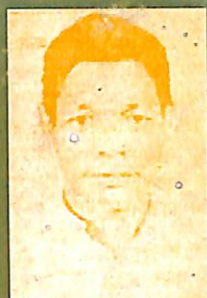


SOCIO-CULTURAL ACTIVISTS AND REFORMERS OF THE RABHAS

VOLUME - I



DR. M. GOPAL SINGH

**SOCIO-CULTURAL
ACTIVISTS AND REFORMERS
OF THE RABHAS**

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“Socio-cultural Activists and Reformers of the Rabhas” Volume - I, a collection of life sketch of Rabha personalities written by Dr. M. Gopal Singha and published by MFL Publications, Dhupdhara, Goalpara with financial assistance of Assam Institute of Research for Tribals & Scheduled Castes, Guwahati-22, Assam.

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Dedicated this volume
in memory of my parents :
Late M. Lalbabu Singha (1914-2001)
&
Late M. Chaubi Devi (1920-2004)
—Source of my inspiration

‘Gopal’

PREFACE

The Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati under the aegis of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India, have been providing grants-in-aid to authors for publication of books written on different aspects of tribals and scheduled castes. The scheme is basically known as 'Grants-in-Aid for Literary Works for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes'. The scheme receives very good response from different authors. In fact, it is difficult to accommodate all the authors under the scheme. As a part of this popular scheme, the book on **SOCIO-CULTURAL ACTIVISTS AND REFORMERS OF THE RABHAS** by **Dr. M. Gopal Singha** has been sponsored by the Institute for publication. It is expected that the readers will receive the book with pleasure. We look forward for comments and suggestions from the readers.

I am thankful to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India for providing financial assistance for the scheme. I am also thankful to the Government of Assam, Department of WPT & BC for giving financial assistance for the scheme. Finally, I like to thank M/s. Bohniman Printers, Guwahati for their help and co-operation for bringing out the book.

Dated Guwahati
the 16th February, 2006

Mrs. N. A. Hazarika
Director
Assam Institute of Research for
Tribals and Scheduled Castes,
Guwahati-22

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INTRODUCTION

"Socio-cultural Activists and Reformers of the Rabhas" is an attempt to draw life sketches of pioneering Rabha personalities who had rendered yeoman's services for socio-cultural and political development of the Rabhas. The life sketches of a few pioneers have been published in regional languages but such life sketches have yet to be focused and presented in English. Keeping this in view, the biography of a few pioneering personalities have been chosen to sketch considering their relevance and importance in the community. The significance of such pioneering personalities towards the development of the society is glaring. It is pertinent to point out that the study of socio-cultural activists and reformers is a paramount importance because of the fact that such luminaries have brought about major socio-psychological change in a backward tribal society. The social mobility and structural changes that have brought about by social activists and reformers are based on sacrifice, tolerance, confrontation, persuasion, protest, challenges, etc. Hence, the role of such promising personalities towards the development of the greater Assamese society and the Rabha society in particular cannot be ignored. The Rabhas since the inception of the society have produced a number of social activists and reformers who have been able to establish niche in local and regional levels and have contributed largely in the process of development of the community in different levels and capacities. All of them deserve appreciation and need to highlight their valuable contributions to the world. But it is not possible to incorporate all such activists and reformers in the present publication. Efforts have been made to incorporate more number of persons but due to non-availability of proper information a few prominent pioneers have been left out in this book. In the present volume biographies of twelve promising personalities have been incorporated. In fact, most of the persons who have

depicted in this volume are no longer in this world except four. There are still a few pioneering personalities whose life sketches are yet to collect namely Late Purna Chandra Koch, Adhar Bantho, Abinash Rabha, Rajen Rongkho, etc. No stone will be left unturned to incorporate these personalities in the next volume. Besides, it is also sincerely expected to incorporate the personalities of new generation who have rendered pioneering works in various levels of society. This volume is the outcome of eight years long endeavour.

The present book is also the outcome of valuable suggestions given by a number of eminent personalities like Dr. Promod Chandra Bhattacharya, Rajen Rabha and Sarat Chandra Rabha (during their life time), Sri Biren Rabha, etc. I am particularly indebted to Sri Listi Rabha Rongkho, Dr. Upen Rabha Hakacham and Sri Prakash Rabha for their valuable suggestions. I am also grateful to Smti Anandi Bala Rabha, Sri Ramesh Sarkar, Sri Sashimohan Santok for helping me in collecting materials for this book. Many well-wishers have also offered their ideas and advice for preparation of such type of book.

My thanks are due to my wife Dr. Malina Devi Rabha, without whose help this book could not have been written. I am also grateful to Smti N. A Hazarika Director, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati who has made a major contribution for publication of the book.

I am also grateful to Bohniman Printers, Guwahati for timely printing of the book.

Dhupdhara, Goalpara
Assam

Dr. M. Gopal Singha

GOBARDHAN SARKAR



The late nineteenth and early twentieth century marked a great awakening in Rabha socio-cultural development. During that period, there emerged a number of personalities who sacrificed their lives for a better Rabha society. Late Gobardhan Sarkar was one of the greatest pioneering social activists and reformers of the period whose relentless efforts ultimately bore the fruits of social development. He had been a source of inspiration and guiding force for the people in general and Rabha community in particular. As a matter of fact, the community regard him as 'Jatio Jibanar Kandari'

Gobardhan Sarkar, a household name of the Rabhas was born on 3rd October 1897 at Bongaon, a Rabha inhabited village located in the foothills of Chitolmari Hillocks of Tiplai in Rangjuli Revenue circle of Goalpara district. He was the second son of Bangal Rabha and Sombari Rabha. The newly born baby of the couple was named 'Gobar' (cowdung) as the mother entered cowshed and cleared cowdung minute before her labour pain and delivery of the baby.

