

**Where Children Lose Their Language:  
The Endangered Linguistic Identity of the Rajbanshi Children  
of North Bengal**

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**DRIPTA PIPLAI**

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## **1. Introduction:**

The relevance of Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) lies in the fact that people can be discriminated against in terms of language. Apart from gender-race-religion, 'language can also be used in discriminatory ways, so that some groups become invisible.' (Phillipson and T, Skutnabb-Kangas: 1999:51).

In a complex society, monolingualism is held as the established norm. The State expects that the 'Others' should assimilate with the dominant culture and language. This result is the language death of certain communities which gradually becomes 'invisible'. Language Death and the maintenance of linguistic and cultural identity are two different possibilities. Attitude towards the language decides the future of the languages. The future of an Endangered Language (or a language, which is not apparently endangered but is actually endangered) has been decided by the factors like:

- (a) Whether the speakers think that the language is difficult to maintain
- (b) Whether the members of the speech-community use their own variety in presence of the dominant language or not etc.

In many cases, people of the oppressed language deny the existence of their language or the young generations replace the language by the prestigious variety. But on the other hand, some 'aware' speakers try to revive the linguistic variety. This revival is involved with the language attitude and also awareness of linguistic rights.

Linguistic Human Rights deals with the rights of every linguistic group to retain their linguistic behavior in their own language/mother tongue. Most of the linguistic communities cannot retain this as the powerful linguistic group threatens them, and the powerful groups are the only linguistic groups that matter in a nation state in most of the cases. Speakers of the so-called 'dialects', 'vernaculars' and 'patois' mostly lose their LHR as they do not have 'a language'. But 'In order to form a nation or state you have to have a language'. (T, Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000: 426)

It has been observed that, not only the minorities but also many other dominated speech communities face psychological violence. The hegemony of dominant languages results in

‘Linguicism’ – which involves ‘Ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce and unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language.’ (T, Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988 quoted in Tove, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, R: 1999)

Some attempts to prevent this discrimination and protect the rights of these dominated people have been made since 1945. Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) was one such attempt where it was mentioned that linguistic minorities should not be denied their rights. They should use their own language.

A draft of Universal declaration of Linguistic Rights was presented to UNESCO in 1996 where LHR of (1) individuals and (2) linguistic communities was assured. Educational Language Rights was an important part of this declaration.

Educational Language Rights were also upheld in Article 5.1(C), UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960), which has stated that the first two years of a child’s schooling should be done in his/her own mother tongue. In India, the constitution has also demanded teaching through mother tongue in the first two years of schooling.

In an amendment in 1956, the constitution of India had directed the states ‘to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups’ (Act 350A).

The Kothari Commission Report (1966) was in favour of the Three Language Formula where it was said that the child should get education in her mother tongue in early school years. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) of NCERT has also emphasized mother tongue education at the early stage of schooling. The scenario of school education in India ‘suggests that the language question needs to be addressed urgently and with sincerity.’ (The Pratiche Education Report, 2002:37).

The present project wants to reflect on the language problems of the Rajbanshi school children of North Bengal in terms of their LHR. The condition of these children in relation to LHR can be viewed from two perspectives.

- (1) The poor performance of the Rajbanshi-speaking children because of their lack of familiarity with the Bengali code

(2) The tendency of the Bengali monolingual authorities to ignore the marginalized people's linguistic identity.

The Research Problem posed in the project is:

**The Rajbanshi school children of North Bengal lag behind in their classroom performances due to their encounter with an unfamiliar language, and face problems of interaction in classroom due to incomprehensibility of the target language.**

## **2. Methodology**

The study is based on extensive **fieldwork** in some selected parts of Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal. The fieldwork was conducted in three parts, the different areas were

(a) Lataguri – Uttar Matiyali New Additional Primary School

(b) Jalpaiguri Town- Subhashnagar Mahutpara Primary School

And (c) Amguri- Some teachers and students of Amguri village

One of the research methods was detailed **classroom observations** in two schools.

Teachers in respective classes were requested to mark each student on their understanding of 'good', 'average' and 'bad' students. A few students from each group were chosen by random sampling, and observed in their classroom. The observations were recorded by a qualitative questionnaire.

Interaction with students included Picture Story Test, voluntary story-telling session and interview with teachers. Children's problems with the first language textbook provided by the West Bengal Board of Primary Education were also taken into consideration.

The children who were observed in the classroom could not articulate their problems in the classrooms; hence interviews were conducted with some higher-level students who could express their difficulties as a school student. A compilation of such interviews could help us to better understand the problems posed in this project. For this purpose, some students of Amguri village and also some students from North Bengal University were interviewed.

In a separate section of this project, the Rajbanshi language and its structural differences with the Standard Colloquial Bangla were marked.

An attempt has also been made to analyze the language curriculum of the children in terms of the present situation in the area under review.

### **3. Linguistic Human Rights and Primary Education: the West Bengal**

#### **Scenario and Rajbanshi Children**

The most important domain where the Linguistic Human Rights is threatened is in the domain of schooling. Children in many schools are not allowed to speak (or are given punishment for speaking) their linguistic variety in the classroom. By not allowing a child to use her home language in the class, she is denied her right of self-expression. It affects the children's linguistic identity, and thus the formation of social-national identity in terms of a bigger perspective. Thus the language textbooks of early school-curriculum silently kill the language of the children of the dominated groups.

The early language curriculum of the West Bengal Board of Primary Education at a first glance does not seem to be problematic. But the hidden aim of the curriculum can be understood from the teacher's handbook provided by the board.

In 1980, the Education Minister of West Bengal Government Mr. Partha Dey mentioned in his article '*Prathomik store prothom bhasha*' (First Language in Primary Level) that, learning through mother tongue cannot be compared with any other methods of learning. (Dey 1980:619)

But in practice, West Bengal Primary Education Board has decided Bangla (as the primary first language); besides Urdu, Hindi, Nepali and Santali (in some selected schools) are taught as the First languages. As mentioned in 'The Position of Languages in School

Curriculum’ (Chaturvedi and Mohale, 1976), Bangla should be the medium of instruction in West Bengal throughout the school education as it is the majority language.

In the curriculum handbook for teachers published by the West Bengal Board of Primary Education, ‘*Prathomik Shikkhar Shikkhakrom O Pathyosuchi*’ (Curriculum and Syllabus for Primary Education) it has been mentioned that the child should learn to ‘shift his/her home language to the ‘standard’ language’. But it has not been mentioned that the shift or ‘transfer’ is not an easy task in most of the cases. Neither there is any mention whether the students’ mother tongue is Standard Bangla or some other varieties , nor there is any consideration of whether the teachers have the ability to explain things by using the students’ home language or not.

