

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Rajbanshi Ethnic Group: Insight on Socioeconomic, Socio-cultural, and Educational Status

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ABSTRACT

The Rajbanshi are the indigenous ethnic people of eastern terai who have been systematically marginalized from the socioeconomic, cultural, administrative, and political mainstream of the country. Thus, a study was undertaken to study the socioeconomic, socio-cultural, and educational status of the Rajbanshi community of Gauradaha Municipality, Jhapa. The study followed cross sectional convergent parallel mix method. Hundred samples were taken by a random sampling technique, where both quantitative and qualitative data were taken. The study showed that 93% of household head were male and 52% household head (HH) were of age group 41–50 years. Similarly, 56% HH had secondary level education. Most respondents (78%) lived in a nuclear family where 66% HH were unemployed. The study also revealed that 68% people had 1–3 bigha of land. Paddy (rainy) and cow were the major crops and livestock reared by the households. The annual income of 51% respondent was 1–2 lakhs and only 32% had savings. Only 78% people had access to the internet and the majority used it for communication. Rajbanshi is the major language spoken and most people wear cultural dress in festivals only. The advancement of modernization and the spread of Western culture may threaten the preservation of their unique cultural identity.

Key words: Convergent parallel, household-head, marginalized, rajbanshi

INTRODUCTION

Nepal, despite being small in size, is a country with geographical and cultural diversities. It is a shelter for 30 million people, which have a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-religious society. According to the National Population and Housing Census 2021, there are 142 castes/ethnic groups in Nepal, out of which 125 are the ones that were also reported in the earlier census 2011, and 17 are newly found in the census 2021. Among the total population residing in Nepal, 35.9% of fall under the indigenous group. The National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act-2058

defined indigenous peoples as having a distinct cultural identity and tradition, their own mother tongue, a distinct social structure, and their own oral or written history. Nepalese indigenous peoples have a distinct egalitarian socio-cultural pattern quite different from the dominant caste-based, hierarchical socio-cultural and religious practices prevalent in Hindu society. Nepalese indigenous communities are considered to have been systematically marginalized from the socioeconomic, cultural, administrative, and political mainstream of the country for most of its history due to oppressive socio-cultural practices and predatory state policies (Bhattachan *et al.*, 2005). The Nepalese Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, an umbrella organization of the indigenous peoples, has divided indigenous communities into five different categories: Endangered, highly marginalized, marginalized,

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disadvantaged, and advanced, based on composite indices, including population size, land holdings, occupation, educational status, language, and cultural parameters (Piya *et al.*, 2012). Rajbanshi is categorized as one of the marginalized indigenous communities and its member comprise 0.43% of the total 29 million population of Nepal (CBS, 2021). The 2021 census registered a total of 1,27,985 people who identify themselves as Rajbanshi. The Rajbanshi people of Nepal can be found predominantly within the Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari districts in the southeastern corner of the country. Jhapa and Morang, these two districts, accommodate more than 90% of the total Rajbanshi population (CBS, 2021).

The Rajbanshi community, a significant ethnic group in the southeastern corner of Nepal, known for its rich cultural heritage and unique traditions, faces socioeconomic, and socio-cultural challenges that warrant in-depth exploration. These challenges include marginalization and discrimination, landlessness, livelihood issues, educational attainment, access to health care services, cultural identity and recognition, political representation, gender inequality, migration, and urbanization. This research aims to investigate and analyze the current socioeconomic, socio-cultural and educational status of the Rajbanshi community, including their education levels, employment patterns, income disparities, healthcare access, language usage, cultural practices, religious beliefs, traditional roles and norms, interactions with mainstream society, school enrollment, causes of dropout, academic performance, access to educational resources, participation in higher education and overall quality of life. By identifying these dimensions, the study seeks to uncover the key barriers and opportunities for socioeconomic advancement as well as the dynamics influencing the preservation, adaptation, and transformation of Rajbanshi culture within the Rajbanshi community. Similarly, the study seeks to identify barriers and facilitators influencing educational outcomes among the Rajbanshi community. As this study explores information about the impact on socioeconomic, socio-culture and educational aspect of marginalized Rajbanshi, this study is crucial for informing policy makers, community leaders, and stakeholders of on targeted interventions to improve the socioeconomic conditions, informing cultural preservation efforts,

fostering intercultural dialogue, and promoting the recognition and integration of Rajbanshi cultural identity within broader societal frameworks and informing educational policies, interventions, and initiatives aimed at promoting equitable access to quality education and improving educational attainment levels within the Rajbanshi community.

METHODOLOGY

Research Area

The study was conducted in the Gauradaha municipality of Jhapa district. It lies in Koshi province with an area of 96.11 km². Gauradaha municipality, in Jhapa district, was established on 19 September 2015 by merging the existing Maharanijhoda, Baigundhura, Juropani, Kohabara, and Gauradaha village development committees. The population of this municipality is 60451 with population growth rate of 1.26 according to the latest national census 2021.

Research Design

The study followed cross sectional convergent parallel design to carry out the research. Both quantitative and qualitative data were taken. For qualitative data, field notes were taken during the survey from our participants, whereas demographic data were taken as a qualitative source.

Sampling Strategy

The total households of Rajbanshi inhabiting in Gauradaha Municipality were considered as the population of the study. Slovin's Formula ($n = N/1 + Ne^2$ where N is population size) was used for sample size estimation. From which, 100 households were selected randomly as a sample. An interactive questionnaire survey for every household was done, where preferences were given to elderly people or the head of the family.

Data Collection

Data were collected from both the primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected

through a household survey by employing a pre-tested questionnaire. Secondary data were collected from publications, such as the District profile, report from the National Statistics Office. Further information was gathered from published articles, journals, books, scientific papers, proceedings, annual reports, newspapers, etc.

Data Entry and Analysis

Collected data were checked, reviewed, and organized after finishing the survey to maintain the accuracy. The coding and categorization of the data were done according to the objectives of the study and entered in Microsoft Excel. The collected raw data were analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences), which is suitable for descriptive and comparative analysis of data.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of the Rajbanshi Community

Sex and age group of HH

Among the total population, the percentage of male HH was found to be 93%, whereas the percentage of female household head was only 7% (Table 1). It indicates that there was a problem of gender inequality. Among the total HH in the study area, the majority of the HH were of the age group 41–50 years, which is 52%. The percentage of HH of the age group 31–40 years was found lowest, that is, 8%.

Education level of HH

In the study area, among the total household heads, most of the household heads were educated, which is 92%. About 56% of HH had attained secondary level education and only 8% of the household head were illiterate [Figure 1].

Type of family

Now a days, many people prefer to live in a small-sized family due to awareness, better living standards, education, as well as burden of a large number of children. Most of the Rajbanshi family in the study area lived in nuclear family, which is 78%.

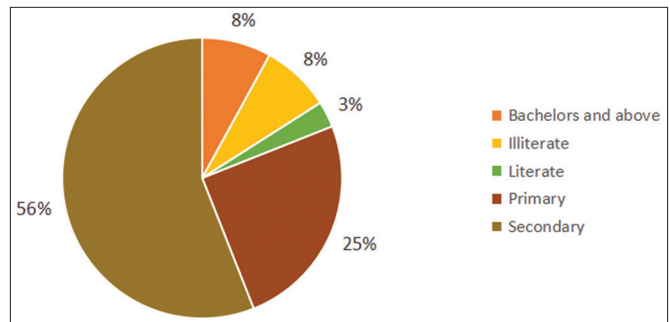


Figure 1: Education level of the household head of the Rajbanshi community

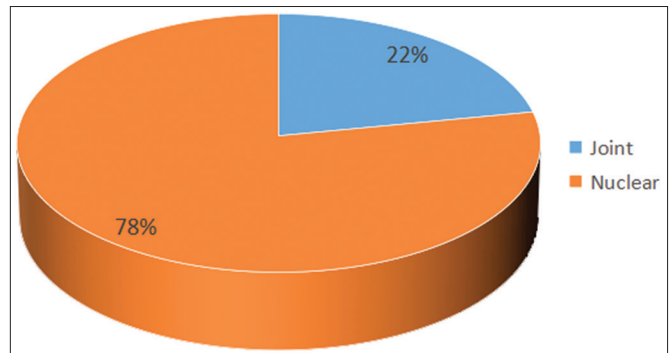


Figure 2: Types of family of the study area

Only 22% of the Rajbanshi family lived in a joint family [Figure 2].

Economic active population

In the study area, the population of both sexes of the economically active population was found highest, which is 46.8% (male) and 42.9% (female), as shown in [Figure 3].

Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Study Area

Land holding pattern of the respondent's family

The study revealed that most of the family (68%) had land holding of 1–3 bigha. Only 9% family had Table 2 holding more than 3 bigha.

Annual household income

Most of the families had an annual income of 1–2 lakhs, which is 51% of the total families (Figure 4). Only 21 % families had an annual income of more than 3 lakhs and only 14% families had an annual income <1 lakh. Only 32% families of study area had savings. Remaining 68% families had no savings.

Crops cultivated and animals reared

In the study area, paddy and maize were the major crops cultivated. Paddy was cultivated in both the spring and rainy season whereas maize was cultivated in spring. Almost all the people cultivated rainy season paddy. Only 45% families cultivated spring paddy and 31% families cultivated maize. Similarly, cow, buffalo, goat, and duck were the animals reared. 79% of families of study area had at least one cow reared as presented in [Figure 5].

Storage of grains

The study showed that 31% people used steel containers, 27% used jute sac, 23% used bhakari, and 19% used wooden baskets to store grains [Figure 6].

Level of food sufficiency

It was found that only 57% family sustain with their own food production for more than a year. 37% families sustain for 8–12 months while 6% families sustain 5–8 months from their own food production [Figure 7].

Household facilities

The study showed that 100% families had access to mobile, 97% people had access to television, 78% people had access to the internet, and only 3% people had access to a computer (Figure 8). Among the families having access to the internet, 78% people use it to communicate with friends and relatives, 43% use it for social media, 5% use it for sharing ideas and information, and only 2% people use it for learning.

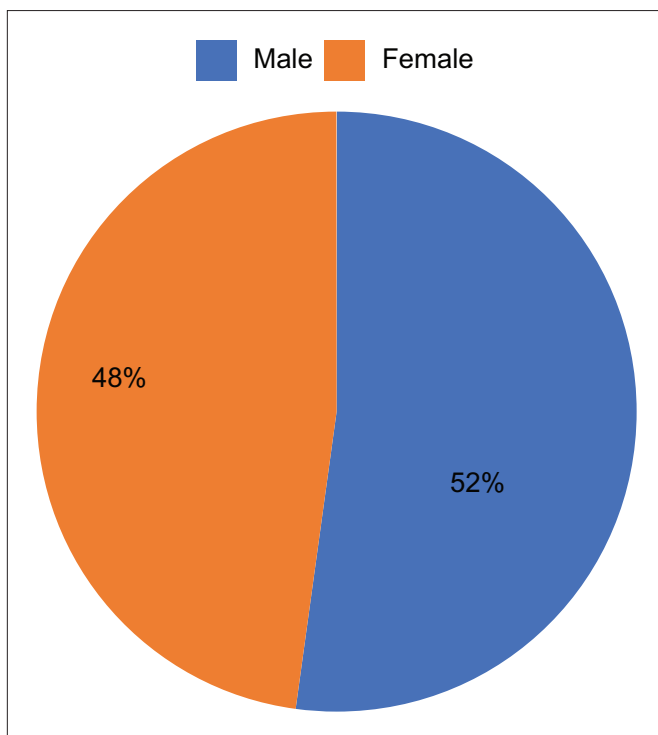


Figure 3: Economic active population

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Economic challenges of families

It was found that household affordability was the major economic challenge faced by most of the families, which is 47%. Similarly, educational

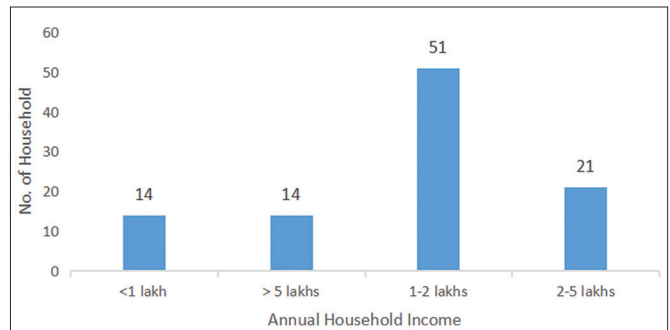


Figure 4: Annual household income of families in the study area

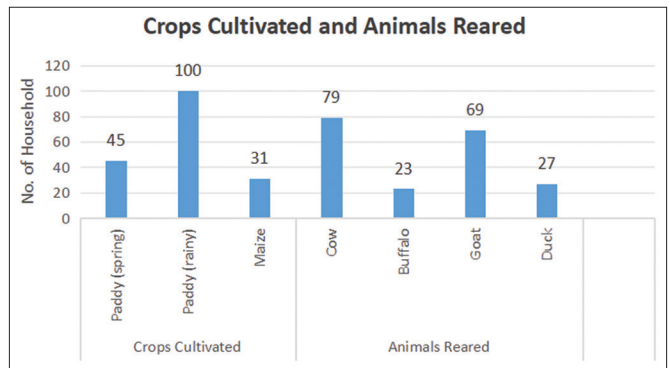


Figure 5: Crops and animals reared in the Rajbanshi community

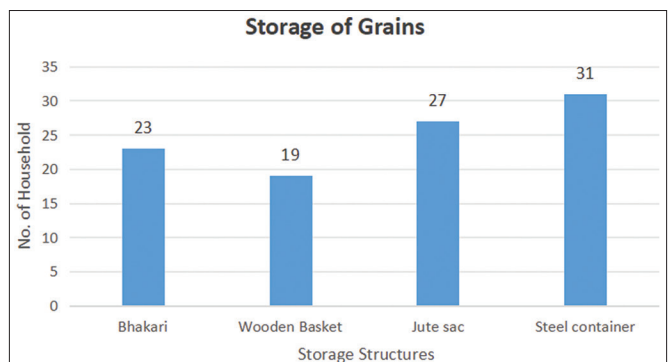


Figure 6: Traditional storage structures used by people to store grains

expense, debt, unemployment, and healthcare cost were the economic challenges faced by 25%, 18%, 6% and 4% families, respectively [Figure 9].

Socio-Cultural Characteristics of the Study Area

Language

The study showed that Rajbanshi is the major language of the community, as shown in [Figure 10]. Sixty nine percentage families used the Rajbanshi language to communicate within the community and 81% families used the Rajbanshi language to communicate with family members. This showed that the Rajbanshi language is preferred by the community for communication.

Cultural dress

The study showed that 93% people wear cultural dress once in 3 months and 7% wear it once a month. The majority of the people which is 68% wear it in festivals only and 32% people wear it in festivals as well as in social gatherings (Table 4).

Involvement in cultural groups

The study showed that 57% peoples were involved in Rajbanshi cultural groups, which means there is moderate awareness in the people regarding the importance of culture and the importance of cultural groups to preserve culture presented in [Figure 11]. Rajbanshi Samaj Bikash Samiti is the organization in which people were involved.

Changes in culture

In the study area, the majority of the people which is 41% felt there was no significant change in culture, while 26% people felt adoption of modern practices is causing changes in Rajbanshi culture. Similarly, 21% people felt there is a language shift, while 12% people feel there is changes in traditional attire or customs, as shown in [Figure 12].

DISCUSSION

The Rajbanshi are the indigenous ethnic people of eastern Terai. Among the 61 indigenous nationalities in Nepal, Rajbanshi is considered

