

# INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER

## RUPKATHA JOURNAL

ON INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN HUMANITIES



ISSN 0975-2935

### About the Journal

<b>Journal DOI</b>	<a href="https://dx.doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha">https://dx.doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha</a>
<b>Journal Home</b>	<a href="http://www.rupkatha.com">www.rupkatha.com</a>
<b>Indexed by</b>	<a href="#">Scopus</a> <a href="#">Web of Science: Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)</a> <a href="#">DOAJ</a>
<b>Journal Metrics</b>	CiteScore 2021: 0.2   SJR 2021: 0.194   SNIP 2021: 0.642   JCI 2020: 0.50

### About the Issue

<b>Themed issue</b>	<b>Volume 4, number 2, 2022 (March-June)   Themed Issue on Literature of Northeast India</b>
<b>Guest Editor</b>	<a href="#">Jyotirmoy Prodhani</a>
<b>Issue DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n2">https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n2</a>
<b>TOC</b>	<a href="https://rupkatha.com/v14n2.php">https://rupkatha.com/v14n2.php</a>

### About the Article

<b>Title</b>	<b>Topophrenia and Indigenous Belonging: Spatial Memory in Rajbanshi Poetry</b>
<b>Author/s</b>	Gunajeet Mazumdar
<b>Affiliation</b>	Manikpur Anchalik College (Gauhati University), Assam.
<b>Author IDs</b>	<a href="#">0000-0003-4711-4825</a>
<b>Funding</b>	No funding received. Published free of any charge.
<b>DOI</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n2.ne16">https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n2.ne16</a> <b>Pages:</b> 1-11
<b>Full Text HTML</b>	<a href="https://rupkatha.com/v14n2ne16">https://rupkatha.com/v14n2ne16</a>
<b>Full-text PDF</b>	<a href="https://rupkatha.com/V14/n2/v14n2ne16.pdf">https://rupkatha.com/V14/n2/v14n2ne16.pdf</a>
<b>Article History</b>	<b>First Published: 23 June 2022</b>
<b>Article Impact</b>	<a href="#">Check Dynamic Impact</a>
<b>Copyright</b>	<a href="#">Aesthetics Media Services</a>
<b>Licensing</b>	<a href="#">Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0</a>

This Open Access article is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For citation use the DOI. For commercial re-use, please contact [editor@rupkatha.com](mailto:editor@rupkatha.com).

# Topophrenia and Indigenous Belonging: Spatial Memory in Rajbanshi Poetry

Gunajeet Mazumdar

Manikpur Anchalik College (Gauhati University), Assam. ORCID: [0000-0003-4711-4825](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4711-4825).

Email: [mazumdargunajeet@gmail.com](mailto:mazumdargunajeet@gmail.com)

---

## Abstract

Space and Memory are co-related as memory imbibes historical roots to a space with the process of recreation. Arguing the concept of Spatiality, Geocritic Robert Tally coins the word 'Topophrenia' to locate "the subjective engagement with a given place and with the possible projection of alternative spaces" (Chap. 1). Here, Tally argues the idea of subjectivity both with the ontological and imaginary places. These dialectics of space are imbibed in the individual and collective memory of the Koch Rajbanshi people with historical consciousness. With this historical consciousness, Koch Rajbanshi Poets from the undivided Koch Kamata Kingdom write poems imbibing strong memory associated with the spaces- both real and imaginary. Koch Rajbanshi Poetry has a profound legacy of the glorious history and culture of the community in South East Asian nations. Due to Geo-political bifurcations of the nations, the greater Koch Kingdom was merged with the other states and nations. Consequently, liminal political boundaries displaced and scattered people giving different identities and marginalizing their own indigenous epistemology. As Rajbanshi is a major community of the modern states of Assam and Meghalaya, the canon of Rajbanshi literature with its own identity also comes under the purview of North East Literature. The colonial knowledge system in the new geopolitical space subjugates their rich epistemological and ontological presence. This paper attempts to argue that Rajbanshi Poetry shares a collective memory to assert their historical consciousness by reclaiming their right to the lost land and epistemology. While upholding the argument, Robert Tally's idea of spatiality, Walter Mignolo's concept of colonial knowledge system and Leanne Simpson's argument of Land as pedagogy will be problematised.

**Keywords:** Spatial, Memory, Koch Rajbanshi, Epistemology, Ontology, Land.

## Introduction:

Space and Memory are co-related as memory imbibes historical roots to a space with the process of recreation. Geocritic Robert Tally (2019) coins the word 'Topophrenia' to locate "the subjective engagement with a given place and with the possible projection of alternative spaces" (Chap. 1). Here, Tally argues the idea of subjectivity both with the ontological and imaginary places. This subjective engagement, however, occurs through mnemonic representation. Memory as a process of recreation has thus subjective occupation over both the real and imaginary spaces. According to Susannah and Hodgkin (2003), "Memory that is like subjectivity means different things and is understood in different ways of different times" (p. 2). The contemporary mode of memory studies however extends its periphery "not only on individual, private memory but on historical, social, cultural and popular too" (Susannah and Hodgkin, 2003, p. 2). Richard Terdiman (2003) configures

memory with space as “memory is so constitutive, so indispensable to our intellectual and practical activity to begin with that every cognitive and discursive act or fact is already tangled up in the memories of realm” (p. 186). This entanglement of memory with space acts as means to look back historical root. As Tally observes the dialectics of ontological and imaginary places, these dialectics of spaces are also imbibed in the individual and collective memory of Koch Rajbanshi people with a historical consciousness. With this historical consciousness, Koch Rajbanshi poets from undivided Koch Kamata Kingdom which comprises parts of Assam, North Bengal, parts of Eastern Bihar, Southern districts of Nepal (Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari districts and Rangpur / present Bangladesh, write poems imbibing strong memory associated with the spaces — both real and imaginary. Koch Rajbanshi poetry has a profound legacy of the glorious history and culture of the community in South East Asian nations. Due to the geo-political bifurcations of the erstwhile Kamata kingdom, the greater Koch Kingdom was merged with other states and nations. Consequently, liminal political boundaries displaced and scattered people giving different identities and marginalizing their own indigenous epistemology. These unwanted political bifurcations disfigured the cartography of Kamata kingdom by dehistoricising their rich historical, political and cultural configurations. Noted author Arup Jyoti Das (2011) writes:

The Kamata Kingdom of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which has been referred to as Koch Kingdom in most of the history books and also as Koch Kamata by a few local scholars, went through various names and settled as Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) and became princely state of British India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Cooch Behar was merged with West Bengal in 1950 as a district against the will of the local people of Cooch Behar. (p. 24).

In this way, the rich historical map of Koch Kamata Kingdom was disfigured into only some liminal spaces and the reason was the hegemony and tactics of some newly decolonized agencies which further resulted in the unprecedented geopolitical changes in the landscape of Kamatapur. In this context, Gautam Chandra Roy writes:

The territorialisation of the landscape in the line with requirements of the modern nation state in the colonial period followed by the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 scattered and reduced the ‘traditional home’ of the community into the peripheries of three independent countries of South Asia, namely India, Bangladesh and Nepal. (Para.1).

Accordingly, if one looks at the transformation in the conditions of Rajbanshis in these new geopolitical spaces the presence of the Rajbanshi community has been subjugated and disfigured. Jyotirmoy Prodhani (2021) in fact calls this disfiguration as “culturally disabled collective” (p. 225). The bifurcation of Kamata Kingdom between Assam and West Bengal also subjugates the positions of Rajbanshi people as marginalized subjects of border space. The Rajbanshis in the postcolonial space of Assam and West Bengal, have been subjected to a process of dehistoricisation “through discursive strategies of dislocations” (Prodhani, p.242). He cites the burning of the Royal Records room and the records of Land Reform office on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1974 at Coochbehar in West Bengal as some of the physical modes of historical annihilation. In the states of West Bengal and Assam, it is also seen that the history of Kamata Kingdom is not given much importance as well as in the mainstream socio-political and cultural discourses; rather, the historical traditions of Rajbanshi community were subjugated to the epistemic dominance of monolithic histories. What is more striking is that in Assam, according to Prodhani (2021), “history

has been adopted as a 'historicist'<sup>1</sup> tool as well to accomplish the task of "displacing the Koch Rajbanshis from the spaces of legitimations" (p. 242).

Rajbanshi poetry has its root in the folk and oral traditions of the community but modern Rajbanshi Poetry evolves as a result of the historical consciousness of the community. Along with the lure of folk traditions, modern Rajbanshi Poetry imbibes strong memory associated with the cultural and historical geography of the Kamata Kingdom. Panchanan Barma, the precursor of the Khastriya movement of the Rajbanshis, is regarded as the first modern and realist poet of Rajbanshi literature. His poem "Dangdhari Mao" was a protest poem against the frequent incidents of atrocities faced by Rajbanshi women in Rangpur district of present Bangladesh. Thus, modern Rajbanshi poetry contests against their lost spaces and epistemology in the new geographical locations of the postcolonial map, such as the modern Rangpur district of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bihar, West Bengal and Assam where the community share a common memory of the aspiration to reclaim their lost land and history.

### **Topophrenic Memory:**

'Topophrenic Memory' can be understood in terms of mnemonic representation of ontological and imaginary places as 'topophrenia' means "subjective engagement with a given place and the possibility projection of alternative spaces" (Tally, 2019, Chap. 1). This subjective engagement takes place through the interplay between 'lived space' and 'abstract space' and according to Tally, "topophrenia remains with humanity at all times: a constant and uneasy 'placemindedness' that characterizes a subject's interactions with his or her environment... (Tally, Intro). Tally's engaging with the idea of 'lived space' explores the subject's entanglement and encounter with the spaces. In this interrelation of space and memory, 'topophrenia' also propels the idea of a sense of belongingness to a place and defines the matters of "displacement and replacement, of movement between places and over spaces, and of the multifarious relations among place, space, individuals, collectiveness, events and so on..." (Tally, Intro). These entanglements among the place and persons are mappable through the process of re-creational memory associated with the lived experience of place. Tally (2019) also speaks about 'effects of place on persons' (Chap. 1) and according to him, "Mapping makes visible places, and, is what might seem to be a circular logic, being mapped in what in many respects establishes a place as a place" (Chap. 1). This idea of mapping a place in the literary domain undergoes the process of rejuvenation of lived memory as well as the literalization of speculative alternative memory.

The component of spatial memory is a vital lens to approach Rajbanshi poetry it imbibes strong memories rooted in the indigenous spaces that poems transgress through the subjective entanglement with the places. The regimes of memory associated with these spaces again confront the dialectics of real and imaginary places. This binary of real and imaginary spatial memory however transforms from the subjective to the objective affiliation, that is the sense of collective consciousness and belongingness for the spaces. Tally (2019) also argues that "a place is apprehended by subjectivity", but it can also be understood "in reference to a non-or suprasubjective ensemble of spatial relations" (Chap.1). It suggests that spatial relations transform from subjectivity to objectivity and this subjective vis-a-vis objective entanglement of place with the individual is mappable in literary texts through the medium of re-creational memory. The

modern Rajbanshi poetry also engrosses with this politics of drawing ontological and imaginary places of Rajbanshi consciousness through the linkages of spatial memory.

Dwijendra Nath Bhakat, a prominent scholar and poet from Dhubri in Assam, draws on the strong memory of subjective entanglement with the places which transform from being individual to collective memories. To start with his poem "Gauripur Madhupur", one can visualize the co-relation between space and memory. The poem converges two places from two different political maps of modern India with poetical retention of the historic linkages of these locales. Despite having the modern political boundary between these two places, they are still culturally aligned to each other and people from both sides feel a sense of belongingness to the space on the other side. While explaining the concept of 'topophobia', Tally points out how it propels the idea of a 'sense of belongingness to a place' and comments on the existential notion of displacement and replacement (Chap. Intro). The political dislocations of these two spaces in terms of liminal political boundaries also give the subjects the experience of pain and agonies. Decolonial critic Walter Mignolo's (2000) proposition on 'border epistemology' (p. 52) can be brought here to substantiate the argument. Mignolo, while dealing with the idea of border epistemology, argues that indigenous stories can be located in the border spaces which are often the 'forgotten stories' because of the 'global design' that are the histories of the dominant groups (p. 52). It is seen that Rajbanshi poetry also vindicates the memory of lived experience of these forgotten spaces. Bhakat recreates the memory of the spaces associated with the cultural and historical legacy of Koch Kamata Kingdom. His poem "Gauripur" shows affiliations with memories of the historical spaces such as Gauripur, Gadadhar, Lau Khowa, Rajbari, Matibagh. In fact, the poet glorifies 'Gauripur' as a site of history with the process of re-creational memory which is a collective spatial consciousness of the community itself:

Hail O Gauripur

At the Vehemence

Of the roaring thunder

(Trans. J. Prodhani, 2021, p. 53)

The re-creational process of spatial memory of the places of Rajbanshi historical consciousness subsumes Tally's idea of 'Topophilia' as an offshoot of 'Topophobia'. which suggests the sense of belongingness to and fondness of a place. 'Topophilia' and 'Topophobia' are two paradigms of topophobic memory. Whereas Topophilia suggests love for a place, Topophobia means fear for a place (Tally, 2019, Chap. 1). The present poem, "Gauripur", similarly, incorporates both this topophilic and topophobic memories associated with the historic place of Gauripur as the poem visualizes Rajbanshi people's intense love for the place and at the same time fear of its disfiguration. The poem concludes with an expression of agony and crisis as the poet has a serious fear of Gauripur's degeneration:

Is the new age of Gauripur

Full of turncoats

Watch the show

As mute spectators

(Trans. Prodhani, 2021, p 53)

In a similar note, 'Topophobia' which locates subjective engagement with the real and imaginary places, Rajbanshi poems also encounter both the real and imaginary locales. However, in the case of Rajbanshi poetry, it can be argued that there is a contestation of the same space with the changes in the semantics of time. For example, the cartographic map of Cooch Behar was earlier a real phenomenon but the same map is now only in the consciousness and imagination of the Rajbanshi people. However, Rajbanshi poetry also takes a political stance through this contestation between the real and the imagined in order to get back to the real. Jatin Barma's poem "The Coochbehar Palace" reflects this anxiety:

The majestic Coochbehar Palace  
Stares vacantly like an abandoned orphan

(Trans. Prodhani, p. 71)

The stanza is important in terms of interrogation of the real and the imagined space. The poet begins it with the glory of the historic monument of Koch Kamata kingdom by calling Coochbehar Palace as 'majestic', but at the same moment, the poet is able to visualize the present reality of the same Palace and accentuates the term majestic by lamenting that it is just his imagined subjectivity which compels him to exclaim with sorrow that the palace now 'stares vacantly like an abandoned orphan'. Similarly, in the poem "For You O My Love-I", Jatin Barma mentions historic city Cooch Behar as a 'manicured' and 'forgotten city' of "Madhupur" (p. 73). The city, being the capital of historic Koch Kamata Kingdom, has a profound sense of association with the Rajbanshi consciousness but strikingly, this place is forgotten and abandoned as a frontier space bifurcated and truncated. Due to its frontier re-location, the city now lies in an 'in-between space', what Edward Soja would call the 'Trialectical' (qtd. in Tally, 2019).

The idea of 'Trialectical' can be understood in terms of "conception, perception and experience of space that posited real and imagined space" (qtd. in Tally, 2019). While defining the production of space, French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991) propounds the idea of the 'spatial triad' which comprises three categories of spatial dynamics—spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space (pp. 38-39). These three categories of space can be visualised as perceived, abstract, and lived spaces. Spatial critic Soja later, while developing these spatial offshoots, brings out the proposition of 'Trialectical' by putting forward another notion of space what he called the 'Thirdspace' which argues about the existence of a middle space thereby dismantling the binary of "subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconsciousness, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history" (qtd. in Tally, 2019). The cartographic disfiguration of Koch Kamata Kingdom also compels the Rajbanshi community to confront these multilayered spaces and to live in the void of the middle space — the 'third space'. Rajbanshi poetry brings on the memory of these experiences of living in this intermediate empty space.

The periphery of space cannot be defined as a fixed location as it also extends its boundaries to other forms of spaces such as buildings, monuments, rooms, landscapes etc. Gaston Bachelard (2014) defines a house as "a privileged entity for a phenomenological study of the intimate values

