

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION OF THE RABHAS

The basic structure of the Rabha tribe is governed by the ethnologic ideas contained in the "Pandulipis" or the local customary laws. These "Pandulipis" have been framed by the consensus of the village people on the basis of customs, usages, traditions and religious beliefs covering such subjects like juridical power of the society, mode of inheritance and succession to office of the socio-religious nature etc. The Rabhas were matriarchal tribe. But now it becomes change to some extent.

The Rabha's social system is divided into four sections or Suba or neighbour, there are one union. This union is formed with the male members of each family. They select a Secretary and a President and do so many constructive and developmental activities within their neighbourhood. They do the activities like constructing roads, repairing bridges etc. Besides these if anybody cannot do to start agricultural work due to lack of ploughing bullock or etc then the other neighbours help him without remuneration. This is called "Souri". At the end of their agricultural work they collect crops in a minimum quantity and form a puji (Store) and they sell it or give others instead of debt.

The second stage is "Mondal". This "Mondal" is formed with a

three or four "Suba". The members of the society elect a "Headman" who is called "Mondal". In the Mondal level, there are also one Secretary and one or two peons, whom they call "Kathial". There is no limitation or definite period or term of office. The Mondal receives not any salary but yearly he is given some quantity of crops as salary. Within the area of the Mondal each Headman of the every family becomes the member of the Mondal and they also form a "Puji" with a collected crops which is generally collected from each family. Like "Suburiya" the main functions of the Mondal are to repair road, bridge and preserve (Social) locality, to maintain peace and Unity etc. The Mondol also offer special helps and accomodations to a specific family like "souri".

In some religious activities, the "subas" of the "Mondol" are sub-divided in two or three divisions and each division performs their respective duties and responsibilities. They perform the "Kalipuja" and "Lakhimipuja" collectively.

After Mondal, the next stage or step is 'Jamad'. The 'Jamad' is formed by 30 many Mondols. The executive committee of Jamad is formed by the each mondal and other two elected representatives. There are one President, two Vice-presidents, one General Secretary and one Assitant General Secretary in the committee. The "Jamad" makes provision for peace and unity of the society and gives verdict of the unsolved and undecided cases.

After the Jamad the Rabhas form Rabhas society in regional

level. This society is formed with so many "Jamads". It is called "sanmilan" by the Rabhas. This is their highest organisation. This sanmilan is formed by the elected executive members as well as the port polios of the every "Jamad". Besides these members the representatives from different organisations student union (Rabha), Mohila samaj etc. which are formed in area level. The duration of the office is three years. This 'sonmilan' is the highest and powerful in the Rabha society. This 'sanmilan' is empowered to make rules and regulations, laws customs, traditions and functions of "jamad" and 'mondal' laws and rules of marriage discipline etc. In this way the people of Rabha have to follow strict rules and regulations in different manners. The 'Rabhas' society is so strict that if anybody remains absent from attending in any social meeting or developmental works then he is to pay fine as imposed by the society. This fine system is called 'Khona' by the Rabha society. Even, the society boycott the family and transfer them from the society to other place. The Rabhas are matrial pattern of society and the children take their mother's title. The Rabhas called it "Barai".

In the marriage system, it is compulsory to arrange a feast and invite the members of the society, otherwise he will boycott or remain apart from the society and will not allow to participate in any social functions. The Rabha society has also the punishment system to those who are disobedient to their superiors and have unauthorised relationship with other male or female.

According to Karma puran, the Rabhas belong to the Khatri

family of 'Chandra Bansa'. In their caste systems, Rangdani and Maitory are called 'Barai', Koch is called 'Howsug' is Koch family and 'Mahari' in pati Rabha family.

There are so many reasons to believe that the Rabha were once a matrilineal tribe. The belief is based on the prevailing custom of reckoning descent from the female line and the practice of inducting the children of a marriage into the, Barai of the mother (i.e. if the father's Barai happens to be 'Rongkho' and mother's barai). But now it is not the Rabhas seem to be in a state of transition from the matrilineal to the patrilineal form of family life. It may refer to the system of inheritance, succession, a father is position of a groom etc. to see how far the transition has taken place. In this way, all sons are entitled to get equal share of a father's property. A daughter inherits no property unless the father makes arrangement for her share before his death. Of course, if the 'Daughters (also called Bhagi) agree she may be allotted a share even after the death of her father. On the other hand a widow is not entitled to inherit property of her husband, even though she is encumbered with issues. Of course her male children will automatically come to inherit their fathers property on attaining majority.

