CHAPTER THREE
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3.00 Contribution of Rabha litterateurs in languages other than Rabha and Assamese:

In addition to Rabha and Assamese some Rabha litterateurs have also expressed their thoughts and ideas in languages like English, Hindi and Bengali. Here the word 'Litterateur' has been used in a wider sense and it covers all authors, composers, compilers of creative literature, songs or grammars, textbooks or other literary works. If seen from this perspective then we can say that Rabha writers have made a mark in regard to showcasing their enriched culture and language before the world. Instances are few but all these sincere efforts made by Rabha writers and educationists reflect their enthusiasm and positive attitude towards exploration of new horizons and install the Rabha language, literature and culture at a dignified position. So far we have seen the emergence of only a handful of Rabha writers of calibre who have represented Rabha language, literature and culture not only in the state level but also in the national and international level. Mere mention of their scholastic achievements is enough to evaluate their contribution.

Various higher educational institutions of Assam and other socio-cultural institutions have been instrumental in several monumental efforts to nourish and preserve Rabha language and culture at large. One of the earliest of such monumental efforts have been initiated by the Gauhati University. Rajendra Nath Rabha started his research work titled *The Rabhas: Their Language and Culture* for Ph. D. in 1972. He worked under the guidance of Dr. Maheswar Neog of the Department of Assamese, Gauhati University. Unfortunately he couldn’t complete his research work. But it is a matter of great relief for the inquisitive mind and enthusiasm on the part of ABILAC (Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, Art & Culture) to published this incomplete research work of Rajendra Nath Rabha (Rajen Rabha)
titled as *The Rabhas* in 2002. Within the scope of the seven chapters of this incomplete research work of Rajendra Nath Rabha, Rabha life, culture and language with all its distinctive features attract the attention of scholars related to Rabha studies.

Under the presidency of Dr. Prafulla Dutta Goswami a workshop on Compilation of a Comparative Lexicon in Assamese, Bodo, Mishing, Karbi, Khasi and other languages of the North Eastern Region of India was held at B. Baruah College, Guwahati from 4/1/85–6/1/85. Rajen Rabha and Upen Rabha Hakacham attended that workshop. Upen Rabha Hakacham and Jibeswar Koch participated at the workshop on Standardization of Rabha Language and Preparation of Rabha dictionary held at Bilasipara College from 20/1/97–28/1/97.

As far as the international scene is concerned Upen Rabha Hakacham is the sole Rabha writer who has received accolades for his distinguished works related to Rabha language and Rabha life at large. His first international participation dates back to 1993 when he participated at the Group Discussion in one of the sessions of International Meet on Tribal and Analogous People sponsored by U.N.O. The three days long Conference (15/12/93 – 17/12/93) was held at the Indira Gandhi National Museum for Human Resources in Bhopal.

His research paper titled *Morphophonemic Change in Rabha Language* has been accepted for the International Conference on South Asian Languages (ICOSAL) held at Punjab University, Patiala from 9/1/99 - 11/1/99 and published in the proceedings.

His research article titled *Some Peculiarities of Noun Formation in Bodo, Garo and Rabha* was accepted for the 5th Himalayan Language Symposium sponsored by the Himalayan language Symposium held at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal from 13/9/99 – 15/9/99 and published in the proceedings.

A joint research paper of U. Rabha Hakacham, Th. Sarju Devi and U. V. Subbarao
Such attempts have been quite few. But through utilisation of these few opportunities Upen Rabha Hakacham has been able to familiarise the Rabha language and Rabha life with a selective group of scholars of the international community.

At the national level too, the Rabha language, literature and culture has made a niche for itself as a distinctive tribal language group of the North East of India. Inclusion of the Rabha language as a topic of discussion in many a national seminar and workshop points out to this particular merit of the Rabha language. The Rabha writers involved in such projects have also an important role to play concerning the promotion and spreadth of Rabha language and culture at large. The below mentioned workshops and seminars indicate towards this productive trend –

Under the leadership of Rajen Rabha Listi Ram Rabha and Baneswar Koch represented the Rabhas in a workshop on Politeness Exchange held at the Head Quarters of CIIL at Mysore in 1976. The workshop was sponsored by the CIIL.

Upen Rabha Hakacham presented a research article at the workshop on Treatment of Kinship Terms and Lexical Convergence held at NEHU from 2/6/92 – 6/6/92. His research article was based on the treatment of kinship terms in the Rabha language. Needless to say this particular research article had some sociological aspects worthy of discussion.

A workshop on Treatment of Gender, Number, Tense and Aspect was held at Manipur University in Imphal from 28/1/93 – 31/1/93. U. Rabha Hakacham was the sole Rabha participant to read out a paper on Gender and Number in Rabha language.

Again he was the participant at the workshop on Impersonal Construction and
Syntax held at NEHU from 18/10/93 – 22/10/93. His research paper was specifically based on the Rabha language.

He also represented the Rabha language at the workshop on *Preparation of Common Idioms in Assamese and Tribal Languages in North-East* held at Mysore from 18/10/94 – 28/10/94. It was a CIIL sponsored programme.¹

Apart from these efforts some Rabha writers have made their contribution in the form of essays. Their works lay scattered in occasional souvenirs and journals. R.C. Rabha has contributed several articles related to the Rabha language. Some of his major articles are: *Rabha Number System* which has been published in the souvenir of BRKR, 1993. *Rabha Case System* has been published in *Tiray*, 1995.² *Tense System in Rabha* has been published in the souvenir *Mogso* of BRKR, 1994.³ *The Syllable in Rabha* has been published in the souvenir of Dodan Mela Silver Jubilee, 1995. *Rabha Phonemes* has been published in *Purbanchal* of D.P.R.S., 1997.⁴


It has been seen that after Rabha and Assamese, majority of Rabha writers have an inclination towards the English language. Most of the articles written in English are based on different aspects of the Rabha language. Articles on Rabha literature and culture is quite few in number and in quality too. Inspite of this it is a healthy trend to see the flourish of the study of Rabha language. So far CIIL is that prominent institution which has been giving full assistance for the full nourishment and spreadth of Rabha language and culture in the national level. It is
followed by ABILAC in the state level which has sponsored several projects for the development of Rabha language and literature.

