

Research Article

The Eco-Friendly Culture of the Rajbanshis of North Eastern India and Their use of Banana and its Plant

Wg Cdr Ranjit Kumar Mandal

Founder Principal, BGS World School, Bangalore, Karnataka, Editor-in-Chief of 'The Journal of Advance Research in English and Education' and 'The Journal of Advance Research in Humanities and Social Science', ADR Publication, New Delhi.

I N F O

E-mail Id:

ranjitmandal2005@yahoo.co.in

Orcid Id:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7215-4648>

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A B S T R A C T

The human society has undergone a drastic change in the recent time due to rapid industrialization and globalization. The people have shifted largely from the eco friendly living to the living habits that dependents largely on industrial products. Whereas, there are some communities like that of the Rajbanshis in the North Eastern India which are still maintaining the nature friendly living style even these days. But it is a matter of a great concern that the consumerism is creeping into the nooks and corners of India and the social values are changing rapidly. The objective of the article is to record some of such ecofriendly values of the Rajbanshi community of North Eastern India which had contributed to the healthy living of the past generations. This is an account of the fact which the author has seen himself sine the middle of the previous century, though it is changing day by day.

Keywords: Rajbanshi, North Eastern India, Banana, Banana Plant, Buddhism, Eco-friendliness

Introduction

Our planet has been passing through an ecological crisis at present which is posing a threat to the human beings and the other species for their survival. The earth is becoming increasingly polluted and affecting the healthy living of all living beings. In this circumstances, it is essential that the people protect the environment by getting into a changed living style which is ecofriendly. Notably, there have been some indigenous communities in India, who, by their own living habits been ecofriendly and have been living for centuries. Some details shall be presented here of an indigenous community of North Eastern India called Rajbanshi, who have been the inhabitants of North Eastern India for centuries. Their ecofriendly living style shall be presented here with reference to a crop named banana which they call in Rajbanshi language as *Kala* (Banana). It

shall be presented here as to how the banana and its plant called *Kalar Gach* have become the parts of the social, religious, cultural and economic life of the Rajbanshis.

Banana (*Kala*) as a fruit and its plant (*Kalar Gach*) have a significant impact on the Rajbanshis since time immemorial. The banana as a fruit and its plants are treated to be very auspicious in the culture of Rajbanshis and they contribute in their economic life too. It may be for the reason that the banana and its plant are easily available in the nearest proximity in the North Eastern Indian houses throughout the year. The high rate of rain falls, humid weather and fertile land of North Eastern India make the banana plants easily grow; and the nature loving Rajbanshis are, therefore, have become very much adept in its use.

One will not find a house in the North Eastern Indian countryside without one or two banana groves around

within the close proximity of their houses, which they call as '*Kalar Thop* (Banana Grove)'. They consider it to be the part of their kitchen garden, reliable source of food and is a cash crop. So much so, in the concept of house construction (*Vastu*) planning, banana grove gets its place of priority. The Rajbanshis generally select a site for construction of their house where they have enough space available to plant banana plants around. It has been seen that they first plant banana saplings in a selected site of house construction, even a year or two in advance, and then they go in for house construction, so that the banana is ready for them for their use when they move into their new sweet home.

The Ethnic Background of Rajbanshis of North Eastern India

The term Rajbanshi has been derived from the words of the Rajbanshi language - Raja (king) and Bansh (descendants). As the term suggests, the members of this community have ruled in the vast area of the North Eastern India for centuries. As it is estimated that this community has been the original inhabitants of the land and has been the descendants of the Indus Valley Civilization of India. They were originally the Buddhists by religion and their original language was the Prakrit (later Pali). Later, this community has developed the newer form of their language called the Rabanshi Language. The Rajbanshi language is being retuned in the census of India and the language has a great treasure of literature. The After the Aryan invasion of Indian in 1600 BC, the Aryan *Brahmanna Dharma* (later named as the Hindu Religion) reached to North Eastern India too and the kings of the Rajbanshi dynasty took a conversion into the Hinduism. What we see today among the Rajbanshis, it is a changed culture due to Hinduization. But though the present day Rajbanshis are the Hindus, but they still carry the spirits and signs of Buddhism in their social and cultural life – some of them being that they are nature worshippers, nature dependent and nature friendly.

