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An Approach to Tradition Cultural of Rabha

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Abstract

The Rabhas is a distinct tribal community of the greater Mongoloid ethnic group of North East India. Anthropologically the Rabhas belong to Mongoloid stock and linguistically they are included in Sino-Tibetan group. Like other tribal groups and sub-groups of North-East India and that of Assam and Meghalaya, the Rabhas have been trying to develop the socio-cultural qualities through organized way of living. In doing so, several organizations and institutions have been organized by the Rabhas since the origin of their society. The Rabhas are mostly occupied in the North Eastern part of India, particularly in Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. A section of the Rabhas is concentrated in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. Besides, considerable populations of the Rabhas are also inhabited in the neighbouring countries of India like Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. Though the Rabhas are inhabiting in different parts of Assam, both in the northern and the southern bank of the Brahmaputra river, they are mostly concentrated in Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Udalguri, Baksa, Nalbari, Sonitpur, Bongaigaon, Dhubri, Kokrajhar etc. In the present paper an attempt has been made to review the rich cultural tradition of the Rabha tribe so as to represent their multicolored society as well as socio-cultural background.

1. Introduction: In Assam, the Rabhas live mostly in Goalpara and Kamrup districts. The Rabhas belong to the Indo-Mongoloid group of people and have similarities with other members of Bodo group such as Garos, Kachari, Mech, Koch, Hajong and others. Most of the Rabhas of Dooars refer to themselves as Rabha, but some of them often declare themselves as *Kocha*

The study of socio-cultural attributes is immensely necessary in order to know the socio-cultural character of the Rabhas. Like other tribal communities of North-East India, the Rabhas also form a unique community (Das, B.M. 1960) having rich socio-cultural inheritance. The society and culture of the community is strictly governed by democratic social system (Rabha Moni, 2007) having certain rites and rituals, way of living, social beliefs, practices and customs.

So far the cultural background of the Rabhas is concerned; the community possesses vast cultural landscape. The society of the community is gifted with rich and diverse cultural components, such as (i) Habitation (ii) Material culture (house type and living pattern) (iii) costumes (iv) Religious rites and deities (v) Fair and festivals and (vi) Social Organization and Institutions.

2. Habitation: Since the time of immemorial the different groups of the Rabhas used to occupy different livable places contributing to their occupation and life style. Among the eight groups found in different parts of India (Hunter, 1976). The Rangdani and Maitari Rabha occupy both plain and hilly parts of southern foothill of East Garo Hills and West Garo Hills of Meghalaya and Assam (Endle. 1911). The Rangdani and Maitari Rabhas establish their place of abode on the hillocks and also in the plain areas. In Lakhimpur Sub-division of Goalpara district and West Garo Hills of Meghalaya the Rangdani groups (Hunter, usually build their houses on flat top of a hillock and agricultural and horticultural practices are done in the surrounding of houses including the plain areas. The villages are comparatively small in sizes. The patterns of housing of Rangdani Rabhas are of compact type while the Maitari group has their housing pattern in rows on both sides of a road. While selecting the places Rangdani and Maitory groups are depend on some factors like easy availability of drinking water, secured from natural disasters like floods, cyclones and storms etc. and land suitability for agriculture.

The Pati, Dhari, Bitalia, Koch, Hana and Totla Rabha groups are inhabiting sporadically in different parts of Assam usually establish their villages in the plain areas where agricultural activities are favorable. The villages are big in sizes and the housing types and complex are also big which are alike to non-tribal and general castes counterpart. The village is well establishing with neat and clean complex. Their houses are typical and most of the houses are four parts in sequence with a common courtyard in the mid of houses.

3. Construction of House and Village system: The housing type of Rangdani Rabhas is of compact pattern while the Maitory group has their housing pattern in rows on both sides of approach road. The selection of sites for house is an important factor for construction of house for all groups of Rabha. Different rituals are followed on the basis of traditional magical belief while selecting a site of homestead as well as living houses. There also belief among the Rabha groups in selecting their dwelling sites in the North, South and western part of the compound. The northern side of the compound is suitable to dig a well for drinking water, while the southern side is to be kept for open air. The eastern side is suitable to dig a pond and in the western side bamboo orchard and trees are to be planted as a measure for protection from storms and cyclones that usually blows from the western side.