The early life of Gobardhan Sarkar was very miserable. He was brought up in his village under the care of his grandmother – Suwari Rabha as she had lost his father when he was hardly six years of age. Gobardhan had also lost his mother just after two years of his father's demise. Gobardhan Sarkar started his primary education

at Rangjuli. In the school he was very much loved by the teachers as he was an extraordinary, intelligent and meritorious pupil. When he was in class sixth and seventh standard he had been entrusted with the duty of Monitor in the hostel. In 1918 after appearing the student scholarship examination he engaged himself in cultivation along with his elder brother. At that time, he received a letter which directed him to join as Headmaster. He was appointed as Headmaster of Madang Primary School. On 31st December 1918 he joined the school and took charge of Headmaster from Taruni Prasad Das. But it was not an easy task for Gobardhan Sarkar to render service as a teacher in such a backward and remote village. As a dutiful and dedicated teacher he had been able to attract learners. His salary was fixed depending on the ratio of pupils according to the rules prevailing at that time. If a girl is admitted in the school two 'anna' (paise) was given as bonus to the teacher. In order to increase the enrolment of the school he frequently called public meeting and convinced the rural masses on the need of education. He succeeded in his mission and within a short span of time number of pupils increased to 30. The Sub-Inspector of school who came for inspection was highly satisfied with the performance of the school and enhanced his salary with the passing of time. The village school master became very popular among the villages and organized a group of 'Jatra Gan' (open theatre) under his leadership.

Gobardhan Sarkar's teaching career was further brightened after he was instructed to undergo Normal Training at Jorhat in 1921. The letter which instructed him to undergo teacher training received from the Deputy Inspector of Goalpara Sub-Division brought him immense

pleasure that as if his dream became a reality. He set out for Jorhat on 1st January 1921 boarded steamer from Dolgomaghat for Gauhati and from Gauhati again he proceeded Jorhat by train. He joined the Jorhat Normal School on 6th January 1921 for training.

Gobardhan, just after admission into the Jorhat Normal Training School experienced the caste hatred bias when he was forced to arrange separate kitchen. He tried to share in the kitchen of Sibsagar district where the Ahoms and Sonowals inmates forbade him. However, he forcibly managed a part of the kitchen by demarcating as a boundary as per advice of the hostel superintendent Prannath Bujurbarua. In course of the training the intimacy among the inmates from Goalpara and Dhubri Sub-divisions grew closer in their friendship and echewed the caste hatred and began to dine together in a single kitchen.

With the passing of time the final examination of the training course was about to commence soon. But Gobardhan was quite astonished to find a notification inviting application for further study in the Normal School after completion of the ongoing training. He immediately met Prannath Bujurbarua, the superintendent of the hostel and took his advice. Ultimately he got permission for reading Normal from Deputy Inspector of Jorhat. In the meantime, he got scholarship in the Normal Scholarship Selection Test by securing highest marks. He along with Kajiram Das of Rampur in Kamrup district who promoted to second year class decided to stay together in a room though arranged separate kitchen in the hostel. Just after taking admission in the first year class another

incidence took place. In the hostel, the wave of untouchability flared up again as because Gobardhan belonged to Rabha community. He was not allowed to use kitchen anywhere. The matter was informed to superintendent Hari Narayan Dutta Barua but he expressed his inability to solve the problem. Instantaneously Gobardhan passed a strong remark that, "there should be a written order that the students belonging to lower castes have no right of education in the Normal school, I will go back home tomorrow." Having heard the remark superintendent Hari Narayan Barua called on Gobardhan by sending a bearer next day and arrangement for the kitchen was ultimately made. Sarkar while continuing a year-long Normal training he had been able to acquire courage to fight against the menace of caste hatred that prevailed in the hostel. Gobardhan Sarkar by dint of his extra-curricular activities and as a good footballer he came in limelight. Besides, he also secured highest marks in Mathematics and Geography in the annual examination of second year. All these extra ordinary qualities helped him in breaking the barrier of untouchability. Sarkar had the opportunity to meet Mahatma Gandhi in a public meeting organized at Jorhat when he was in Normal school. He was highly influenced by Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement and henceforth he used to wear Dhoti and Khadar clothes. On completion of third year examination, Hari Narayan Barua, the superintendent of hostel one day invited him in the residence and told him 'you are the first among the Rabha community who has been selected for scholarship in the Normal Test, I expect your better future.'

Gobardhan Sarkar while reading school at Rangjuli had to face caste hatred problem for the first time. He was badly disturbed and shocked by the menace. Some-

times he became very unstable. He often asked himself the reasons behind ignorance, illiteracy and sanskritization of lower caste people especially the Rabhas. So he determined to devote his life to uplift the racial glory of the Rabhas. It may be mentioned that while studying in Rangjuli primary school he envisaged the process of mass sanskritization among the Rabhas. In that time the revolutionary awakening of 'Sanatan' religious cult reached its climax. Under the influence of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva's "Ek Nama Sarana Dharma", a large proportion of people from Rabha and Boro community were sanskritized in the Southern Bank of Kamrup and Goalpara districts. Gobardhan Sarkar deeply speculated on the ways and means to keep the Rabha society intact. He thought of social emancipation of his community by revitalizing the social system. In view of this objective he started secret discussion with elders like Budhmal Chandra Rabha and Mihir Chandra Rabha and proposed to start agitational programme. But later, decided to undertake the programme through social organizations. Immediately, in the month of February 1916 the Rabha students of Rangjuli area unitedly established 'Rabha Satra Sanmilan' with Mihir Ch. Rabha as president and Gobardhan Sarkar as General Secretary. The main objectives of the student body were (i) to promote educational interest in the Rabha community; (ii) reformation of social system and (iii) establishment of schools by awakening the masses in the viable areas. Keeping these in view Sarkar started his pioneering efforts by bringing consciousness among the masses of Dwarhai and Tope Bikali areas where the Rabhas inhabited predominantly. Sarkar further strengthened the students' organization by establishing 'Assam Rabha Satra Sanmilan' in 1925 at Santipur M.E. school premises wherein Dwarikanath Rabha was nominated as