In regard to succession matters also, a son's claim is socially recognised for his ascendancy to the position of his father either or his death or incapacity. It is further noticed that the social and domestic authority of a father in all religious or ritualistic matters are secured he being subordinate to name. All these elements of the

social structure strengthen the belief that the Rabha society is primarily patriarchal at present though some traits of matriarchal are still lingering from the hoary past.

The Rabhas caste divisions are divided according to their works and activities. At first when the Rabhas were performed the 'khokchi' or 'Baikho' puja then they created some sub-groups to maintain discipline and activities are also distributed. In this way, during the Khokchi puja to construct altar and make arrangement of seats, the people who carry stone is called "Rangdani" or Randani. 'Rang' means stone and 'Dan' means array, later on this group of people is known as "Rangdani".

The people who took the responsibility of arranging social feast, this group is known as 'Maitari' (Mai means rice and Tari means supply) i.e. rice supplier. So the group of people who were engaged for arrangement of feast is called 'Maitary'.

The another social group of Rabha people, which were engaged to see and observe hens and cocks coming to the kitchen room is called "Dahari", means a long bamboo stick used to collect fruits from the tree. On the other hand, the group of people who were engaged to supply banana leaves and bamboo pot is called 'pati' and they have to supply the necessary banana leaf for the puja.

Another group of people, who supplies necessary animals like pig, goat, duck, hen etc. during puja as well as feast is called 'Tatla'.

Another group of people, who were engaged to get ready the meat from this collected animals is called as Hana and they have to get ready the meat for cooking.

In this way the people who supplied drinks is called "Modahi" and the group of people who sing songs and make role as comedian during the puja are called 'Bitol' or 'Ditolia'. In such a way the Rabha's different castes are classified. So as a whole the Rabha's different castes are as follows : (1) Rangdani, (2) Majitori, (3) Dahari, (4) Pati, (5) Hana, (6) Modahi, (7) Tatla, (8) Nitolia and (9) Mech.

II. DWELLINGS AND LIVELIHOOD PATTERN

Like the Boro-Kocharies the Rabhas like to live in compact blocks comprising of 50 to 100 families in each block, They put barriers all around the homestead and have a sense of privacy and esthetic beauty in putting up a residential house. Each house with its granary and others buildings are surrounded by a ditch and fence. The fences are usually made of ekreared, jungle grass or split bamboo etc. The ditch some three or four feet in depth surrounds the whole homestead, the earth taken from it being roundup on the inner side, that is the nearest to the dwelling house, and on the earth works some two or three feet in height, so thrown up are firmly inserted the reeds or split bamboo work forming the fence itself, this later often inclining outwards at a very obtuse angle, so that the ditch and fence are not easily surmounted from the outside, This

type of semifort like residential complexes have commonly adopted by the Rabhas. The construction materials and the site plan which are adopted and used by the Rabhas and the Boro-Kocharies are almost same. Even the semi fort like constructions with earthen barricades all around are to be seen like the Boro-Kochari households. It is however a fact that with the increasing intercourses with town life and improvement of road communication, the basic characteristics of Rabha houses are in the process of rapid change and constructions in modern styles have already made their headway in Rabha villages.

a) SELECTION OF PLOT FOR A HOUSE

Like the Boro-Kacharis, the Rabhas also construct their house. Before constructing a house, they pay their due attention about the plot of land which they select for the purpose. They simply select the plot which they think as best for construction of a house. There is no hard and fast rules or laws in selection of plot for a house.

After selection of a plot, next important thing is position of the housesteads. Like Boro Kocharies they (The Rabhas) also build the granary ("Bharal") and cowshed and give much importance to the presence of the granary and cowshed in the family.

b) POSITION OF A HOUSE

The main house is built on the north side facing to the south.