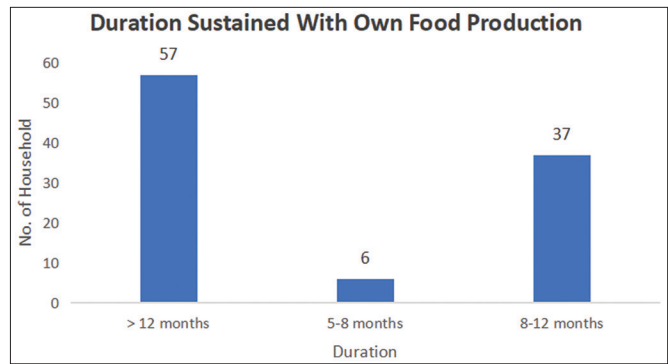


Figure 7: Level of food sufficiency in the families of the study area

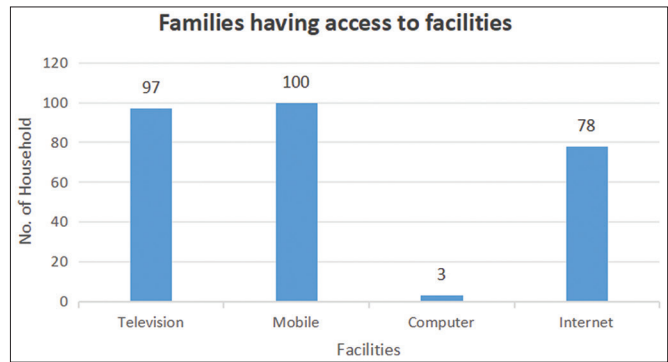


Figure 8: Distribution of population according to household facilities

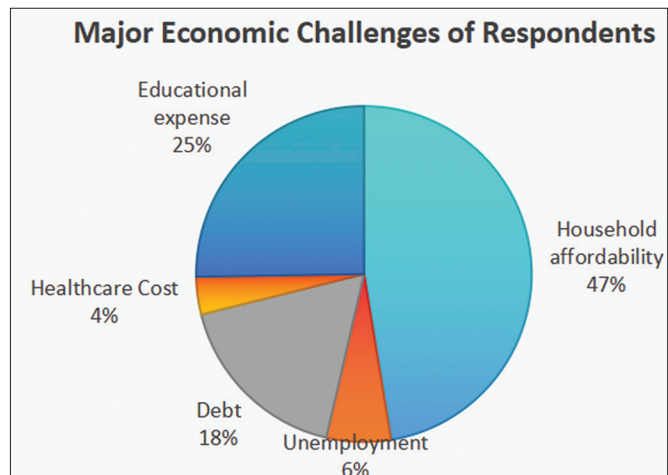


Figure 9: Major economic challenges of the families in the study area

one of the marginalized ethnic groups. This field study also clarifies this issue. They are the agrarian community. Because of the low income, they are going backward day by day in every field. In the community, there was a problem of gender inequality as Rajbanshi live in a male-dominated society. The trend of living in a nuclear family was adopted by most of the Rajbanshi. As a result, the families

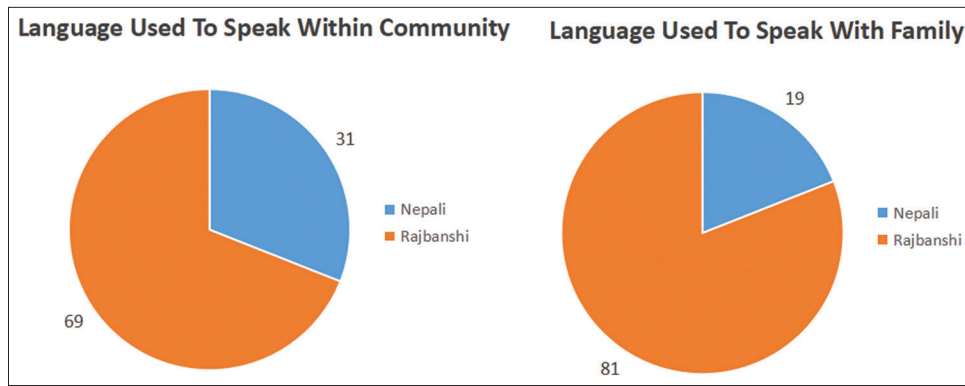


Figure 10: Language used to speak within the community and family in the study area