president, Gobardhan Sarkar as General Secretary and Kartik Chandra Rabha as Joint Secretary. On 15th January 1926, the first joint annual conference of 'Assam Rabha Sanmilan' and 'Assam Rabha Satra Sanmilan' was successfully organized under the aegis of Dwarhai Rabha society and presidentship of Dwarikanath Rabha. In this session Gobardhan Sarkar was reselected as secretary of 'Assam Rabha Sanmilan'.

In 1929 Gobardhan Sarkar married Bimola Rabha, daughter of Nayalu Rabha of village Chandoria in Goalpara. Gobardhan Sarkar being a responsible teacher, never neglected in the organizational work of the community. But he sometimes felt loneliness due to lack of social activists. Several time the Rabha social organizations had to suffer set back due to lack of social activists and their patronage.

It may be noted that the then Rabha society in the eastern part of Goalpara was extended from Kamrup border in the east, Dudhnoi river in the west and Garo Hills in the south in the name of two social organizations namely Dwarahai and Tope Bikali. The Tope Bikali ranges from Rangjuli to Dhupdhara and Dwarahai, the western part upto Dudhnoi. Gobardhan Sarkar belonged to Dwarhai Rabha society. Some basic social reformations were brought in Dwarhai society. But the society was disintegrated into two parts following the reformation movement. In Tope Bikali also similar situation arose. Sarkar made every possible efforts to bring a common social system by initiating negotiation with the organizers of those fragmented social groups. Sarkar's effort to form a common organization was supported by noted socialist Bishnuprasad Rabha. Gobardhan Sarkar's effort to get cemented the Rabha society was highly appreciated and

supported by Bishnuprasad Rabha when he attended in a series of meetings following the invitation of Tope Bikali at Gathiapara and at Maslam in Dhupdhara. As per advice of Bishnuprasad Rabha and constant effort of Gobardhan Sarkar a special meeting was convened on 6th November 1960 under the patronage of 'Bikali Samaj' at 'Biswahari than'. The meeting was attended by senior and responsible members of Tope Bikali and Dwarahai Rabha society. In the meeting a consensus was reached to form a common organization in the name of 'Dudhnoi Purbanchal Rabha Samaj'. Gobardhan Sarkar was unanimously selected as founder president of the august organization. A commission of five members including him was constituted and entrusted with the responsibility to write a customary rules after cross examinations of the prevailing rules. Apart from this, Sarkar had the credit of writing the constitution of 'Purbanchal Rabha Samaj' with the help of his associates.

In 1943, the untimely demise of Khirod Mohan Rabha suffered a setback in 'Rabha Sewa Sangha' in its organizational work and it was very difficult to keep under the organization's umbrella due to lack of organizers and activists. Gobardhan Sarkar yet again swang into action to revitalize such an important organization from its dormant state. In the first annual session of 'Purbanchal Rabha Samaj' at Madang-Dhanubhanga a convenor committee was formed to organize 'Assam Rabha Sangha' with Gobardhan Sarkar as main convenor in the thread bearing meeting under the Presidentship of invited guest Haliram Baghdev of Kathiatoli in Nagaon. A representative session was convened on 11th May 1963 at Rangjuli High School under the Presidentship of Gobardhan Sarkar wherein the representatives from Lakhipur, Goalpara,

Boko, Chhygaon and Garo Hills unanimously resolved to revitalize the organization. The congregation further decided to organize the same in the name of 'Assam Rabha Sangha'. Sarkar had to take the responsibility of the august organization as president and he was successful in elevating the organization in its spirit and strength. His relentless endeavour led to the awakening of Rabha nationalist sentiments and consciousness which further helped in the establishment of a couple of organizations in the name of 'Rabha Jatio Parishad' in 1970 and 'Nikhil Rabha Jatio Parishad' in 1975. Through his effort a distinctive flag of Rabha community was prepared and the constitution of the 'Nikhil Rabha Jatio Parishad' was written. His tireless effort had far reaching impact on the evolution of Rabha nationalist movement in Meghalaya and West Bengal.

Gobardhan Sarkar's commendable service to the community at large was recognized by the people and was felicitated at the Bongaon Session of 'Dudhnoi Purbanchal Rabha Samaj' in 1976 and Tamulpur session of 'Nikhil Rabha Jatio Parishad' in 1978. Besides, he had been given the title 'Rabha Jati Kandari', (pioneer of Rabha community) by reknown personality of Assam – Benudhar Sarma. Sarkar was the driving force and pioneering organizer in the formation of 'Rabha Satra Sanmilan', Assam Rabha Sanmilan, Rabha Sewa Sangha, Rabha Jatio Parishad (now Nikhil Rabha Jatio Parishad), etc.

This pioneer of Rabha community presented a parody song composed by him in the open session of the first annual conference of the Assam Rabha Sanmilan. His song was as follows:

Hera Rabha jati bhai thaka dat niktai
Bideshiye nile ahi thai,
Khowa bhang kani bilatipani
Dhani habar aiye upai.