The traditional Rabha villages were designate on the basis of clan based in early times. The Maitory Rabhas inhabiting in Trikikilla and Phulbari areas of west Garo Hills in Meghalaya and Jairamkuchi and greater Daduri-Makri areas of Goalpara district in Assam live in cluster called 'Songdam'. The traditional typical pattern of Maitory Rabha house was made of bamboo, wood and thatched roof. Their houses are lengthened size approximately of 50 feet in length of single house. The house has no front Varanda. The roof of the house is pointed shaped sloping down thatches on both sides. Walls of the house are prepared generally with bamboo fencing plastered by earth mixed with cow-dung, pieces of straw and water. The floor of the house is also making clean and smooth with mud and cow-dung. In this long house, there are two main rooms such as back room is called 'Nansra' wherein a platform is constructed in a part to keep valuable belongings of the family especially 'rontak' (rice vessels) and major part is used as living room of the head of the family. The other main room in front part is used for guests. This room is called 'Mazara' and also used as storehouse for keeping rice 'maidop'. A part from this, the room is also used to keep the death body of any member of the family before final rite.

Besides the traditional house type, Maitrari and Rongdani Rabha groups have four types of houses such as (i) Nok Chung Kai (main house) (ii) NOK thap (house for young and children) (iii) NOK Sara (kitchen) and (iv) Masunak (cow shed). Arrangements of rooms for the entire family members and also for storing material, keeping livestock etc. are made

according to a traditional system. Nok-Chung Kai (sleeping room for elderly persons parents) 'moja' (sleeping room for son and daughter in-law) 'Tok-lab' (sleeping room for adult children), 'Bar-dam Jibra' and 'Bar-dam Sashra' (fire place), 'mai-jham' (store room of rice packed with straw), 'To-grab' (store room of 'jonga's of chako (rice-bear), 'Rantak' (room for keeping rice vessels), 'Budaba-bai' (special room for worship of deities), 'Noksara' or 'Nok-pimung' (kitchen) etc. are essential arrangements inside the houses. Besides, separate arrangements of rooms for live stocks such as 'Dob-ka' (for pig and goats), 'To-nohar' (compartment for poultry) and 'Bakhanok' (fire wood keeping place).

In most of the groups of the Rabha traditional houses are constructed with thatched roofs sloping down in two sides with the erection of hard wooden pillar specially prepared by Sal tree in Sal predominate areas. In case of poor family bamboo pillars are also common. The walls of the houses are made of bamboo being plastered by mud mixed with cow-dung Fence around the compound of the houses including courtyards is made by earthen wall about 4 to 5 feet height supported by bamboo fencing is common.

4. Livelihood: Agriculture is the main way of livelihood adopted by the Rabhas. The majority of communities are mostly based on agriculture as their survival. In the early days they followed the practices of 'Hamjar' (Jhum or Shifting cultivation) cultivation in the border area of Meghalaya. As plains tribes, the Rabha also follow the practices of both Ahu and Sali cultivation. Rather, different pulses, mustard seeds, Jute, vegetable are cultivated as Rabi crops. But the possession of land is an important aspect in the field of development of cultivation. Insufficient of cultivation land, non-availability of irrigation facilities, lack of improved methods of cultivation etc. causes a major problem of cultivation.

In addition to agriculture, considerable sections of the Rabhas are engaged in fishing, forestry, mining and quarrying. Handicraft and handlooms are other major significant employment generating activities of the community. The Rabha women are expert in procuring raw materials, spinning and weaving. It is seen that the weaving is not only a contributory source of income for their domestic life but also a part and parcel of material culture. By reason of changing socio-economic structure, the Rabha women folk are now tending on using modern tools in weaving than that of indigenous method.