Though the directions of the Primary School Board in Bengal emphasize the use of Bangla in school curriculum, many other languages are spoken in the province. And there is also a continuous effort to mark some other varieties as dialects of Bangla and putting them under the umbrella of ‘Bangla’ in order to increase the number of the Bangla speakers in the linguistic census. ‘The rural ‘non-standard’ varieties are rated grammatically ‘incorrect’ and ‘bad’, conceptually ‘deficient’ and sociologically ‘deprived.’ (Bernstein, 1971:225). These communities, though they speak a language, very different from Standard Colloquial Bangla, are pressurized to use the standard language in various ways.

An article on a Pratichi Trust Seminar published in the Anandabazar Patrika dated 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2007 Swati Bhattacharya has stressed that ‘A survey is needed on the language of education. 7% of the primary school students in West Bengal belong to various tribes. Ramaprasad Bandyopadhyay, a teacher from Murshidabad Sebamilani Primary Schools informs that, ‘if the students are taught in Standard Bangla, they cannot understand. Bangla is the second language for them and English is the third language.’...What can be the language policy for them? Providing local teachers for the (tribal) children? A separate textbook for them? Or teaching through their mother tongue up to a certain level?’ (Translation from Bangla by the author)

**Rajbanshi community of North Bengal speaks a very different linguistic variety which is regarded as a dialect of Bangla by the governmental authorities. And thus the children of this community are compelled to use Bangla in their classroom.**

It is not only that the Rajbanshi children are not allowed to use their own language in the classroom; use of Rajbanshi words, in many cases is treated as a stigma by them for many of their upper caste classmates. Childhood memories of many of the high school students of this community confirm this fact. Language has become the tool of threats on one hand, and on the other the linguistic use of the threatened community poses a threat to the formation of the child's identity from the very childhood. The Rajbanshi children have already begun to feel themselves as a subordinated group.

The directions for using Bangla are stricter now, because of the language movement which is a part of the Kamtapur movement. The movement-zone is inhabited mostly by Rajbanshis. There is an official attempt to link this issue with the language movement as some of the participants of the Kamtapur Movement<sup>1</sup> are Rajbanshis. The children who speak Rajbanshi at home will certainly benefit if they are provided with education in the mother tongue. But they are indirectly or directly given to understand that they are not permitted to use their linguistic variety in the classroom.

‘Whether Rajbangshi is a dialect or a distinct language, in its own right, is a matter of controversy. In recent times, this issue has become central to the Kamtapuri political movement in north Bengal. ...one significant revelation of a survey carried out by the DPEP in 1996 in West Bengal is discussed. The survey found the first generation learners in Kochbehar, a north Bengal district, lagging behind in vocabulary...The authors point is that the seeming poverty of vocabulary might be the result of children's inability to cope with the school-language which is too alien from their mother-tongue.’

(Bandyopadhyay, 2004: 16)

During the field work (in three phases) many instances were found where children have faced difficulties as they are taught in Bangla, provided with books in Bangla – which is very much alien to them. In the rural school it was observed that most of the students

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<sup>1</sup> It should be mentioned in this regard that, the term ‘Kamtapuri’ according to many scholars denote the indigenous people of a large area of North Bengal. Vaskar Nandy, who is associated with ‘Swadhikar’ has informed that Rajbanshis are also a part of the Kamtapuri population. But some other scholars do not use the term. The movement in northern Bengal is popularly known as ‘Kamtapuri Movement’.

cannot understand simple Bangla instructions. Some teachers informed in an interview that, in case the students write names of some objects in Rajbanshi, there are clear instructions to mark them 'zero'.

#### **4. The Rajbanshis and their language: how different from Bangla**

Rajbanshi is spoken in almost seven districts of West Bengal, four districts of Assam, one district of Bihar and also in Nepal and Bangladesh. According to the 1991 Census of India, there were 2,839,481 Rajbanshi speakers in India. Official sources claim Rajbanshi as a dialect of Bengali in West Bengal and a dialect of Assamese in Assam. Grierson also mentions Rajbanshi as a well-marked dialect of Northern Bengal (Grierson 1903, Vol. 5, Part-1: 163).

In the framework of the historical linguistics, Rajbanshi has been put in the Bengali-Assamese group, which is a part of the Indo-Aryan language group of the larger Indo-European stalk. But the history of Rajbanshi people directly connects them with Tibeto-Burman group as they are said to be the offshoot of the Koch tribe. 'It is said that they belong to the great Bodo family that entered India in the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C. from the east and settled on the banks of the Brahmaputra and gradually spread over Assam and the whole of North Bengal' (Singh, K.S., 1998: 2927). In this connection, it should be mentioned that there are two different theories among the Rajbanshi scholars regarding their anthropological background. One stream directly relates them to the Tibeto-Burman Group as Sanyal (1965) has mentioned. But another stream tries to show the community's connection with the Aryan kings and also wants to establish that a Sanskritized version of Old Bangla is the ancestor of Rajbanshi, which is an effort to connect their past with the glorious privileged class.

The anthropological past of the Rajbanshis has been wonderfully described in an article by Dipak Kumar Roy (2006:74 in Roy, Nikhilesh ed. *Degor*), with a detailed genealogy of

the Rajbanshi community, its origin and the division, which can be helpful to understand the history of the community.

## **RAJBANSHI**

### **Indo-Mongoloid**

|

KOCH > **Hinduization**

|

### **Social Sub-Group**

(Madashi, Saru, Koch (Rabha), Heremiya, Koch-Kahar(Rawani Kahar),

Morangiya(Samtiya, Thunthuniya, Rabaniya, Pashucharan, Deshiya,

[Baradeshi(Dhanuya), Charadeshi (Dhokoi, Dhyakra, Dhunikoch)],

Paliya(Matuyan or Babupali, Sadhupali)

|

**Kshatriyization** > Other Communities-Dhimal,

| Tharu, Jalda, Rabha,Hazong, Mech,

|

Baidar etc.

| > Koch-Rajbanshi+ Bhutiya=

|

Dobhashiya

## **THE RAJBANSHI SOCIETY**

**A linguist can structurally differentiate between Bangla and Rajbanshi**, to show that Rajbanshi is much different from Bangla and describing the language as a dialect of Bangla is not tenable.

The major criteria by which Rajbanshi can be differentiated from Bangla are<sup>2</sup>:

1. Phonetically, both some vowel and consonant sounds of Bangla are different from Rajbanshi. (Piplai, 2007: 26-27) Widely used Bangla vowel /æ/ is totally absent in Rajbanshi.
2. The syllable patterns of Rajbanshi and Bangla are also different.
3. Rajbanshi verb forms are quite different from Bangla.
4. The verbal morphology of Rajbanshi is different from Bangla. Rajbanshi verbs change according to number, which is a remarkable feature. It is not discernible in Bangla morphology.

