



Echoes of Resistance: Reform and Empowerment in Rajbanshi Poetic Expressions

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Rajbanshi poetic expressions serve as a powerful medium for social reform, while nurturing cultural pride, social awareness, and political consciousness within the community - particularly in the context of Kamatapur, a land deeply rooted in their historical and ethnic identity. Through an in-depth analysis of selected Rajbanshi poetic works, this study illustrates how poetry becomes more than a form of artistic expression; it emerges as a vehicle for resistance, unity, and empowerment. At a time when the Rajbanshi people face systemic marginalisation, cultural erasure, and socio-political exclusion in their own homeland, poets from the community seek to awaken a sense of identity, solidarity, and purpose through their writings. These poetic expressions often carry themes of displacement, identity, heritage, and struggle, aiming to bridge generational divides and reaffirm the community's shared history and aspirations. Writing in rhythms the community knows, and with symbols from their soil, the poets awaken a common spirit of resistance and hope. They do not merely romanticise the past but rather engage with present realities, urging the Rajbanshi people to come together and raise their voices against injustice and demand rightful recognition and autonomy. By examining the socio-political context in which these poems are written and received, the paper argues that Rajbanshi poetry serves as a form of cultural

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resistance. It becomes a unifying force that not only documents the pain of marginalisation but also inspires a movement towards reclaiming identity, rights, and dignity within the broader narrative of regional and national discourse.

Introduction

Every piece of literature, whether in English or any other language, is shaped by its context. Many religious and linguistic minorities across the world and in India use their unique form of literary expressions to convey their culture, identity, and struggles. Among such communities are the Rajbanshis, “one of the oldest aboriginal ethnic groups of South Asia, having predominantly Mongoloid features. Presently they are found in three South Asian countries viz. India, Bangladesh and Nepal. In India they are predominantly found in four Indian states, i.e. West Bengal particularly in North Bengal, Assam, and some parts of Bihar and

Meghalaya” (Borah, 2019, p. 2029). Through their literary expressions, the Rajbanshi poets speak from the margin, sharing their rich culture, raising awareness about their language, and highlighting their identity struggles. They also issue a clarion call to their people to unite and stand against their marginalisation. Thus, these writings help members of the community to understand the importance of their own roots, culture, and voice.

Literature Review

The article “Rising kshatriya consciousness in *Dangdhari Mao* (Minatory Mother) of Rai Saheb Panchan Barma” by Sanjit Sarkar (2015) explores Thakur Panchanan Barma’s efforts to assert the Rajbanshi community’s identity as *Kshatriyas*¹. Written during a time of violence against Rajbanshi women in Rangpur, the poems in *Dangdhari Mao* (Minatory Mother) urge the community to awaken to their warrior heritage. It challenges traditional gender roles, emphasising that both men and women must stand against oppression. The paper shows how the poem serves as a call for collective action and empowerment, reflecting a broader movement in Rajbanshi literature that blends cultural identity with social transformation.

In his paper “A depiction of different Dalit dimensions in Nikhilesh Ray’s *Kalnattir Kavita*”, Dipak Barman (2017) compares Rajbanshi poetry with Dalit literature, noting that while Rajbanshis are historically recognised as Kshatriyas, their literature, like Dalit writings, emerges from a marginalised position. Through



Nikhilesh Ray's work, Barman shows how Rajbanshi poets use literature to unite their community and reclaim identity, challenging mainstream dominance. The study highlights the need for broader research into how Rajbanshi poetry serves as a voice for social transformation from the margin.

In another article of his titled "The search for the lost identity in Rajbanshi poetry", Dipak Barman (2020) highlights how Rajbanshi poets connect deeply with nature as a source of healing, identity, and resistance. Unlike English Romantics who view nature as aesthetic and escapist, Rajbanshi poetry uses nature symbolically to reflect struggle, resilience, and a fight for justice. This contrast reveals a research gap in understanding how marginalised communities like the Rajbanshis use nature to assert identity and resist historical injustice - offering a rich area for further study.

In Gunazeet Mazumdar's (2022) paper "Topophrenia and indigenous belonging: Spatial memory in Rajbanshi poetry," we see how Rajbanshi poetry reflects strong ties to memory and space, especially the lost homeland of the Koch Kamata Kingdom. Using Robert Tally's concept of "topophrenia", here the author shows how these poems reflect the community's emotional and historical connections to their land. Due to political divisions, the Rajbanshi people were displaced, and their indigenous knowledge was marginalised. Now part of Northeast Indian literature, their poetry preserves collective memory and reclaims identity. Through Walter

Mignolo's idea of colonial knowledge and Leanne Simpson's "land as pedagogy", Mazumdar shows how Rajbanshi poetry emerges as a tool for cultural resistance, helping the community to remember, resist, and reconnect with their roots.

Jyotirmay Roy's (2025) article "Nature, memory, and identity: Tracing lost cultural traditions in Rajbanshi poetry" mentions that the Rajbanshi people, living in North Bengal, Assam, Nepal, and Bangladesh, keep their culture alive through their literary expressions. Their poems often use nature - like rivers, forests, birds, and seasons - as symbols of cultural preservation, continuity, and transformation. This study shows how Rajbanshi poetry expresses both love for the past and resistance to cultural loss. It is not just an art but a way to protect their language and history. In fact, the poems show a strong connection to nature, highlighting a deep bond among the Rajbanshi people, their land, and their way of life.