The Types of Banana and their Uses

The banana, available in the North Eastern India, have several varieties. Every variety of the banana has its own specialty and its specific uses. The details use of banana as a fruit and their usages are as the following: –

Atia Kala

A large size, bulged in the centre and of pink colour when it is ripe. It has lots of seeds, but very tasty and used as offering to god, especially as *thait* (where whole bunch of banana is offered). This variety of banana is very much ideal for consumption as a fruit and for making several varieties of cakes. This banana has several medicinal values. This variety of banana is called the king among the bananas.

Jahazi Manua Kala

Comparatively smaller in size than *Atia Kala*. It is dark-pink in colour when ripe, moderately tasty with comparatively of lesser seeds, but not used for puja.

Manua Kala

Very common, comparatively smaller than *Jahazi Manua*, yellow looking when it ripens, with no seeds or very few seeds and required for every puja, especially as *thait*.

Malbhog Kala

Most tasty, most sought-after, light yellow in colour when ripe, of same size of *Manua Kala*, which has no seeds and used for puja. This is especially required to be consigned into the *Homa* (Yagna) fire.

Chini Malbhog or Chini Champa Kala

Slightly smaller than *Malbhog Kala* and looks exactly like the *Malbhog Kala*. Though as tasty as the *Malbhog Kala*, but not used for puja.

Kacha Kala

Kacha means unripe or green in colour. The *Kacha Kala* is a variety of a banana which is of green colour. It is as large as the *Atia Kala*. It has no seeds and consumed as vegetable, when it is still tender and green in colour. There are various preparations of this banana. It can be eaten with rice just by boiling also and mixing it with salt and mustard oil which is called *Sija*. This is like a kitchen items which could be plucked fresh from the plant and used whenever required and as many as required. *Kacha Kala* of one plant can be used for two to three months by a family.

Different Parts of Banana Plant and Their Uses

As the banana (*Kala*) as a fruit, the banana plants (*Kalar Gach*) also have equally important places in the life of the Rajbanshis. In fact, every portion of a banana plant has its specific use. The plant of every variety of banana has its different characteristics. The different size of the stems and their leaves are used by the Rajbanshis for different purposes. The height and size of the stems and the leaves of the banana plants are as large as the size of the fruits which has been mentioned above. While *Atia Kala* as a fruit is the largest as a fruit, it has the largest and tallest stem; the smallest being the *Chini Champa* plant. The use of different parts of the banana plants at different stages of their growth are the following: -

Kalar Mukoch (Banana Flower)

A banana plant takes about one year or so to become full-grown. A dark maroon colour flower comes out from the top of a full-grown banana plant and banana bunches come out one after the other from the banana flower during a span of about 15 days. After the banana releasing stops,

the banana flower is chopped off from the plant and used for different purposes as the following:-

(a). As the Vegetable

The banana flower is used as vegetable in several preparations like curry, cutlet, kofta, pakoda etc. The banana flower dishes are tasty and highly rich in minerals. It is a popular dish in almost all tropical countries. It is a good source of earning.

(b). As the Idol in Puja

The banana flower is used as idols in *Karakari Puja* by the Rajbanshis and people of many other communities for their religious purposes. Three or seven banana flowers are decorated by pinning flowers and placed in front as the *Karakari* deity.

Kalar Pat (Banana Leaf)

The banana is a fast growing variety of plant and it produces plenty of leaves. Leaving the few tender leaves in the centre a banana farmer chops off the older ones for use or selling them. The usages of different parts of the leaves are as the following:-

(a). As Neus Pat in Puja

The top portion of the leaf when cut into a piece of 1.5 feet length is called *Neus Pat*. It is used for all religious ceremonies. It is a must that the banana bunch (*Kalar Jhuki*) which is offered as *Thait* during the puja is placed on a *Neus Pat* only. Besides the *Thait*, if any other special offering has to be made, it is also placed on *Neus Pat*. People attribute so much religious significance on the *Neus Pat* that they do not eat on a *Neus Pat*. They would at least pinch the tip of it before they use it to have meals on it.

