5.1: As the foregoing chapters show that Rabha is a basic branch of Sino-Tibetan family of languages, and it is spoken in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam by the substantial number of the Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group – the Rabhas. Besides, it is also spoken in some regions of North-Eastern part of India, Nepal, Bhutan and Nepal, too.

As the methodology, synchronic study is concerned, this study is envisaged for collecting materials from the Monolingual, native speakers of the jurisdiction and as a primeval sources, ur tex, journals and periodicals have been consulted.

It is amazing a fact that there are still prevalent some of myth and legends among the Rabhas as to their generic name and nomenclature, saying that the powerful deity ‘Risi’ brought them from ‘Rang-krang’ (‘heaven’, invariably the lofty Tibet), and as such, they became ‘Rabha’ (Rabha, D : 1973 & Rabha, M : 2006).2

Another legend narrates that the kith and kins of the Rabhas, the Garos brought them for better agricultural purpose, in Garo, ‘raba’, ‘rabaha’ means ‘to bring’, and in course of time, they were named as ‘rab ha’, ‘raba’. In turn, the Rabhas call the Garos as ‘mutang’ (name-keepers).3 Jose opines…..“The native Rabha refer to themselves as ‘Rabatang’, as the aspirated plosives bh, dh & jh are a feature of Assamese influence “(Jose : 2000).4 John M. Cosh recorded it in both terms ‘raba’ and ‘rabha’, (John M. Cosh : 1975).5

It is noteworthy that there were scrappy and sporadic notes on the oneness, origin and nomenclature of the Rabhas, as envisaged by colonial and native
writers. But Hamilton rightly asserted".... The Rabhas are entirely the same with the Pani Koch". (Francis Buchanan Hamilton: 1810, Reprint 2014)⁶

Today, they are working jointly for the upliftment of their language and culture, forming the apex literary body, “Bebak Rabha Kraurang Runchum” (All Rabha Sahitya Sabha) on 8th April, 1973.⁷

Rabha language comprises three principal dialects: Rongdani, Maitory and Kocha (invariably Songa, Chunga, Pani Koch). Linguistic variations among Rongdani and Maitory is quite minimal, and there lies a marked difference with that of Kocha, but these are fairly intelligible. The other groups Pati, Dahuri, Hana and Bitaliya speak the patois of Assamese.

5.2: Principal Findings:

It is found that except Kocha, the rest two dialect speaking people, Rongdani and Maitory speech communities are mostly in ‘unstable’ bi-lingual position, and they switch easily to Assamese, and this factor reminds of what Gait⁸ and Grierson⁹ opined that ….. “Rabha language was fact dying”.

The immediate cognates of Rabha are Bodo (Boro-Kochary), Garo, and Tiwa. Besides, there are a great similarities and genetic relatedness among the Rabha and Lepcha, Limbu, and Dzongkha languages.¹⁰

It is fascinating to note that Rabha is a tone language, having the two degrees, high and low, and it retains the same among the dialectal varieties.

Besides, Rabha, invariably in Kocha variety, possesses the fricative labio-dental feature /f/; but Rongdani and Maitory do not exhibit it; but these varieties retain plosive bi-labial feature /ph/. Most of sino-Tibetan speech, such as Bodo (Boro-Kochary), Garo and Tiwa do not inherit this rare fricative labio-dental feature.

Another distinct feature of Rabha is palatal/c/ phoneme, but it is not found in Bodo (Boro-Kochary).
Rabha vocabularies are rich, having 'physical anatomy' (Saha:1981).11 It has a substantial number of classifiers and determiners.

Another feature is highly fascinating, as Rabha tribe is matrilineal system and its kinship terms are also unique one.

The present study has shown and explored the linguistic variation of Rabha.

5.3 : Scope for the Further Study and Investigation:

The present-day situation of Rabha is promising one. It was first introduced in 1988 as language subject in Assam, with modified Assamese script, and under the aegis of the Runchum, some text books and other related text books, word-book, anthology of prose and poetry have been published.

It goes without saying that the first Rabha literary works were initiated by the British Missionary. The first printed book, say ur tex was found as 'Markni Saikai Katha' in 1909. It was followed by a native writer Purna Chandra Koch (Rabha) in 1926. The book, entitled 'Penem Lamon Dam' was an anthology of religious hymns, in lyrical style.

This is the first book in its kind of creative literature in Rabha, and can be termed as 'noble numbers' and 'songs celestial'.

In fine, it is to be mentioned that today's standard Rabha language is an outcome of plan and normative process, which was first initiated by the Runchum.12 Generally, the core systems of each dialect have been explored and eventually the configuration of the language have been made thereof.

There lies an ample scope for further research in this line, specially taking micro-level analysis of the subject, with a socio-linguistic view.
Notes and references:


3. As stated earlier in foregoing chapter 1, an aged old women narrated this tale: 'we call the Garos as 'mutang' (name-keepers').

   Refer to 'Apasong Agana' by Dewansingh Rangmathu, where this legend was also narrated.


7. The premier literary body of the Rabhas was set up in 1973, 8th April, at Ghaksa Village near Gossaigaon town in the district of Kokrajhar, Since its inception this Runchum is playing a pivotal role for the upliftment of the Rabha language.


12. The Runchum organized a national convention at Hahim, near Boko (Kamrup, Assam) in 1987 and all other Rabha social organizations were invited there. The unanimous resolution was taken for initiating the normative process for Rabha standard language, and the Govt. of Assam recognized this language in the primary Schools of Assam, in 1988.