¹ *Kshatriyas* are one of the four traditional varnas (castes) in Hinduism, historically associated with warriors, rulers, and the protection of society. Therefore, Rajbanshi poetry is a powerful expression of resistance, identity, and empowerment. While some scholars have studied well-known poets, many writers remain unexplored, and their works convey strong messages of social reform, cultural pride, and community



resilience. A comprehensive study is needed to understand how Rajbanshi poetry functions at the margin, working collectively like a movement for social and cultural resistance.

Research Questions

1. How do Rajbanshi poets use their poetry to express the experiences and struggles of their marginalised community?
2. In what ways does Rajbanshi poetry function as a tool for social reform, cultural revival, and to unite people within the community?
3. What specific sociopolitical, or cultural issues are addressed through the literary and activist efforts of Rajbanshi poets?
4. How do Rajbanshi poets balance their roles as artists and social reformers working from the margin of mainstream society?
5. What impact have the literary or leadership activities of Rajbanshi poets had on the community's self-perception, solidarity, and visibility?
6. How does Rajbanshi poetry contribute to shaping a collective memory of resistance and hope within the community?

Objectives

1. To identify the main themes and issues expressed in Rajbanshi poetry.
2. To explore how Rajbanshi poets describe the struggles and challenges of their community through literary expressions.
3. To understand how Rajbanshi poets aim to bring social awareness and reform through their poems.
4. To examine the use of Rajbanshi language, culture, and traditions in their poetry.
5. To study how Rajbanshi poets work together as a group or movement to stand for their community.
6. To assess the impact of Rajbanshi poetry on the identity, unity, and confidence of the Rajbanshi people.

Research Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research, using both primary and secondary sources.

Primary data were collected through the close reading of books, records, and journals from institutions such as Centre for Koch Rajbanshi Studies and Development (Guwahati), Rajbanshi Bhasha Academy (Cooch Behar), Centre for Studies in Local Languages and Cultures (University of North Bengal), among others. Being a native Rajbanshi speaker helped me understand the texts more deeply. I also interviewed some



Rajbanshi writers, poets, and readers to gain additional insights. Since few people are familiar with Rajbanshi literary culture,

purposive and snowball sampling were used to select participants. Secondary sources included earlier research works, relevant information from the newspaper *Haamar Khabar* (The News of

Ours), and the journal *Dagor* (The Road) - both of which highlight new and emerging Rajbanshi writers and poets, and others. The study also applied some postcolonial ideas to interpret the data.

Inculcating Values: Empowering People to Fulfil Their Duties to Family, Community, and Society

Literature has long been a powerful medium for awakening people by cultivating moral, cultural, and social values, helping them recognise their shortcomings, encouraging positive change, and guiding them to take responsibility for their life, family, community, and society. In

the same way, Rajbanshi poets use their artistic expressions to awaken their people, guiding them towards a greater sense of responsibility. “Dystopians concern themselves with the moral

structure of a fictive society...A dystopian narrative tries to warn, didactically predicting a coming evil while there is still time to correct the situation” (Sisk, 1997, pp. 5-6). Similarly, Rajbanshi poetry becomes a powerful tool not only in pointing out problems within the community but also in encouraging awareness and change. A key example is Mahadeb Barman’s poetry collection *Gachar Talath Andar* (Darkness Under the Lamp). The title uses a common

metaphor to show how we often ignore problems closest to us. His poems push the community to reflect, recognise hidden issues, and work towards reform. Barman’s poetry also touches on deep existential themes, like those explored by philosophers Sartre and Camus - such as feeling lost, disconnected, and searching for meaning.

One poem in the book depicts an old man working hard in the field while his son ignores his responsibilities. This highlights a growing emotional and moral gap in modern Rajbanshi society. Through such themes, the poetry reflects the struggles within the community and shows both its problems and the hope for change:

I go to the fallow land

And see an old man farming. He works
hard to provide food For his family.



On the other side, his adult son

Rides on a motorcycle on the paved road, Spending
time with girls

Without any responsibility.

.....

Even though they have sons and daughters, the parents still have to beg. (Barman, 2019, p. 13)

(*Gachar Talath Andar* (Darkness under the Lamp) by Mahadeb Barman, my translation)

This moral abandonment enrages the poet, and he contemplates killing those vagabonds who have forgotten their studies, familial and social responsibilities, and idle away their time wandering aimlessly and flirting with girls:

Your aged father is dying from overwork, Yet instead
of helping him,

You wander about aimlessly.

My heart tells me to take your life. (Barman, 2019, p. 16) (*Baudiya*
(Vagabond) by Mahadeb Barman, my translation)

Here, the symbolic Baudiya displays attitudes reminiscent of Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where Stephen says, "...I will try to express

myself in some mode of life or act as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use, silence, exile and cunning" (Joyce, 2004, p. 219). We find Stephen rejecting the traditional authority of his family and institutions, determined to live authentically and on his own terms, even if it means distancing himself from his parents.

