

TRADITION AND TRANSITION AMONG THE PLAIN LAND RABHAS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL OBSERVATION

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Abstract

In the multiethnic India the tribal people has their own identity and cultural heritage. They are distributed throughout the every corner of the country and engaged in diversified occupational pursuits. In this context the Rabhas are a little known tribal group, and in West Bengal they are mainly concentrated in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts. Geographically they can be divided into two groups, one, inhabiting in the forest and hilly areas and the other residing in the plain lands. The study was done among the Rabhas of Bochamari village who were residing with a number of other communities. The concerned people were engaged in settled agriculture and other white collar jobs. Their new occupational involvement and acceptance of the rituals and customs of Hindu religion had leaded a number of changes in their daily livelihood as well as different aspects of their social and cultural life. This paper is an attempt to highlight the issues that how the economic and religious changes altered the different organisational aspects of the plain land Rabha society.

Key Words: *Environment, Economy, Social Organisation*

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1. Introduction

Human being is recognised as the superior most living creature of the world. It is because of the fact that he deals his livelihood in an organised society and he has the possession of superior most culture than any others. The feature of present day society has not resulted in a day or two, but it has taken a prolonged period to come in this form. L.H.Morgan in his book, Ancient Society (1877), mentioned various stages of cultural evolution like savagery, barbarism and civilization. In the stage of savagery people were totally hunter gatherers; people started to do domestication and simultaneously cultivation of crops in barbarism; and finally in the stage of civilization, there occurred the use of iron implements, settled cultivation and permanent way of living and use of alphabet. In earlier the people were not well organized but gradually they find out the inconveniences of individuality and thought to work in joint venture. It made the people of isolated sectors to come together and perform the works jointly. In this way the co-operation and interaction of people made them to get organised. Again with the changes over time and changes of habitation a number of alternations had taken place in the

socio-cultural life of the people. In this context India is very important. From early historical period a number of invaders like the Shaks, the Pathans, the Moughals had come to India and established their dynasty. They started to live here permanently and their cultural tradition got admixed with the traditions of early inhabitants. As a result the socio-cultural heritage of India is a rich collection of the cultural heritage of a number of ethnic group. At present India is the second most populous nation of the World and it is a multiethnic, multireligious, multicultural country. In its multiethnicity 8.60 percent belongs to the tribal population (Census, 2011). Each of the tribal group has their own cultural heritage and different way of living. The Rabhas are one of the tribal groups of West Bengal, inhabiting in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar district. They are Mongoloid in origin and belongs to larger Bodo or Mech community. From Tibetan region they migrated towards Brahmaputra river valley and settled mainly in the Garo hills of Meghalaya, Assam and other hilly areas. Later on they came downward to Assam, Tripura and also started to reside in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts of West Bengal. In this regard, besides forest and hilly areas very few of them also started to live in plain land areas. With the changes over time their habitat and habitation have been changed. As a result, the Rabhas have to come in close contact with other communities and naturally some changes must have taken place in their socio-cultural life. This paper highlights the various socio-cultural changes among the Rabhas of Kamakhyaguri subdivision which is situated in the plain lands of Jalpaiguri district.

2. Methodology Applied:

The present study was conducted in the selected villages of Kamakhyaguri block in Jalpaiguri district on 92 families. The total studied population was 650 with 335 males and 315 females. In this study Preliminary Census schedule was applied to collect data about their early settlement, traditional cultural practices, social structure and organization, traditional political system, economic and religious organization, demographic composition. Further, interviews were taken from the key informants to know about their traditional social norms and emerging changes in this aspect. Thereafter, case studies were taken on the elderly members to compare their cultural tradition and contemporary transition. The entire study is based on intensive field work with an emic approach and empirical micro study conducted during January-December 2012.

