CHAPTER SIX

THE RACIAL BACKGROUND OF THE TRIBE 'RABHA'

I. ORIGIN AND AFFINITY OF THE RABHA:

The Rabha is one of the nine scheduled tribes in the Plains Districts of Assam. They are widely scattered but mostly concentrated in the districts of Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Kamrup and Darrang. Besides Assam, their distribution spreads over Meghalaya, Bangladesh, Nepal, West Bengal, Manipur etc. Different views have been expressed by different writers regarding the ethnic individuality of the tribe, its original place of abode and the relationship with other tribal groups. According to Lt. Col. Wadel, "The Rabhas were one of the branch of Kochari". Hadson also viewed in the same that Rabhas are the group of great Bodos. Major play fair had tried to trace the origin of the tribe as in the Tibetan region where from migration had taken place to Garo Hills area now in Meghalaya and then distributed in Assam plains. Dr. Grierson also held the view that the Rabha was a Hindu name of the Kocharies and many of the Rabha were actually Kocharies. On the other hand E. A. Gait identified them as a distinct tribe and said that they are also known as Totlas and Datiyal Kocharis. In this regard Rev. S. Endle ("The Kocharies" Page-83-1975) said that the Rabha of Darrang used to called themselves sometimes as Totlas. Dr. E.M. Das supported the view of E.A. Gait that the Rabhas were ethnically and culturally a distinct tribe. He said that probably the Mongoloid people
Problems of Plains Tribal Women's Education in Kokrajhar District came in successive waves from the North and Nort-Eastern region and later on formed various tribes like the Rabha, the Garo etc.

Various writers have put forwarded their view regarding the sections of this tribe. Rev. S. Endle sub-divided the Rabhas into various sections like 'Pati', 'Koch', 'Rangdaniya', 'Maitoriya', 'Bitliya', 'Songha' and 'Daburiya'. Amongst the seven sub-division among the tribe and he assigned similar places of prominence like Endle. Gait however had shown five sub-groups such as "Rangdani" "Pati", 'Maitory', Dahuri and Kachari.

According to Dr. B.M. Das among these Sub-tribes, the Rangdani Pati and the Maitory used to enjoy superior status compared to other sub-groups like Total Dahuri, Bitla, Shangha, Hana etc. He said that the Pati section is the most advanced section of the tribe and they adopted Hindu customs for all purposes and due to loss of their mother tongue had taken to speak a patois of the Assamese language. The Maitori section on the otherhands as resembled the Garos in their habit and custom. But they had a status equal to that of the Rangdani and the pati groups. "The general appearance of the Rabha show all the characteristics of the Mongolian stock, a round face, flat nose, prominent cheek tones obliquity set eyes, sallow complexion, coarse hair, scanty beard and well-developed lower extremities."
II. AREAS OF THE RABHA CONCENTRATION:

The Pati sections are quite numerous in the southern bank in the belt stretching from Gauhati to Dudhnoi. Numerically the Rangdanies are well represented on western Goalpara (south bank). The Maitories are having relatively lesser numerical strength in Assam than the Rangdanies. They are inter spersed with the Rangdhantes but their main concentration is western Meghalaya followed by pancharatna area of Goalpara. Although both the sections communicate with the same mother tongue the Rangdanies appears to be less conservative in outlook than the Maitorise. Some other lesser represented sub-groups of the tribe are Dahuri and Totla in Assam plains. The Dahuri group is to be seen in North Goalpara and the Totlas in north Kamrup area and in the northern belt of Darrang district particularly around Rowta, Udalguri and Hugrajli. In Kokrajhar district they are scattered in different places like Kochugaon, Ramfalbil and Bismuri. According to 1971 census the total population of Rabhas in Assam and specially in Kokrajhar district are 32400 and 6840 respectively. The Rabhas are found living in specific areas by a specific section although they live in a scattered manner in different places like Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and all over the North-east India. In this way Maitaries section live in Ticrikilla, Paham, Phulbari, Garo Hills of Meghalaya as well as Mechpara of South West area of Goalpara district of Assam. The Rangdanies are living at the West Goalpara from Dudhnoi to Lakhipur and Northern part of state of Meghalaya. The Pati Rabhas are
scattered in the Western part of Goalpara district from Krishnai to South Kamrup, Nawgaon, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, in the east, some of them are found in northern bank of the river Brahmaputra, namely Abhayapuri, north Shalmara, Bijni etc. Besides these areas, they are found in Koochbehar and Jolpaiguri among Koch Rabha pocket area.

On the other hand, Hana Rabhas are scattered in the southern Kamrup district and Totla, Hana, Madami and Bitolia Rabhas are found in north bank of the river Brahmaputra specially at Nalbari. Barpeta, Darrang, Shantipur and Lakhimpur district.

The Dahari Rabhas are scattered in different places like Abhayapuri, North Shalmara, Bijni and Kakoijana of Goalpara district and Koch Rabhas are found living in Dhubri and Kokrajhar district. Besides these two districts they are scattered in Koochbehar, Jolpaiguri, Darjeeling, Nepal and Bhutan. But they are known as Koch-Rajbongshi, Khatriya. In this way, in course of time, they entered into the Assam and live to some extent in every district of Assam.

III. RABHA POPULATION IN ASSAM

The numerical strength as per population census of 1991 of the Rabhas of Assam can be studied as 13,8630.

IV. RABHA POPULATION IN KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT