

# Defying the Bengali Entrepreneurs of Jalpaiguri- A case study of the Rahuts

*Asmita Roy*

**ABSTRACT:** - Prince Dwarakanath Tagore was the pioneer of Bengali entrepreneurship in tea industry. Thereafter many fortunate Bengalees followed his footsteps and succeeded in Darjeeling and Terai. The lucrative tea industry attracted the British and Indian entrepreneurs to try this venture at Dooars. During this time many pleaders and lawyers from Rangpur shifted to Jalpaiguri to work at the newly established district. Most of them were Hindus, though there were some Muslim entrepreneurs also. These fortunate people began to invest in the venture of tea. The Rahuts in this sphere are worth mentionable. The Rahuts, who originated from Dacca, later marked an important role not only in Jalpaiguri tea industry but also in all around socio-cultural development of the district.

**KEY WORDS:-**Tea industry, Jalpaiguri, Bengali Entrepreneurs, Rahuts

## **INTRODUCTION:-**

After the establishment of Jalpaiguri district the families who came and settled in Jalpaiguri from Eastern Bengal, played a pivotal role in the economic social and cultural arena of the district. The Rahut family was worth mentionable in this respect. Though they were originally not of Jalpaiguri soil, but gradually they got mixed with the people of the soil. Even now their name is uttered with great respect and gratitude in Jalpaiguri. The Bengali entrepreneurs who came from various part of East Bengal owe the similar characteristics mentioned above which helped them largely to become an entrepreneur in the Colonial period. Professor Ananda Gopal Ghosh, an eminent expert on the history of North Bengal, rightly remarks that ‘the main problem in writing the entrepreneurial history of the tea industry in North Bengal is that the data is in the minds of the managers, it has never been written down in detail’<sup>1</sup>

**ORIGIN OF THE RAHUTS:-**

The 'Rahut' family originated from Kazirpagla village of Bikrampur, Dhaka. Kailash Chandra Rahut's father was Ramlochan Rahut and mother was Chandrakala Devi. He was very much affectionate towards his own brother Ananda Chandra Rahut and also step Brother Pralhad Chandra Rahut. Writing the history of the Rahut family and of the Bengalee tea entrepreneurs of Jalpaiguri of Jalpaiguri, there is lack of source materials. Therefore I depended on oral sources and interviews of some people who were associated with the family like Bharati Mukherjee (Rahut), Sandhya Bhowmik (Rahut), Reba Rahut, Bhaswati Talapatra, Arati Guha Neogi (Rahut) etc. The Rahuts were the predecessors of Balaji Bajirao of Maharashtra. The meaning of the term 'Rahut' literally means armed cavalry. According to the description of their family members many weapons were found from a pond of their Dhaka house where a large number of Maratha scripts were inscribed.<sup>ii</sup> This incident proved their ancestral connection with the Marathas. In Dhaka they earned huge wealth from their zamindari and family business. In course of time this money was invested by them in tea business of Jalpaiguri.

**WHY THEY WERE IN JALPAIGURI:-**

When the new district, Japaiguri was formed, a number of people from Eastern Bengal came to the district to make their fortune. Thus a new administrative headquarter was established in Jalpaiguri district and it opened up some new opportunities in the field of employment. The local residents of Jalpaiguri district especially the Rajbanshi's could not respond effectively to the new opportunities. Perhaps being traditional they were in general conservative and were not inclined to venture much beyond their own periphery. Hence, all the positions were filled up by the immigrant population from rest of Bengal like the Rahuts. The second factor which accelerated the immigration from various part of undivided Bengal was the free entry railway passes granted by the British Government to the Dooars. During that period no extra inducements were necessary for immigration to the Dooars. By taking the advantage a large number of people began to advent there from the adjoining districts of Rangpur. Like the others Kailash Chandra Rahut also came to the district to do something new. At first he came alone then his wife, Smt. Sabitri Devi and his brother Ananda Chandra Rahut and rest of his family came and settled permanently in Jalpaiguri town.<sup>iii</sup>

During that time the Bengalees started to invest in the venture of new commercial based tea industry. The first factor which contributed to a large extent behind the rise of the Bengali people as an entrepreneur in the tea plantation industry was the granting of non-transferable tea leases to individuals. During the first phase from the foundation of the new district non-transferable tea leases were granted to individuals. This privilege was received not only by the white coloured people, Indians were also stood in the same line who developed their tea gardens with their own money and small investments from other individuals including government officials, army officers and doctors and so on. The emergence of nationalism across the whole of Bengal also left its indelible impetus in this region, especially in Jalpaiguri town. Like many other Indians, the immigrant Bengalis of the Jalpaiguri town endeavoured to do

something by which the vanity of the colonial Government would be crush. The immigrant Bengalis of the Jalpaiguri town educated in English education tried to demonstrate that in every sphere of activity they were as capable and efficient as their European counter parts.