For example-

Bangla	ami	jai	Rajbanshi	mui	za
	I	go-present- 1p-sg		I	go-present- 1p-Sg.
Bangla	amra	jai	Rajbanshi	hamra	zai
	We	go-present- 1p-plu.		We	go-present- 1p-plu.

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<sup>2</sup> International Phonetic Alphabet has been used to mark the linguistic differences between Bangla and Rajbanshi. It is difficult to demonstrate it otherwise.

5. Rajbanshi pronouns are quite different from Bangla pronouns.

E.g. Bangla /ami/ is /mui/ 'I' in Rajbanshi

Bangla / tui/ is /tɔmra/ 'you (singular)' in Rajbanshi

Bangla/tomra/ is /tɔmrɔl/ 'you (plural)' in Rajbanshi [symbols as International Phonetic Alphabet] It should be pointed out that these difference in pronominal terms create a confusion among the teacher-student interaction in a class where the teacher is not a Rajbanshi speaker and the students speak Rajbanshi, as the [+ honorific] pronoun in Rajbanshi is [- honorific] in Bangla.

7 Plural formation in Rajbanshi is done differently than Bangla.

tʃɛŋra	la
boy	plural

'Boys'

tʃaoyar	ghɔr
child	Plural

'Children'

8 Case markers of Rajbanshi are different from Bangla. In many cases, the case endings of Rajbanshi resemble the case-endings of Prakrit. For example-

Accusative and Dative case-endings are /-ok/ in Rajbanshi.E.g.

maʃtar	čhatrok	porebar	bɔʃail
teacher	Student-accusative	To read	Made to sit-present-

			3p-singular
--	--	--	-------------

Bangla:

maʃtar	čhatroke	porte	boʃalo
teacher	Student-accusative	To read	Made to sit-present-3p-singular

‘The teacher made the child study.’

9 Verbal paradigms of Rajbanshi are much different from Bangla.

Verb to eat, Present Tense

		First Person singular	First Person Plural	Second person Singular	Second Person Plural	Third Person singular	Third person Plural
Rajbanshi	Indefinite	/mui khao/	/hamera khai/	/tui khaiʃ/	/toma khao/	/uyay khatʃe/	/umra khay/
Bangla	Indefinite	/ami khai/	/amra khai/	/tumi khao/	/tomra khao/	/ʃe khay/	/tara khay/

Rajbanshi	Progressive	/mui khatʃo/	/hamera khatʃi/	/tui khatʃit/	/toma khatʃæn/	/uyay khaʃæ/	/umra khatʃæ/
Bangla	Progressive	/ami khačči/	/amra khačči/	/tumi khaččo/	/tomra khaččo /	/ʃe khačče/	/tara khačče/

Rajbanshi	Perfect	/mui khaitʃu/	/hamera khaiʃi/	/tui khaiʃit/	/toma khaitʃæn/	/uyay khaitʃe/	/umra khaitʃe/
Bangla	Perfect	/ami kheyečhi/	/amra kheyečhi	/tumi kheyečo/	/tomra kheyečo /	/ʃe kheyeče/	/tara kheyeče /

The differences between the verbal case endings of two languages are that Rajbanshi has more forms than Bangla in terms of the present tense case endings.

10. In syntactic structure the formation of negative is different than Bangla.

Rajbanshi	mui	na	Zaim
	I	Neg.	Go+ Future+ 1p-Sg
Bangla	ami	jabo	na
	I	Neg.	Go+ Future+ 1p-Sg

‘I shall not go’

The Rajbanshi negative particles are pre-verbal while in Bangla these are post-verbal.

11. Finally, the differences between two varieties can be understood from the vocabulary differences. E.g.

Rajbanshi	Bangla	Meaning
ʃaruya	har	‘bone’
tʃaoya	bačča	‘child’
etti	ekhane	‘here’
mɔʃɔŋ	maŋʃo	‘meat’
gad <sup>h</sup> ana	gola	‘neck’
næʈo	lej	‘tail’

ḍhæle phæla	čhūre phæla	'to throw'
bhata	bɔr	'husband'
bayu	bon	'younger sister'
aṭa	ruṭi	'roti'
močči	loŋka	'chilli'
neŋul	aŋul	'finger'
ničot	niče	'downwards'
abo	didima	'mother's mother'
azu	dadamoṣai	'mother's father'
ṣak	ṣobji	'green vegetables'
paiṣa	poyṣa	'paise'
mṣo	mṣa	'mosquito'
ḍhækenai	nok	'nail'
ḍigi	pukur (big ponds are /dighi/)	'pond'
uporot	upore	'upwards'
ṭeuri	cōrai	'sparrow'
jyat poit	jamaibabu	'sister's husband'
kuṣiyar	ak	'sugercane'

## 5. The Study

Rajbanshi is spoken in seven districts of North Bengal, the most part of which is socio-economically backward. The Northern part of West Bengal has been showing poor

performance in educational achievement, which are very much related to the socio-economic causer of the area. The drop-out rates in the schools are also higher in this area.

One main reason for poor academic performance of the children here is the language problem. Providing early education to the children in Rajbanshi has never been taken into account seriously. Rather, using the language in classrooms has been ‘prohibited.’

Teachers of the Rajbanshi speaking area informed me that in some particular teacher-camps the teachers had got clear instructions of not using Rajbanshi in classrooms. Teachers are critical towards this approach.

During the field work of the project it has been noticed that, the teachers have agreed with the fact that the **students’ poor performance is mainly because of the incomprehensibility of the school language**. The students do not understand the language of the textbooks and thus they are reluctant to come to school. Now the question is, isn’t it possible for the concerned authorities of West Bengal to introduce the language of the majority community of Northern Bengal as a school language too?

In fact, a Bridge Reader was proposed by some local intellectuals in order to combat the Rajbanshi children’s language problems in schools. But the issue has never been taken into account by the concerned authorities. Nandy (1999:12-13) mentions that the language movement of North Bengal, along with various demands, has demanded a separate centre for research on the Rajbanshi language in North Bengal University. There are demands for preparing elementary textbooks in the centre also.

The proposal of the Bridge Reader in order to facilitate the Rajbanshi children has never been taken seriously. It has rather been sidelined by relating the issue with the ongoing Kamtapur movement of North Bengal. The demand for a separate ‘Kamtapur’<sup>3</sup> state had started in the 1970s. In order to stop the movement Rajbanshi speakers were boycotted in many parts of North Bengal. The demand for introductory school education in Rajbanshi was also ignored by the governmental authorities. The boycott of a linguistic group is certainly a violation of the community’s LHR.

### **5.1. Classroom Observation:**

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The primary method adopted for the study was Classroom observation. Students of **one rural school** (Uttar Matiyali New Additional Primary School) and **one semi-urban school** (Subhashnagar Mahutpara Primary School) were observed throughout the school-time (approximately four hours per day) for one month. In both the schools, Standard 4<sup>th</sup> students were primarily observed, but the students of Standard 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the rural school and the students of Standard 1<sup>st</sup> ( Standard 1<sup>st</sup> in this school has been divided into Upper-1 and Lower-1 by the teachers) <sup>4</sup> in a school of Jalpaiguri town were also observed in some classes.