This main house is partitioned into three room is known as "Najugul" where father and mother or other eldest man of the family slept. It is on the south side. The middle room is known as "Nipung" that is kitchen room. In the "Nipung" they place three earthen post where they preserve and stock rice and these three pot are called "Rongtak". The third room is known as "Mouja" where the young boys or young girls are slept and used as bed room. Another small room which is called "Dupka" as varanda and used as guest room. It is built in the front of the home stead that means near the Nojugul and at the north-east corner of the court yard they build granary house and a poultu house if possible are also seperaterly constructed. This system of position of a house generally is used by some Rangdani villages. But in general the Rabhas household consist of four houses like the Boros. One is main house, another is guest house. The third is outer house, for the adult family members and the forth one for using as a cookshed. In addition to these, cowshed , a granary are also built. In the main house , the head of the family resides and is constructed in the northern side of the courtyard maintaining its length in east west direction. On the opposite side the "Batghar" or guest house is constructed the courtyard being in between the two. The other two houses are also constructed usually facing each other.

The construction materials and the site plan which are adopted by the Rabhas and the Boro-Kacharis are almost identical.

III. AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is the chief occupation of the Rabhas. Like the rest of the other plains tribes, the Rabhas also derive their livelihood mainly from agriculture. Their livelihood pattern is characterised by agricultural occupations and also a way of life. They undertake cultivation of both Ashu and Sali along with some amount of pulses, mustard seeds and jute. They generally select the plains and alluvial land for the purpose of agriculture. They also mainly depend on the paddy cultivation like Boro-Kacharies. The major part of the cultivated land of the village is devoted to growing rice, which is the staple food of the Rabhas. Those who reside on the bordering areas with Meghalaya resort to shifting cultivation to a certain extent. The Rabhas though basically agriculturists and practice wet paddy cultivation, yet, the progressive elements in their operational techniques are awfully deficient. Only a small segment of the cultivators have taken to improved methods of cultivation leaving a large majority with their traditional system. This lack of general response to improve cultural practices is partly attributable to marginal land holdings and partly to inherent poverty. Their indigenous devices for preserving seeds and digging dongs and canals are widely acclaimed. They are also skillful in the construction of irrigation canals and earth work embankments for diversion of water river beds into their rice fields.

Rice falls under three main heads, "Ashu", "Sali" and "Bawa".

The sali is transplanted as winter rice in low lying land. The long "Baw" or "Bawa" is the stemmed rice sown broad cast mainly in marshes with deep water. "Ashu" also is sown in the spring time and is grown in high lands.

Besides rice growing, the cultivation of jute, mustard seeds and various kinds of pulses are done side by side. Another important fruit tree which brings more economy to them is the areca tree. Without areca nuts and betel leaves no social function or ritual can be performed in their society.

The "Muga" and "Endi" is another traditional culture of Rabhas like Boro Kacharis. They produce "Muga", silk and "Endi". The Rabha women are expert both in spinning and weaving. Normally they prepare their own apparel including those used by the males. The women's dresses consist mainly of "Ruphaan", "Kambung" and "Khodabang" which are invariably needed for attiring a bride at the time of marriage. The male dresses consist of "Pajal", "Fali", "Buksil", "Khasne", "Pasra", etc etc. The "Pasra" or "Passa" is made out of Endi yarn while rest are made of fine cotton.

Regarding agriculture, Rabha people pay their attention in selection and classification of the plot of land. Because agriculture is the main occupation of the Rabhas and it is also their chief source of livelihood. For successful agriculture the Rabhas select a field very carefully. They generally consider only tableland or plainland for the purpose of agriculture. The irrigation facility is regarded as the

best criteria for the classification of land. The plot of land where the cultivations of paddy is done with the help of rain water then this type of land is regarded as medium standard for the paddy cultivation. On the other hand, the land, if there is a proper irrigation facility with the help of canals that type of land is suitable for the paddy cultivation. Bandh or embankment to preserve water for the use in cultivation and to divert the water to the plots of land where they planted the paddy.

