CHAPTER- IV
CHAPTER IV
PRESENT STATUS OF THE RABHA LANGUAGE

4.0: Present status of the Rabha Language:

Rabha, being linguistic offshoot of Sino-Tibetan stock possesses some of richness of its linguistic properties. Besides, it has rich traditional folk literatures, folk songs of Baikhu and songbai puja tales, parables and lalables, myth and legend, riddles and sayings are still prevailing among the tribe.

The foundation of written Rabha literature was first initiated by the colonial and Missionaries. Hemiltion, being the first of this kind collected some basic vocabulary of the ethnic people, including Koch and Rabha, (Comparative vocabularies: 1800); and he was followed by Hudgson (Koch, Bodo and Dhiamal Tribes: 1847), Williamson (Vocabulary of the Garo and Koch Dialects: 1869), Damant (Vocabulary of 22 Matrai Rabha: 1880), Hunter (A comparative Dictionary of the Languages of India and High Aria: 1968) and Grierson (LSI, Vole-III, Pt-II, 1903). They collected folk-tales, vocables, narratives, comparative vocabularies and grammatical notes and rendered Biblical gospels into Rabha.

In the first part of the 20th Century, the British missionaries made a remarkable work for the Rabha: they had published small book, entitled “Jisuni Nemkai Markhai Saikai Katha”, The Gospel of Mark, translated into Rongdani variety of Rabha, published by British and Bible society of London, 1909, printed at the Baptist Mission press, Calcutta. It is, as per record, the first published book, or text, written in Bengali script.

In the early decades of the 20th Century a large books have been published by the British Missionary setup in 1933 in Davitala in lower Assam though they had an intent to preach their religion, but they had published some
books on their purpose in the native language of the regions, and thus they had founded literature. Of course, these were not the instance of creative literature.

The first Rabha literature work done by a native writer, Purna Chandra Koch (Rabha) is “Penem Lamon Dam” (PLD : 1926) and it is a collection of Rabha lyrics and hymn written in lucid poetic manner with sublime philosopher of the supreme God of the tribe, “Risi”. It can be rightly termed as “noble numbers” and songs celestial”4.

Then two books have been published by Rajen Rongkho: (I) Rabha Zibra, Orgi (1948) and (II) Songraya Rabha Katha (1951)5 and they are followed by the two Rabha primers’! (I) Phai nang phoraiya, by the Rabha Baptist church Mission, (RBCU : Desitola : 1963 and (II) Rabha primers by Jogen Bantho in 1963. In this same year, a good collection of poetry was published by Lokhmni Phenan, in the name & style “Bandana Chandra”(1963), and they were followed by a poetry book by Khagen Hato, “Hachuini Khurang” in 1963.

4.1.0: Process of standardization initiated :

It is noteworthy that an endeavour was made to press the Govt. to introduce the Rabha language in the primary school in the sixty decades. As per records, a memorandum was submitted by to the Union Home Affairs. UN, Dhevor while he visited Shillong in 1961, and this delegate team was led by the veteran social figure Dukheswar Koch (1902 – 1980). But after the formation of the premier literary organization of the Rabhas of North-East Region, Bebak Rabha Krauang Runchum (BKRR : 8th April, 1973) at Ghaksa near, Gossaigaon town in lower Assam, again the demand for introducing Rabha Language in the schools was raised by this Runchum. Eventually, an accord was signed between the Runchum and the Assam Govt. On 9th December 1987, and then Rabha was introduced as a language subject in the schools of lower Assam on 19th March, 1988.
Thus, the Runchum has been playing a pivotal and proactive role for initiating the process of standardization of the Rabha language since its very inception, and in this regard, seminar and workshop have been organized.

Now, it has been a crystal clear that the process for initiating for the language development among the Indo-Mongoliods in NE region was seen in the seventy decades of the 20th Century. It was vividly opined by Chatterjee in his Monograph.

*The Indo-Monogoloid peoples are slowly rediscovering their language .... A new stir from literary is now noticeable among most of the speakers of the various Kirata language. This should be welcomed as a factor in a New Indian Renaissance in which Aryan and non-Aryan have both a part ..........*(Chatterjee : 1974 : 182-183)*

The Runchum, thus started to shape the Rabha language since its seventy decades and undertaken to produce the text books, including many scheme for publishing the dictionary grammar, terminology and other related matter. It is now endeavouring more books for preaching the Rabha language for non-Rabha speaking children, conducting various Diploma course examinations. Some of famous poets and writers of Rabha literature are to be named here: Purna Chandra Koch (Rabha), Aghar Bantho, Rajen Rongkho, Prasanna Pam, Lakhi Phenan, Parikhit Rabha, Jogat Kama, Rajen Pam, Nirendra Koch, Amarsing Koch, Indra Mohon Koch, Jibeswar Koch, Upendra Ch. Rabha, (Hakacham), Listi Rongkho, Prakars Rabha, Samakeswar Rabha, Janth Cheranga, Sahdey Suksak, Amanta Rabha, Binay Rungdung, Hima Rabha.

They are all creative writers, having their talents in their respective literary genre.

The total population of Rabha in enumerated by the census the past as below:
1) 1971 : 1,38,630
2) 1981: No census was held in Assam.
3) 1991 : 2,36,931
4) 2001 : 2,77,571

The factor of decreasing of Rabha language speaking population is due to unstable bilingual position, what Grierson once opined that “Rabha is fast dying own”, it is still prevalent. As per data collected here in Goalpara district of tower Assam, most younger section of Rong-Mai dialect group are gradually getting oblivious of their dialects, and instead, they speak patois of Assamese.

According to Gait--

*the Koch language is now practically extinct, but the trace of it which remain show that it was almost identical with Garo,* (Gait : 1990 : p.7)*

This day, an apex body literary body of the Rabha, that is, the Runchum is making an utmost effort to develop the language and thus make it popular among the non-Rabha speaking people. The various phases of Rabha Diploma course examination. Pt-I, II & III have been conducted by the examination Board.
Notes & references:


2. Besides other Missionary works, Grierson had some specimens of Rabha dialects, which are instances of prose — literature in Rabha.

3. Souvenir of Golden Jubilee of Rabha Baptist Church Union (RBCU), Debitola.