5. Dress and Ornaments: The dress and ornaments of the Rabhas are traditionally inheritance and has exceptional designs. The Rabha women are generally used to wear three tier clothes. They usually wear Riphon, Kambung, Khodabang (Thoprang). As a major traditional dress Riphon is tied to wear covering from waist to knee and Khambung is wrapped to cover the breast. They also used Khodabang or Thoprang covering on the head. Some women also used to wear a set of cloth tied from breast to the knee. This cloth is known as Lemphota.

The male dresses of the Rabhas are of varies types. Among them Pajal or Gamsa is one of the most important dresses. It is usually of four to five feet in length and one and half feet in breadth. But, the size may be varied according to the age and figure. Besides, Jama, Pajar (neck cloth), Buksil etc. are other clothes for daily and occasional use.

Some other dresses are also common for both male and female sexes such as Pachar or Pachra, Phali etc. Pachar or Pachra is used as wrapper in winter season as warm cloth. This cloth is six feet in length and four feet in breadth. It is made with 'endi' threads which are commonly found in Assam. Phali is cloth tied around the waist. Besides these, Taugu, Khosne, Chengkhan, Bakshali, Pashar alor, Kumbai-khambai etc. various clothes are worn by male and female. The Maitory and Rongdani Rabhas, Pati, Dahari and Bitalia Rabhas have been using the ornaments being used by Assamese folk such as- Keru, Jumka, Thuria etc. put on in ear; Jonbiri, Golpatamoni, Chandra har, Siki, Pai-juk etc. wear in neck; Kharu, Gamkharu, Bala etc. put on in hand and Nupur put on in legs, Angthi etc.

The Koch group inhabiting in different parts of Assam especially in northern part of the Brahmaputra have also been using different types of ornament like Muda-Kur (ear ornament made of gold or silver), Bul-dukum (ornament inserted in upper parts of ears, made of gold or silver), Nakum par (nose ornament made of gold or silver), Chandapa bakak (bracelet wear in the wrists of hands made of silver or copper), Bali (ornament inserted in the lower part of nose made of gold or silver) etc.

5. Food and Drink: Rice is the major staple food of the community. They use to cook rice along with vegetables, meat, fish etc. In early past the Rabhas used to eat meat gathered from hunting of wild animals. But in the changing time they used to rear pig, duck, goat, fowl etc. which they take as curry. There have been the practices of sacrificing animals as rituals of worship. Apart from meat they also use to take fishes, snails, tortoise, crabs etc. after fishing and collecting by various means. Some species of insects like 'Japa poka' are considered as traditional delicious dishes. The Rabha community of different groups have practice of preparing and consuming indigenous drinks being prepared from rice known as 'Choko', 'Makham', 'Sinchina' etc. these rice beers are used as offering to the deities in various rites and rituals and also welcoming and offering to the guests in the community. The various types of rice beers are 'Chusa', 'Chinak' and 'Chithar'.

The Rabhas used to take three square meals a day i.e. breakfast, dinner and supper. Besides, rice they also take flatten rice, 'Pitha' (bread) of different varieties, 'Laru' 'Panilaru', 'Pongna bhat', 'Topla' etc. all prepared from rice. These subsidiary food items are very common in all sections of the Rabhas. The Rabhas have the practice of preparing many items of meat like pok, mutton, duck, chicken etc. in socio-religious ceremonies and festivals. However, such meal items are completely not in use by a section of Rabha communities who follow Vaishnavite religious. They prepare various qualities of 'Nakham', 'Sidal', etc. from the fish. 'Gaja' and 'Mikhi' being prepared from bamboo shoots are delicious food items of the Rabhas.