(b). To Offer Puja

The *Kalar Pat*, other than the *Neus Pat* portion, is used to lay puja ingredients. These puja ingredients offered during the puja are called *Nabut* (which generally include soaked raw rice, ripe banana pieces, sugar, jaggery, curd, fruit etc.), *Bhujja* (un-cooked rice, pulse and fresh green whole vegetables etc.) and any other things (like clothes) etc.

(c). To Serve Food

The *Kalar Pat* is used to serve food or snacks to the people during the mass gatherings.

(d). To Cook Patao

The *Kalar Pat* is used to cook *Patao* (fire smoke roasted dishes) by wrapping marinated vegetables or small fishes or green fresh vegetables with banana leaf and getting them fire roasted.

(e). To Cook Patua Pitha

The *Kalar Pat* is used to cook *Patua Pitha* (a cake) by

wrapping the rice powder batter with banana leaf and getting them steamed.

(f). To Cook Topla Bhat

The *Kalar Pat* is used to cook *Topla Bhat* (rice cooked in banana leaf packs) by wrapping a special variety of raw soaked rice with banana leaf and getting them steamed.

(g). To Pack Food

The *Kalar Pat* is used to pack dishes or food stuff by wrapping with it for storing or send as parcel as it is useful to pack hot, cold, moist or dry food as it is moisture and heat resistant.

(h). To Pack Items

The *Kalar Pat* is used to pack any other item by wrapping for storing or sending as parcel. For packing the vegetable in bundles by the farmers in the field to take them to market and for laying them on ground for selling them.

- To Protect items from Rain or Sun

The *Kalar Pat* is used to protect items from rain or sun as a cover as it is water and temperature resistant.

- To Wrap Items of Puja

The *Kalar Pat* is used to wrap items of puja such as top cut out of the paddy plant. After taking the cut out it is tied up and wrapping with banana leaf and then kept in the puja room.

- To Bind or Tie Items

The *Kalar Pat Chotor* (Banana leaf's centre stick) is used to bind or tie items like paddy, jute stick, fire wood etc. as a substitute to rope. If it is slightly dried, it works better. It is stripped if thin rope is required.

(l). To Prepare Cheyka – A Dish

The ash of dry *Kalar Pat* or *Dhakuna* (the entire leaf from the butt to the tip) is used to prepare *Cheyka* (alkaline) by filtering it with water and that decoction, looking like tea decoction, is used for making dish of vegetables, pulses, dry fish etc. The *Cheyka* dish is a delicacy for the Rajbanshis.

(m). To Prepare Cheyka – As Detergent

The ash of dry *Kalar Pat* or *Dhakuna* (the entire leaf from the butt to the tip) is used to prepare *Cheyka* (alkaline) by filtering it with water and that is used for washing cloth, washing hair of the women.

(n). To Prepare Utensil Cleaner

The ash of dry *Kalar Pat* or *Dhakuna* (the entire leaf from the butt to the tip) is used to prepare *Cheyka* (alkaline). After the *Cheyka* is prepared the remaining ash is used to wash hand and clean utensils.

(o). To Prepare Kajole (Curnbon)

The *Kalar Pat* (the banana leaf) is used to prepare *Kajol* - a

carbonic substance to be used for application around the eyes of the small babies and the ladies as cosmetic. It is prepared by applying mustard oil on the leaf surface and by holding the oily side above the mustard oiled lamp flame smoke. If it held for sometime the carbon gets deposited and the *Kajol* gets formed.

Kalar Gach (Banana Stem)

The different portions of banana plant are used by the people for different purposes. The usages of those portions are as the following:-

(a). Kalar Noka

The banana plant shoots, up till it is about 3 feet tall and has only 2 or 3 leaves, are called *Kalar Noka*. It is used as the following:-

- For *Gochor Guna*

The *Gochor Guna* is the first plantation of monsoon paddy. In this, a very small *Kolar Noka*, a jute plant, an alocasia plant and few paddy saplings are planted together by the head of the family to make an auspicious beginning of the year's paddy plantation season.