Origin and Distribution of the Rabhas: The Rabhas belong to Mongoloid group. They have a short stature, flat nose, little bit of beard and moustache, yellowish skin and epicanthic eye fold. It is very difficult to opine about the exact origin of the Rabhas, because with changing period they migrated from one place to another throughout a vast region. There are a number of opinions regarding the origin of the Rabhas, according to Hodgson, they belong to larger Bodo or Mech community. Groves Alhen pointed out that the Rabhas are a part of Bodo community and they have a connection with Garos. Playfair is of opinion that Kacharis, Garos, Rabhas all have come from a common Tibetan region and they all belong to larger Bodo community. From the Tibetan region they migrated towards Brahmaputra valley, hilly regions of Assam and Garo hills of

Meghalaya belonging to main land India. Later on, they came downward to the plain lands and started to reside in various parts of Assam, Tripura and West Bengal. According to A. K. Das the Rabhas are more similar with the Garos. They migrated towards the northern and northeastern regions. In this context S.K. Biswas (2004&2006) opined that, “there may be a great probability that in earlier the Rabhas were totally a matriarchal tribe or a section of any above tribes. As the Rabhas have more close similarity with Garos, so it may be assumed that earlier they were a section of Garos. But now a day with prolonged detachment with those matriarchal tribes and on the other hand due to continuous interaction with patriarchal society they have forgotten most of their matriarchal practices except the acceptance of mother’s clan”. Presently in West Bengal the Rabhas are residing in hilly-forest and plain land regions of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar district. The number of Rabhas inhabiting in West Bengal is given below—

Category											
Census Year	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Total Population	Data Not Found	722	Data Not Found	3,015	2,955	5,133	6,053	2,466	11,256	6,325	15014

Source: Census of India, 1971, 1981, 1991 & 2001

In West Bengal the Rabhas can be broadly categorized into two broad sectors namely the plain land Rabhas and the forest dwelling Rabhas. Here the discussion is confined on the plain land Rabhas of Kamakhyaguri block of Jalpaiguri district. In the said area the total Rabha population is 3280 where the male is 1655 and female 1625 and among them 3220 (male 1687, female 1533) are living in rural areas and the rest 60 (male 35, female 25) in urban areas (Census 2011).

Social and Cultural Changes

Family, Kinship and Clan Inheritance: The Rabhas traditionally practiced the joint family system. Their family primarily comprised of one or more married couple with their children, grandparents and near and dear kin members. The families are patriarchal in nature and the authority is under the hand of males. In each family the eldest male member is considered as the head and everybody of the family follow his direction. The Rabhas have their own clan system. The whole Rabha society is divided into a number of exogamous clan, called as husuk. The clan inheritance is still now matrilineal that means a new born baby inherit his or her mother’s clan. Some of the clans are totemic in nature where the others do not have any totem object. Persons belonging to totemic clan observe many restrictions and prohibitions in connection with totem object. Some of these clans are further divided into sub-clans. Among them in some cases two clan members establish a friendship relationship among them which is known as Bandhu Gotro or Saru Husuk. Their clans are named as Chinchet, Darboth,

Kantran, Kara, Kama, Moiji, Moistak, Nokman, Nogora, Pomrei, Ponjibok and Uni. The Rabhas mainly use the classificatory kinship system. Regarding denotative and descriptive term they have several relatives and others by their own respective terms. The criterion of sex differentiation is reflected in the kinship terminologies of the Rabhas. In younger generation similar sex differentiation is also noticed. The Rabha kinship nomenclature also indicates generation differentiation. They give much value to the age differentiation in the kinship terminology. They have a close relation with the people of Bodo group. At present most of the younger generations have forgotten their traditional kinship terms. They have become more accustomed with Bengali kinship terms.

The advent of modern education and new modes of occupation have greatly influenced the traditional social and cultural life of the Rabhas. The communications with outer world have given them the opportunities of new economy, education and scope of interaction with others in various aspects. Naturally due to this gradual interactions with outer world the unanimous decision making by the elder members of the family are on a way of abolishment. Intake of greater monetary access have influenced a lot from where the people are giving more importance to material value rather than own familial and traditional culture value. They have now become more interested to maintain the individual status of life by taking the conveniences of modern luxurious goods and entertaining mediums. This has made their mind to live with a small family and lead the life in own fashion. Presently among the total 92 families, 52 (56.52%) are nuclear; and regarding number of family members the highest rank is occupied by 40 (43.48%) families where the family members are only 1–4 in number which is constituted mainly by parents (husband-wife) and their very few number of unmarried children. So the globalised culture has greatly influenced on their traditional family pattern. It is to be mentioned here that most of the Rabhas are now accepting the modern family planning methods to control the childbirth. But this is not practiced in the traditional Rabhas society and it has also been known from the senior Rabha members that still now it is absent among the forest dwelling Rabhas. The acceptance of planning regarding the control of child birth among the studied families is clearly showing the impact of modern civilized society on them and their gradual assimilation with this practise and procedure.