Khaba nite nite mod jane prati bhinamat
Hingshabhab rakhiba manat;
Thiala thiali kori bahu dhon shesh kari
Unatir korohe upat.
Hobo lora borbhai porashali napathai
Morom kori rakhiba ghorot,
Jona buja hole pashe amongol hobo aashe
Moh charai karmath korahe sobai.

Sarkar through his song depicted the characteristics of Rabha society which was lagging behind the time in consciousness, self confidence and efforts. The song composed by him played a positive role in social transformation of the Rabhas.

The pioneer social activist, reformer and iron man of the Rabhas during the last part of his life had been languishing in illness for about two years and departed his soul for the heavenly abode on 19th March, 1981 at the age of 85.

Gobardhan Sarkar with his excellent organizing capacity could be able to bring a new socio-cultural awakening and new dawn to the Rabhas. He will always be remembered for his constant fight for social upliftment of the Rabhas.

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2. Rabha, M. 2002 'Rabha Sahityar Buranji', MFL Publications, pp. 35-36.

Note : Informant :

Sri Ramesh Sarkar, son of Gobardhan Sarkar, age, 68,
Vill- Bongaon, Tiplai, Goalpara.



PRASANNA KUMAR PAM

Late Prasanna Kumar Pam, is a great name in the history of Rabha socio-cultural development. A man of multifaceted personality, Pam is undoubtedly a pioneer of Rabha Drama movement. He was an artist who established a niche in Rabha folk-song. His pioneering efforts aimed at strengthening Rabha language, art and culture by highlighting potential socio-cultural elements of the Rabhas. He used art and culture as a medium of social mobilization.

Prasanna Kumar Pam was born on 21st April, 1932 at Latapara (Mozaipara, Dwarka) village under Balijana Revenue Circle in Goalpara district, Assam. Kolam Rabha, a poor villager was his father. His mother was Dakhelbala Rabha (Pam). He lost his mother when he was in his infancy. Kolam Rabha was migrated to Manikganj village in Meghalaya with his child in search of livelihood, as he was deeply shocked by the demise of his wife.

Prasanna Kr. Pam had to pass his childhood amidst poverty and misearable family condition at Manikganj. He used to earn his living as cowherd in his tender age. He began his early education at Khamari Lower Primary School serving as a herdsman. He used to graze buffalo and while grazing he usually played 'bahi' (flute). Since then he began the rehearsal of traditional Rabha folk song sitting on buffalo. On completion of primary education he was admitted in Agia M.V. school (Agia) in 1946.

where he had to spend three odd years devoting himself in education as well as by rendering household services like ploughing, firewood cutting and collection from the nearby jungles in a couple of families. He had to shift for his High school education from Agia to Dudhnoi High School in Seventh Standard. In Dudhnoi also he continued his education by serving as a labourer and promoted to ninth standard. In 1958, Prasanna Kr. Pam married Umnibala Rabha (Rungdung), daughter of Nidhan Chandra Rabha (Rongkho), the then Mauzadar of Manikganj when he was reading in class nine. He appeared Matriculation Examination next year but could not come out successful due to household problems.

Prasanna Kr. Pam began his livelihood by negotiating wants and poverty. Despite facing several problems owing to his poverty, the born artist had not been daunted. He began his cultural revolution by composing, singing songs and started a nomadic way of life.

Prasanna Kr. Pam began his pioneering works on folk songs and plays in Rabha language. Despite having minimum academic qualification he could achieve an extensive knowledge and experience on Rabha folk literature and folk culture. Through his constant struggle in the field of Rabha folk tradition and literature he had been able to establish a distinct Rabha folk culture in greater Assamese society.

Prasanna Kr. Pam had the credit of writing, directing and staging a number of plays in Rabha language. Among them mention may be made of (1) Dadanbir, (2) Marukhetri, (3) Shristi Pidan, (4) Moirapala, (5) Pidan Sangsar, (6) Maya Hasong, (7) Langa Mukti and (8) Numila-E-Pradhan. Besides these, a number of unpublished and incomplete writings had lost. Most of his plays

were written taking historical facts and backgrounds of the Rabhas into account. Apart from these the societal structure and other cultural milieus of the Rabhas were keenly observed and depicted through his plays. By and large, the plays were based on cultural revolution and social reformation. He tried his best to depict the realities of life through songs in his plays. His plays were made more attractive by incorporating six to seven songs in a particular play. Besides, application of lucid language and dialogue is also another important characteristic of his plays. As a popular dramatist he organized a number of dramatic groups and Rabha cultural troops in many parts of Rabha inhabited villages like Nadiapara, Naguwapara, Kashumari, Sarapara, Dairong, Rangchi, Thouwapara, Upar Manikganj, Nakchar, Khardang, Kantapara, etc.

Late Prasanna Kr. Pam was an artist of All India Radio, Guwahati and regularly presented Rabha songs. He had to his credit more than three hundred Rabha folk songs composed by him.

Prasanna Kr. Pam died on February 21, 1977 in a fatal road mishap that took place at Rechu Belpara in Garo Hills while he was coming from election campaign of Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. The pioneer of Rabha folk song, Rabha drama and folk traditions, Prasanna Kr. Pam would be remembered for his creative works.

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RAJEN RABHA



Late Rajen Rabha was one of the greatest pioneering socio-cultural activists and litterateurs of the Rabhas. He was also a representative from the Rabha community who contributed to the field of Assamese literature. A man with mission, Rajen Rabha worked to establish a distinctive identity of the Rabhas in the socio-cultural and literary arena. He made pioneering efforts through the study of historical backgrounds, legendary facts of the Rabhas and also through the development of Rabha language and literature. His research oriented scholastic work on the community had been able to establish a strong foundation of Rabha language and literature.

Rajen Rabha was born in 1928 at Bhodeyapara village of Dudhnoi in Goalpara district. His father was late Alu Ram Rabha and mother was late Phuleswari Rabha (Fello Rabha). He was brought up by his parents in a very miserable economic condition. Little Rajen started his early education at No. 233 Dudhnoi Lower Primary School and there he got a monthly scholarship of Rs. 3.00 for four years. In L.P. scholarship examination he stood third position in Goalpara district. On completion of L.P. school he was admitted in Dolgoma M.E. school in 1933 and there also he secured scholarship with first division. After completion of M.E. School examination he could not pursue further education due to poor economic

condition of the family. In 1937, he served as a teacher in Rowmari Primary school for six months in deputation vacancy and got Rs. 12.00 per month. Despite having a strong urge to continue higher level of education Rajen Rabha had to console himself as he had to set his foot in the struggle for earning a living from the very days of childhood. He had to move from one place to another in search for a livelihood. He, however, started his bread earning by involving himself in a local cloth store owned by Mr. Raja Ram Chaube, a businessman from Rajasthan, as a salesman. There he got a monthly wage of Rs. 5.00. As a salesman Rajen Rabha had to visit neighbouring weekly markets sailing clothes. After a few years he left the job and hence began to engage himself in the agricultural activities of his household. Then he got an opportunity to study a year long Sanskrit education at 'Kokila Mukh Ashram' under Assam Bangio Saraswato Moath which is about 7 miles away from Jorhat. He got the information about such Sanskrit education from a news paper 'Asomiya' daily. Rajen Rabha successfully completed the course. In 1940, Rajen Rabha was appointed at Damra Tehsil under Bijni Raj Estate as 'Mohari' or Revenue Collector. In 1942, with the launching of Quit India Movement by Gandhiji he rendered yeoman's service by engaging himself in voluntary organization as a chief secretary and there he had the opportunity to work closely with the President of the organization Manisankar Basumatary. In 1944 he resigned from the post of Revenue Collector to join as the Headmaster at Shilook Primary School. In 1948-49, he underwent training in Kokrajhar and from the Teacher Training Centre he secured distinction. Again he was also selected for 'Normal Training Course from Dhubri Sub-Division under

Dhubri School Sub-Inspector for three years long training course at Jorhat Normal Training School. As a result of his keen interest and hard labour in the training course he secured letter marks in Mathematics, Science and other subjects like Art of Teaching. After successful completion of Teacher Training Course he was appointed as Headmaster of Joyramkushi M.V. school through Goalpara Local Board. In 1956 he was transferred to Khara Girls' M.E. School. In the same year he was nominated for undergoing training at Titabor Basic Training College. In this training course also he came out with first place in one year and two months long course. In 1974, he was appointed as an instructor in Dudhnoi Basic Training Centre.

A man of high ambition and profound quality of tolerance Rabha had been able to achieve high academic career even without attending the classes. He passed the Matriculation examination in 1955, 'Bisharad Degree' in Hindi in 1957, Intermediate Arts in 1961, B.A. in 1965 and M.A. in Assamese in the year 1971. Besides, he also carried out research work for Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) on the topic "The Rabhas : Their Society and Culture with reference to Non-Sanskritize Groups" under the guidance of Dr. Bhuban Mohan Das but due to some unavoidable circumstances he could not submit the thesis. However, the research work so far carried out has been formulated for publication and a book entitled "The Rabhas" (2002) has been published by Anundoram Barooah Institute of Language, Art & Culture, Assam (252 pages).

Despite having post graduate qualification Rabha

rendered his service only in intermediate pay scale as a Headmaster in Kalpani Basic School. After rendering a meritorious service of about a decade Sri Rabha attained superannuation on 31st October, 1986. It is worthwhile to mention that just before a month of his superannuation, the government of India announced the name of Rajen Rabha, Headmaster, Salpara High Basic School as one of the recipients of 'National Award for Best Teacher on 5th September, 1986 among the three teachers selected from Assam. He was also conferred 'Kamal Narayan Choudhury Memorial Award' by Sri Robin Dutta, Chairman, Blue Hills Travels Pvt. Ltd. on 3rd August, 1988. Besides, Rajen Rabha was also the recipient of 'Dalim Kumar Medhi Award' of 1999, which was conferred to him by Naba Kanta Barua, President, Apurba Singha Trust on 18th February, 1999.

Besides being an eminent teacher, Rajen Rabha was also a renown scholar and he had a niche in the socio-cultural and historical aspects of the Rabhas. A litterateur par-excellence, he had the credit of publishing and editing a large number of journals, magazines, souvenirs and books. Of these, 'Kisholay' (1955-57), Magazine of Titabor Basic Training Centre, Uddaiyan (1955), magazine of Rabha Kristi Sangha edited by him were worthmentionable. His one of the greatest contributions was the publication of a comprehensive book titled 'Rabha Janajati' (1974), by Asom Sahitya Sabha. Besides, 'Rabha Sabda Sambhar' (1982), 'Rabha Sadhu' (1990) were also published by Asom Sahitya Sabha. Earlier, Rajen Rabha published 'Hari Sankirtan Mala' a compilation of books in Goalparia language. He was also actively involved in writing books for Rabha language

studies. As an outcome of the effort, 'Rabha Biyakoran Prathom Bhag' (Rabha Grammar Part-I, 1981), 'Rabha Biyakoran Ditiyo Bhag' (1983) and also such textbooks for 'Parichai', 'Prathamik', 'Madhyamik', 'Prabodh' and 'Bisharad' examinations conducted by Rabha Bhasa Parishad (Rabha Language Council), Dudhnoi were published under his incharge ship. He had also written more than 150 articles on different topics related to folk literature and socio-cultural aspects of the Rabhas. The 'Prabandho Kunja' a collection of various articles written by Rabha was published by Mr. Hemanto Phukan with a view to preserve the publish works appeared in sporadic journals, magazines, souvenirs, etc.