6. Weapons: The Rabhas had the evidences of using different weapons since the antiquities. According to ethnographic notes of Friend-Pereira 'from the old swords and rhinoceros hide shields possession of some families it would appear the Rabhas were martial race and indulgent in warfare' at prehistoric time (Friend Pereira, 1838). The Rabha have used variety of traditional weapon in their domestic life and many others social activities. The main weapons used by the Rabhas are Khusung, Khapak or Dhal, Taral (Taruwal), Thungri (Taruwal), Khapar, Jonghodo, jong banduk (local made gun), Kangka (Dau), Bakeng (axe), Kachi, Kodal etc. there also some other weapons that used in difference social function are Fikjuwari, Thaurafijimik, bol-bolap, Changi, Torjap, Mewapatra, Deokhar, Handa Shurkhang, Shul etc. (Rabha, 1975). In early period, deferent types of 'dhal' (shield) made of animal skin and Tarwal (sword) were used by Rabha households. Besides these weapons, different weapons and instruments have been found that relates with fishing, hunting and agricultural activities. Among the important domestic tools are pantan (long knife), kangklo (curved-knife), khujeng (spade), kinchi (scissor), selu (spear), bakeng (axe), langar (spear like pointed weapons) etc are have to be said traditional weapons available in Rabhas.

7. Musical instruments: The Rabha by tradition are music lovers. They have rich cultural heritage of musical instruments. The musical instruments used since immemorial times are of numerous and varieties types (Rabha, 20). They may be classified as per Indian musical tradition. E.g. (i) Tata type (string instruments) like Badungduppa, Gamena etc. constructed from bamboo tube. (ii) Bitata type (instrument with leather cover) like varieties of drums such as kham tarsi etc. (iii) Sushira type (wind based instruments) like buburenga (mouth organ made of reed) singa, bransi, karanol etc. and (iv) Ghana type (wood and metal based instruments) like Chengchap (cymbal), Gomena, singa etc.

Musical instruments of the Rabhas are used in religious ceremonies, fairs and festivals and also in entertainments. However, there are some superstitions and taboos associated with the musical instruments. Instruments like Badungduppa, kara and daidi are allowed to play only in the place of worship of traditional deities. The priests of surchung, Rungdung, Pam and Tentong clans (barai) can only play these instruments. Besides, instruments, like Singga, brangsi or bransi etc. have restriction in playing in other areas except at fishing place or lake and night time respectively.

8. Social Life: The Rabha is a distinctive community having rich socio-cultural heritage. The social life of the community is governed by traditional social system having certain rites and ritual, social beliefs, practices and customs (Hakacham, 2019). So far the social customary practices are concerned the Rabha households were originally formed by matriarchal system of inheritance. The 'Barai' clan descends from matrilineal groups but in due course of time the system has been changed into patriarchal whereas the female child inherits only certain properties such as ornaments, weaving implements and other household materials. It is worth mentioning that by following the practices of adopting groom known as 'Nok Dhankay' in remote villages among certain sections of the Rabhas matriarchal system of family still exists. Here, it may be referred the statements of Friend Pereira (1911) in his ethnographic notes on the Rabhas in Census Report of 1911. "It is an interesting fact that the Rabhas seem to be in a state of transition from the matriarchal to the patriarchal form of family life. At present days also it is seen that respect is always mark out in the female line and to be get marriage girls must belongs to the mother's clan (barai). It can also believe from the fact is that at some inaccessible period the matriarchal was in full vitality.

8.1. Rites and Rituals Related to Birth: Like other community, Rabhas have certain habitual rules related to the child birth. Of course, there are regional differences of rules amongst the various clans of the Rabhas. They however, propitiate a household deity known as 'Bey-ma-bay' especially by Rongdani and Maitory groups. But the other groups offer a sacrifice to 'Kshetor' (Jokhini) daity. They also offer a sacrifice on the bank of a stream or 'beel'. These offers are performed for save delivery and to eradicate other complicacies that may come with the birth of a child. There is also the ritual of taking 'KOS' (a kind of sanctified thread) from an 'Oja' (indigenous medicine practitioner) to protect pregnant women from evil spirits. The mother remains unclean till the date on which the umbilical cord of the baby falls. There is also the ritual of purification ceremony among Pati, Bitalia, Totala, Hana and Dahari groups. But the process of purification varies slightly. The Pati and Bitallia Rabhas have more or less similar purification ceremony. The ceremony has two types such as (i) provisional and (ii) final. The provisional ceremony is observed on 4th day in case of a new born girl while it is on 5th day in case of new born boys. Till this day, pollution of mother continues and they have to remain away from domestic works. Besides, whole of the family members also remain untouched with religious and other secret rites and ritualistic activities.