In a similar vein, Rajbanshi poetry shows that the Baudiya is neglecting his familial duties. The poet urges him to return to his studies and warns that the society will otherwise consider him worthless:

Leave these things, please listen to me. Start studying
again.



Don't let anyone take control of your mind,

Otherwise, everyone will call you worthless. (Barman, 2019, p. 17) (*Baudiya* (Vagabond) by Mahadeb Barman, my translation)

The poet seeks to influence the vagabond with philosophical lessons: "Stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny" (Vivekananda, 2009, p. 58). In fact, here the poet's voice is "to reform the State (here the Rajbanshi community) in order to save it, to preserve it by changing it," and for this "a body of workers is needed as well as a leader; - a considerable body of workers, placed at many points, and operating in many directions" (Nicholson, 1916).

According to Munshi Premchand, "Unless literature deals with reality it has no appeal for us. Literature can best be defined as a criticism of life" (Indian History Collective, n.d.). In the same spirit, drawing on Matthew Arnold, we may say that Rajbanshi poetry functions as a form of social criticism, reflecting the present conditions of Rajbanshi society. Through their verses, Rajbanshi poets seek to inspire awareness and foster change within their community.

The Rajbanshi poets, while not primarily focused on writing fables, frequently incorporated fable references to support their ideas. Thus, they can be likened to fabulists such as William Golding, who writes,

The fabulist is a moralist. He cannot make a story without a human lesson tucked away in it. Arranging his signs as he does, he reaches, not profundity on many levels, but what you would expect from signs, that is overt significance. By the nature of his craft then,

the fabulist is didactic, desires to inculcate a moral lesson (Golding, 1965, p. 85).

In fact, the poets of the community write with avowed dreams to "justify the ways of God to men" (Milton, 1877, p. 2), and "to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality" (Addison & Steele, 1891, Vol. 1, p. 41)

Poets often use satire to point out problems in society, and Rajbanshi poetry does the same. Pijush Sarkar mocks highly educated people in the community who show no love for their mother tongue and



know little about their homeland, Kamatapur. His poetry encourages reflection on this loss of cultural connection:

There are so many dignified people, even with doctorates,

Yet none show love for their own language and native land! (Sarkar, 2016, p.19) (*Kalpi Jaoya Manshilak* (To the People Who Have Gone Astray) by Pijush Sarkar, my translation)

This statement appears to be mocking individuals with prestigious academic degrees, suggesting that despite their education and accomplishments, they lack affection or attachment to their own language and culture. The poet wants to instill in his natives the love for their native land because for the poet “What matters is not to know the world but to change it” (Fanon, 1986, p. 17).

The poet considers the Rajbanshi people as *Matir Chhaoya* (*Children of the land*) and emphasises that, regardless of the honours they have achieved in their lives, they should always hold a deep love for their motherland, attentively listen to its needs, and consistently advocate for it:

You are the children of this land. Listen to this
land, speak for this land, Think of this land.

Success will come to you,

For everything around is yours-

If you bow down to the motherland. (Sarkar, 2016, p. 19)

(*Kalpi Jaoya Manshilak* (To the People Who Have Gone Astray) by Pijush Sarkar, my translation)

Following Ambedkar’s call to “Educate, agitate, organize, have faith and lose no hope” (Ambedkar, 2020, p. 273), Rajbanshi poets guide their community through poetry. They highlight education as strength and unity as resistance. Their verses nurture hope and cultural pride. In this way, Rajbanshi poetry carries forward Ambedkar’s vision of empowerment.

Fostering Hope and Aspirations: Guiding the Community to a Better Future

For the Rajbanshi community, poetry serves as a source of hope and resilience, inspiring faith in a better future. Kavi Ratna Shyamapada Barman’s line, “The moon smiles in the lap of clouds” (Prodhani, 2021, p. 35) assures the Rajbanshis of coming prosperity. A similar vision appears in Langston Hughes’ “I, Too”, where the marginalised confidently declare that one day they will sit “at the table” (Hughes, 1994, p.



46). In this way, Rajbanshi poets become part of a wider literary tradition that uses poetry to nurture hope, dignity, and collective strength.

Rajbanshi poetry often inspires farmers with messages of hope, reminding them that there is no need for sorrow because a new golden moon is rising beyond the clouds. This image becomes a symbol of light, prosperity, and renewal. Through such verses, poets encourage poor Rajbanshi farmers to remain optimistic, overcome worries and conflicts, and trust that a brighter future lies ahead:

O fellow farmer

Why do you still weep inside your dark home? Put on your
torn piece of cloth

The golden moon has descended for the peasants... (Prodhani, 2021, p. 33)

(*Chashi Bhai* (O Fellow Farmer) by Binod Bihari Barman, translated by Pradip Acharya)

The poem values the farmers' hard work and struggles, encouraging them to keep their hope alive. It promises that their patience and effort will bring a better future and a rich harvest. This hope resonates with Tagore's words, "MAN's history is waiting in patience for the triumph of the insulted man" (Tagore, 1916, p. 89), which affirm that those who suffer will, in time, find justice and dignity.