Various problems of the classroom e.g. the students' difficulties in reading-writing, teacher-student interaction, difficulties in understanding the textbooks etc. were tried to be understood by detailed observations. The students were also observed outside their classroom, e.g. in the playground before and after the school-time. Two schools of Jalpaiguri district were selected for the study. One of the schools is a rural school where more than 95% students are Rajbanshi, and the other school is situated at the town where there are few Rajbanshi students, but there are also students who speak Bangla, Mundari, Oraon, Assamese etc.

The infrastructural facilities of the schools were also take note of.

Name of the school	Type of the School	Boys/Girls/ Co-Educational	Total No. of students	Location of the school	School building	Boundary Wall	Drinking Water
Uttar Matiyali NAP	Primary	Co-Educational	138	Lataguri, South Mal Block, Jalpaiguri	Building not in good condition, paucity of classrooms	No	Yes

<sup>4</sup> The teachers of the school told us that it is not possible for them to cover the syllabus of Standard 1<sup>st</sup> in a year because children have severe language problems. So they had divided the Standard 1<sup>st</sup> in two years.

				Rural			
Subhashnagar Mahutpara Primary School	Primary	Co-Educational	170	Jalpaiguri Town, Semi-Urban	Building Reasonably good	No	Yes

Name of the School	Toilet	Library	Playground	Staff-Room	Electricity	Mid-Day Meal
Uttar Matiyali NAP	Only one (for teachers and girl students)	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Subhashnagar Mahutpara Primary School	Yes (for both teachers and students)	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Primary information of the schools can help us to understand the background of the schools. Now let us see the number of students per class in both the schools. In Uttar Matiyali New Additional Primary School, the number of students per class is the following:

Standard 1<sup>st</sup>-56

Standard 2<sup>nd</sup>-25

Standard 3<sup>rd</sup>- 30

Standard 4<sup>th</sup>-27

In Subhashnagar Mahutpara Primary School the numbers are:

Standard 1<sup>st</sup>-36+34<sup>5</sup>

Standard 2<sup>nd</sup>-34

Standard 3<sup>rd</sup>- 31

Standard 4<sup>th</sup>-34

The important fact to note is that, the decrease in number of students from Standard 1<sup>st</sup> to Standard 2<sup>nd</sup> in Uttar Matiyali School. **Almost 50% of the students drop out from the very beginning.** It was assumed by the researcher that, one main reason for the dropout could be poor socio-economic conditions of the families of the village. But the teachers informed us that, after implementing the mid-day meal scheme, parents want to send their kids to school regularly. On the other hand, in the other school, not much change in the number of students is observed between Upper-1 and Standard 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The Classroom observations have tried to understand the linguistic problems of the children in the classroom. The focus of the observations was:

- Whether the students can **understand the teacher's instructions or not**
- Whether the students can **understand the language of their textbooks**
- Whether the students feel **free in the classroom or not**
- Whether some particular students can **follow the teaching style of the teacher**
- Whether the students are **performing well in the written tasks given in the class or not**

In case of the rural school, it was found that the instructional language of the teacher became a great problem if the teacher had not used Rajbanshi in classroom. Specifically, in case of the Standard 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> classes, only three or four students were

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<sup>5</sup> The syllabus of Standard 1<sup>st</sup> in the school is covered in two years, thus there are two batches of standard 1<sup>st</sup> in the school- Upper-1 and Lower-1

active learner in the class. Many students were seen sitting as passive learners in the classroom.

- The teacher of the class was teaching a particular text for four days. And when the students were asked simple questions from the said text, **only two or three students could reply.**
- The **classroom transaction was one-way. Some students looked vacant.** The teacher was reading out from the textbook loudly and the students could hardly understand anything.
- In Standard 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> classes, when the teacher asked the students to read out a few lines from the already-discussed text, the **students could not follow the teacher's instruction.** When the teacher asked in Rajbanshi, some students responded. In an observation of Standard 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> classes, when the teacher asked the students to read out from the text, some Standard 2<sup>nd</sup> students could read by spelling out almost every letter of a short text, with great difficulty.
- In a Standard 4<sup>th</sup> class, **when the teacher was explaining things by using colloquial Rajbanshi while teaching a poem, students could follow well. But when he switched to Bangla, their response immediately ebbed.**
- In Standard 4<sup>th</sup> classes, word-for-word translations helped the students understand the teacher's words. When the teacher tried to speak Bangla in the class, the students faced great difficulties.

Now let us look at the students' problems of understanding the text.

- In many cases it was difficult to make out whether the students could understand the text or not because **there wasn't any response from the students' side.** Especially, the **girls were absolutely silent** in most of the classes. Teachers were mostly encouraging the boys.
- One important observation was that **the students could not understand the meanings of most of the textbook's words,** even some of the simple Bangla words.

- Because of the difficulty in understanding the text, **they were lost all interest in the textbook**. In some cases, **they could not understand 3-4 words of a 5-word sentence**.
- **Explaining the text in Rajbanshi helped the students**. When the teacher of Standard 4<sup>th</sup> explained the text of a poem from the textbook 'Kishalay', the students could understand it better. If the teachers are asked to use only Bangla in the classroom, will it be possible for them to teach the students at all?

Few of the so-called 'good students' of the class were participating in the class.

- Most of the students of the class were totally silent. Generally, boys were responding comparatively freely. **Girls were almost silent**.
- **One or two of them seldom responded**. Some Standard 4<sup>th</sup> students volunteered for reading, but all of them read mechanically, obviously without comprehension.
- Some students seemed to have memorized the text already; **they were not actually reading but uttering the text from memory**.
- Some particular students, who were seen sitting completely speechless in the classroom, responded as they were asked some questions in Rajbanshi.

The majority of the students cannot follow the teaching style of the teacher, as revealed by our observation.

- In Standard 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, **a few students could somehow follow the teacher** (the teachers have informed us outside the classroom that all these students have private tutors).
- Even in Standard 4<sup>th</sup>, there were some students who could not follow the teacher.

The most important factor concerning the writing tasks given to the students is that,

- **Writing tasks were not given to the children of Standard 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>.**
- **Some students of standard 4<sup>th</sup> do not know how to read and write the alphabets**

- The detailed observations in the rural school found a very important point. The students who were marked as ‘bad’ students by the teachers did well in class if the language of communication is Rajbanshi. But as they were asked to speak in Bangla, they are not doing well. But the ‘good’ students according to the teachers can copy the teachers and please them, but in terms of language production they are not much creative.