Marriage: The traditional Rabha society always followed intra-tribal marriage i.e. endogamy and clan exogamy marriage. Even besides clan exogamy, marriage within sub clans and bandhu-gotra was also restricted. In the traditional Rabha society marriage in outside of the tribal group was strictly prohibited. They followed the traditional customs and practices to perform the marriage ceremony. But now there occurred a lot of changes in the traditional marriage customs of the studied Rabhas inhabiting in this region. It is found that now they are getting married in their own clan that is clan endogamy which is against their traditional social rules and customs. At present they are accepting both the bride and groom belonging to other castes of the Hindu community. This was not at all appreciable earlier. In their marriage ceremony they have accepted a number of Hindu

ritualistic norms and customs. Now with the help of Hindu Brahmin priest they perform and complete the marriage ceremony. Simultaneously to make the marriage ceremony gorgeous one, there is the impression of modern civilized society particularly in decoration (Biswas, 2004).

The dowry system is now well practiced and well appreciable, though it was not at all entertained in the traditional Rabha society. It is to be noted that out of eleven tribe-caste marriages, nine males are engaged in government services, one is a casual government employee and the rest one is the landholder of 13 bighas. That means all of them are well-to-do from economic point of view which have become helpful to do such tribe-caste marriages or it is to be seen just as an effort to break up the bondage of traditional tribe-caste conservatism practiced from a prolonged period (Biswas, 2004).

Influence of Education and Economy: The prime essential factor that has developed the knowledge and awareness of the Rabhas is the educational enlightenment. The cultural heritage of Jalpaiguri district and due to the influences of renowned educationists of Cooch Behar, the Rabhas got the privilege to come in the modern educational scenario. Presently in their locality there are one high school, one primary school and one library. With the advent of modern education they have now become accustomed with Bengali and English languages. Studying in either Bengali or through English medium the Rabhas have now learned other languages. Education through English they have come in global nexus of internationalized educational means. In context of education they are far away from their traditional mother tongue 'Cochacrow'. Among the total 544 people (except 0-6 years age group), literate population is 347 (63.79%), where 197 (56.77%) are male and 150 (43.23%) are female. Census 2001 shows that the literacy rate among the tribes of eastern region is 32.40 percent which reveals the fact that the tribal people of the studied area have made a remarkable progress in their educational pursuit. The standard of education of the female mostly confined up to class X standard. It may be due to the fact that the senior most guardians are more interested to their daughter's early marriage as per their prolonged cultural practices. But with the gradual progress of education this scenario is getting changed. Now the parents of present generations are interested to educate their child by providing with best accesses as far they can and this trend is increasing day by day. With the progress of educational enlightenment the Rabhas are now becoming interested to acquire more and more knowledge. They have now the potentiality to compete with modern society. Their educational empowerment has given them the capability that an educated Rabha people can himself represent the society in front of national and international level. The formal increase in educational standard is also developing their personality and helping them to get self-established. Due to their close interactions with other communities and studying in formal education they achieved modern knowledge and awareness. All these factors have changed the oldest traditional Rabha society into new and modern one.

Traditionally the Rabhas were very fond of collecting fruits, hunting and fishing. Simultaneously they also practiced Jhum cultivation which indicates their keen interest