In *Alor Bade, Haoyar Bade* (For Light, for Air), Nikhilesh Ray uses the image of the narrow sky seen through a hut's crack as a symbol of restricted vision and limited hope. The poet urges:

If you can, step out of your room. Stand in
the light, stand in the air.

For light and air, the doors and windows of the mind Should be
kept open-

To become like light,

To become like air... (Ray, 2009, p. 33)

(*Alor Bade, Haoyar Bade* (For Light, for Air) by Nikhilesh Ray, my translation)



Here, stepping outside the room becomes a metaphor for moving beyond personal limitations. It suggests that by leaving behind confinement and opening oneself to light and air, an individual can discover new perspectives, embrace change, and move towards a fuller, more hopeful future.

Everyone has a wandering mind because we all come from different backgrounds and have different thoughts. Rajbanshi writers and poets, like many social reformers, speak about peace and unity. Life is short, so it's better to avoid fights and focus on understanding and helping each other. Living in harmony brings happiness, stronger bonds, and helps both people and society grow together:

How long will we live? Let us live together. Come and see
how few the days remain.

A devastating flood will sweep everything away, Leaving
emptiness all around. (Asoar, 2022, p. 60)

(*Deekkha* (Initiation) by Jagadish Asoar, my translation)

The poet wants to share life's deeper meaning in the words of Swami Vivekananda (1944): "My noble prince, this life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive" (p. 111). Solving conflicts through talking, listening, and understanding others helps build respect and peace. Qualities like compassion, patience, and tolerance are key to living together in a kind and inclusive way:

Ignorant people fight among themselves. They pay no
attention to the passing of time. Losing their wealth
through their own faults, They seek to recover it again.

Seeing them, *Gosai*² smiles within himself. (Asoar, 2022, p. 60) (*Deekkha*
(Initiation) by Jagadish Asoar, my translation)

By respecting diversity and learning from others, we can build unity and grow together. This brings new ideas, progress, and stronger communities. Since life is short, it's important to focus on kindness, understanding, and working together for a better world. In Hinduism, *Deekkha* or *Deeksha* (initiation) is when a spiritual teacher guides someone on their spiritual path. Rajbanshi poet Jagadish Asoar calls on Gosai to guide their people on the path to salvation. Salvation can be reached in different ways - through devotion, knowledge, selfless action, or discipline. A good spiritual teacher can guide the Rajbanshis on this journey:



Gosai, whisper the mantras in their ears-The path
to Nirvana, to Buddhagaya!

(Asoar, 2022, p. 60)

(*Deekkha* (Initiation) by Jagadish Asoar, my translation)

Rajbanshi writers and poets often focus on their community's struggles for identity.

Through their works, they try to guide, uplift, and inspire their people with new ideas and ways of thinking. They stress that after death, what remains is not wealth or material things but a person's name and the good deeds they leave behind. In this sense, true value lies in the positive influence and reputation we create. Such thoughts connect with Viktor E. Frankl's (1985) lesson:

Don't aim at success - the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than

oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself (p. 16-17), which emphasises that genuine success arises when individuals are passionately committed to a meaningful purpose, rather than chasing success for its own sake:

What will remain except your name?

But is that name truly yours? Your parents gave it to you.

² *Gosai* is a spiritual guide of the Rajbanshis.

You are fighting in vain - plant the saplings,

The paddy will be plentiful; don't burden yourself with stress. (Asoar, 2022, p. 60) (*Deekkha* (Initiation) by Jagadish Asoar, my translation)

A person's name is important to their identity, but their true legacy comes from their actions, values, and the positive impact they make in life. What lasts after we are gone is how we lived, the relationships we built, and the good we did for others. Legacy is more than being remembered - it's about making a



difference through kindness, creativity, or helping society. We should focus on living a meaningful life, not just on fame or success. Rajbanshi poets share ideas like “plant the saplings”, “don’t stress, paddy will grow,” teaching people to work hard without worrying too much about results. This helps people to stay patient and dedicated. As community leaders, Rajbanshi poets also teach about “freedom” by encouraging people to value their own

culture while respecting others. This helps to promote unity, understanding, and respect for diversity, making society stronger and more peaceful:

Freedom means

*Palatia*³ performances throughout the night. (Prodhani, 2021, p. 137) (*Swadhinata* (Freedom) by Premananda Roy, translated by Jyotirmoy Prodhani)

Cultural autonomy is key to true freedom. Rajbanshi poet Premananda Roy, in his poem *Swadhinata* (Freedom), shows that real freedom means valuing one’s heritage and identity while respecting society and others. This idea connects to existential theory, which focuses on personal freedom, responsibility, and finding meaning.

Bachchamohan Ray’s poetry gives hope to the Rajbanshis, aiming to lift them up and reverse their place in an unfair society:

The cars take rides on the boats, then the boats on the cars Think of
it my fellows,

This is the fate in this country of ours. (Prodhani, 2021, p. 42).

(*Aloknata Aar Bogori* (Jujube and the Dodder Vine) by Bachchamohan Ray, translated by Jyotirmoy Prodhani).