The picture is quite different in Subhashnagar Mahutpara Primary School. Only a few students of the school were found as poor performers in the school. And these few students come from a Muslim Rajbanshi community of North Bengal. Before starting the observations, the teachers were asked of their opinion on the students’ performance. Interestingly, the group of ‘bad students’ marked by the teachers comprised Muslim students whose home language is Rajbanshi.

In this school, the findings of the observations were quite different.

- Most of the students from Standard 4<sup>th</sup> seemed to understand the texts. But some students (already mentioned group of students) could not follow the teacher.
- Even in the Standard 1<sup>st</sup> classroom, the students’ performance was better than the students of the rural school, even as some particular ‘bad’ students were fared poorly.
- The students of this school were not found to copy the teachers. But some ‘bad’ students of Standard 4<sup>th</sup> like Jyotsna Begum, Marjina Begum and Habibur Rahaman were seen to copy the teacher several times.
- In Standard 4<sup>th</sup> classes, the teacher used the following instructions-finding opposite words, making sentences, finding antonyms, reading out from the text, arranging jumbled letters to form words etc. ‘Good’ students did not find problems to follow the teacher’s instructions.
- In Upper-1, short questions from the texts were asked in some classes. It seemed that they understood the texts.
- Standard 4<sup>th</sup> students could answer well when the teacher had asked questions based on the text. There wasn’t any evidence to indicate that they have difficulties in understanding the text.

- Not everybody participated as the teacher in standard 4<sup>th</sup> classes asked some short questions. Specifically, some ‘good’ students were answering.
- But students from every group had volunteered to read out from the text. Many of them had also volunteered to write on the blackboard. Some standard 4<sup>th</sup> ‘bad’ students were facing difficulties while reading out from the text, but in discussions they participated comparatively freely.
- In Lower-1, many students were not participating freely in the class. But in Upper-1, students were free in participation. Some students, however, were not willing to participate. Some ‘bad’ students of the Upper-1 class sat silent in the class. But they appeared to be willing to participate in the class. In the Upper-1, no students could be termed as completely ‘blank’. But students were not paying attention to the class; they were playing at one corner of the classroom. Some standard 4<sup>th</sup> ‘bad’ students were not taking interest in the class, but still they sat through.
- Different types of writing tasks were given to the standard 4<sup>th</sup> students. Teacher had asked the students to write the answers of some short questions on the blackboard. Most of the ‘good’ students had performed well, but some students made spelling errors. ‘Bad’ students did not volunteer, but two of them performed well in writing tasks.

## **5.2. The Picture Story Test**

The children’s achievement in schools were tried to understand from the language proficiency through a picture story test. The children of Standard 4<sup>th</sup> were given a simple colourful picture storybook and asked to describe the story. The story was selected from a book by National Book Trust book named *belun* (‘balloon’).



In the village school, the students were asked to describe the story in Rajbanshi first, after a few days they were asked to write the same story in Bangla. In the Subhashnagar Mahutpara Primary School, the students were asked to write the story in Bangla.

One probable assumption of designing this methodology was that students will not be able to write in Rajbanshi because they lack the habit. The formal literacy norms have always allowed them to use Bangla in school.

The constructions (phonological, morphological, lexical or syntactic) were helpful to scan their descriptions of the picture stories. Analysis of the picture stories described by the students of Uttar Matiyali NAP was the following;

- The performance of the students' in picture-story writing, as a whole was very poor.<sup>10</sup>
- Most of them had not used any punctuation. Only one student of Standard 4<sup>th</sup> (Dhananjay Roy) had used punctuation.
- Some of them were confused about which verb form to use. They seemed to be unfamiliar with Bangla verb forms and thus have not used proper verb forms, or create some verb forms which do not exist. In most of the cases, they had mixed Bangla verb-forms with Rajbanshi verbs (for example, Manasi Roy has used the form /kɔmɔr heŋele haʃetʃe/ 'he leans while walking').
- Some students had written all the words together, there were no gaps between the words; it seems that they do not have any writing habit at all.<sup>11</sup> One cannot locate separate words from his writings.
- They were confused about how to describe the story; it seemed that they do not have the habit of writing at all. Though some differences were found between the two writings, the students who had used words from Rajbanshi vocabulary expressed themselves better. Ruma Roy seems to be more creative in her story written in her 'home language' where she has mentioned,

/e tʃeleʃa kanna kortʃe/  
this boy-classifier. do-Pres-prog-3p  
'This boy is crying'

Ruma Roy's overall description of the story in home language was also more creative and imaginative.

Generally, the detailed study of their description of two picture stories reveals that, the students have not attained the required achievement level for standard 4<sup>th</sup> students, and they are lagging far behind. The confusion in language choice, skills for writing a paragraph, and poor performance in a writing task were found while analyzing the picture stories of Uttar Matiyali School.

Let us discuss the writings of two particular students.

- 1) Manasi Roy (G-A student) – Manasi had shown some features of Rajbanshi in her first writing. She had used a number of words from Rajbanshi vocabulary. E.g. /heŋele/ 'bending' (Bangla /hele/ or /nuiye), /pakhigila/ 'birds' (Bangla /pakhigulo/), /akaʃet/ 'sky-ablative' (Bangla /akaʃ theke/), /pakhila/ 'birds' (Bangla /pakhigulo/), /gise/ 'go-past-3p' (Bangla /gæçhe/) etc.

She has not used any punctuation mark in her writings.

In her second writing (in school language), she tried to change some verbs.

She could not describe the story properly, but she could describe some actions.

- 2) Kanika Roy (G-B) - In both of her writing, the story line is not clear. She had problems in writing verbs. In writing-1, she had used the word / phakçhe/ for the word 'blowing', but in Writing-2, she had used the word /phɔkaççhe/.

As a whole, her writing cannot be regarded as passably correct.

3) Ruma Roy and Anjana Roy have written some verb forms which are Rajbanshi verb forms, Manoj Roy's description of the picture story was without any word gap, and he has written all the words of sentences together. Only two students, Khagen Roy and Dhananjay Roy could understand the storyline though they could not express it well.

In Subhashnagar Mahutpara Primary School, the performance of the students in writing the picture story was much different from the performance of Uttar Matiyali schoolchildren.

- Many of the students have marked the punctuations.
- Some have used complex and compound sentences.
- Spelling mistakes are minor. Some students have given minute descriptions.
- It was noticeable that the students whose home language is Bangla (or Eastern Bengali) have written the story more or less good. But students whose home languages are Rajbanshi (and also Assamese, Munda etc.) could not describe the story well.

Rashida Khatun, Sharmira Thakur, Sabina Yasmin, Pushpita Roy, Beauty Begum could not follow the story line, but their constructions are good. Poor students of the class, most of who are from a Muslim Community and speak Rajbanshi performed badly. Some of them have not marked punctuations. Some stories were difficult to understand. Some serious spelling mistakes were found, too.