The purification ceremony or 'Pachuti' is the day on which a newly born baby is given a name by the mother and father. On the purification day people from neighbour and relatives come and help in cleaning the house with cow-dung and sanctified water is spread in the entire premises. With the purification of all the members of household by taking bath and also the bay is bathed with water mixed up with milk and basil leaf. The hair of the baby is then cut by the maternal uncle or father. This is followed by placing of the baby on a wooden platform covered by a new cloth and a Puja is done in the name of god. The head of the baby is touched with 5 numbers of arrows and 5 bows made of bamboo and changes 4 arrows by each bow towards four directions and one arrow upwards, which is done by an experienced woman. Further the process of purification of the baby is done involving a number of rituals

like shaving of hair by maternal uncle or father, touching baby's hand with sword, knife, 'Dao' etc. in case of boy; touching hands with cotton gin made of wood, in case of girl.

This provisional purification is followed by final purification after a month of baby's birth day. During these 30 days of pollution there is taboo of prohibition of the family from taking part in socio-religious ceremonies. The mother is kept in restriction to enter kitchen, cowshed, place of deities in the house, granary, temple, etc. On the day of final purification ceremony sanctifying the house and prayer of deity with offering of articles are essential. Besides, father of the new born child offers rice-beer and feast to the people attending the ceremony. The old women involved at the time of giving birth of the child is rewarded with cash and kind especially cloth. It may be noted that purification ceremony or 'Pachuti' is celebrated with a slight differentiations amongst the various groups of Rabha like Pati, Totla, Hana, Koch and Dahari. But the Rongdani and Maitori groups did not observe such purification ceremony on the occasion of birth of a new baby. Of late, these groups have also been affirmed to observe the purification ceremony in the changing socio-cultural circumstances under the influence of Hinduism.

8.2. Religion and magico-religious rites and deities: The Rabha are animist in their religious traditions since the early days. Friend-pereira in his Ethnographic notes on the Rabhas (Census Report, 1911) has mentioned the Rabha as animists. Their religious philosophy is mainly based on animism. But it may be mentioned that the influence of Hinduism has a far reaching impact on the religious tradition and structure of different groups of the Rabhas. Since the early forties there has been a widespread movement of Hinduism and a larger section of the Rabhas have adopted Hinduism. Besides, the society and groups of the Rabhas have also constantly in the process of Sanskritisation and Christianisation (Singha, 2004). The advent of Christian Missionaries in the Rabhas inhabiting areas and preaching of doctrine of Christianity and publication of such doctrine by the British Foreign and Bible society (1909) first in Rongdani dialect in 1909 had to be said as the process of Christianization among the Rabhas. On the other hand, the process of Sanskritization and influence of Vaishnavite cult has also tremendous impact on religious traditions of the Rabhas.

Despite of the facts, the Rabhas by and large continues to be animists. But the present trend in Rabha religion shows the practice of combination of Hinduism and Animism. The Rabhas attribute their way of life and soul to the inanimate objects and natural phenomena. They continue to be the worshipers and followers of supernatural being- primarily 'Rishi'. The Rabhas believe that 'Rishi' is the supreme creator of the world and resides in heaven. He is the supreme creator of all deities and spirits. Therefore, he is remembered first among all the God and Goddesses. According to Allen B.C. "Their Chief God is Rishi and is represented by a pot of rice on a bamboo platform to which offerings of fowls and pigs are made." (Allen B.C. 1905). So, the animist tribe like the Rabhas primary God is 'Rishideo' or 'Charpak'. 'Rishi Deo' is the transformation of 'Shiva'. So he is worshiped in various forms. The Rabhas worship 'Kali' as 'Hasang', 'Kamakhya' as 'Kechaikhati', 'Laksmi' as 'Grimbuda' in different forms, time and locations and offer fowl, goat, buffalo, etc. as according the Rabhas 'Tikka' (Daini) is most dangerous. So, 'Tikka' is worshiped and offered food to please.