The images of “cars take rides on the boats”, and “boats on the cars” show a wish for a big change - where the oppressed rises up and the powerful feels what it’s like to be in their place. It’s about turning unfair systems around. Rajbanshi poets use such powerful lines to

inspire their people - to believe in themselves, speak up for their rights, and become leaders of their own community. Their poems bring courage, hope, and a push for reform.



³ *Palatia* is a popular folk drama of the Rajbanshis, mainly performed by farmers as recreation. A team of about fifteen, including women, stages episodes from both tradition and contemporary society. Each performance lasts six to seven hours, accompanied by instruments like harmonium, dhol, flute, khol, tabla, ghungur, juri, dugi, and arbanasi.

Empowering Action: Preparing the Community for Collective Effort and Resistance

The defiant voice of Namdeo Dhasal, which strongly speaks against oppression, also finds resonance in the works of Rajbanshi poets. Dhasal declares:

In the shadow of tyranny, we gather
our voices,

defying the chains that bind,

we rise against oppression. (Dhasal, 2014, p. 41)

In a similar spirit, Rajbanshi poets use their poetry to guide their community. Their verses teach people to value their identity, inspire them to speak against injustice, and encourage them to unite in solidarity. In this way, Rajbanshi poetry becomes more than art; it emerges as a call for collective strength and resistance.

In *Kalnattir Kavita* (The Poetry of the Darkened Night), Nikhilesh Ray tries to awaken the Rajbanshi people by reminding them of their self-identity. He shows this identity as a light that must be protected so it is never lost:

I draw a light within my mind. That light
grows slowly.

Let me hide it now,

In case they ask me to extinguish it. (Ray, 2009, p. 11) (*Alo* (The Light) by Nikhilesh Ray, my translation)

In his poetic vision, Nikhilesh Ray employs *Alo* (the light) as a metaphor for the Rajbanshi community's sense of self-identity. As a pioneering figure, he aspires to illuminate every household with this light, driven by a profound passion and sustained by the hope it carries:



I want to spread that light from door to door. It is not
my belly's hunger, but my heart's.

I draw a light within my mind,

Yet that light draws me instead. (Ray, 2009, p. 11) (*Alo* (The
Light) by Nikhilesh Ray, my translation)

Rajbanshi poets, like leaders, use their words to guide and inspire. Santosh Sinha urges
the community to follow Panchanan Barma's ideals for self-reform and unity, leading to freedom and a
brighter future:

Everybody, please come together

And walk towards the East - keep walking. Do not be
afraid... (Sinha, 2012a, p. 11) (*Ekta manshi* (One Man)
by Santosh Sinha, my translation)

The poet's call to walk towards the East symbolizes new beginnings and hope. As a
leader, he guides the community towards a brighter future and clear direction. "Awake, arise, and stop not
till the goal is reached" (Vivekananda, 1944, p. 332) is the poet's urge to his people to go to Khalishamari,
the birthplace of their leader Panchanan Barma to better understand the struggles that their leader came
across throughout his life to uplift the status of his people:

Leaving all troubles behind,

He who dedicated his life to the community and the nation-Let us go
to Khalishamari, holding his flambeau.

There lie all our traces, all our wealth. (Sinha, 2012a, p. 18)

(*Elao Achi Je Kayjhan Baudiya* (We, Who Are Called Vagabonds) by Santosh Sinha, my
translation)

Rajbanshi poetry, like other postcolonial works, rejects dominant ideas and shares its own cultural
view. The term "Subaltern" means marginalised groups silenced by power (Gramsci, 1971, p. 52). Indian
writers in the 1930s, influenced by Marxism, focused on these oppressed voices. In describing the



marginalised, Spivak gives the idea of the “subaltern”, and she is of the view that “The subaltern is [not] just a classy word for “oppressed”, for [the] Other, for somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie. [...] In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to cultural imperialism is subaltern - a space of difference” (De Kock, 1992, p. 29-47).

In “Can the subaltern speak?”, Spivak (1988) explores how marginalised groups struggle to express themselves in their own voice. She proposes a method that encourages letting “the oppressed speak for themselves” (p. 292), highlighting the importance of listening to their own voice. And interpreting Spivak, Stephen Morton (2003) illustrates that “the benevolent impulse to represent subaltern groups effectively appropriates the voice of the subaltern and thereby silences them” (p. 56). This imposed silence often causes inner conflict for individuals, who feel a strong need to release their anger and break free from social constraints:

The fierce mother bursts out in anger:

“We want our language!” (Roy, 2011, p. 6)

(*Bhashar Bade* (For Language) by Premananda Roy, my translation)

After long suffering, the Rajbanshi community’s buried revolutionary spirit bursts out, which is shown by the words such as *Girjji* (roaring) (Roy, 2011, p. 6), and *Chikiri* (shouting) (Ray, 2009, p. 14). Poets now give voice to their suppressed mother tongue, seeking freedom to express and share without domination:

Language is like a flying bird, That bird
needs open sky.

Language is like a flowing river,

That river needs open muddy path. (Ray, 2009, p. 14) (*Bhasha*
(Language) by Nikhilesh Ray, my translation)

Language is like a flowing river and a bird in the open sky - always
changing, free, and vital for sharing culture, emotions, and ideas. It
thrives when allowed to move freely across boundaries.



The Rajbanshi people are shouting, but they aren't sure anyone is listening. Although Spivak (1988) argues that "The subaltern cannot speak" (p. 308), the Rajbanshi poets continue to raise their voices, offering both questions and hope for change:

Now we will till the land, Cut the tree
and set it on fire. Gathering at its base

With chopper, *Khanta*⁴, axe, and spade... Always
deceitful tree, you are-

How will you survive forever? (Ray, 2009, p. 20)

(*Matragachh* (The Male Tree) by Nikhilesh Ray, my translation)

In Ray's poem, the "male tree" symbolises dominant cultures that exploit the Rajbanshis without giving back anything. The poet urges the community to unite and resist these colonising forces through collective strength since "a territory has only been decolonised when it has been purged of every remnant of its colonial past" (Bismarck, 2012, p. 2).

Like Dalit literature, minority writings also reflect struggles, identity, and resistance, sharing a common goal of equality and empowerment. These themes can resonate across different communities, fostering solidarity and understanding among them because the

'Rejection' and 'revolt' in Dalit literature have been birthed from the womb of Dalit's pain. They are directed against an inhuman system that was imposed on them. Just as the anguish expressed in Dalit literature is in the nature of a collective social voice, similarly, the rejection and revolt are social and collective (p. 31),

as Sharankumar Limbale (2004) argues in *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature*.

Leaders such as Panchanan Barma are regarded as father figures within the Rajbanshi community. He is remembered for guiding, protecting, and inspiring his people through compassion, courage, and unity. His life and work serve as an example for the Rajbanshis to follow in building a society rooted in justice, freedom, and equality:

One who questions every word, Who moves
forward without fear,



And leads his people towards new hopes and aspirations-He is the noble one,

He is the person we all long for. Do you know who that person is? He is Thakur Panchanan!

If you wish to live, be like him! (Sinha, 2012a, p. 14-15) (*Manshi* (The Man) by Santosh Sinha, my translation)

⁴ *Khanta* is an equipment for digging up soil. As freedom fighters, Rajbanshi poets urge their people to remain strong and determined in order to break their long “silence,” and to “wrest our (their) belongings back” (Prodhani, 2021, p. 120). In Bourdieu’s sense, this “silence” can be understood through the concept of “habitus”, which refers to “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in

determinate ways, which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu” (Wacquant, 2006, p. 318). Such silence, however, may persist, for as George Orwell (1950) observes, “Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious” (p. 56). This call for awakening resonates with the same tone of urgency and defiance that Milton gives to Satan when addressing his fallen angels in *Paradise Lost*:

What though the field be lost,

All is not lost; the unconquerable will, And study of revenge, immortal hate,

And courage never to submit or yield, (Milton, 1877, p. 5)

Rajbanshi poets employ their writings as instruments to awaken their community to the realities of oppression and to inspire acts of resistance. They stress that meaningful transformation often requires rebellion. By calling for unity, these poets highlight the importance of collective responsibility and cooperation in building a stronger and more just society. This vision is expressed in Santosh Sinha’s (2012a) lines:

We, who are called vagabonds,



Must stand together with our heads held high. The sun is
rising in the East-

Bring new light to your darkened home! (p.17)

(*Elao Achhi Je Kayjhan Baudiya* (We, Who Are Called Vagabonds) by Santosh Sinha, my translation)

Rajbanshi poetry promotes civic duty, inclusivity, and collective responsibility. It encourages all the members of the community to take part in the community's growth to "make a new country, a country of our (their) own." (Prodhani, 2021, p. 118), and for this the poet urges:

Run, run, run, everybody!

Let us begin the revolt in our empty place. We, who
are called vagabonds,

Let us rise and stir together. (Sinha, 2012a, p. 17)

(*Elao Achhi Je Kayjhan Baudiya* (We, Who Are Called Vagabonds) by Santosh Sinha, my translation)

Literature can make people think, question unfair systems, and bring change. Books like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and George Orwell's *1984* are good examples - they reveal social issues and inspire reform. Although the Rajbanshi poets are aware about their people that "the lack of practical ties between them and the masses, their apathy and, yes, their cowardice at the crucial moment in the struggle, are the cause of tragic trials and tribulations," they are still in the process of writing their poetry to bring positive change (Fanon, 2004, p. 97).

Some critics argue that literature by itself cannot bring real change. While it can spread awareness, real reform also requires action, policies, and public support. Furthermore, the effect of literature depends on how readers understand and interpret it, which can vary from person to person.

When we say a culture fights for "her" rights, it means that the people of that culture must unite to defend their identity and protect their traditions. In Santosh Sinha's poem *Shidol, O Baay Shidol* (Shidol, O Dear Shidol), the Rajbanshi traditional food *Shidol* becomes a symbol of cultural heritage and is called upon to raise its voice and take part in the struggle for rights and recognition. This reflects what Padma



Vibhushan Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, architect of India's Green Revolution, said, "One of India's major blessings is the rich store of experience and

knowledge available in the rural and tribal areas." Similarly, playwright Mahesh Elkunchwar has also mentioned, "*Adivasi* (tribal) heritage is a tapestry woven with threads of resilience, wisdom, and cultural diversity that enrich the fabric of our nation" (Majumdar, 2023).