To give example:

A "Good" student of the class like Pranab Sarkar has written complex sentences like:

/ʃe dekhlo je ʃe ʃɔpno dekhche/

he see-pres-3p that he dream see-pres-prog-3p

'He realizes that he is dreaming'

In Sharmita Thakur's description of the story, there were also some instances of complex sentences. E.g.:

/ʃe jete jete dekhlo je pothe ækʈa belun pore ache/

He while going see-3p-pres that on the way one-cla. balloon lie- 3p-pres.  
'While walking he realized that there is a balloon lying on the ground.'

### **5.3.The Creative Mind**

In the initial methodological plan for the project, only classroom observation and picture story were thought as the main tool for the study. But, after spending time with the children of Uttar Matiyali School before their school time in the playground, it was thought that Story Telling can be a very important tool for the study.

Children of the rural school always speak Rajbanshi among themselves. But in classrooms they are compelled to give answers in Bangla. So, there is a major difference between the children's fluency in these two varieties.

Students of all the classes were asked to assemble together and they were asked to tell stories to other children. A few students volunteered to tell. An important fact to note was that, some of the students tried to tell stories in textbook language, i.e. literary Bangla but neither could they tell the stories fluently in Bangla nor had they enjoyed the stories. The students themselves have selected the 'best story teller' among their peers, and the 'best story tellers' have described the stories in Rajbanshi.

Story telling was seen as a Verbal Protocol Analysis for the students' discourse was individually analyzed as they were asked to 'talk aloud'. The idea behind it was to look at the students' language production and fluency. The choice of language while telling the stories was also an important point in case of the Uttar Matiyali School.

The formal story-telling session for the rural school was quite interesting; a total 9 students volunteered to tell stories.

Ruma, a student of standard <sup>4th</sup> described the story partially in Bangla and partially in Rajbanshi. Her pronunciation bore a regional accent. Fluency was average. She had used many Rajbanshi words while describing the story.

Sarajit, a standard 4<sup>th</sup> student who is a marked backbencher, had gladly volunteered to tell a story. He told the story totally in Rajbanshi. His fluency was good, other students also enjoyed.

Kaushal, a 'good' student from standard 4<sup>th</sup> started telling a story in bookish Bangla, but paused in between. It seemed that he had tried to memorize the story from somewhere and thus could not continue.

Khagen, another 'good' student of standard 4<sup>th</sup> had described the story in partial Bangla with average fluency.

Manasi, a 'good' standard 4<sup>th</sup> student used some Rajbanshi and English words to tell her story. Her fluency was medium.

Paritosh, a student of standard 3<sup>rd</sup> described his story completely in Rajbanshi. Students enjoyed his story a lot. His fluency was good.

Biswamita, another standard 3<sup>rd</sup> student had described a long story in totally Rajbanshi. Her pronunciation and vocabulary were regional.

Dipali, also standard 3<sup>rd</sup> student had narrated her story in Rajbanshi, too. Her fluency was more or less good.

Paritosh, considered as the 'best story teller' of the day by the children, narrated the entire story in Rajbanshi.

Ruma, Manasi and Bulti, these three students had tried to tell stories partially or completely in Bangla. These three students were asked to tell the stories again in 'home language' (Rajbanshi) later, outside their classroom where no teachers were present. Ruma admitted that she had tried to tell the story in 'school-like language', later she had agreed to narrate the story in 'home language', and it had resulted in a bilingual story. Her fluency was better than that of the previous day.

Manasi said that she had learnt the story from her grandma. She also agreed to tell it again in 'home language'. But she tried to speak in Bangla and she was not successful.

The analysis of story-telling was definitely an important part of the study, as it has directly pointed out the fact that the **Rajbanshi schoolchildren are comfortable and**

**creative in their own language**, while use of Bangla had become a hindrance in their creativity. Doesn't it mean that if these children could be provided school education in their own language, the drop out rate would not have been so terrible?

#### **5.4.What did the Teachers say?**

It would be really nice if the students themselves could talk about their language problem in classrooms. But as the students in view of their age were not able to point out their problems, teachers were asked regarding their students' problems and also their problems in communicating with the students etc. Teachers of three areas were interviewed as a part of the project.

- (a) Teachers of Uttar Matiyali New Additional Primary School were asked regarding their students' problems in classrooms
  - (b) Teachers of Subhashnagar Mahutpara primary School were also interviewed in order to understand the problems of the school students
  - (c) Some teachers of Amguri village were interviewed in order to have an understanding of the students' problems in that area. It should be mentioned that the particular area was selected as a 'target' by some authorities. Some of the teachers of this area teach in Rajbanshi and refused to teach in Bangla.
- (a) Teachers of Uttar Matiyali School are three in number. (One of them himself could not communicate well in Bangla as Rajbanshi is his mother tongue) They noted that one important task can be to inform the concerned authorities of the children's problems and to provide them with textbooks written in the students' language. More writing tasks and classroom discussions are needed according to these teachers.

The headmaster of the school along with another teacher from another primary school of the locality was interviewed in order to understand the students' problem. The teachers informed us that the students cannot even follow short instructions in

Bangla. If they teacher asks them to bring the ‘big book’ or ‘small book’, they cannot understand.

Another big problem relates to teacher appointments. Sometimes, teachers who cannot speak and understand Rajbanshi are recruited for the Rajbanshi children’s schools. The communication between the teachers and students is actually nil in these cases. A teacher whose home language is Rajbanshi practically translates each and every line to the students into the home language so that they can understand it. But if a teacher does not know Rajbanshi, the students suffer as they cannot understand their teacher’s words.

Debendranath Roy, a teacher from village Jhar Matiyali, adjacent to Uttar Matiyali told us in the course of interview **that, if books prepared in Rajbanshi are provided to the schoolchildren of the area, students will definitely benefit.** He is also optimist about the local resources, which can be used as the materials for the text.

(b) There are five teachers in Subhashnagar Mahutpara Primary School. The teachers were interviewed twice. In the first day’s interview, the teachers informed us that many of their students face problems when they first come to school. In order to combat that, they have divided the syllabus of Standard 1<sup>st</sup> in two years. Otherwise, it would not have been possible for many of the newcomer students to learn the syllabus of Standard 1<sup>st</sup> within one year.

In the first day’s interview with the teachers, when they were asked about how many Rajbanshi students are there in their school, the teachers were reluctant to answer. But when they were interviewed again after a few days, the teachers informed us that many of the students are Rajbanshi.

One particular teacher maintained that these students are ‘bad students’ because they belong to ‘lower caste’ and they speak a derogatory language. It is also impossible to teach them Bangla.

But the headmaster of the school informed us that he often uses Rajbanshi in order to explain things. He was sure that teaching them by using the home language helps the students.