Few Rabha writers have ventured to write on various aspects of Rabha life other than Rabha, Assamese and English. So far we see quite a small number of Rabha writers' writings published in Bengali and Hindi. Sushil Kumar Rabha’s article on Rabha life and culture titled *Rabha Sanskriti O Jeevandhara* is one of the articles published in Bengali. Here the writer explores certain social aspects related to the Rabhas residing in the various districts of West Bengal. No doubt there is a blend of Bengali culture in the socio-cultural life of the Rabhas in West Bengal. Yet the Rabhas of West Bengal have been able to retain many of their traditional values and customs. Those have remained intact in the wear and tear of time. Some geo-political differences may be there. But the Rabhas residing in the areas of Jalpaiguri in W.Bengal have close proximity to their fellow brethren residing in the different districts of Assam. This socio-cultural and linguistic proximity between the Rabhas of W.Bengal and Assam have immense scope of exploration and conduct comparative studies related to various aspects of the Rabhas of W.Bengal and Assam.

Amongst Rabha writers whose works have been published in Hindi Charu Mohan Rabha’s name is worth mentional. His brief introduction to Rabha life *Rabha Jana Joati: Ek Parichay* is an all-inclusive portrait of Rabha life at a glance. The writer has cited historians view concerning the migration of the Rabhas from Tibet to the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam. Apart from this he has also discussed about social customs and mundane life of the Rabhas. This article of Charu Mohan Rabha is an informative one which enlightens the people of the Hindi speaking zone about the Rabha people and their culture. In regard to Rabha literature the onset of renaissance was late in the last part of the 20th century. The publishing of the Rabha literary magazine *Champai* (1978–1982) has been considered as a milestone in this process. Rabha litterateur and critic Listi Rabha Rongkho was the architect of this
short-lived yet significant literary magazine. Visionaries like Rajen Rabha, Mani Rabha, Rajen Pam, Prakash Rabha, Charu Mohan Rabha were among the senior Rabha writers who contributed towards this progressive cause of Rabha literature. Following their footsteps writers of the later period such as Rajat Chandra Rabha, Jibeswar Koch and Upen Rabha Hakacham has continued this trend. It is worth mentionable that Rajen Pam wrote a dance-drama titled *Hamara Hindustan Hai* in Hindi. But this dance-drama is still in (unpublished) manuscript form. From the title of this dance-drama it can be concluded that it bears the message of harmony and national integrity. It is indeed unfortunate that such a work of Rajen Pam is yet to be recognised in published form. As quoted earlier Rajen Pam and his fellow litterateurs of the renaissance period of Rabha literature couldn’t do much concerning writing exclusive books in languages other than Rabha and Assamese. But people like Rajen Rabha, Mani Rabha, Charu Mohan Rabha, Listi Rabha Rongkho, Sarat Chandra Rabha, Upen Rabha Hakacham and Sushil Kumar Rabha have tried to do the needful by contributing substantial articles in English, Bengali and Hindi. Upen Rabha Hakacham, Rupak Rabha, Charu Mohan Rabha, etc. are involved in translation of poems, songs and short stories in Hindi as well as in English under the guidance of Ramanika Gupta (All India Tribal Literary Forum) which will be published shortly. No doubt their efforts are laudable. But there is still much to be done so as to familiarise Rabha language, literature and Rabha life among the other language speaking communities of India and abroad through languages like English, Hindi, Bengali, etc. Upcoming Rabha writers of the new generation need to divert their attention to this unexplored field. They should consider the works of their predecessors as their ideal and embark on their mission to explore Rabha language and literature in mediums other than Rabha and Assamese.

Before concluding this chapter the name of a budding young Rabha writer need to be mentioned. Saswati Rabha is that budding writer who has tried to explore different vistas of children literature in English. Her poems illustrate the colourful world of innocent children
where even a pet cat gains much significance from its owner (the child). Her poem My pet Cat published in the seventh issue of the school magazine Spectrum (2002 St. Mary’s High School, Maligaon) portrays this aspect of Saswati Rabha’s writing. Her short story The Birthday Gift published in the tenth issue of Spectrum (2005) describes the tragedy of a little boy’s life after he lost his parents in an accident. He was adopted by a childless couple later. Though he didn’t actually get the parental love from them, yet he had no grievance. For on his birthday they presented him the most valuable gift – they brought home his sister who got separated from him after his parents death. The sympathetic attitude of the elderly couple in the story shows that there is still humanity left in this complex society of today. So, it can be seen that there is a promising future ahead for Rabha writers who have been contributing towards children literature in languages other than Rabha and Assamese.

Notes & References:

1. The above mentioned all research papers which were read out in CIIL, have been included in a book Language of the North East (edited by Duttabaruah, P.N.) in 1997.


4. Rabha, Rajat Chandra: Rabha Phonemes, Purbanchal, Edited by Rabha, Dashrath, Published by Dudhnoi Purbanchal Rabha Samaj, 1997, p. 139-142.


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