Rajen Rabha also edited 'Ghototkash Badh', a folk drama which was published by Rabha Adhyan Chakra, Dudhnoi in 1991. He also had the credit of staging and acting in several historical plays like 'Bandir Bir', 'Chandragupta', 'Ashok' and 'Harshabardhan' to enable the people to learn historical facts of ancient India. He had to his credit a number of unpublished manuscripts. Of these, a few were in incomplete stage. 'Manab Darpan' is one of the books written on spiritual aspects of the human beings. He also wrote on distinct socio-cultural aspects of each of seven Rabha 'Barai' (clans). Rabha had also the credit of editing 'Udoyan', the mouthpiece of Rabha Kristi Sangha by establishing a printing press at his own residence in Dudhnoi. He also served as the Chief Editor of 'Kisholay' the magazine of Titabor Basic Training College. Rajen Rabha also used to write in various weekly, fortnightly and other journals of Assam like 'Akon', 'Arun', 'Ramdhenu', 'Jowar', 'Haomarjyoti', etc.

Rajen Rabha, besides his pioneering literary works on folk tradition, legendary and historical aspects of the Rabhas, had the credit of attending a number of seminars, lecture series, popular talks and academic meets of writers forum, etc. He attended the CIIL Seminar at Mysore in 1976. Apart from this he presented paper in the seminar of North East Folklore Society and North East Language Council at Gauhati University.

As a pioneering social worker, litterateur and scholar he was associated with several socio-cultural organizations of the state and the locality. He was the pioneer of 'Rabha Bhasa Parishad, Dudhnoi' – an institution for Rabha language study and examinations established at Dudhnoi. Rajen Rabha was the ex-Vice President of Asom Sahitya Sabha. He died at his residence in Amrabati, Dudhnoi after a prolonged illness at the age of 71. He left behind a daughter, a son-in-law and a grandson. A man with excellent scholastic aptitude, and high organizing capacity in the field of language and literature, Rajen Rabha could be able to bring a new socio-cultural awakening in the Rabha society. His personal life and works will continue to inspire the Rabha community in particular and greater Assamese society in general. The chronological events of his life and works were obviously great milestones of his personality and should be earmarked as red letters in the history:

Some selected works and event:

(i) Education and Training

1920: Born in a needy Rabha family at Bhodyapara (Thekachu) village, Dudhnoi, Goalpara.

- 1955: Passed Matriculation Examination as a private candidate from Goalpara Centre.
- 1956: Undertook Basic Training at Titabor Basic Training College.
- 1961: Passed Intermediate Arts (I.A) from Guwahati as a private candidate.
- 1965: Passed B.A. Examination from Gauhati University as a private candidate.
- 1971: Passed M.A. in Assamese from Gauhati University as a private candidate.
- 1972: Registered provisionally as a Ph.D. candidate on the topic "The Rabhas: Their Language and Culture", under the guidance of Prof. (Dr.) Maheswar Neog, G.U.
- 1977: Final Registration of Ph.D. degree was accorded with modification on the topic as 'The Rabhas: Their Society and Culture with special reference to Non-Sanskritized Groups.'

(ii) Socio-cultural and occupational activities

- 1942: Joined in the Quit India Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi and took the responsibility of Chief Secretary of 'Do or Die' wing of the freedom movement under Dudhnoi regional unit.
- 1949-1952: Studied in Jorhat Normal School.
- 1952: Joined as Headmaster of Jayramkushi M.E. School just after completion of Normal study.

- 1954: Selected as the founder President of Dudhnoi branch, Asom Sahitya Sabha.
- 1955: Transferred to Khara Girls' M.E. school and passed 'Bhisarat' Degree in Hindi language.
- 1974: Appointed as an instructor in Dudhnoi Basic Training Centre.
- 1986 October: Retired from teaching profession.
- 1981-1997: Selected as Chairman of 'Rabha Bhasa Parishad', Dudhnoi (Examination).
- 1986-1992: Nominated as Member, Asom Prakashan Parishad.
- 1983: Vice President, Asom Sahitya Sabha, Bongaigaon Session.
- 1990: Chief Patron, 'Rabha Adhyan Chakra' Dudhnoi.
- 1991: President, Reception Committee, Asom Sahitya Sabha, Dudhnoi Session.

(iii) Participation in Seminar and Workshops

- 1973 December: 'Asomor bibhina jati-upajatir majat sanghoti' organized by Asom Sahitya Sabha, President, Giridhar Sarma,
- 1973, 1974: Asomor Anchalik bhasa-boror samaishya' – First writers' Meet, Asom Sahitya Sabha – President, Dr. Maheswar Neog, (1973),
"....." 2nd meet, President, Dr. Maheswar Neog, (1974)
- 1975: "Symposium of Politeness Exchange in Indian Languages, CIIL Mysore, (14th-24th April. 1975).

- 1978: "Akhar Jatani Samaishya' 6th Lekhok Sibir, Asom Sahitya Sabha, Chairperson : Dr. Mukunda Madhav Sarma, 28th-29th October, 1978.
- 1979: "Asomiya Sahityalai Janajati Lekhokar Obodan', Asom Sahitya Sabha, Chairperson: Rajni Kanto Dev Sarma, (10th November, 1979).
- 1982: "Asomar Loko-Sahitya' Asom Sahitya Sabha, Chairperson: Dr. Birendranath Dutta, (24th April, 1982).
- 1983: 'Asomiya bhasar Anchalik bishessata', Asom Sahitya Sabha Golden Jubilee Session, Chairperson: Dr. Birendranath Dutta.
- 1984: "Nagamese" Kohima Sahitya Sabha. President : Dr. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharjya, (14-15 October, 1984).
- 1985: 'Compilation of a comperative Lexicon in Assamese, Bodo, Mising, Karbi, Khasi and other languages of the North Eastern Region of India, NELSO, Guwahati, President : Dr. P.D. Goswami, (4-6, January, 1985).