IV. FOOD HABITS

Rice is the staple food of Rabhas with an interest in liking for dried and powdered fish, pork, and rice-beer. They collect different types of vegetables from their garden as well as from the neighbouring forests. So they supplemented it by a plentiful supply of vegetables. They are also very fond of meat and fish. They were at liberty to eat almost every kind of flesh that is pork, mutton, chicken, duck etc. The most highly favourite article of diet is the pig (in Rabha "DA") and numbers of these animals are seen in all Rabha villages. The Rabha's another favourite national beverage is a kind of rice-beer prepared by steeping rice in water for two or three days. Another liquor known as "Photica" which they use and prepare from "Madh" by distillation is of less innocent character. The Rabhas use rice-beer to welcome their guests and become very glad if they can entertain their guests with rice-beer. The consumption of rice-beer is now gradually coming down due to strict enforcement of the excise law which is a healthy sign for the socio-economic growth of

the society. It is now brewed in a restricted land that too on occasions connected with some socio-religious rites and ceremonies. Further, those members of the pati Rabhas who got themselves initiated into the Maha purusiya sect of the vaishna vite school no longer indulge in pork and rice-beer.

The Rabhas are also very fond of meat and fish. They dry the flesh of deer and pork and preserve these for a long period and use it as food during the time when they are busy with their agricultural works. They also dry the small fishes in the sunlight or on the fire, apply some quantity of stems of "Arum" then grind them together, store it in a bamboo tube and cover the mouth of the tube with the leaves of the plantain. This is called "Nakhem" and it can be preserved for two to three years.

They collect fish from river, stream etc. Generally, in collecting fish, the leading part is taken by the women. The fishing implements used are of a very simple. The implements commonly used are mainly (i) choreng (2) foloh, (3) The net, and (4) "Khudur". These implements are commonly prepared from materials found in almost every village, The first implement, the "Choreng" is used by women and the Foloh and the net are commonly used by men. Except net, the 'choreng' Foloh' and Khudur are made of Split bamboo work fastened together with cane. The making process of these implements are same to Boro community.

The people of Rabha are accustomed of collecting the wild

vegetables from the forest, besides they produce at home. The wild vegetables are of different tastes like sour taste, bitter taste and scented plant which is used in the fish curry and flesh of goat. Meat is the essential item for the guests in the Rabha community. So to meet their immediate necessity as food when any guest visits one's house and to some extent for the purpose of economy they keep fowls or cocks, ducks, pigs, goats, peacocks etc. at home. They generally eat the porks or the meat of pigs ("Da Nakam" in Rabha), meat of Ducks (Hangsha Nakam), meat of goats (Pron Nakam), meat of sheeps (pronbela Nakam). They don't take the meat of Buffalo and beef.

V. DRESSES AND ORNAMENTS

The Rabhas are not differentiated from their mode of dress. The male persons, both young and old put on "Gamscha" which are commonly prepared at home. They hang down the "Gomscha" to the knees from the loins. During winter they use to wrap the body with a 'Cotton' or 'Endi' wrapper which are spun and woven at home. This is called "Passra" or 'Passa'. The male dresses consist of "Pajal" 'Khasne', "Fali", Buksil and passra. They also use a banion, a sort of coat of "Cotton" or "Endi". But now a days such dresses of the Rabha male persons are found rare, except the villagers of the interior places. The young one uses the modern dresses of the present days like pant, shirt, dhuti etc. and old one uses Dhuti and shirt or kamij. The women's dresses consist mainly of "Rifan" or 'Rufan' "Kambung", and "Khodabang" are invariably needed for attire-

ing a bride at the time of her marriage. The women tie a cloth round the chest just below the armpit that hangs to the toe, which is called "Rufan". Now a days , it is seen that the young Rabha girl uses the ornamented, "Rufan" in common. In earlier days the Rabha women did not use any other body cover except a scarf. But at present the women wear blouse, peticoat (under wear mekhela) as other Hindu women do. In some advanced families the women also wear " sari" like other tribal women in upper Assam.