Through this poem, Sinha urges the Rajbanshi people to come together, take pride in their culture, and protect their ethnic identity:

Shidol, o dear Shidol, Please step
outside.

Become the *Kushyi*⁵,

Strike the tail of the big hairy cat.

Take the *Katai*⁶ of Panchanan's fierce mother, Stir a storm
in every shidol's mind...

And unite!

Shake your body, rise up-Bring a
new day,

Show your power." (Sinha, 2012b, 26-27)

(*Shidol, o Baay Shidol* (Shidol, O Dear Shidol) by Santosh Sinha, my translation)

The anger of the Rajbanshi community reflects their fight against injustice and exclusion, not only for gain, but for equality and rights. Their hope lies in a brighter future with social justice, ecological renewal, and a better life for them:

⁵ *Kushyi* is a traditional agricultural tool of the Rajbanshis that resembles a heavy sledgehammer. It is made by shaping the main root of a bamboo tree into a solid, mallet-like head, while its long handle is crafted from slender bamboo. Farmers use the *Kushyi* to break apart soil clumps and to mix the earth evenly across the farmland, preparing it for cultivation.



⁶ *Katai* or *Katari* is a kind of heavy chopper usually made up of iron consisting of a blade attached to a handle.

The land you snatched away And turned
into acres of weeds Would bloom one day

With flowers and grains. (Prodhani, 2021, p. 120)

(*Jagibar Gaan* (Anthem to Wake Us up) by Nikhilesh Ray, translated by Jyotirmoy Prodhani)

Dharma Narayan Barma's poem *Mui Chang* (I Want) talks about a "storm" symbolising the need for a major, radical change to challenge old systems and bring true transformation:

The storm is stricken And beats a
hasty retreat

I want just this much. (Prodhani, 2021, p. 47)

(*Mui Chang* (I Want) by Dharma Narayan Barma, translated by Pradip Acharya)

To break down old power differences and make everyone equal, the poet uses the image of "let the sky crush on the earth." Usually, the sky is far and big, but bringing it down to earth shows a call for fairness. Through "the earth cloud over the sky" the poet wants to focus more on everyday people and their needs instead of distant and difficult ideas. The poet wants everybody to take care about real life and real problems:

Let the sky crush on the earth And the earth
cloud over the sky

I want just this much. (Prodhani, 2021, p. 47)

(*Mui Chang* (I Want) by Dharma Narayan Barma, translated by Pradip Acharya)

The poet feels that the world has lost its way due to problems such as injustice and inequality. There is also a strong concern for the sufferings of oppressed people, showing a deep wish to end unfairness and bring change:

Swallowing with ease the rubbish of the earth Like the
*Neelkantha*⁷



Offer refuge to the oppressed

I want just this much. (Prodhani, 2021, p. 48)

(*Mui Chang* (I Want) by Dharma Narayan Barma, translated by Pradip Acharya)

This poem shows a deep wish for a big change and a fairer society. The poet is frustrated with the current situation and hopes for a better future. Poetry helps to express strong feelings and invites people to think and act.

⁷ *Neelkantha*, a title for Lord Shiva in Hindu mythology, refers to the episode of the *Samudra Manthan* (churning of the ocean), where Shiva swallowed a deadly poison to protect both gods and demons from its harmful effects. The poison remained in his throat, turning it blue, which gave rise to the name *Neelkantha*, meaning blue-throated.

In *Jagibar Gaan* (Song to Rise), Basanta Kumar Das' urge resembles Satan's calling to his fallen angels, "Awake! arise! or be for ever fallen" (Milton, 1877, p. 12). This awakening is not just from sleep, but about shaking off passiveness and unawareness. He calls on them to break the habit of quietly accepting injustice and to become more alert and active. The image of sleep shows how people may have grown used to their struggles, and the poet's message is for them to rise and take charge of their own lives.

Stand up, rise, rise my Rajbanshi brethren How long
will you be in your slumber Rise, my Rajbanshi
brethren

... .. For how
long will you remain mute,

O my Rajbanshi brethren? (Prodhani, 2021, p. 58)

(*Jagibar Gaan* (Song to Rise) by Basanta Kumar Das, translated by Jyotirmoy Prodhani)

The poet speaks out against social injustice, inequality, and political neglect. His message is clear here: real change starts with awareness and action. He reminds them that they are from

the Kshatriya clan - born to protect themselves - and urges them not to follow *Parasuram*, a

warrior in Hindu mythology who gave up his duty as a warrior and became a sage. Instead, the poet wants his people to stay strong, united, and ready to stand up for justice:



You were born to a kshatriya clan

But abandoned your sword and armoury And became
a mendicant living on alms Your simple tongue is
returned with insult

How will you remain so, my Rajbanshi brethren?