of inside space" (p. 25) and also associates it with a "community of memory and image" (p. 27). The faculty of memory related to space incorporates these material objects of space. Rajbanshi poetry also engages this kind of spatial memory in their writing process. In this context, the reign of Kamata Kingdom, especially the reign of Koch King Naranarayan, can be revisited as a remarkable juncture for the vibrant royal patronage and affiliations provided to the institutes of culture and learning. His patronage of Sankardeva for the promotion of the Neo-Vaishnavite faith and culture of learning marked his greatness as a King and a lover of knowledge. This Neo-Vaishnavite culture later played a crucial role in the formation of the greater Assamese society and identity, which also made a strong presence in the Rajbanshi consciousness. However, the Madhupur Satra, established by Sankardev with the royal grants from Maharaj Naranarayan in the Koch capital of Cooch Behar was a major centre of learning and production of several vaishnavite and cultural texts, is now a neglected abode both by the Bengal and Assam Governments. Ironically, the Koch Rajbanshis whose king was the most important patron of the Vaishnavite tradition, once in the famous Barpeta Satra was a very painful humiliation for the Rajbanshis as it was the king of the Koches, Maharaj Naranaryan who had patronised Sankardeva (See Das, 2011, p. 72). As structural and cultural spaces, the Vaishnavite Satras and the Namghars made great contributions to the socio-cultural milieu of Kamatapur, The Satras and Namghars are part of the cultural history and also have mnemonic associations with the community that is reflected in one of the poems by Dwijendranath Bhakat:

The howling of the fox, Na Satra

Rajahuwa Satra Reverred *Bapus*

And *Ais*

*Nagara Thiyo Naam Kushan Dotori Sonarai, Padma Puran*

The fair of *Dol jatra Ashtami snan*

("Shattered by Many a Moon", Trans. J. Prodhani, 2021, p. 54)

### **Land and Memory:**

Land is the most important space for indigenous community in which their own civilization and culture grows. The notion of indigeneity is always associated with the land where the history of that indigenous community lies. For this reason, land as a spatial entity has an intimate association with the memories of a community. The concept of land should be looked at from more comprehensive perspectives that would include language, culture, nationality and historical legacies rooted in the 'Land'. The scattered and displaced people of Rajbanshi community also carry forward the memories associated with their native land which include both pleasant and haunting experiences. Whereas pleasant memories bring about the glorious historical and cultural legacy of the community, haunting memories strike with the bitter experience of unwanted bifurcations and the experience of subjugation in their native land.

Walter Mignolo (2007) defines 'modernity' "as a European narrative that hides its darker side of 'coloniality' (p. 39). Against this notion of modernity along with the coloniality which are seemingly pointed out as 'European agenda' (Mignolo, 2007, p. 39), the process of decolonization started aiming at the formation of one's own national identity. Mignolo (2007) also calls it 'decolonial

modernity' (p. 42). But, the striking point is that within the formation of nationalistic identity in the decolonial process, the newly transferred centres of powers with the discourse of modernity exclude and marginalize various indigenous entities with a fresh process of homogenization and appropriation. After the bifurcation of the political geography of Kamatapur, the Rajbanshis have been encountering politics of exclusion in the wake of the rapid process of postcolonial modernity. This process of exclusion within their geopolitical space brings ontological and existential threats as their right to their land begins to dislodge. Rajbanshi poetry manifests an eager urgency to act for an assertive reclamation:

We want to proclaim our identity  
 To proclaim as denizens called Kamatapuri  
 Kamatapur, the name of the country  
 Kamatapur, the name of our land

(*"As We Search for Our Roots"*, Ramola Ray Sarkar. Trans. Prodhani, p. 168)

The Rajbanshi community had a primordial bonding with the soil of their belonging. Before the political dislocation of the Koch Kamata Kingdom, the community facilitated an original form of belonging to their land which was later dismantled through colonial strategies; however, the land of historic Kamatapur continues to be in the memory of the Rajbanshi community. Ramola Ray Sarkar's poem asserts this autochthonous claim for their lost land of 'Kamatapur' and identity as 'Kamatapuri' through the re/creational process of memory. Similarly, Ramkanta Ray's poem "This Land, this People" metaphorically expresses this sense of dislocation off their native land and at the same time attempts to recuperate from this trauma of loss:

No, I don't want anything else  
 The fecund field of my adolescence  
 The green expanse of emptiness

(Trans. P. Acharya, 2021, p. 78)