- As Vegetable

A *Kolar Noka* is eaten as vegetable. If cooked with *Cheyka* or without *Cheyka* cutting into very small pieces. *Kolar Noka* makes a delicious dish.

- For Use in Puja

At the four corner outside the *Thakur Ghar* (the temple) where the puja is performed four of them are positioned placing a *Ghat* (earthen pot) each in front of them.

- To Use as *Maroa* (Puja Alter)

Four medium size banana plants with five or seven leaves intact are dug into the ground at four corners of the puja venue as *Maroa*. The *Maroa* is required for the marriage ceremonies or at very significant puja venues where lots of decorations are done of those banana plants. A *Ghat* (earthen pot) each is placed in front of them with mango leaves on the *Ghat*.

(b). Full-Grown Kalar Gach (Banana Stem)

The full-grown up banana plants are used for:-

- As a Deity in Puja

A *Kalar Gach* is worshipped as a deity. In *Hudum Deo Puja* only a full grown banana plant is placed on the alter as the deity and worshipped.

- To Make Gates

To make welcome gates by positioning two plants either side of the entry passage and decorating them to give a shape of a welcome gate.

- For use During Diwali

On the Dipawali day three plants are dug into the ground in the inner lawn to lit the Diwali lamps. To make it ready some thin bamboo strips called *temals* of about 10" length are used. English 'U' shape horizontally lamp stands are made pricking both ends of those strips into the banana plants. A plant can hold about 15 lamp stands and the household would decide as to how many stands they would like to have.

- For use as Poles

To make poles for shamiana or pandals for any festival the banana plants were used. In the olden days when the electricity was not available, the kerosene lights (pertomax) were made use of. The banana plant having high moisture content were used as pole to avoid fire accident. Its capability of resisting heat was considered very suitable for this purpose.

- To Make Raft for Transportation

Banana plants float on water. To make raft of different sizes banana plants can be used. By pinning in two three places with bamboo split or thin size bamboo the rafts are made. The rafts are used for transportation of goods, people and also for fishing purposes. It can be made of any size as per the requirement.

- To Make Raft for Puja Purposes

Where a puja is supposed to be performed on floating platforms banana stem rafts are made use of. A goddess named *Sitala* used to be worshipped making very small raft of 2X3 feet size. Puja used to be performed at home placing the offering on the raft and later the offering of the puja used to be floated on the water of any lake or river. *Sitala* used to be considered as the goddess of pox.

- To Make Raft to Dispose of Snake Bite Patient

I have heard that the people used to believe in olden days that the snake bite patients sometime survive even after few days of the death, if due to some miracles the effect of poison abolishes. In that case the people used to put the snake bite patient on the raft and float the body in the river expecting that some miracles may happen and the person may get back the life.

- To Douse Fire

Whenever there used to be fire accidents in villages, people used to quickly cut the banana plants and dump them on the burning objects to douse fire.

- To Protect Houses from Storm

The banana groves grow very thick and are of moderate height. It is capable of resisting wind blow and at the same time there is no danger of a banana plant to topple on the house due to its short height. Due to that the people in

the villages plant banana around their houses to avoid the impact of storm.

- For Use as Elephant Fodder

Banana plants are the ideal fodder for the elephants. The elephants need a huge volume of fodder and the banana plants substantially meet that requirement.

(C). Kalar Gach with Kalar Pir

This means fruit-laden banana plant i.e., a banana plant along with the bunches of fruits. These are the occasions where the *Kalar Gach* with *Kalar Pir* are made use of:-

- Gate for the Religious Ceremonies

Two fully grown banana plants are dug into the ground and positioned either side of the passage to make gate for the religious ceremonies. A *Ghat* (earthen pot) each is placed in front of them with mango leaves on the *Ghat*.

- Placed at the Temple Door

A fully grown banana plant bearing fruit bunches (*Kalar Pir*) with five or seven leaves intact are dug in front of the temple door. A *Ghat* (earthen pot) each is placed in front of them with mango leaves on the *Ghat*. This is considered to be auspicious.