The weaving excellence of the Rabha women is further testified by their intensive knowledge in dying yarn purty by indigenous process. They weave their "Rufan", Gamscha", Kambung", "Khodabang" and "Pajal" "Khasne" "Fali", "Buksil" and passra for male. They spin the yarn from cotton and Endi at home. They use pitloom is called "Tatshal " in weaving the clothes. Weaving is not only a secondary source of livelihood to a Rabha women but a part and parcel of their material culture.

The women use other few ornaments made of silver and gold. They use ornaments for ear, nose,neck and hand. They use different kinds of ornaments like Rubuk, Sun, Buk, Honsahasuli Rukuk, Bajusun, Bogala, Khusumakari, Gulimala, Hunsahar, Koreya, Numbri,Nukphul, Khulimutha, Dhala,and phoni.

For the hand, thay use Baju sun, it is and ornamented tangle about 21/2 " wide. for the neck they use necklace which is called hunsahar and gulimala.

For the ear, they use "Numbri" or "Thuria". It is seen that the Rabha's dresses, musical Instrument and ornaments have occupied a standarable and high place in cultural life.

VI. LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE:-

The Rabhas language is now confined among the Rangdani and the Maitory groups. The paties, hanas and totlas and a few other groups have already lost their mother tongues. The Paties now speak a patois of the Assamese language. The Koch or the Kocha group also speak the same language spoken by the tow former groups but their word structure and phonetied differ slightly. Minor groups like the Dahuries, songhas, Tintekias and the chapras speak their own dialects and the dialectal Variations in between them are quite considerable.

The Rabhas are mainly divided into groups According to their speaking languages. In this way, the Koches are speaking koch language, Rangdannies and Maitories speak Langdani and pati and Dahuei, Hana, and others speak regional language. According to Dr. Rebati Mahan Saha- the language the Koch, Rongdani and Maitories are same in their different rules of constructon, Word and grammar's rule. It has once on the Rabha language. However, the Rabha language has its own singnificance'.

Efforts have recently been made to standardise the language

and to impart education at the primary level through mother tongue. One the literary organisation name "Bibek Rabha Kraurang Runchume" has taken up some positive steps towards standardisation process of the language with all available materials. The "Rabha Bhasa Parisad" of Dudhnoi another literary organisation has also taken up the cause of establishing this language on a scientific footing. With this end in view the parisad has recently produced Rabha text books including Rabha grammar upto primary level. In their effort to evolve on correct base to Rabha grammar, the parisad has studied so many grammars of foreign and Indian writers. Besides these, the grammatical works of local grammarians have also been given sufficient weightage. The "Rabhas Sahitya Gosthi" of Bondapara yet another literary organisation has been supplementing the creative works of the other organisations.

In this way, the co-ordinated efforts of these organisations are going to give the Rabha language and identity of its own. In the literary activities, it is found that till the attainment of independence, Rabha literature did not take any headway due to extremely low percentage of literacy and smaller number of educated persons. It was only during the post independence period that some literary works have made their appearance. In this regard, the pioneering effort of the "Sodou Rabha Kristi Sangha" must be given due credence. The cultural revival brought about by the Kristi Sangha paved the way and in fact became the fore-runner of literary work in the Rabha language. There are so many local cultural units formed under this Sangha. These cultural units were looking for dramatic

literature which ultimately led to the production of same such literary bulks with materials rooted in the indigenous soil itself. In this process, the pioneering effort of same literary minded persons are not negligible. In this way in the creation of Rabha language and literature, the different organisations have their contributions and valuable efforts. The Rabha Sahitya Sabha subsequently took up this challenge with much conviction and self exertion.

There are various sources of Rabha literature. They composed their literature form oral literature, folk-tales, ballads, Proverbs, folk-songs, story etc. Their literature, culture, and language are of high standard. In this connection, different organisations like the "Rabha Sahitya Gosthi", "Rabha Bhasa parisad", "Rabha Kristi Sangha" etc. are contributed most in the development of Rabha language and culture.

VII. **SMOKING:**

The Rabha people also smoke regularly like Boros. There is no restriction in Rabha society specially in the villages as well as towns. So smokers are not rare among the Rabhas. The elderly women also smoke. The elders and the youngsters smoke together. They use one type of name made tobacco which is prepared by making the tobacco leaf as dust after biting on fire of sunshine.

Now a days Biris and Cigarettes have used but the majority of the Rabha people. This system of old age and fashion has replaced

by these new things like Cigarettes etc.

VIII. RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL LIFE OF THE RABHAS

The basis of Rabha's religious philosophy is mainly based on animism cannot be denied even today, though under influence of Hinduism a considerable number of Pati Rabhas have already assimilated with neighbouring Hindu culture and have begun to take part in all religious festivals like Durgapuja, Kalipuja, Shivapuja etc. From this point of view, this section of the tribe may be described as the followers of both Shaktism and Saivism over and above their adherence to the traditional faith to the animism. In the field of religion one of the development has come to notice the adoption of Christianity by a section of the tribe. It is seen that those who have embraced Christianity have adopted for all intent and purpose and hardly revert back to their original faith.

The Rabha community as whole does not have any national festival of their own. The different group celebrate their ritualistic festivals which relate more or less to their own religious concepts and beliefs. The Rangali Bihu, the Spring Festival and Bhogali Bihu the Harvesting Festival are celebrated only by the Pati Rabhas like other villages of Assam Plains. Their different festivals are as follows:

1) BAIKHO OR KHOKSI PUJA : The Rangdani and Maitori groups celebrate "Baikho" or "Khoksi" puja festival with intention to

propitiating Baikho the Goddess of Wealth and prosperity. It is instituted once in a year preferably in the month of Baisakh (mid-April to mid-May) just before the starting of agriculture operation. It is not that the Pati Rabhas do not propitiate this deity. But they propitiate the Goddess of wealth along with their "Langapuja". Hence the impact of the Baikho festival on the mind and psychology of the pati Rabha is not of the same vigour like that of the other groups. But now a days, the pomp and grandeur of the Baikho festival are not to be seen even in the villages which once used to hold it most magnificent. In most of the villages this festival has been substituted by "Hachangpuja" which is organised at the specified place called "Hachang Than". Almost all the Raogdani villages have now opted for the institution of "Hachangpuja" through the folk songs known as "Sathargeet" or "Khoksigeet" are still sung during this festival by the youths to convey feelings of love and affection to their beloved ones.

2) LANGA PUJA:--- "The Langapuja" of Rabhas is another important occasion to deserve the status of festival. The "Langa" word literally means "Mahadeva" one of the Trinity of Hindu mythology. Therefore in the "Langapuja", Mahadeva is the primary deity of propitiation, though other deities such as "Dhan-Kuber", "Thakurani", "Dudh-Kumar", "Phul-Kumar" and Goddess "Baikho" or "Khoksi" also finds place in the altar of the worship. The deities are represented with different pieces of find stones for each of them. Generally the propitiation is done in the month of Baisakh or Jeth (mid-April to mid-June) either in forest area or on the bank of nearby river. "Langa"

is propitiated with two-fold objects to have profuse yield of crop as well as to get rid of all the evil influences that might be looming large over man and animals in the year just beginning. The first deity to receive propitiation is Tankurani followed in order by Dudh-kumar-phulkumar langa, Dhankuber and lastly the Goddess Khoksi, Along with the Pati Rabha, the langa puja is instituted by the Rangdaries also. But excepting the "langa" which is common to both the other subordinate duties are different from the paties. Thus from the propitiation of different deities, the diversity of their conceptional approach on religious thoughts can be perceived to some extent.

3) KECHAI-KHATI PUJA : Another religious festival of the tribe is connected with the propitiation of "Kechai-Khati" the deity presumed to be the protector of all humanity. Some pati Rabhas hold this puja simultaneously with the "Langa puja". The puja is also known as "Dingapuja" simply because a prototype of a "Ding" (boat) is made out from the trunk of a plantain tree and all items of offering are, put in this boat and carried ultimately to the bank of a river for actual performance of the "puja". The symbols of some deities such as Mahadeva, Biswakarma, and Chandidevi also find place in this "Dinga" It is to be noted that no sacrifice is made in this occasion and all items of offering are in the raw form. However, a duck or a goat is put inside the Ding and is allowed to float as a symbol of sacrifice. When the dinga goes on floatation, all the members are to move himeccards without loomng back to it as other wise this may entail misfortune to the families.