In Rajbanshi epistemology, the concept of land is not taken simply as a place to live; rather their land as a native entity that absorbs a significant space. Not only does it have the forest, the rivers and even wetlands as components of the landscape, it also occupies an important place in the indigenous knowledge system of the community. The Rajbanshi socio-cultural legacy includes all forms of human and non-human entities of lives within the same enclosure of Rajbanshi epistemology which can be seen from a posthumanist perspective. Prodhani, in his poem, "Gadadhar", draws on spatial memory associated with his ancestral place, the people and the native lore and depicts how the river 'Gangadhar' occupies as important a space as the other human entities in their lives. Here, it is important to note that despite the river Gangadhar's grandeur, the river does not figure in the mainstream narratives on river of Assam for it is at the frontier of both geography and imagination of Assam. The poet's recollection of memory associated with the river Gangadhar is also a kind of an attempt to reclaim the receding history and culture of the community. Rajbanshi poet D. N. Bhakat also brings his personal memory



associated with some wetlands such as 'Ekshia' and 'Singimari Beel'. These wetlands of their native land intertwined and entangled with the collective memory of the Rajbanshi folk.

The poetical body of Rajbanshi poetry also entangles memory of their native land as a medium of preservation and reclamation of indigenous epistemology. The poets understand that in order to reclaim identity and right to their lost land, the reinvention of indigenous epistemology (rooted in land) is important. Decolonial critic Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014) argues that for dismantling settler colonialism, academia should make conscious decision to introduce intellectual lives of the indigenous people protecting the source of knowledge which is the indigenous land (p. 22). In this regard, Simpson (2014) also mentions critic Deloria's comment, "Indigenous education is not indigenous or education from within our intellectual traditions unless it comes through land, unless it occurs in an indigenous context using indigenous process" (p. 9).

Simpson's argument that indigenous education comes through land can be argued by showing the historic link of land with indigeneity. In order to sustain and reclaim indigenous epistemology, indigenous pedagogy should be land based and there should be serious endeavour to bring it in the academic system of the nation. Rajbanshi poetry also delineates the epistemological traditions of the community rooted in their native land. The colonial knowledge system in the new geopolitical space subjugated the rich epistemology of the community. Therefore, modern Rajbanshi poetry can be seen as an attempt to retrace the indigenous epistemological traditions of the community in retrospect through the intertwining of memory with that of the native land. A poem by Santosh Sinha expresses that urge of cultural epistemology:

Go near the land

The land can unravel you the secret roots of real raptures

("Go Near the Land", Santosh Sinha. Trans. Prodhani, p. 108)

This retrospection through memory in connection with land in Rajbanshi poetry explores indigenous root of the community located in the pre-bifurcated Koch Kamata Kingdom. For the community, their native land is the source of their indigenous epistemology as their land bears the memory of the ancestors for generations:

This land is nothing but gold

Its dust is nurtured by ancestor's grail,

Seven generations old

("Splashing Tales of Flowing Water", Kamallesh Sarkar. Trans. Prodhani, p. 67)

The rich land based indigenous knowledge system of Koch Rajbanshi community is passing through generations and Rajbanshi poetry imbibes such mnemonic representation to uphold the identity of the community:

My father gave me the plough

And asked to hold it tight

("The Plough and the Saplings", J. Prodhani. Trans. Self, 2021. p. 207)

This conceptualization of memory is not simply an individual experience; rather, it can be seen as a collective memory of the community as this conceptualization focuses on the idea of holding 'land' handed down by the forebears.

The indigenous language of a community has a profound sense of bonding with the native land. The Rajbanshi language along with its literature and culture has its roots in the native land of the community. But, the colonial policies in the new geopolitical space also vanquished their linguistic and cultural identity by homogenizing the language as a sub-standard dialect of other major languages. In modern India, the language is not constitutionally recognized and it is taken as a dialect or a sub-standard language despite its own independency and rich philology. There were scholars like Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed, Panchanan Barma, Gauri Nath Shastri, Australian scholar, Matthew Toulman and many others who argued in favour of the independency of Rajbanshi language and script (see Prodhani, p. 231). The practice of writing modern Rajbanshi poetry can also be regarded as an act of protest against this linguistic imperialism as well as an appeal to get back to their epistemological heritage. Hence, Rajbanshi poetry also imbibes the memory of their linguistic and cultural heritage:

We have our own heritage

Script, words and language

Literature and culture, so much great

("As We Search for Our Roots", Ramola Ray Sarkar. Trans. Prodhani, p. 167)

The indigenous knowledge system of a community generally lies in the oral and folk tradition and the Koch Rajbanshi community has a rich and vast treasure of oral traditions such as folk songs and performances. The views of Ivanna Yi (2016) on Native American oral tradition are pertinent here:

Storying the land by the indigenous people of the Americas works against the geographical and linguistic violence that began with Columbus. This practice traverses the pre-colonial past and the present.... ( Para. 3).

As discussed, Rajbanshi poetry has its origin in the folk traditions of the community and modern Rajbanshi poetry also draws on those folk legacies. Many Rajbanshi poems carry forward these nuances of oral traditions in terms of mnemonic representation by indulging in the exercise of reviving the receding landscape by retrieving the folk figures like 'Mahut Bondhu' and the folk ritualistic performance, 'Hudum Deo'. Kumar Sauvik's poem "Sobhalata's Letter" attempts to retrace the markers of such a landscape and its turmoils. While arguing the land based pedagogical concept, L Simpson (2014) also exemplifies Nisshnaabeg oral stories which are passed down to new generations who have learnt from parents and grandparents (p. 19). Phoolti Abo, the traditional shaitol singer, (an oral folk narrative) has been a custodian of such folk pedagogy (see Acharaya & Prodhani, p. 258). She also underlines the changing dimensions of land:

Since then

There are so many changes in this land

("Phoolti Abo's Tale-II", Phoolti Gidali. Trans. Prodhani, p. 92)

Tally describes 'topophobia' as the subjective engagement with space. Rajbanshi poetry, in a significant way, delineates subjective interactions, entanglement, and encounters with the lived experience of geo-historical and geopolitical spaces essentially linked with land which is not only a source of their sense of belonging and source but also a part of their cultural pedagogy.

### **Declaration of Conflicts of Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest.

### **Funding**

No funding has been received for the publication of this article. It is published free of any charge.

### **Note**

Dipesh Chakrabarty (2007) in his *Provincialising Europe* refers to John Stuart Mill's essays, "On Liberty" and "On Representative Government" where Mill made the 'historicist' argument that the Indians and the Africans were not yet civilized enough to rule themselves justifying to keep them in the 'waiting room of history'. (see Prodhani, 2021, p 234-235)

### **References:**

- Acharaya, Pradip and Prodhani, Jyotirmoy (2021). *This Land This People: Rajbanshi Poems in Translation*. MRB Publishers.
- Bachelard, Gaston (2014). *The Poetics of Space*. (M, Jolas, Trans.). Penguin Books.
- Das, Arup Jyoti (2011). *Kamatapur and Koch Rajbanshi imagination*. Montage Media.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1991). *The Production of Space*. (DN Smith, Trans.). Blackwell.
- Mignolo, Walter D (2000). *Local Histories/ Global Designs*. Princeton University Press.
- Mignolo, Walter D (2007). "Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity". In *Cultural Studies*, Vol-21, No-2-3.
- Prodhani, Jyotirmoy (2021). "Resonance of Liminal Identity in Rajbanshi Poetry". In Acharaya and Prodhani's *This Land This People: Rajbanshi Poems in Translation*. MRB Publishers.
- Radston, Susannah & Hodgkin, Katharine (Eds.). (2003). *Regimes of Memory*. Routledge.
- Roy, Gautam Chandra (2020). "Negotiating with the Changing landscape: The Case of the Rajbanshi Community". In *Economic and Political Weekly* (online). Vol-55, Issue No-39, 26<sup>th</sup> September.
- Simpson, L Betasamosake (2014). "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation". In *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Vol-3, pp-1-25.
- Tally, Jr Robert T (2019). *TOPOPHRENIA: Place, Narrative and the Spatial Imagination*. Indiana University. Ebook, Kindle edition.

DO1-4417580-6053436.<https://amzn.in/czupt26>

Terdiman, Richard (2003). "Given Memory". In Radstone & Hodgkin (Eds.). *Regimes of Memory*. Routledge.

Yi, Ivanna (2016). "Cartographies of the Voice: Storying the Land as Survivance in Native American Oral Traditions". In *MDPI Journal* (Online), Vol-5, Issue-3.mdpi.com.

Gunajeet Mazumdar is an Assistant Professor of English at Manikpur Anchalik College, Assam He completed his M.Phil on Eco-consciousness studies in the poetry of Mamang Dai and currently he is pursuing his doctoral research in the area of Afghan-American Fiction. He is also a teacher member of the Academic Council of Gauhati University. His area of research interest includes Green Studies, American Literature, Performance Studies and Writings from Northeast India.