on agriculture from early days. With gradual change of time they got settled on plain land and started to settled agriculture. But till now the prime source of income of the forest dwelling Rabhas are mainly hunting and gathering from forest, fishing and Jhum cultivation. Besides these, animal husbandry is their subsidiary economy. All of the collected, gathered foods are used for their own consumption. But at the same time the scenario is different in case of plain land Rabhas. Here with the advent of formal education a gradual change took place in the occupational sector. With the help of knowledge regarding modern education they are now able to compete with contemporary society. Thus they have the capability to seek for governmental jobs and other official works and as a result the new generation is coming to more close contact with the so-called modern society. Not only is that, the knowledge and awareness of an educated individual spreading through out the whole community. Now each and every member is applying their knowledge for betterment in occupational sectors. With the application of modern technological devices as well as knowledge now they produce more. Modern occupation is providing them better access of livelihood and so their life style is changing. These factors are also changing their social life and concerned value system. The people who are engaged in services (8.92%) belong to government services and school teaching. Though it is true that a good percentage of population depend on agriculture (28.06%) but they are not at all depend on traditional agricultural means. They now use the modern agricultural implements and apply developed technological devices like power tiller, shallow pump, implication of fertilizers, pesticides and so on in the field. Not only that the Rabhas now a day cultivate many high yielding varieties of crops. With those varieties they got the production throughout the year. In a particular cultivable land they now produce a number of crop varying at different seasons which was even absent up to 1995. It is most important that the agriculturists are now not only produce for their own consumption, now they sell the surplus crop to the adjacent market and earn the money by which they maintain their other necessities. Previously fishing was an important economic means for this tribe and for it they went to Rasik Beel but recently it is declared as a tourist spot and that's why the earlier practices of fishing has been prohibited by the government. Now only in rainy season from the over flooded stream of outside the Rasik Beel a very few number of families catch fishes but that is totally for their own purposes. Meanwhile due to this tourist spot the adjacent surface communication was more developed and it has a direct contact with adjacent urban centers. A number of tourists are coming in this locality as a result the Rabhas are getting more influenced from the urban cultures as well as outsiders. Among the total Rabha families in the village 72.18 percent families have the monthly income below Rs. 4000/- and the rest (27.82%) families have the monthly income above Rs. 4000/-. The occupation and monthly income have changed their life style a lot and it is on a gradual progress.

Land holding pattern: The Rabhas came in the studied area during the 3rd decade of the 18th century. Since then they are living with the people of other communities and have come in close contact with the different cultural traits and elements of those communities. Out of total 170 families of the studied area there are 92 (54.11) Rabha

families and the others (46%) belong to Rajbansi, Namasudra, Mahiswa, Jugi (Debnath), and Sunri and Muslim families. Out of total populations the Rabhas are 3280 (58.26%) in number. Presently they have no concept of community land holding pattern. Every family has their own separate land. Their traditional practice of Jhum cultivation has now disappeared and at present they are in settled agriculture. The agro-based economy now provides them their necessities of daily livelihood. With the advent of new technological means they not only produce for their consumption but they have a surplus in their hand. With the progress of modern communication they are now able to sell the surplus in market and readily get the cash in their hand. Land has become their prime source of livelihood through which they are able to establish settled life. The personal land holding pattern, implication of modern technological means and proper marketization of the crops all have come among the Rabhas due to their close interactions with neighbourhood as well as advancement of modern means of transportation throughout the village. Now with the help of modern agricultural means and communication measures the entire cultivation work and production of crops in the village has changed a lot.

Religious Belief and other Practices: Basically the traditional Rabhas are animistic in nature. Every Rabha family worshipped their traditional household deities Runtuk and Basek for household peace. They had their own traditional priest named as Deusi Bura. They also had a keen faith on their totemic objects and they never killed them. But as some of them have started to live in the plain land from a prolonged period as a result they came under the influence of the Hindu religion and it influenced a lot on their traditional socio-cultural life. As the plain land Rabhas are living with the people of caste Hindus from a prolonged period, naturally a lot of cultural traits of the latter can be observed among the former. By accepting the religious and daily livelihood practices of the caste people the Rabhas are trying to develop their social status as well as social hierarchy. For the first time in 1935, the Brahmin priest Dhareshwar Sharma came from Nalbari Assam and gave them the initiation of Vaishnavism. Later on many other Rabha people followed the pioneers. Each Rabha's has now their own familial Hindu Kulguru. During 1970's they were Khastrised by wearing six threaded paita (sacred thread) from Rajbansi Vaisnab Gosai or Adhikari (priest). Again in 1998 ten Rabha families were initiated by the holy Satsangha of Thakur Anukul Chandra. With this gradual acceptance of Hindu belief naturally a lot of Hindu rituals are more prevalent among the present Rabha society. At present various social and religious festivals are performed by them with the help of Hindu Brahmin priest. Still now they worship their traditional house deities Runtak and Bashek for household peace and prosperity. But these are their ultimate confinement of traditional gesture. After the acceptance of Vaishnavism they started to worship Lord Balarama and a number of other Hindu Gods and Goddesses namely Lord Shiva, Devi Kali, Devi Durga, Devi Biashari etc. Simultaneously they perform many Hindu religious occasions like Rasyatra, Dolyatra, Bijoya Dashami and so on. They organise fairs during these occasions and as a result there occurred cultural admixture of a number of people irrespective of any religion, caste and locality. These factors are automatically mobilizing them to get more Hinduized. Like Kshatryaised