Kalar Khole

The berks of the banana plant stem which can be peeled off one after the other are called the *Kalar Khole*. The following are the ways the *Kalar Khole* is made used of:-

(a). Chata

Chata is prepared by cutting pieces of about 1.5 feet size and removing the outer hard portion with knife. It is used for serving meals during mass gatherings as the dining plate. The big size plants are required for the purpose of making the *Chata* of size bigger. From the big size plants about 1.5 feet wide *Chata* can be made.

(b). Bhat Dhala Pat

Bhat Dhala Pat means the large sheet which is used to store cooked rice during the feasts. It is a mat of 4-6 square feet size. It is prepared by weaving *Kalar Kholes* by removing the outside hard portion and the by weaving them. The big size plants are required for this purpose so that the width of each strip is enough to weave the mat.

(c). Dhongal

Dhongals or bowls are prepared by cutting *Kalar Khole* into the pieces of about 6" – 18" inches size by raising two open sides with a technique of twisting upward the split edges and putting a small height raiser made out of a piece of a *Khole* itself. The technique used is such that there are no pins required. It finally gives a shape of elongate bowl. It is used for offering puja, serving snacks like curd and beaten

rice etc. during mass gatherings. *Dhongal* is used to transfer water from one field to other as vessel. Depending upon the requirements, to make big, medium and small size *Dhongals* different size of plants and their *Kholes* are used.

(d). Pokir Bhasa

Temporary birds' cage, called *Pokir Bhasa*, may be made using *Kalar Khole*. A long *Kalar Khole* could be flattened by removing the outside hard portion of the *Kalar Khole* and then that could be turned in the round shape to make a round shape cylinder joining the edges. The two hollow sides can be woven with bamboo splits (*Temal*). By this a box-like cage is made of which the top and bottom side will have bamboo grill-like surface. To keep carry the birds, pigeons, chicks, duck-lings temporarily this *Bhasa* is used.

Kalar Thore

The solid rod like white portion which is found inside in the centre if the banana stem is called the *Thore*. It is cooked by cutting into small pieces as vegetables to make several dishes. It has good mineral contents.

Kalar Gacher Sotor

The jute like fiber of the *Kalar Gacher* is called *Sotor*. It is used to tie things like paddy, jute stick, fire wood etc. as a substitute to the conventional jute rope.

Kalar Gacher Suta

The *Suta* means thread. The jute like fiber of the banana plants are used to make thread which are called *Kalar Gacher Suta*. This thread is used in weaving door mats, table mats, sitting mats, hand fans and various show pieces.

Kalar Mura

The lower part of the plant which remains below the soil is called *Kalar Mura*. This portion gives better quality *Cheyka*. To prepare it, the *Kalar Mura* is cut into small pieces, dried up, burnt to make ashes and then *Cheyka* is prepared by filtering the ashes and then for cooking dishes with the decoction received.

Banana in Daily Life of Rajbanshi

We cannot think of a typical daily life of a Rajbanshi farmer at all without banana and its plants. A person may eat breakfast with ripe banana using banana leaf or banana *Dhongal* as the plate, going to work in the field wrapping his tobacco (as a popular smoking substance) with banana leaf, working in the banana orchard (*Kalar Thop*), having lunch with *Kalar Nokar Cheyka*, *Kacha Kala* curry, going to market to sell banana or may be a pair of pigeon to sell carrying in a banana *Khole* made cage, having some puja in the evening using banana leaf and ripe banana, sitting in your room in the evening where one would see some decoration pieces made of banana plant fiber, having dinner with some *Patao* and *Cheykar Dail* (*Dail* means dal, made

of pulse which is cooked with homemade alkaline). One might find kids playing riddle-game or singing where there would be references of banana or banana plants.

Banana in Ceremonies of Rajbanshis

If a case of marriage ceremony is taken, a huge amount of use of banana and banana plants is found in a Rajbanshi family. About a month prior, the family starts gathering the banana bunches (*Kalar Pir*) from the orchards and keep them to ripe. A week prior to the ceremony, we could see the grown-up *Atia Kala Plants* and their leaves are being piled up to make *Chata*, *Dhongols* and poles etc. for the pandal. One and two days in advance the big plants and small plants having their five or seven leaves intact are brought in and *Chata* making and *Dhongal* making commence. On the wedding day, in the passage from where the groom has to enter, we would find one or more gates are made where two banana plants at each gate are placed on the either side of the passage. The *Chlion* which will be used to do the *Baron* (welcome rituals) will have colour-decorated *Kalar Jhuki*. The puja shall be laid on *Kalar Pat*, *Dhongal*; and the *Kalar Thaits* shall be offered on *Neus Pats*. The Puja offerings (*Nabut and Bhujja*) shall be placed on banana leaves. The guests will be offered betel nut and betel leaves on their arrival on *Dhongal*. The snacks of beaten rice, curd, and ripe banana shall be served on *Dhongal* and the meals will be served on *Chata*. Wedding ceremonies shall be held under the banana plant *Maroa*. The *Maroa* will have four small decorated banana plants. The puja room where the groom has to visit for some rituals on the next day morning will have two *Kalar Gach* bearing *Kalar Pir* at its gate.

Similar things would happen for any other puja ceremony or any other celebrations in a Rajbanshi family where the banana and its plants would be used to the maximum.

Medicinal Value of Banana and Its Plant

Banana is a very nutritious fruit and food. It also has some medicinal values, as believed by the Rajbanshis. It is advisable for people of all age group to include banana in their diet in the form of vegetable and fruit for their good health. It is believed that the banana provides fiber and minerals and the consumption of banana can keep one healthy.

The Rajbanshis believe that the consumption of ripe banana keeps the bowel clear. *Atia Kala* syrup cures dehydration and indigestion. Curry of *Kacha Kala* is a diet for the patient and small children; and the boiled *Kacha Kala* cures loose motion. It is also believed that regular consumption of ripe banana helps having normal and smooth delivery. The pox patients are made to lie down on banana leaf wearing loose clothes to get rid of irritations. It may be due the non-sticky, heat and moisture registrant and ecofriendly

nature the banana leaf that the patient gets such relief. It was believed in the olden days that the dead bodies of snake bite cases were not cremated immediately but used to be placed on banana plant raft and floated on the river believing that with the effect of banana raft the person would become alive.

Art and Craft Work with Banana Fiber

With the banana fiber, several utility and craft items can be prepared. Door mat, small carpet, bags, hand fans and seat cushions are prepared using banana plant fiber. The *Mukoch* (banana flowers) are used for *Karakari Puja* after decorating them and the green *Kalar Jhuki* used on the *Chilon* for the marriages ceremonies and the other occasions are artistically decorated. The raft prepared during the *Sitala Puja* are very attractively decorated constructing colourful shade over it. The making of the beautiful and different size *Dhongals* (bowls) is also an exhibition of a craft work.

Even the other communities like Rava community people decorate also the small banana plants at their marriage venue.

Banana in Economic Life of Rajbanshis

It is believed that a few groves of banana can look after complete economic need of a family. Observing the great utility of the banana and its plant, the poets have lavishly praised in Rajbanshi language the banana plantation and gave some advisory as to how one should plant a banana sapling and take care of the banana plantation. Some of them are presented below:-

Kala gari na katey pat.

Tatey kapor tatey bhat.

(If someone ventures into plantation of banana, takes care of the crop and does not tamper with its growth by ruthless cutting of the leaves, he shall certainly gain economically.)

Tinisho shatijopa rua kol.

Mahokey posheke chikunba tol.

Pat pachala labhotey khaba

Lankar banij gharot paba.

(If someone plants 360 saplings of banana, shall eat the fruit, make use of the leaves and other parts of the banana plat and finally shall have a huge financial gain.)

Atiat gobor manoharat jabar,

Purat khai malbhogot chai.

Jalukot gobar panat mati

Kalopuli rua tinibar kati.

(These verses highlighted about different types of care needs to be taken for different types of banana plant, like

some banana plants to be given cow dung fertilizer, some banana needs ashes, some banana requires composted fertilizer and betel leaf plant to be given soil filling on the roots every year for better yield.)