Parasuram of *Satya Yuga*⁸ A raging
warrior, Decimated the kshatriyas

To avenge on his father's behalf How long
should we shudder

And remain disguised to escape his wrath. (Prodhani, 2021, p. 58)

(*Jagibar Gaan* (Song to Rise) by Basanta Kumar Das, translated by Jyotirmoy Prodhani)

The poet uses the idea of “awakening” to mean gaining knowledge, understanding, and awareness. By waking up, the community can see their problems clearly and take steps to improve their lives. Through poetry, the poet wants to touch hearts, make people think, and feel responsible. The message is to stop being passive and start working together for a better and kinder community. A similar wake-up call is found in Nikhilesh Ray's poem *Pasila Sarir Gaan*

⁸ In Hinduism, a *Yuga* is an epoch or age within a cycle of four ages, known as the *Chatur Yuga*. The first and longest age, *Satya Yuga* (also called *Krita Yuga*), is often referred to as the golden age and is characterized by truth, righteousness, and a high level of spiritual development.

(Songs from the Rear Seat), where the poet also urges the community to become aware and take action:

If we sit quiet and keep waiting

They take no time no lick clean all our curd

They would even encroach upon our homes with glee It is
enough.

Let us speculate no more.



This is the worst of times. (Prodhani, 2021, p. 119)

(*Pasila Sarir Gaan* (Songs from the Rear Seat) by Nikhilesh Ray, translated by Jyotirmoy Prodhani)

The poet warns against being too passive or trusting, using “curd” as a symbol of something valuable, and “they” as those who might take advantage. He urges the Rajbanshi community to protect their rights and not let others take what’s theirs. While kindness is important, the poet says they must also be strong and set clear boundaries. They should stay alert, stand up for themselves, and work together to face challenges and create positive change. He also encourages self-understanding and staying true to who they are. By listening to their strong inner self and reclaiming their lost identity, the community can find strength and freedom:

Someone is chanting incantations inside me:

Open your hands,

Open your eyes, open your mouth If you want
your land back,

If you want a life a man must have. (Prodhani, 2021, p. 119)

(*Pasila Sarir Gaan* (Songs from the Rear Seat) by Nikhilesh Ray, translated by Jyotirmoy Prodhani)

The poet’s phrases - “if you want your land back,” and “if you want a life a man must have” show a deep wish to reclaim lost land, identity, and dignity. He urges his people to take control of their own lives through awareness, action, and responsibility. Other phrases - “open your hands,” “open your eyes,” and “open your mouth” encourage the Rajbanshi community to wake up, speak out, and act for their rights. The poet calls for self-empowerment and leadership from within the community. Such chants awaken the community’s inner strength, inspiring collective resistance and the transformation of their identity.

Rajbanshi poets will keep writing revolutionary and resistant poetry, showing the strong spirit of their community. Their writing will prove that no matter what tries to stop them, poetry will continue:

“No matter how many times we are pushed aside, or how often we are oppressed, the act of writing poetry will never cease.” (Sinha, 2012b)



(Kabita Kungkurar Suta (Preface)) Conclusion

This study makes clear that Rajbanshi poetry serves as both resistance and reform, giving voice to a community long shaped by loss and marginalisation. Through their verses, the poets reclaim cultural memory, affirm identity, and offer their people a language of hope. As Ramola Ray Sarkar reminds:

We have our own heritage Script,
words and language

Literature and culture are so great. (Prodhani, 2021, p. 167)

(*Ami Amar Shipa Bisriya Jang*” (As We Search for Our Roots) by Ramola Ray Sarkar, translated by Jyotirmoy Prodhani)

These lines capture the essence of Rajbanshi poetry: the safeguarding of heritage as a form of resistance. The poets often draw on nature, rituals, and everyday life to root their work in lived experience. As Jyotirmay Roy (2024) notes, rivers and forests become symbols of identity and survival, turning poetry into a vessel of cultural endurance.

This voice is never solitary. Poets often gather, publish anthologies, and hold public readings, creating collective platforms that transform literature into a gentle yet determined form of protest (Prodhani, 2021, p. 240). In this way, poetry becomes not only an individual expression but also a social movement.

At its heart, Rajbanshi poetry is woven from pain and memory. Pradip Acharya’s reflection that “Poetry is born from a pain” resonates deeply, for the Rajbanshi people write from histories of exclusion and displacement. Their longing for Kamatapur symbolises both a search

for roots and an assertion of identity (Prodhani, 2021, p. 244).

Yet, these poems are not only about remembering; they are also about awakening. By embedding social, moral, and philosophical values in their verses, Rajbanshi poets seek to build strength and unity. Through such voices, Rajbanshi poetry becomes a means of cultural survival. It preserves memory, nurtures unity, and resists marginalisation. In this way, poetry stands as both a memory of pain and a path of hope, giving the Rajbanshi people strength to assert themselves together to preserve their identity and dignity. As Nikhilesh Ray (2022) observes:



A language cannot be advanced by a single individual, as it is not the possession of one person but a communal asset. Just as people invest effort in nurturing and protecting their personal belongings, the preservation and growth of a community's language requires the collective collaboration of all its members (p. 5).

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