(c) In a third field trip, the selected area was the Amguri region and two teachers of the region were interviewed separately. One of these teachers was threatened by the authorities for using Rajbanshi in the classroom.

This particular teacher referred to the traditional Rajbanshi system of teaching the alphabets in schools. The systems are no longer used in the area. The teacher added that students who speak Rajbanshi at home cannot understand many of the words in their textbook as they use totally different terms at home. In many cases, it becomes difficult for a teacher to explain each and every word of the textbook by way of translation.

The teacher talked of a teachers' camp which was organized under the Sarva Sikhsha Abhijan and there it was clearly declared that the local language 'should not be used' in the classroom by any means. Many of the teachers, para-teachers and resource persons held that it is impossible not to use the local language in class because it is the home language of the children.

### **5.5. What did the Students say?**

Students' responses were supposed to be a very important tool for the project. But if the primary schoolchildren are asked to tell about the language problem in schools, the little children cannot articulate it well.

So, a set of questionnaires was prepared to interview some students who are continuing/ have continued with higher education. They were asked to recall the problems during their school time and narrate it.

Some students from Amguri village and some students from the postgraduate Bengali class of North Bengal University were interviewed. First; they were asked to tell about their language problems in educational institutions and secondly; they were asked some questions aimed to understand feelings in terms of their linguistic identity.

While talking to the students and others in an informal conversation/setting, the key intention of the researcher was to relate the speaker's linguistic behaviour with their identity-question.

Kalyani Roy and Antara Roy, two cousin sisters from Amguri village have informed that, they have inferior feelings for they cannot speak 'Shuddha Bangla' (pure Bangla). In fact, they could not understand Bangla at all till the 3<sup>rd</sup> standard and learnt to read books in Bangla later but still they could not understand many words. Problems in morphological level were also identified.

Aparna Roy, a graduate student who is also from the same village studies Bangla literature but does not know many basic words of the Bangla vocabulary yet. She finds pronunciations and spellings of Bangla tough. Aparna confirmed that her Bengali classmates neglect her because she is 'Rajbanshi'. Her mother is searching for a match for her, but most of the matrimonial columns mention that 'we do not need any Rajbanshi girl'.

Kokil Chandra Roy and Saptarshi Roy, two graduate students from the same area also informed us that they had to face major problems in schools; only if the teacher had explained the text in Rajbanshi they could understand it.

Five students from the postgraduate Bengali Distance Course Classes were also interviewed in order to understand their views. When the students were asked how they would like to introduce themselves, four out of five students said that they would term themselves as 'Rajbanshi' (not Bengali). When they were asked if they thought that their language variety was different from the one heard in nearby town or city, everybody said that their variety was different from Bangla. All the students have mentioned that they were proud of their own speech variety. When they were asked if they wanted to have a different speech-style, one of the students said that he was not sure, two of them said that they didn't want to change it and one of them maintained that she wanted to speak the standard language. Everybody however pointed out that, they feel embarrassed because of their 'caste dialect', and they want to speak Bangla. All the students are aware of the various infrastructural problems of the area like- poor communication system, absence of electricity in most of the villages, and the poor irrigation system.

When they were asked if it is necessary to speak the local language, all of them said that it is necessary to speak Bangla, not Rajbanshi. What compels them to speak out '*Amader Bangla boltei hobe*' (We have to speak Bangla)? Is the process of killing Rajbanshi is yielding fruit?

## **6. How is the Situation in the Rajbanshi Area?**

Though most of the languages of the world are becoming 'endangered' as a result of threat from the dominant languages, in a complex society the birth of a new language is however still possible. These new born languages, in most of the cases die in course of time. The death of the newborn languages is also case of language endangerment and language death. The powerful languages and authorities in these cases do not accept the existence of these languages. Rajbanshi is not an exception.

When the people of northern part of West Bengal, who have been deprived in terms of many socio-economic factors for a long time, demanded their own linguistic rights, the reply from the governmental side was a denial of the fact that they have their own rich culture which is distinct from the so-called mainstream Bengali cultural pattern. Instead, the linguistic-cultural heritage of the Rajbanshis is very much different.

The non-acceptance of the Rajbanshi people's demands resulted in a larger movement, which is continuing still now. Because of this movement, the official authorities in West Bengal are rejecting any issue related to the Rajbanshi language. The issue that the Rajbanshi-speaking schoolchildren are lagging behind in schools because of the language problem is not taken into account seriously; moreover Rajbanshi is branded as a prohibited language in the classroom. Let us discuss the situation of the Rajbanshi zone briefly which will help us to understand how the governmental authorities are reluctant to address the problems of the children of northern Bengal.

In order to look at the Rajbanshi language problem, one needs to understand the position of Bengalis vis-a-vis the Rajbanshis in north Bengal. It includes

- (1) The role of the local Bengalis and their attitude towards the Rajbanshis
- (2) The role of the governmental bodies which emphatically maintain that, Rajbanshis do not have a distinct culture; they are a part of the Bengali culture.

The 'Bengalaization' process particularly targets the Rajbanshis, who are the largest scheduled caste community in West Bengal. As Annamalai has pointed out, 'the basic ingredient of nationhood is a sense of sharing among the people living in a country. The sharing may be a real or an imagined historical past or a dream of the future.' The Rajbanshis of Bengal are demanding their own linguistic state. Though the constitution of India has given the provision of allowing more than one official languages for the states, the linguistic imperialism is practically marginalizing the other languages. And the dominant slogan in West Bengal is 'Bangla=Bengal'.

The linguistic identity of the Rajbanshis have systematically been put in jeopardy, as Rajbanshi has always been termed as a 'dialect' of Bengali in order to prove the Bangla-dominance. The politics behind incorporating the Rajbanshi people among the Bengalis is a violation of the Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)

Though the Rajbanshis were the indigenous people of the northern part of Bengal, at present they are

'facing a lot of hardships and are fast losing their ethnic identity, culture, language and civilizational attributes under pressure of alien Bengalis(Bhatias), who mostly came from downstream region of southern East Bengal( now Bangladesh) to this territory.'

(Mukhopadhyay, 2005: 260)

Nandy (1999:8) observes that during the time of partition and after(1950s), the riots of 1964 and also during the war of 1971, many Hindu Bengalis migrated to the northern part of Bengal. A number of educated middle-class Bengalis had also migrated to this

area due to administrative reasons. As a consequence, the indigenous people of North Bengal have now been marginalized by the overflowing migrated people from East Pakistan(now Bangladesh).

Because of these migrated people, the indigenous people of North Bengal were marginalized.