Aashar mashey garia kala,

Dhangsha hoil Rabon shala.

(It is mentioned that one should plant banana much before the rainy season. If the banana is planted in the summer, the sapling would settle down well and in the monsoon the crop will grow. If not done so, it would be foolishness as the consequences would be disastrous and shall ruin themselves as king Ravana.)

Banana in Rajbanshi Literature

The banana and its plants have formed parts of the Rajbanshi literature. Some of the verses on banana and its plants are given below:-

Atia kalar piri,

Manua kalar piri,

Moke jey golam nibar chaish,

Koisho takar giri.

(Here the beloved of a person is throwing a challenge to her lover that it is easy to grow various types of banana but to marry a suitable girl one has to show his eligibility by acquiring economic solvency.)

Kacha kala khailey bandhu jivat bandhe kash,

Paka kalak khailey adhik chapey rash.

(The raw banana does not taste good and it sticks on the tongue, whereas the ripe banana is very tasty.)

Atia kalak kala na kong rey,

Tar bichi khas khas karey.

Par purushok purush na kong rey,

Nidan kalay charey.

(Here, it is highlighted that the Atia Kala is a variety of banana which would have been an ideal banana if it had little less seeds. And a friend through illegitimate relationship is not reliable as that friend does not remain available at the time of needs.)

Chariya gaichen praner pati,

Garia gaichen kala.

Tar pat katia nai deng bhat,

More jouban bela.

(Here, a young woman whose husband has been staying out of the station now laments that her beloved had planted banana and went out before the banana grew; and she

did not have the opportunity to feed him rice serving on a banana leaf from his plantation.)

Jyogyer kalar taley,

Sita snan karey satsagarer jaley.

(Here, it is mentioned that it is a matter of great joy and privilege to take bath under the banana grove which had even been enjoyed by Sita with the water brought from seven seas.)

Kalar sari sari madhey phuler bari,

Ei shey Sitar bari, aishey Sita Debi.

(Here, it is mentioned that a cottage built in-between the rows of banana groves always looks better and Sita had the privilege of staying in such a cottage.)

Ek kala dui mon,

Thakurak deng na mui khang.

(This verse highlights the extraordinary attraction of a person for a banana that it puts any one in a dilemma whether one should offer it to God or to eat himself.)

Dur hatey aishey badur,

Kala khabar ashey.

Gacher kala gachey railo,

Badur gailo more dashey rey. (Sung durig Kati Puja)

(It is a song sung durig Kati Puja. Here, it is described that bats have come from far-off place to eat banana; but alas! the bat left the place before eating any banana.)

Alpa boysher kala thamak dhari barey,

Bayosh kaler pirit char char korey.

(The early bunches of banana grow better than the later ones and similarly the love of the early life remains firm than the love which happens in the later age.)

In Rajbanshi language there are some riddles centering around the banana and banana plant, which are made use of in gatherings. In this session one would ask some questions using riddles and the other people would answer. They are:-

Agalta hoil aul jhaul,

Gorata hoil achha.

Mukh dia dima parey,

Tika dia hoi bacha. (Answer: Kalar Gach)

(Here, a riddle has to be solved that what is such a thing which is scattered on the top, neat at the bottom, lays egg from the mouth and delivers baby from the buttock?)

Matata hoil ang shung gorata hoil achha,

Mukh dia chaoa hoy putki dia bachha. (Answer: Kalar Gach)

(Here, a riddle has to be solved that what is such a thing which is untidy on the top, neat at the bottom, delivers fruits from the mouth and breeds offspring from the buttock?)

Ekhan kami duikan chal,

Dekhibarey khub bhal. (Answer: Kalar Pat)

(Here, a riddle has to be solved that what is such a thing which holds two shades from a centre beam and it is nice to look at?)

Ghar hoil more acha bhua,

Duikhan chal ekt rua. (Answer: Kalar Pat)

(Here, a riddle has to be solved that what is such a strange house which has two shades and a single centre beam?)