### ***KAILASH CHANDRA RAHUT:-***

Kailash Chandra Rahut was the first of this family who came and settled here. Most possibly he came in Jalpaiguri between the times 1870-1878, as an employee of the police department. He came from Dhaka through Yamuna, Bramhaputra, Tista and Karala and ultimately reached at Dinbazar kalibari ghat. Primarily he settled at the Saudagar Patty and in 1900 he came with his family permanently at the present 'Rahut Bhawan', Babupara. The then Jalpaiguri town was full of jungle and agricultural lands. Kailash Chandra was very much patriotic by nature. He used his own horse cart for going to his office daily, though during that time British officers were only allowed to use horse cart. In 1902 Kailash Chandra Rahut bought the Gazaldoba Tea Estate from Oadlabari Tea Company. This was the first tea garden of the district which was opened by the British in 1871. This tea garden was situated on the eastern bank of Tista River and it was affected every year by the flood of the river. Therefore Kailash Rahut sold the garden to the directors of Friends Tea Company with some conditions. But the directors of that company failed to repay the money and for this reason Kailash Rahut lodged a case against the Friends' Tea Company.<sup>iv</sup> But he could not see the result during his life as he died on 1918.

### ***ANANDA CHANDRA RAHUT AND HIS SUCCESSORS:-***

Kalilash Chandra Rahut had no legal heir and thus he gave all his properties to his younger brother Ananda Chandra Rahut. Ananda Chandra Rahut first started his career as a lawyer but as his elder brother did not like the job, so he left the job and started to look after Rahut estates. In 1923- 1924 Ananda Chnadra Rahut got the lease of 902.42 acre land and established the Anandapur Tea Estate and also formed a 'jote' at Rajadanga, Panga. In 1928 Ananda Chandra Rahut passed away. After his death this tea garden severe crisis. During that time Prahlad Chandra Rahut sold all his properties at Midnapore to help Anandapur garden financially and started to reside permanently at Rahut house Jalpaiguri. But in spite of his help the deplorable condition of Anandapur Garden did not improve. Natural calamities were greatly responsible for the demise of Anandapur and to cope up with the problem the Rahut family took loan from Faridpur Loan Office of an amount of Rs. 400000. The then Chief Minister of Bengal Fazlul Haque passed "Debt Settlement Act", according to which all the loans of were forfeited by the Government. But this family did not take the advantage and in 1942 when the condition of the garden improved they repaid all the money to the loan office. This incident proves the loyalty and honesty of the family.

The Court Case during Kailash Chandra Rahut regarding Gazaldoba Tea estate ended in 1939 and the Rahuts got the ownership of this garden permanently. With the help of Kamini Kanta Rahut, the younger son of

Ananda Chandra Rahut this tea estate was renamed as Kailashpur Tea Estate (1944). The tea estate prospered very much under his guidance and became a model tea estate with modern factory system.

Ananda Chandra Rahut had four sons namely-Nalinikanta, Abanikanta, Ramanikanta and Kaminikanta Rahut. All of them devoted their life to develop their tea business and the development of the district by many ways. The Younger brother Kaminikanta was a very able tea entrepreneur. But after the four sons of Ananda Chandra the family had no able successor to develop further the business. They spend their life in a Zamindary or feudal style. Nalinikanta Rahut was known as ‘prince of Rajadanga’ due to his extravagant life style.<sup>v</sup> They did not collect everyday news about their garden, not tried to increase the controlling power in the board of directors, or even to increase the number of shares under their names. As they were so much involved in leading an indiscipline aristocratic lifestyle in Calcutta, it was not at all possible for them to pay heed to their own gardens situated in the far-flung areas from Calcutta. Consequently this practice was ultimately culminated in creating a massive gap between the management and the Bengali owners. Nevertheless, the third or fourth generation Bengali planters used to visit their gardens now and then with their friends, relatives and the huge expense of these tours were borne by the tea garden authorities alone. In addition to this, whenever some respectable dignitary like ministers, film stars used to come to their gardens extravagant arrangements were made for their stay during those days and for highly entertainment also. Even sometimes, half day holiday was declared in honor of the aforesaid guests. The dominance of pioneer Bengali planters, the Rahut’s in tea industry thus began to alter during their third or fourth generation. We cannot see now such predominance holding by them over the tea industry of Jalpaiguri which was set up long before by their forefathers, except the Kailashpur Tea Estate.

### **CONTRIBUTION OF THE RAHUT FAMILY ON JALPAIGURI:-**

This family first dreamt of about higher education for the people of this district. During the Second World War when a number of colleges were closed at Calcutta the Rahuts established the Ananda Chandra College (1942) at their own land. Nalinikanta Rahut took the initiative of building this college with an initial amount of rupees 1.5 lakh. Later Ananda Chandra College of commerce and Ananda Chandra Teachers’ Training College were established under their patronage. Prior to these they established a primary girls school in the name of Saudamini Devi, wife of Ananda Chandra Rahut and Ananda Model primary and high school in the memory of Ananda Chandra Rahut.<sup>vi</sup> This family also helped many students economically and also by giving food and shelter at their house.

The Rahuts had keen interest in the field of culture also. The sons of Ananda Chandra Rahut were the members of the Arya Natya Samaj, which also patronized in education, culture and all around development of the youth. Nalinikanta Rahut was elected as a secretary of the Arya Natya Samaj. Both Kaminikanta and Nalinikanta were good actors who performed in many drama acting. Kaminikanata Rahut wrote many dramas such as ‘Manik’, ‘Jibon Ahuti’ (1927). This family was also famous for their patronage in music and sport. Many members of this family like Lina Ghatak (Rahut), Tapati Rahut were famous radio singers and performers.<sup>vii</sup> Classical singers were also invited to perform in Rahut Bhavan. Abani kanta Rahut was the first in this town who arranged movable cinema hall to show silent movies.

Jalpaiguri played a vital role in sports since its birth. There were many excellent badminton and football payers. On May 1944 Friends' Union Club was established where Tusharkanti Rahut and Kalyan Rahut played vital role. From 1948 onwards Ramen Rahut was associated with this club and with his financial help and encouragement this club became popular within very short period. Many internationally renowned players came at Jalpaiguri to play for this club. Anil Rahut, son of Nalinikanta Rahut formed 'Shanti Byamagar' in the memory of his mother for physical and mental improvement of the youth.

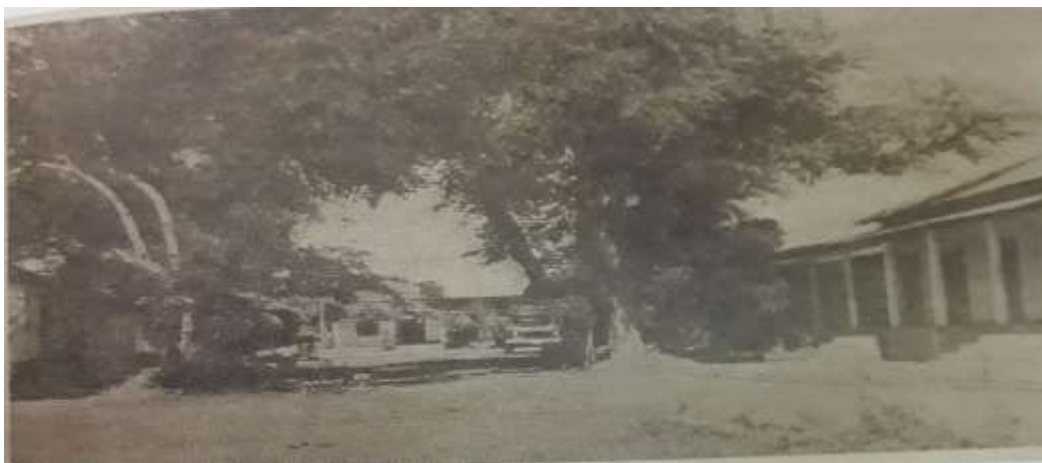
Jalpaiguri played a vital role in the nationalist movement. The 'Rahut Bhavan' was a safe shelter for many national leaders' and revolutionaries. They were known for their generous attitude. Ashalata Rahut helped Swadeshi movement secretly. Anil Chandra Rahut of this family was arrested during Quit India Movement. Women of this family got participated in anti British protest rally. The glory of the Rahut family faded during their third or fourth generations. But the generous attitude and nationalism is still a topic of interest.



**ANANDA CHANDRA RAHUT**



**NALINIKANTA RAHUT**



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- <sup>i</sup> Bharat Tirtha Uttarbanga, Ananda Gopal Ghosh and Supam Biswas, Kolkata, 2016
  - <sup>ii</sup> Interviewed Bharati Mukherjee, Daughter of Ramanikanta Rahut, 20.3.2018
  - <sup>iii</sup> Kiratbhumi, Vol-1, Kolkata, 2002
  - <sup>iv</sup> Interviewed Reba Rahut, Daughter-in-law of Kamini Kanta Rahut, 13.4.2017
  - <sup>v</sup> Pachimbanga, Jalpaiguri Zilla Sankha, Kolkata, B.S. 1408
  - <sup>vi</sup> DBITA Centenary Souvenir
  - <sup>vii</sup> Interviewed Sibuh Rahut, 7.12.2018
  - <sup>viii</sup> Platinum Jubilee Souvenir, Ananda Chandra College, Jalpaiguri, 2018