This is my modest attempt to study the Rabhas, a plains tribe of Assam, applying all the latest techniques and tools of research. The inspiration to undertake a sociological study of the Rabhas came from Dr. V. V. Rao, Professor Emeritus, Gauhati University. Dr. Rao carefully scrutinised the final draft and made a number of suggestions which I carried out.

Social surveys and research are growing in extent and importance. Professional groups and individuals, public-spirited citizens, private organizations, as well as governmental agencies—local, state and central—are more and more recognizing the importance of social studies as a basis for scientific thinking and for social planning.

Students of social life have for a long time realized that human society and its social institutions are undergoing complex and rapid changes.

It is increasingly evident that these changes have produced new needs, new problems, new organizations, new
social systems and new ideologies which have exerted new influences and new effects on human personality and social institutions. Such a rapidly evolving social and economic order requires fundamentally new and thoroughgoing knowledge of social forces and social processes, only such knowledge can serve as a guide in the formulation of scientific principles concerning social life as well as provide a guide to sound social planning and social administration.

The work is an empirical study and the result of a long association with the tribes. It deals with the origin, social institutions, individual life-cycle, economic pursuits, law and justice, religion and rituals and culture of the Rabhas.

Although the Rabha country was visited by several anthropologists in the past, no systematic study of the Rabhas was made. My interest in the study of Rabhas dates back to the year 1976, when I got an opportunity to reside in a tribal hostel campus at Goalpara, the then sub-divisional headquarters of Goalpara sub-division. My wife was the superintendent of the hostel and as such I spent most of my holidays there and got well acquainted with the tribal guardians of the boarders, most of whom were Rabhas. As a result of this association, I have relied mainly on field work.

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student of cultural history. I was actuated by the old latent desire to study the Rabha tribals. And I chose this topic for my Ph.D. thesis.

Dr. (Miss) Niru Hazarika, Reader in Political Science, Gauhati University agreed to be my guide and extended co-operation at every stage and evinced keen interest in my project from the very beginning without which it would not have been possible for me to complete the work. I shall remain indebted to her for the tremendous inspiration she provided me.

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Mangaldai College.