It is also believed by the Rabhas that the "Kechai/ Khaiti" is the only competent deity to keep under control the evil spirits and witches that might inhabit in the village. So to drive to scare them away is organised in this occasion which is appropriately called "Hawal Kheda". Here, the youths of the village go on striking the wall of each and every household under the belief that by the at process all the evils could be driven out and sacrificed before the "Kechai-Khaiti".

4) MAREPUJA OR MARAIPUJA : The Pati Rabha of south-east Goalpara and south-west Kamrup institute "Merepuja" or "Maraipuja" to propitiate Goddess "Manasa" or Bishahari" (The Queen of serpernts).It is regarded as the most important festival occasion of much Socio-cultural importance. The Propitiation is done though the institution of "Deodhani " and "Ozapali" dances accompanied be traditional folk songs based on the legandary quarrel between Monasa and Chando-Sadagar and fate that befell on sati, Beula. The "Marai puja" is instituted primalily seeking blessings against fell and fatal discases, natural calamities and also to allay fears from serpents during the year ahead. Though it is a community festival, it is sometimes instituted privately for fulfilment of any particular desire or wish. Besides " Monasa" two other deities are also worshipped in this "Puja" inseperate altars they are "sitala" and "Dharma Devta". Some times the Maraipuja continues for three days when it is called "Gata Marai" But in some other occasion it is completed within one day when it is known as "Ful Marai" on both the occasions the deity is propitiated by sacrificing either a buffalo

or a he-goat. In this way, the Rabhas perform their differnt religious festivals.

IX. THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE RABHAS

Generally a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and begining birth, social puberty, marriage fatherhood, advancement to a higher Class, occupational specialization, and death. The life of an Individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another, and from one occupation to another. The life cycle consists of a series of rites of transition, which have been accompanied every change of place state, social position and age.

Birth is the first crucial transition of the human being all sorts of rites, ceremonies, observances, toboos etc. are associated with child birth and rites the passage. Another important transition in the life and status of the individual is marriage. It is also accompanied by different types of rites and ceremonies.

Death is the last but great transition of the human life. various rites are performed relation to death. As a whole the Rabha life cycle centres round the three most important rites of passage namely birth, marriage and death.

i) BIRTH CEREMONIES :- The Rabhas follow many rules in regard of birth of a baby. The mother is treated as unclean till the

date on which the umbilical cord of the baby falls. On the day of purification, the mother is to give her child a name and on this occasion the lady attending her during confinement is specially invited to bless the new born. On completion of all these rituals the neighbours are entertained including this lady in a grand feast usually by killing a pig. If this feast some how or other can not be arranged, the mother feels herself not relieve from the social obligation that she owes to her neighbours. It is found that ritualistic uniforming in connection with a birth is not to be found in the Rabha society, the same being performed by customary rules which vary from place to place and region to region.

ii) MARRIAGE :- In the marriage system of Rabhas, it is essential to know some basic customary rules governing the marital relationship amongst the Rabha. There are some customary rules that the Rabhas have followed in marriage system. In this way no marriage can take place between the same "Barai" or Gotra of between two Barais included in a 'Hur' that means 'Mitragotra'. Amongst Pati and Bitlia Rabha some laxity in these restrictions do often occur but not deviation has been noticed amongst the Rangdanie and the Maitories. The Pati Rabhas are the most predominant among all other groups. An important aspect of Pati Rabha marriage is that in comparison with the Rangdanie and the Maitories, it is solemnised in a very simple way though it requires to pass through several preliminary stages before the actual marriage rites are performed.