Rajbansi Hindu ritual they follow the funeral ceremony on 13 days with the help of Brahmin priest irrespective of their traditional duration of funeral ceremony. Now a day the marriage and first rice giving ceremony are also performed through the Hindu rituals with the help of Brahmin priest.

Through the impact of modern means of communication with others particularly due to economy and expansion of education the rigid concept of intra-tribal marriage has started to get loose onwards. The literate elite groups with more financial backbone are engaged in new occupation and thus have placed position in the higher elite class. People are more interested to reach in this class by accepting technological accesses and acquiring knowledge through proper education. It is to be mentioned here that there occurred 2.52 (3) percent inter- tribe marriage and 9.24(11) percent tribe-caste marriage. Dowry system is now well practiced among the Rabhas but it was not at all entertained in the traditional Rabha society. It is to be mentioned here that if the bride came from other communities then by tradition she got the Rabha clan from the eldest women of the Rabha society and her children inherited the same. But now the plain land Rabhas are not following this practice rather the children are getting their fathers clan that means a trend of clan inheritance from matriliney to patriliney is observed.

Political System: The Rabhas have their own traditional panchayat system. The village panchayat looks after the matter of social problem and local administration of the community. Besides this, it also controls over the religious festivals and other ceremonial occasions. The panchayat members are selected unanimously by the village members. Till now the Rabhas give foremost importance to their traditional panchayat system by which they maintain their social rules and customs. But the traditional panchayat has now being transformed into new name and function. Now the activity of this traditional organisation is not only confined in political decision-making but it has also active participation in social welfare works that means the form has now being changed into the function of both social and political organisation. The modern three tier panchayat system has become much influential that it is breaking their old heritage of traditional panchayat system and has expanded the activity into a number of other social welfare works. Besides social justice and jurisdiction the committee also deals with marriage, first rice giving ceremony, funeral ceremony, kshatryaisation, household religious festival. In this Rabha society a fast and rapid change is going on and the modern three-tier panchayat system is slowly but gradually occupying the function or place of traditional village panchayat system. They have their own system of fund from where the poorer families are helped to organise the important familial programmes like marriage, death and treatment. Generally the Rabhas are not interested to take their familial conflicts outside of their courtyard or any kind of administrative interferes. The village panchayat of the Rabhas is mainly formed by the well respected and elderly villagers which is now known as Rabha Samaj Kalyan Committee (Rabha Social Welfare Committee) formed of twenty one members. It has two parts, the fifteen membered Central Committee observing general administrations and six membered Puja Committee look after the religious festivals. Besides these male committee there is

another female committee made up of five female members named as ‘Rabha Mahila Samaj Kalyan Committee’ (Rabha Women Social Welfare Committee). They mainly look after the women’s problem and women’s social welfare. They did not organise any meeting regarding jurisdiction in or out side of their village territory. They mainly deal with the problem like illegal sex relations or other domestic violence, and the punishment is given to the accused. After every three years a general meeting of the Rabha Samaj Kalyan Committee is held at the ground of village ‘kalibari’ or school ground or at the courtyard of a well respected and senior inhibitor of the Rabha society. Persons of all ages whether male or female have the equal right to attend the general meeting without any restriction. But the participation of female members is very few. It mainly decides unanimously on the issues regarding the formation of new committee and other relevant matters of the village. The democratic political system is practiced among them from quite earlier and still it is going on, where the people are able to express their own view. According to Marx’s theory of social classes democracy means a regime “where the people more or less participate in their government”. Among the Rabhas the whole community participates in their issues of community development through the village panchayat system. Thus the democratic system is present among the Rabhas from quite earlier period. If someone is interested to complain directly to administrative authority then there is no restriction at all. Presently, their traditional political organisation is seen in the form of numerous decision making committee. Those committees control the village level or local administration and simultaneously with it they are involved in many other religious and social welfare activities. It is to be mentioned here that there are also some influence of other members of different political parties who opine their view to the traditional panchayat body regarding social welfare and local administration.