Chibla-chibli pat Raja nakhay bhat,

Jay kabar napay tai gadhar jat. (Answer: Kalar Pat)

(Here, a riddle has to be solved that what is such a such untidy leaf which is fit for serving food to the common people, but not a king. The narrator also says that the question is so simple that even a fool can answer?)

Bhaiok thunung andhar petot,

Mao noil ajur petot,

Mui genung Mathabhangar hatot. (Answer: Kalar Mukoch)

(Here, a riddle has to be solved that what is such a thing which remained in the dark womb of the mother when the mother is also inside the grandfather's belly?)

Jangal thaki birail Tia,

Sonar tupi matat dia. (Answer: Kalar Mukoch)

(Here, a riddle has to be solved that what is such a beautiful thing like a parrot that appears to the public from the bush by wearing a golden cap?)

Mui thaklung mar petot,

Bhai gail more Nayahato. (Answer: Kalar Thore ar Kalar Mukoch)

(Here, a riddle has to be solved that what is such a thing that when I am yet in the womb of my mother my younger brother is already born?)

Utti genung iltti genung,

Genung Magalhat,

Utekona deki ashnung sholokona dat. (Answer: Kalar Jhuki which possess 16 bananas each)

(Here, a riddle has to be solved that what is such a person who has 16 teeth which I have come across after wandering here and there?)

Nal tik tika kashiar mura,

Bap thakitey beta bura. (Answer: Kalar Gach and Mukuch.)

(Here, a riddle has to be solved that what is such a thing that a son grows old before the father does? Reply is banana plant and banana flower.)

There are several songs, based on *Kala* and *Kalar Gach*, which children sing. One of them are given below:-

Natar guti hatat dung,

Kalapat katia mar bhat khang

.....Tin tulia tanibar tan.

(In this song a desire is being expressed to have an enjoyable meal using a banana leaf as a plate, because the banana plant plate has no substitute.)

Advisory in Rajbanshi Literature Through Banana Plant

A general advisory in the Rajbanshi literature using the example of banana is presented below:-

Agot kala gar parey hati kinish.

(Here an advisory has been sounded that one should work with plan. If one has to buy an elephant, he should first be ready with its fodder by planting banana.)

Superstition Pertaining to Banana

In spite of having so much of benefits the banana and banana plant are not free from superstitions. It is believed that while proceeding for any mission it is inauspicious to see banana in front. When any mission is aborted they derogatorily make the remark that they have achieved a *Kacha Kala* (raw banana). When any one asks for food after the stock is exhausted, the reply comes, "You have come so late that food is exhausted; and now you eat a *Kacha Kala* (raw banana)." Before going to write examination, to attend court cases or to go for any important mission the people are not given banana to eat considering it to be inauspicious (game spoiler).

Techniques of Banana Plantation

Banana requires non-rocky soft soil and plenty of rainfall to grow. Besides, the humid weather provides a favourable condition. In the North Eastern India banana is planted on newly transferred soil keeping it little raised from the surface so that the roots of the banana plants are not submerged into water. Banana is planted in the summer months. Within one year or so it breeds four to six shoots from all sides of the base which promotes its rapid growth. Every year in the summer just a simple and thin soil filling is required to cover the new shoots. It really does not require much of care. Each plant of banana gives one big chunk of fruits in about one year which contains several bunches of bananas. The number of bunches are dependent on the healthiness of the plant. The healthier is the plant higher is the yield. Generally, once a banana grove is planted it gives the yields

for 15- 20 years and the old banana plants, after getting composed, become the fertilizer for the ongoing crops in a beautiful cycle. It very easy to grow banana.

Conclusion

Banana is such an eco-friendly natural resource that it is used in the whole of India. Rajbanshis of North Eastern India have always been using the banana and its plant for all their daily needs and ceremonies. The Rajbanshi grow and use the banana and its plants, an ecofriendly crop, to a great extent. This could be said that the importance of *Kala* and *Kalar Gach* will remain in future also in the economic and the cultural life of the Rajbanshis. In the present context when the UNESCO has been trying to create an environmental awareness to curve environmental pollution, the nature loving Rajbanshi culture shall have a great significance.

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