(iv) Published Works:

Books:

- 1974: "Rabha Janajati", Asom Sahitya Sabha.
- 1977: "Rabha Sadhu". Asom Sahitya Sabha, 1st published, pp-1-69.
- 1981: "Rabha Biyakoron", Part-I.
- 1982: "Rabha Biyakoron", Part-II.
- 1986: "Rajen Rabhar Prabhandho Kunja".

- 1991: "Ghotatkoch bodh".
- 1992: "Rabhar Sadhukotha".
- 1999: "The Rabhas".

(v) Felicitation, award and honour.

- 1975: Literary Felicitation at Titabor Session of Asom Sahitya Sabha.
- 1986: 'National Award' on Teaching.
- 1988: 'Komal Narayan Award'.
- 1999: 'Dalim Kumar Medhi Award'.
- 1997: 'Felicitation' – by Asom Janakristi Samaj', Mirza Session.
- 1998: 'Felicitation' – by B.R.K.R., Boko Session.

Source : Booklet published by – Dr. Upen Rabha Hakacham, Secretary, Rajen Rabha Memorial Trust, pp-1-12.

Note: Based on exclusive interview at Amrabati, Dudhnoi, Goalpara.

RAJEN PAM



Late Rajen Pam was one of the greatest folk artists and litterateurs of the Rabhas. He was one of the pioneers of Rabha folk-culture, drama movement and literature. A visionary with strong and courageous personality, Pam was the driving force and path finder of Rabha traditional art, custom and culture. He had the credit of popularizing Rabha socio-cultural mileus in the electronic media and also had the credit to bring rich Rabha folk-traditions in national doorstep. It was through his selfless dedication that the 'Sodou Rabha Kristi Sanmilan' (All Rabha Cultural Conference) was organized to bring different Rabha art and culture prevailing in different parts of the country in a common platform.

Rajen Pam was born in 1928 in a tribal village of Chotomatia under Dudhnoi Revenue Circle in Goalpara district. His father was Raguna Rabha and mother was Genashowri Bala Rabha. He was very simple in nature and mode of talking since his childhood days. Rajen Pam was very much enchanted and attracted by melodies of different musical instruments of Rabha folk-culture like Kara, Singa, Buburenga, Badungdupa, Khram, Brangshing, Bahi, etc. Pam had his early education in the village and passed matriculation examination from Sadia High School. He began his career as a teacher in Arunachal Pradesh. After three years of teaching in

NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh) he luckily got the opportunity to join as an Assistant Teacher at Dimarjakhili M.E. school in his home district. But, later he devoted himself to social work. While he was working as a teacher in NEFA he used to travel far and wide in Assam and that time he realized the need to preserve the variegated cultural components of different ethnic groups which had been kept unattended. So, he left the government job which he was holding as a education officer in Garo Hills for about five years.

Since 1958, he began to collect the cultural data and materials of the Rabhas which had been on the verge of extinction. He often visited the Rabha inhabited villages and motivated the people to bring cultural consciousness and had brought a revolutionary change in the Rabha cultural scenario. As a result of his effort and constant search for folk melodies in nook and corners of Assam, he had been able to compose his first Rabha folk-song-

O aiya nangbe
Bishini jarjakre.
Nang tangsa bayante
Nangi shabra bishanbe
Prang jakore.

(Meaning : Oh mother, where are you? Your offspring are feeling today mother's need. Like devastation in earthquake and flood your offspring are on the verge of losing their national assets)

Rajen Pam had the credit of composing about 250 songs which enchanted the community. On 17th July,

1957, his three songs such as – “Riba, riba, ribare, dimdakayon ribare; “(i) aiya nangbe bishina Jarjokre; ” “ and “Terangkho Karang’ were recorded by All India Radio, Gauhati under his direction at ‘Dhupdhara Milan Sangha’ premises and later the songs were broadcasted.

Rajen Pam after broadcasting his self composed folk songs in the All India Radio, Gauhati, he began to concentrate on the traditional folk dances; efforts were made to prepare them suitable for presentation in the stages. He had to face a number of problems in the process to make the folk dances and songs stage fitting as he was a government employee and had the household burdens. However, he had not left his efforts and in order to materialize the plan he tendered his resignation from the government job and concentrated wholeheartedly on choreographing the folk dances. In the process he had been able to form dance groups in his locality. Thus one day while undergoing rehearsal for Rabha folk dance in presence of his friends and associates like Prasanna Pam, Congress Rabha, Fulcharan Rabha and others suddenly, Bishnu Prasad Rabha visited his residence. His intention was to collect a traditional Rabha cloth for an Assamese film. Bishnu Rabha was quite amazed to see the different folk dance forms which were being practised during his visit where he stayed for five days and thoroughly observed the colourful and variegated dance forms like ‘Farkanti’, ‘Hamjar’, ‘Sathar’, ‘Hasong’, etc. Bishnu Rabha at the time of his departure from the house of Pam encouraged him with valuable suggestions to make the dances stage oriented. Rajen Pam, since his childhood days, had been very much concerned with the condition in which the tribal traditional folk dances and folk songs were kept in neglected

state of affairs due to lack of proper conservation and patronage. So, in order to aware the people of Rabha community about their language, literature and culture and also to initiate necessary measures for conservation and upliftment of such cultural components he urged upon the people through a thought provoking song composed by him as following :

Dogo dogo
Dogote riba.
Noki noki
Chime, -
gure tong – somayan tongsa.
Chi chongre hongflung
Dogjo rangsang,-
Chinganeke praweta.