A major socio-economic deprivation led the indigenous people to determined stand to establish their identity by voicing the demand for their linguistic rights. The Rajbanshi children's right to get education in their own language is also a part of the movement as Nandy (Ibid: 12-13) notes:

'...as the children do not get education in their mother tongue, the Kamtapuri children leave the school soon.' (Translation from Bangla: author)

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1. The Language Policy Question

In the Language Education Policy of India, the issue of mother tongue education for the children of non-powerful communities has never been discussed seriously. The National Curriculum Framework of NCERT emphasized the importance of mother tongue education in early school years, but it could not suggest an apt way to solve the problem in terms of the minority children. The role of the governmental authorities concerning primary education in West Bengal has also become questionable as our study shows that there are clear instances to prohibit the use of Rajbanshi in the classrooms. The other 'marginal' languages across the country seem to have met with the same fate.

Can we suggest any alternative approach in this regard with particular reference to schooling of children from such communities?

Srivastava's 'Vernacular-cum-Transfer Literacy Model' can be one of the options for the attested problem. The students will first start learning through their home language and gradually shift to the SCB in higher classes.

'Initiate literacy in the language style in which illiterates have oral competence and then transfer it, if necessary, to the language recognized as the medium of instruction in the formal educational system of the region.' (Srivastava, 1993:85)

Bandyopadhyay (2004:18) has suggested that

'One solution may be the introduction of a supplementary reader written in a specific community language added to the standard primer.'

The initiatives for introducing Bridge Readers have already been discussed. So, the denial of the publication should be resisted by citing examples of the children's performances in schools.

Introducing a Bridge Reader can also be a solution to combat the problems of Rajbanshi Schoolchildren. And it should finally be mentioned that giving the children early education in their mother tongue would definitely be advantageous to their overall education and psychological, cognitive and social development as well. And it will surely lead the children to high proficiency in the dominant language, too.

In this regard, it can be mentioned that the Central Institute of Indian Languages have published some Bridge Readers which can be used for reference.

## **7.2. Programme that can be taken**

An important question is how to use the findings of the paper. As it was evident from the picture story analysis the primary school students have not developed any skill even in writing a single sentence

The Classroom Observations found that the condition of the students is pathetic. They are suffering from serious language problems.

If an alternative education programme can be launched for the Rajbanshi children, the aim of the programme should include the following clauses:

- To allow the children to generate sentences freely
- Not to tell them explicitly or implicitly that their linguistic variety is ‘bad’/ ‘inferior’/‘improper’/ ‘less prestigious’
- In the beginning stage of their education programme asking the children should be encouraged to use words which they use frequently at home. The teacher can tell the synonymous words in Bangla.
- Allowing the children to write small sentences in their home language
- Devising interesting methods to make the teaching-learning activity interesting
- Teacher selection should be done from the students’ linguistic community.
- The initial primer for the Standard 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> students should be provided in Rajbanshi only.
- Bridge Readers can be provided for students of Standard 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>.

### **7.3. The Theoretical Outcome:**

The present state of the Rajbanshi speech-community can be evaluated as a part of the conclusion of the project.

In order to evaluate the endangered condition of the Rajbanshi speech-community we need to remember:

- 1) The tendency of Language Shift by the Rajbanshi speakers. Many of the speakers tend to shift in Bangla. It is always in their mind that, the shifting may help them to get certain opportunities.
- 2) Many of the young generation speakers do not want to use the Rajbanshi in public domain and become passive speakers, as it is a mark of ‘stigma’ for them.
- 3) We also need to understand the role of a state in minority language decline.
- 4) The Ecology of Language question is also important as the speakers are tending to shift their language gradually.

If we consider Fishman's 8-stage Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) which diagnose the level of Language Endangerment- we will find that the condition of Rajbanshi is critical. In the scale, the maximum endangered languages are marked as 8-point, and Rajbanshi is falling between 6 and 7 point.

'Speakers are often deeply attached to the cultures, identities and histories embedded in their minority language, but they may nevertheless feel that for economic reasons they simply cannot afford to transmit the language to their offspring.' (Ferguson, 2006: 73)

The intellectual elites need to respect the awareness of linguistic rights. Thus it is very important to have an understanding about the common people's view in relation to the revival of language.

Now an important question is, can we term Rajbanshi as an Endangered Language (EL)? We have seen that a) The speakers of Rajbanshi are switching to another linguistic variety b) The speakers are replacing many words from their vocabulary by some words chosen from the dominant language. (Bangla)

In 1996, the 'Foundation for Endangered Languages' had remarked that the endangered languages are '...not effectively passed on to the next generation.' (Crystal, 2000: Preface viii). Considering the phenomenon, we can term Rajbanshi an EL. And a deliberate exclusion of the linguistic variety from school is increasing the possibility of its endangerment.

#### **7.4. Rights of the Children: viewed in terms of Equality Rights**

From theoretical viewpoint, Rajbanshi can be termed as an endangered language, because the members of the linguistic speech community are threatened by the dominant linguistic group and the presence of Linguicism is very much prominent.

Regarding the case of the Rajbanshi school children let us look at the following points:

- According to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, every child should get free and compulsory education.  
But we have seen that the drop-out rate in the rural schools from Standard 1<sup>st</sup> to Standard 2<sup>nd</sup> is as high as 50%.
- According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the ethnic religious and linguistic minorities should ‘enjoy their own culture to profess and practice their own religion or use their own language.’ (Article 27)  
But we have seen that the students whose mother tongue is Rajbanshi are not allowed to use their own language in the classroom.
- In an UNESCO Convention of 1993 at Montréal, Canada, the importance of selection of particular communities, appropriate curriculum designing and reformation of textbooks were given importance.  
But in reality, no such steps have been taken to address the language problem of the Rajbanshi school children.
- Denial of allowing the Rajbanshi school children to get early education in their own mother tongue is also a threat towards Indigenous People’s Rights which were discussed in the general Assembly resolution 50/157 of 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1995 under the Programme of Activities for the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People (1995-2004). Indigenous people should not be discriminated according to the resolution. But in fact, one of the indigenous populations of North Bengal—Rajbanshis are being discriminated not only in terms of Language, but also in terms of other social factors, e.g. caste.
- And according to Article 26, everyone has the right to education, at least in elementary and fundamental stages. In case of the Rajbanshi children, we have seen that a large number of students are leaving school as they cannot cope up with the school language. The high percentage of drop-out rate also indicates the violation of right to education.

So, finally it can be said that though the State is supposed to protect the rights of the children, in practice the role of the state is not at all sensitive or pro-active. The Rajbanshi school children of North Bengal are denied their Linguistic Human Rights. The denial of this right is leading them to think themselves as ‘inferior’, ‘backward’. Many of them do not want like to call to themselves ‘Rajbanshi’ while some of them try to assimilate with the Bengalis, many continue to remain marginalized.

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Note:

- In many cases, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols have been used to demonstrate the linguistic features of Rajbanshi or Bangla. In order to describe the children's writing samples the IPA has also been used. To view these examples, IPA fonts are needed. These fonts are downloadable from the website of Summer Institute of Linguistics.

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