The traditional Rabha tribes in different times have been organizing different magico-religious rites related to verities of deities. The 'Puja' offering and deities associated with magico-religious rites are grouped as given below:

- i. The various religious worships are mainly Hasongpuja, Rantak puja, Kancho puja, Baikho puja, Mairabai puja, Khuchumbai puja, khokshi puja, Kali puja, Kechaikhaiti and Manasa puja.

- ii. The various worships based on folk beliefs and customs are mainly Paura deo, Lakhar deo, Bohali deo, Khelaram puja, Kuber debotar puja, Bera Hasubai puja etc.

Based on verities of deities and spirits, the worships are mainly- Daini or Tikka (witch), Yokhini, Bira, Laiksh Debota, etc. In Rabha magico-religious ties there are two categories of deities are emerged. They are (i) those deities whose rites are annually performed as per the day and time scheduled jointly by the masses of the locality for the welfare of the villagers is known as 'Bay-Dhangkhay' (benevolent deity) in Rongdani and Maitory groups. (ii) Those deities whose rites are performed on the need basis for preventing any kind of illness or in order to cure any disease with the help of Oja or Ojani (exorciser) are known as 'Bay Kakkay (Malevolent deity). The rites associated with sacrifice of animals. The rites is performed by socially appointed priests who is known as Oja or Deuri and he is helped by an assistant priest who is known as 'Tokbra'. In Rongdani and Maitory groups the priests are inhabited as according to the high status of a few clans or 'barsai' such as 'Rongdung, Churchung, Bargchung, Tengtang, Pam etc. The major deities of Rabha's are discussed below:-

i. Rishideo or Rntak deity: Rishi is the main household deity of the Rabhas. Rishi is also known by the name 'Rantak' in Rongdani and Maitory sections while the Koch section calls it 'Runtuk'. Rantak is the meaning of 'pitcher of rice'. Rantak or Rantuk is placed in the northwestern corner of the main house on a bamboo platform. The pitcher or runtuk is full of rice. In this pitcher the household deity 'Lakshmi' Goddess is supposed to be seated as believed by the Rabhas. The Rabhas since the ancient time this pitcher of rice is considered as household deity and puja is offered in the auspicious day of 'Bihu-Sankranti' and also in 'Nawabhat' (feast of new rice). In the ritual there is sacrifice of bowl an in the end of the offering rice-beer (chako), feast of meat etc. take place.

The Koch group worships Runtuk along with 'Basek'. Basek is believed to be the younger sister or companion of the Runtuk. A pitcher containing rice is also kept in the right side of Runtuk as Basek. The importance of Runtuk and Basek is very high in Koch Rabhas. The deity is worshiped before commencement of marriage ceremony, harvesting ceremony etc.

ii. Hasang: Hasang is a mainly deity of the Rangdani Rabhas. Hasang is the combination of 13 deities. These deities are (i) Langachara, (ii) Koinang (iii) Fedor (iv) Langacha (v) Tura (vi) Darmang (vii) Kolaka (viii) Pajamba (ix) Burabadi (x) Khuchuri (xi) Tray-nang and (xii) Chari. The symbol of Darmang is a stone and kept in the highest- position. It is known as 'Runujumuk' in Rabha. The Darmang and other deities are placed in a straight line. First of all the main deity Darmang is worshiped which is followed by other deities. In the worship a special 'Bhog' or Phok-Chak curry is prepared with 'Dhekia' (a fern) phok-chak leave and some meat of fowl, pork mixed with rice powder and salt which is dried up in a green bamboo cylinder by burning and heating. The half boiled curry 'Bhog' is offered to these deities and people gather in the worship tasted and take the curry. After worship ritual is completed and people assemble in the house of 'Takbra' or 'Deuri' and throughout the night they drink rice-beer and 'Khokshi' song is sung. So this type of worship is taken as a miniature of 'Khokshi Puja. Boys and girls in the field of Baikho exchange their love and sing the emotional Satire geet like the following:

“Ashar mashi rang fakai
Chika dhol boki ribasho
Baikhu handamise Bandai
Kafai (ching) muthung nukrjao” (Rongkho, 1981)

[Meaning: (The Goddess has come in Ahar month, oh beloved we have also met at Baikho field). This song sung in the Baikho festival and has resemblance with Bihu geet of Assamese.]

iii. Langa: Langa is another important deity of the Rabhas specially, the Pati, Rongdani and Bitalia groups. Langa literally means 'Mahadeva' - one of the greatest deities in Hindu mythology. This deity is worshiped in the jungle or in 'than' in the bank of rivers. Along with Langa four other deities such as- Dhan Kube, Thakurani, Dudh Kumar, Phul Kumar and Khonsa are also worshiped. Langapuja is offered in the month of Baisakh or Jeth with an object to have a good harvest and also to get rid of any calamity or evil that might hamper the lives properties.

iv. Baikho: Baikho is a principal deity of the Maitori group of Rabha. In the ancient time this Goddess was worshiped by all sections of the Rabhas. But now it is confined only to the Maitori and Rangdani groups only. The literal meaning of Baikho is 'bai' means deity and 'kho' means great. Hence the name indicates a great deity. In Baikho four Goddesses are worshiped such as- Susari, Nakkati, Tamai and Daduri. The Rabhas have the strong contention that 'Baikho' Goddesses were the national heroines of the Rabhas. 'Baikho' is worshiped in the fixed date and place in the jungle. In this worship 'Haimaru' song is sung. This song is the memorial song of the past heroes and heroines who were the warriors of the Rabhas. The song is sung in the chief priest's house and when the 'Haimaru' song begins no one can sleep at night. Baikho worship and festival involves a number of rituals such as 'Nok-jumkay' (spreading of rice-powder) on roofs of houses, 'Nok-Khiharkay' (purification of house), 'Killa-Dibikay' (fort construction), and 'Baikho-Trakhai' (love songs for boys and girls) etc. The Baikho festival has similarities with Assamese 'Bihu' and people have the opinion that Baikho is the Bihu of the Rabhas (Sarkar, 1989).

v. Moirabai: Moirabai is a deity commonly worshiped by the Rongdani groups. They propitiate Moirabai when there is any ailments like sudden loss of consciousness, dumb, frightening and abnormally. Like other puja a seat for 'Moirai' (peacock) is arranged and placed a replica of peacock being prepared by soft bark of bamboo. The priest begins puja with 'mantra' and offering of a pigeon fowls. If a pigeon is not ready to accept then duck is offered. There is also provision of offering a goat.

vi. Khusumbai: Khusumbai is another deity being worshiped by Rongdani Rabha groups of Goalpara. When there is a spread of diseases like allergy, swelling of bodies, skin ailments etc. Khusumbai puja is done. In this puja a cock is sacrifice as like Hasang puja. A four cornered seat arranged by creating four bamboo pole converted the deity 'Khusumbai' and placed a stone or 'Runjumuk' inside. This worshiped was done in a particular 'Than', but at present it is notice that Rabha people use to arranged it in their own courtyard of the houses. This puja is scheduled in the evening time. If the scheduled time is not maintained the puja become meaningless.

vii. Koncho deity: Koncho deity is worshiped in order to save the granary from insects, mouse, rates etc. and to keep livestock intact. Some Rabha people regard 'Koncho' as 'Lakshmi deity. So the puja is done in front of the granary.

viii. Kali deity: In Boko areas of South Kamrup among the Pati group of Rabha 'Kali Khora' and 'Hanaghora' dance form is practice. Since their dance forms there is the evidence of worshipping Kali deity. Kali has its own 'Than' and sacrifice is done. Besides, there also other significant deities such as 'paoradeo', 'Gohalideo', 'Lakhordeo', 'Khelaram devota' and 'Kuber devota'.

ix. Daini deity: Daini deity is worshiped to protect crops and to prevent people from diseases. Sometimes, Daini or Tikka deity is worshiped in individual level. In the puja sacrificing of a white cock is essential.