Impact on Language: Due to the influence of worldwide economic transaction, trade, mass media and education most of the people have to share a common culture throughout the world. Though the people of each and every corner of the world have their own culture and localised tradition but these are gradually changing. Among many of these factors particularly language is most important. We all have our own mother tongue, but with the influence of globalization we have to learn the international language in utter urgency to survive in the competitive world. Naturally the Rabhas are also in these uncountable many. The change of language leads to a marked differences between the forest dwelling and plain land Rabhas. Among the plain land Rabhas the youngest generation of 0-19 year’s age group are totally unknown about their mother tongue Cochakrow and they can speak only in Bengali. On the other hand among the eldest population of above 60 years, all the people know their mother tongue Cochakrow. The prime important thing is known to the fact that between the two generations i.e. the eldest and youngest the knowledge of their own mother tongue has become completely abolished. As the youngest generations are more in touch with modern education thus the universal impact is provoking them towards a global cultural nexus. First of all they are coming in contact with regional Bengali language, but for betterment in the competitive world they have to accept the international language like

English. In this way they are getting detached from their knowledge of their own mother tongue as well as their traditional culture.

3. Observation and Remarks:

Society can be looked upon as a process, as a series of interaction between human beings, each person stimulating another person and responding to the stimuli from other person. No social life is possible without such interactions. This is why communication is basic to all social life. Thus, interactions lead to uniformities as well as diversities, so that while there are many similarities between the individuals in a group, whether it is a family group or a neighbourhood group or a national group, there are also much diversity. Thus, the whole human society and each group in the society can be viewed as the manifestation of the social processes between the interacting members. The contemporary social situation in India is the transformation of the individual from a member of a tribe or a village or a caste or a creed or a language group to a citizen of India. This transformation of men and social relationship is necessitated by the new social, political and economic organisations.

It is noteworthy to mention that society is always changing in nature though the rate may be slow or fast. The rate of changes in social, cultural, political, economic, religious and other aspects are mainly depend on the nature of interaction and admixture of cultural traits and elements of other cultures as well as societies. The barrier of interaction is isolation and it may be due to lack of communication or any other barriers like cultural, political, religious and economic. Man, to lead their livelihood has changed the habitation for several times because always they want to survive and they look after better standard of living, so that type of tendency as well as struggle is everywhere for survival or existence. The different barriers like isolation and others sometimes have a great impact on human life and that's why some are in advanced stages and others are in opposite. Mainly the different barriers had started to break from the end of the last century due to better means of communication and other progress which made them to come into close contact with each other in social, economic, political, cultural and others aspects. In this context the tribals who were detached earlier from various aspects of the main stream population have come into close contact with the latter.

The tribals in India have been influenced by certain traditions of the communities around them. The major neighbouring communities in all the areas have mostly been Hindus. As a result from the very early period there have been several points of contact between the Hindus of the area and the tribal communities living within it. The recent studies of the ethnographers specially of the Himalayan tribes, western and middle India have left the least doubt to establish that some of the tribes are Hinduized to the extent that they have been assimilated with the different castes at different levels in the caste system. There are a few examples of “tribal castes” claiming the status of Brahmins in the Hindu caste system. The Bauris of West Bengal claim to be Brahmins owing to their observance of eleven days mourning period, wearing of sacred thread, acceptance of Vaishnavism, going for pilgrimage and worship of goddesses Sitala and Manasa. There

