rajbanshi people strongly agreed to favour the motion and 49.91% (621) people from other communities.

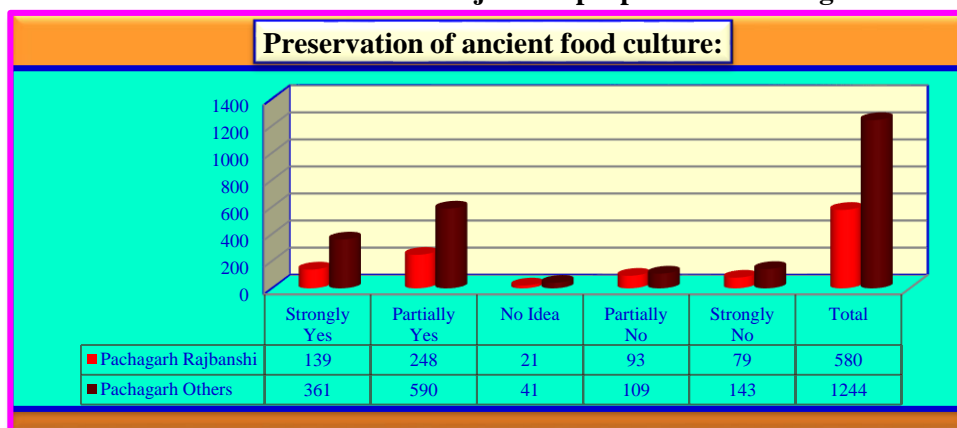
➤ **Preservation of the ancient food practices of Rajbanshi people of the Chhoto Sal Bari GP:**



Source: Field Data (Primary)

This column chart shows crystal picture of the preservation of ethnic ancestral food practices of the Rajbanshi people within the existing socio-political, economic and cultural framework. Out of 632 Rajbanshi people of Chhoto Sal Bari GP, 29.90% (189) replied strongly yes, 38.92 % (246) replied partially yes, 9.01% (57) replied partially no, and 16.61% (105) replied strongly no. In contrast, only 5.53% (35) said with no idea when they were asked whether Rajbanshi people could be able to preserve their ancient food practices of the Chhoto Sal Bari GP within the existing socio-political, economic, and cultural set-up. People from other than Rajbanshi communities also responded unhesitatingly and agreed. Out of 1168 people from other communities, 40.49% (473) replied strongly yes, 34.07 % (398) replied partially yes, 7.02% (82) replied partially no, and 14.98% (175) replied strongly no, whereas only 3.42% (40) said with no idea when they were asked the same question. It has been seen that there are similarities between these two groups of people regarding the preservation of age-old food cultures of Rajbanshi people within the existing cultural set-up. However, the most noteworthy thing here is that 38.92 % (246) of Rajbanshi people argued for partially yes, and 34.07 % (398) replied with partially yes from people of other communities.

➤ **Preservation of the ancient food cultures of Rajbanshi people of the Pachagarh GP:**



Source: Field Data (Primary)

This chart also provides a clear picture of the preservation of age-old food practices of the Rajbanshi people within the existing socio-political, economic and cultural framework. Out of 580 Rajbanshi people of Pachagarh GP, 23.96% (139) replied strongly yes, 42.75 % (248) replied partially yes, 16.03% (93) replied partially no, and 13.62% (79) replied strongly no. In contrast, only 3.62% (21) said they had no idea when asked whether Rajbanshi people could be able to preserve their ancient food practices of the Pachagarh GP within the existing socio-political, economic and cultural set-up. People from other than Rajbanshi communities also responded unhesitatingly and agreed. Out of 1244 people from

other communities, 29.82% (371) replied strongly yes, 47.42% (590) replied partially yes, 11.97% (149) replied partially no, and 8.27% (103) replied strongly no, whereas only 3.29% (41) said with no idea when they were asked the same question. Therefore, it has been seen that there are similarities between these two groups of people regarding the preservation of ancient food cultures of Rajbanshi people within the existing cultural set-up. Nevertheless, the most noteworthy thing here is that 42.75 % (248) of Rajbanshi people argued for partially yes, and 47.42% (590) replied with partially yes people from other communities.

## 6. Findings:

In this article, one kind of nuances have been coming out against the inclusive measures taken by the government like- the 5th and 6th Schedule, 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act-1992, National Commission for SCs and STs, National Human Rights Commission, etc. which can never douse the fire of socio-cultural exclusion. The government of India and several states have taken three important steps such as- 1) Reservation of seats in legislatures; 2) Reservation of jobs in public employment; 3) and reservation of seats in educational institutions- according to the proportionate of the SC and ST populations. The response that has come out in the field study is not homogenous. It is heterogeneous. 1) A segment of the Rajbanshis agreed with the view that ancient food cultures of them is gradually disappearing due to the expansions of modern fusion food cultures; 2) Another section of them argued differently. To them, Rajbanshi people are able to preserve their own ancestral food practices within the existing socio- cultural, economic and political set-up; 3) one noteworthy thing is that some of the non-Rajbanshis people also responded unhesitatingly and agreed on many things. Such as- preservation of ancestral food practices of the Rajbanshis; 4) and another finding that has come out that feeling of ostracism or the feeling of superior complexity among non-Rajbanshi community still existed in the society. Several policy initiatives are needed to ensure the socio-cultural inclusion of the Rajbanshi community in the national mainstream. This study also opined that there are some of the cultural differences in between the Rajbanshis and the mainstream Bengalis. Rajbanshis are trying to prove that the food culture of the Rajbanshis is different from any other communities, particularly Bengalis. Therefore, this distinction needs to be restored.

## 7. Actionable plans may be taken to restoration of ancient food culture:

One collective inclusive model comprises of both central and state government, business groups, entrepreneurs and civil society is needed to promote and preserve West Bengal's cultural heritage. For the sustainability of the northern region of West Bengal in general and the development of the Rajbanshi culture specifically, some actionable plans may be taken by the government. These are- 1) Arrangements for social-cultural security; 2) Resource mapping; 3) Active participation of the private sectors: Entrepreneurship; 4) Proactive government policies for cultural rejuvenation; 5) Positive role of the civil society; and 6) Active role of the Rajbanshis Himself/herself.

## 8. CONCLUSION:

This study suggests a rights-based collective conceptual framework of the cultural inclusion of the Rajbanshi community with the principle of social equity and individual dignity intending to include the excluded sections of the whole heterogeneous society. So, that the people from excluded communities like-Rajbanshis can enjoy their liberty of folk food practices, religious practices, cultural differentiations and economic rights with self-dignity along with the liberty of modern fusion food culture.

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