Daini worship is taken place when there is critical sickness of a person continues. In the worship it is established that witch craft is the possible cause of ailment. The Rabhas believe that a woman converts herself into a daini and she can inflict diseases in the body of the enemies by jugglery.

Apart from these deities and worship a number of other important deities are also found in various groups of the Rabhas. Among these mention may be made of individual deities like Bay-Ma-Bay (benevolent deity), Darmang Bay (God of good health supposed to reside at Darrong Hillock), Bera-Hachu-Bay (protector of domestic animals), Hay-Mayrang-Bay (to save from deafness, dumbness and abnormally like sufferings of human beings), Kama-Hachu Bay (to cure from skin diseases like leprosy), Mayrang-Bay (sacrifice to cure epilepsy disease), Khisam-Bay (sacrifice to cure night blindness) Achka-Bay (Goddess of water), Budha-Bay (household deity), Biswali Bay (sacrifice to cure pain), Singra Bay (to cure fever), Laikos-Bay (sacrifice to please the demon who eats man alive) and Khelaram-Bay (puja offers to save crops, fruits etc. from wild animals and insects).

9. Fair and Festivals: Like other tribal communities of North East India, Rabhas also have their own festivity. Besides, the family related festivals; there are three other types of festivals such as (i) seasonal festival (ii) festivals related to magico-religious rites and (iii) regional or restricted festivals, which are followed in Rabha community. The agricultural base festival of the Rabhas is mainly Baikho, Khoksi and 'Grawmbuda. It is comparable to those national festivals of greater Assamese i.e. Bisua, Katigasa and Domasi (Hakacham 2001). So far the festivals related to magico-religious rites, Rontak, hasang, langamara, hasimarangs etc may be mentioned, on the other Katipuja (restricted among the women folk only), Jagar or Deodhoni worship, Dadan Mela of baida, Aitham Mela of Deuripara etc. are worth mentioning festivals under regional or restricted festivals.

The Rabha observed all rites and rituals with colorful customary programmed. The different groups of Rabha celebrate their ritualistic festivals and ceremonies which coincide with their religious beliefs and faiths. The Pati Rabha group for example celebrates Rangali and Bhogali Bihu as harvesting festival like other Assamese counterpart of Assam. In case of Rangdani and Maitori groups celebration of Baikho or Khoksi puja is a ritual for the prayer of Goddess of wealth and prosperity in the month of Baisakh (mid April to mid May) just before starting agricultural activities.

Apart from these festivals a large number of religious rituals and festivals such as Hachangpuja, performed in Hachang 'Than' especially by Rangdani groups. 'Marai puja' to propitiate Goddess 'Monasa' or 'Bishahari' (the queen of serpents) is considered as an important religious festive occasion of the Pati Rabhas. The 'Marai Puja' is performed for seeking blessings against any possible outbreak of disease occurrence of natural calamities and also to propitiate serpents during the year ahead. 'Hanaghora' is another ritualistic element of the Pati Rabhas inhabiting in southern part of Kamrup district which is now observed as multi-ethnic religious festivals rather than a folk dance.

The Rabhas have been organizing 'Daon Mela' at the hillock of 'Dadan Hasu' at Daida in Goalpara district. The fair is organized every year from eight to tenth lunar of the light fortnight in the month of 'Chaitra'. The fair is organized with object of paying obeisance to Sri Rishi the creator and protector of all the lives of the universe and also to pay homage to the courage of Dadan- the first hero of the Rabhas and his able general Murukhetri.

10. Conclusion: After discussing the multifarious facets of the socio-cultural bases forming a broad based cultural heritage of the Rabhas, it has been able to draw an overall view that the Rabhas had been emerged way back in historical time. The community has wide spectrum of socio-cultural and economic traits and traditions, magico-religious rites and rituals, fair and

festivals etc. So, it is imperative to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Rabhas which are on the verge of extinction and also in the way of transformational forms.

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