are numerous other tribes which have undergone selective acculturation and have added selected traits or features of the regional Hinduism to their respective traditional cultures. In this process of acculturation, most of them have failed to occupy any rank in the caste hierarchy, while a few are being integrated into the lower strata of the Hindu social system. It is to be mentioned here that the implementation of various developmental schemes for tribal areas has brought about certain economic and social changes in the tribal communities. Through the introduction of Panchayati Raj the traditional panchayat have suffered a setback but a compromise between the traditional and statutory panchayat in the tribal areas has been well established in the Himalayan region and in certain parts of middle and western India. In the sphere of modern democratic experiments the periodical elections to elect representatives for parliament and state legislatures and village panchayat have created a new awareness among the tribal voters regarding their political rights, power alignments and functional roles of the leaders. These modern leaders of various levels and types are spearheading the socio- economic and political change and accelerating the pace of transformation in the tribal areas. In general, it becomes that the traditional process, in the past, was exclusively responsible for forging transformation in the secular, social and sacred spheres of the tribal culture. This process directed the change of the respective tribal cultures on the regional pattern of Hindu style of life. As it was indigenous, continuous, non competitive and voluntary, the rate of change was slow and selective, reciprocal and accommodative as well as integrative and assimilative. While the traditional process brought the regional Hindu model before the tribals, the modern process by and large, placed before them the western, urban, industrial developmental and democratic model for inducing change. These factors have greatly influenced the daily livelihood of a number of tribal groups in India even residing in the isolated and high hilly regions. The intensity of media exposure, political participation and competitive outlook towards social mobility has added strength to these processes (Singh, 2000:30-31).

The Rabhas a tribal group is scattered in several places of plains and forests. The section of plain land Rabhas are getting more in touch with other adjacent population. However, their socio-cultural traits were also started to blend with the neighbours as well as with the outer world and emerged a new way of living. Due to this fact sometime they accustomed with the others. In the context of interaction with others they are in touch with modern education, technology, modern economic pursuits like government official jobs and businesses, political systems, languages, and the way of modern means of family planning. In their religious life a number of rituals and festivals of the adjacent Bengalee Hindu caste populations are observed which have made a number of socio-cultural changes in their daily life. With the implication of modern technological means the concept of surplus has emerged. Simultaneously with this global impact they have lost the traits of their traditional culture. In due course in some cases their matrilineal clan inheritance got changed into patrilineal. The Rabha grooms have got married with brides of other communities, and their children are inheriting their fathers' clan and the clan inheritance is gradually getting under the domination of males but it is against their tradition. Their clan based totemic objects like different plants and animals were related

with forest but due to deforestation the totemic objects gradually lost their impressions along with the ecological disturbances. Totemic objects played an important role in their socio-religious life which maintained their social unity and solidarity but it is now getting converted in to atomic in nature. Language and culture are hand logged with each other. Legends and myth of a society can exist through their mother tongue. But now the youngest generations are forced to learn foreign languages due to the pressure and impact of globalization. Earlier in their traditional panchayat there were no out side influence but presently it has undergone several changes. The Rabhas are quite satisfied with their local village administrative authorities and they are less interested to inform their problems to the higher legal administrative authorities. Basically the Rabha Social Welfare Committee is a modified form of the traditional village panchayat and there occurred a lot of changes in its function because of the demand and necessities of the concerned people. Due to their prolonged co- habitation with the Bengalee Hindu caste population a number of cultural traits have come into their life. With the acceptance of Bengali kinship terminologies their traditional kinship based relation has altered a lot. On the other hand due to their marriage with adjacent non tribal population the functions of their social organisations and social institutions have changed from their traditional one. The acceptance of Hindu religious festivals have altered their traditional cultural practices and adopted a number of new social customs in their life. With the application of modern technological devices as well as knowledge now they produce more and on the other hand with the acceptance of modern education and Hindu rituals in their daily life they are trying to reach in Hindu social strata and trying to gain social prestige along with the Hindus in their locality. These changes are gradually taking them towards modernization and today this tribal community is on the way of new horizon. It is impossible to say whether they will continue or not to stay here in near future or they will migrate to other suitable place, because modernization and globalization are continuously providing new opportunities in our daily life. In this context, “the Rabhas and We” are both the representatives and members of human beings in this globe and we are always interested for better accesses in our livelihood.

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