In the first stage, a few ladies of the village set out to the house of the prospective bride with the intention of conveying the choice for the girl. This visit is known as "Pan-Tamul kata". Since the mind of the bride's party is not yet known, a date is fixed on which the groom party arrives again with a bag of chira (pounded rice). If this is received by the bride's party, the proposal for the marriage is presumed to have been accepted. But this acceptance of the proposal is subject to the general approval of all the nearest relations and elderly people of the village. So a date is again fixed on this very day and accordingly the groom-party consisting of men and women arrive at the bride's House where a similar group of people keep awaiting for them. This occasion is known as "Gota-Tamul khuoya" and is most significant part of the entire proceeding here the groom party is to offer betel-nuts and leaves with utmost care. This being done, the approval of the village elders is presumed to have been obtained without any reservation and this clears the way for the next step which is known as 'Pan-cheni' (also called "Joron") on this day groom party arrive at the bride's house loaded with bags of pounded rice and banana. Members of both the parties then begin to feed themselves on the betel-nut and leaves to prepare the ground talks regarding various things requires to be presented to the girl's parents etc. After this discussion, when the bride's side are unequivocally agreed, then as a token of maturity of the marriage proposal, the bride is given her bridal apparels, a ring, a few pieces of bangles etc. along with the permission mark on her forehead.

The actual marriage takes place on an auspicious day ascer-

tained on the verdict of the village priest or as per dictum of the calender. The usual practice on this day is to fetch the bride to the groom's house for holding the marriage rites. On arriving there, the first task is to attire the bride with all the the brida items and this being over, the return journey begins the procession swelling this time with the inclusion of members from bride's side-more appropriately known as "Nok-Swamis"

As soon as the bride arrives she is made to stand just beneath the entrance gate where the first ritual known as "Chalanibati sara Koya" is performed amidst a cheerful atmosphere, She is then led to the "Borghar" along with the female members of her side is established in the midst of an altar (Mandap) where a clayey lamp is kept lighting with mustard oil.

It is customary for both the bride and groom to take both befor they are brought in front of this altar. After bath,both of them are again attired with the prescribed dresses and brought to the pandel and then both of them are tied in a knot callled "lagnaganthi". This is symbol that from now on wards both of them are to march together no the journey of life. After this, other minor rituals known as "Dhup-chaal chatioya", usarga, and "pasa" indigenous game of skill presumably to varify their I.G. After this the couple seen in revernce to the "Rantak" and them individual family members.

After end of all these rituals they entertained a big feast and after the feast bride-party return back to their destination.

It is very important fact that whatever be the form of marriage it is customary to propitiate "Risi-Sore" the deity of family welfare by sacrificing a cock and a hen before the formal union of the groom and the bride. The performance of this ritual marks the completion of all formalities pertaining to a marriage by negotiation. If a conjugal life is affected in any way after marriage then separation can be secured by a divorce which is recognised by the Rabha society.

ii) DEATH : Like the Boro-Kocharis, the Rabhas also practice both cremation and burial process. In a normal death the dead body is washed with "Santi-jal" (Sanctified water) and after that the body is dressed with new garments and kept in an inner and outer house for a night for enabling the distant relatives to arrive for the last rites. It is buried or cremated in the next morning. In an unnatural death caused either by epidemic or suicide, the dead body is however buried and not burnt. It is customary for the whole village not to take any food till the dead body is removed to the cremation ground. After disposal of the corpse, the members attending the cremation come back to the house of the dead and on their way they are required to take some and receive some amount of smoke produced jointly by burning cotton and dried leaves of jute which is kept ready by other members not attending the cremation ground. This is done to scare away any evil effect that might accompany them while returning from the cremation ground. Then the party arrives at the house occurring death where a preliminary death rite is performed which corresponds more or less to the "Marang Kakha" rite of the Rangdaniyas.

The final death rites are usually done on the seven day but if it is intended to defer, the date is required to be announced at the cremation ground itself. It is customary not to take fish and meat till the completion of all the death rites. The Rabhas also practice some other taboos amongst which milk is not allowed to be taken by the children for a year if the death happens to be of the mother and no banana if death happens to be of father. The practice of offering "Mysako" (an offering of boiled rice with meat, egg, fish, rice-beer etc.) to the dead is also prevalent amongst the Paties.

The funeral ceremony of the Pati Rabha is performed which is less expensive and also shorter in its total spread over when compare to the Rangdaries and the Maitories. The Rabhas perform another funeral ceremony called as "Fara Kanti". Generally it is seen that "Farakanti" is performed on the deaths of wealthy persons, old age person as well as honored person of the society. It is very expensive.