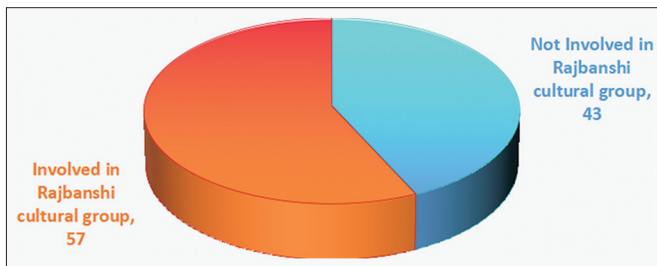


Figure 11: Involvement in Rajbanshi cultural groups

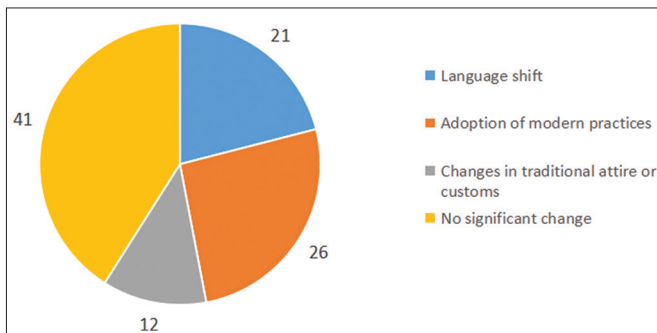


Figure 12: Changes in Rajbanshi culture

had moderate land holding. Although they practice farming in most of their land, the agricultural production is not satisfactory due to a lack of improved seeds and improved cultivation practices. Due to this, the average annual income is very low and only few people have savings. They hardly sustained a year with their own food production (Subba, 2015). Most of the people had access to television, mobile, and the internet, while people used the internet to communicate with friends and relatives. Rajbanshi was the major language used to communicate within the community as well as with the family. Mostly, they wear cultural dress in festivals and social gatherings. They perform birth and death rituals according to Hinduism. There was

Table 1: Distribution of HH according to sex

Sex	Frequency	Age group	Frequency
Male	93 (93%)	31-40	8 (8%)
Female	7 (7%)	41-50	52 (52%)
Total	100 (100%)	>50	40 (40%)

Source: (Household Survey, 2024)

Table 2: Total land holdings of families

Total land holding (bigha)	Frequency	Percentage of HH
<1	23	23
1-3	68	68
>3	9	9

Table 3: Purpose of using internet

Purpose of using internet	Percentage of people
Learning	2
Social media	43
Communication	78
Sharing ideas and information	5

Table 4: Distribution of population on how frequently they wear cultural dress

Wearing of Cultural Dress	Percentage	Occasion of wearing cultural dress	Percentage
Once a month	7	Festivals only	68
Once in 3 months	93	Festivals and social gatherings	32
Total	100	Total	100

no significant change in the Rajbanshi culture. They had the Rajbanshi Samaj Bikash Samiti to promote and preserve their culture. Social stability was established through their kinship networks, which influenced the roles and relationships within their communities (Chaudhary, 2023). The quality of education in the community was good. Although

most of the people were literate, they are unable to attain higher education due to the financial situation. However, the newer generation wants their children to obtain higher education and uplift their status since education plays a pivoting role for upliftment of other aspects. Younger generations are adopting mainstream values, leading to a decline in traditional practices, dialects, and indigenous ceremonies. Bista (1980) reported that interactions with foreign powers profoundly impacted trade networks, political dynamics, and cultural exchanges within Nepal's border regions. Western education, religion, and languages introduced during colonization disrupted traditional knowledge transmission systems (Maharjan, 2016). Transition from spoken traditions to written languages can displace indigenous tongues, resulting in the forfeiture of intricate indigenous (Wyman *et al.*, 2014). Bilingual and multilingual education models are being promoted to ensure that indigenous languages remain relevant. The impact of modern education on indigenous knowledge systems in Nepal is a nuanced interplay between adaptation and challenges. While modern education offers opportunities for advancement, it can also lead to the erosion of indigenous languages, practices, and ways of knowing. Efforts to integrate indigenous knowledge into education, promote bilingualism, and empower indigenous communities to shape their education can help balance modernization and cultural preservation (Chaudhary, 2023).

Recommendations

To uplift the socioeconomic, socio-cultural, and educational status of the Rajbanshi community of Gauradaha Municipality, the following measures have been recommended:

- Launch campaigns to promote the Rajbanshi language and traditions, partnering with educational institutions for workshops and seminars.
- Organize festivals celebrating Rajbanshi culture, arts, and traditions to enhance community pride
- Promote gender equality through women's groups that focus on leadership, entrepreneurship, and health education

- Collaborate with NGOs to run educational workshops, focusing on critical thinking, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy
- Encourage community members to participate in local governance and decision-making processes to ensure their voices are heard.
- Establish vocational training centers focusing on skills in demand, such as weaving, agriculture, and handicrafts. Collaborate with local industries to ensure job placement.
- Provide access to modern farming techniques, seeds, and tools. Implement sustainable practices to enhance productivity and income.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that agriculture dependent Rajbanshi community should be promoted in various income able activities. Proper recognition is needed to uplift the socioeconomic, socio-cultural, and educational status of Rajbanshi. Various grass-root level programme was needed to foster their status. If they get good economic sources and proper education, they can reach to the similar stage of other communities.

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