Nathamre gaburtang
Nathamre doraitang
Chongeni dimdak kaibijan
Keshaba mungshane-
Bonan lagisha.

(Meaning : Come, come out group of boys and girls.
No time to sleep. See there. Sun of
freedom has arisen. We are to awake. So,
do not delay, come out in the new light).

Rajen Pam for the first time presented Rabha folk dance under his leadership displaying various musical instruments like *singa*, *Karanal*, *Buburenga*, *Badungdupa*, *Kham*, *Dhak*, etc. in the tribal folk cultural conference organized under the patronage of All India Radio in Guwahati. He had also the credit of presenting ‘Farkanti’,

a folk dance form for the first time in the All India Folk Drama Conference held at New Delhi in 1957 under his direction. In 1959, he also led a folk troop and presented Rabha folk dance in Republic Day celebration which was widely acclaimed by the public. Besides, he had the credit of presenting Rabha folk dances in Asom Sahitya Sabha's sessions at Goalpara in 1961, Mangaldai in 1974 and many other places of Assam. Pam was an All India Radio artiste, a playwright, a novelist and a composer of Rabha folk songs. As a noted folk artist he was honoured with Artist Pension by the government of Assam in 1987. In 1989, he was conferred the prestigious 'Sangeet Natak Akademi Award' in recognition of his contribution towards Rabha Culture and Society. Yet again in 1990 he was also conferred 'Artist Award' from the government of Assam.

As mentioned earlier, Pam was a great playwright lyricist, essayist, and novelist. Since his childhood days he imbibed the habit of writing short stories, songs based on folk culture and tradition. Despite having household problem, service and social obligations he wrote the book entitled, 'Kara Nolar Mousara Sur' (1960) based on Rabha folk songs written in 1950. The songs were thoroughly modified and 20 newly composed songs were also incorporated. The book was published by Directorate of Welfare of Plain Tribes, Assam and reprinted for the third time (1992).

His literary contribution towards the Rabha community was significant with the publication of his first novel 'Janong Jinong, (1990). The novel lively depicts the traditional Rabha superstition, customs and culture.

Besides a couple of dramas written in Rabha language 'Sirigini rishi' and Rongdar Kshiriadhangsa' in Assamese were some of his pioneering literary works. Pam had to his credit a number of Radio plays like 'Rengoni', 'Maraha phool', 'Lakhuti Aru Kukur', which are some of his highly acclaimed works. Of these 'Rengoni' written in Assamese was translated into Rabha in the name of 'Rangsari'. Apart from these unpublished Radio plays a number of dance-dramas were written. Among them mention may be made of 'Lakhimi', 'Pratidhani', 'Rangsair Rangili' and 'Hamara Hindusthan Hei'.

Rajen Pam was also a great social organizer, an activist of Rabha socio-cultural development. His contribution towards the establishments of Rabha social organizations and institutions was remarkable. He was the founder advisor of 'Sodou Asom Rabha Kristi Sanmilan' and served the organization for a couple of years. Pam took the trouble of organizing workshops on Rabha folk dances under the aegis of Dudhnoi Cultural Centre wherein he extended his valuable services in the process of choreographing traditional Rabha dance forms like 'Sathar' in 'Baikho', 'Farkanti', 'Khoksi', 'Hasong', etc. He was the founder secretary of 'Rabha Bhasa Parishad', Dudhnoi, a Non-Governmental Organization of the Rabha for language and literary studies. Rajen Pam was a pioneering social activist who established a niche in cementing the socio-cultural ethos of different castes and communities of Assam. The experiences that he gathered from the All India level organizations had helped him in making a symbol of integration.

Rajen Pam, a born artist, a patriot, a true lover of

humanity, was a dedicated and active sentinel of folk-culture and tradition.

Rajen Pam had a successful artistic life. He was successful not only in his personal life as a pioneering folk artist but also in moulding whole of his family as an artistic family. His beloved and illustrious wife Mrs. Surabala Rabha had the credit of presenting duet folk song in the first Gramophone record released in his life. Besides wife, his two sons and four daughters were also imbibed the artistic culture. Mr. Mukul Rabha, the first son of Pam has so far been able to establish niche in Rabha and other tribal folk cultural studies and practices. A cultural officer attached to the Directorate of culture, Dudhnoi Cultural Centre, Goalpara has so far succeeded in fulfilling the dreams of his father. The four daughters have also far reaching experiences on dance and folk song traditions.

Rajen Pam died on 24th June 1998 at his 'Kara Kutir' residence in Chotomatia village after prolonged illness. The great artist and pioneer of Rabha folk traditions would be remembered by all for his valuable contributions. The creative works of Pam will continue to inspire the community. The chronological events of Rajen Pam's life and works are memorable moments in his life which should be noted in history with golden letters. A few memorable events are:-

- 1928: Born in a simple Rabha family at Chotomatia, Goalpara, Assam.
- 1950: Passed Matriculation Examination from Sadia Centre.
- 1951-54: Served as teacher in NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh).

- 1954: Joined as an Education Officer at Garo Hills, Meghalaya.
- 1957: Presented first Rabha Folk dance in All India Folk Drama Meet at Delhi.
- 1958: Underwent training on Social Education at Ranchi, Bihar.
- 1960: Published Rabha Folk Song and Culture based book 'Karanalar Mousora Sur' with financial support of Directorate of Welfare of Plain Tribes, Assam, Guwahati.
- 1961: Selected as an All India Radio Artist.
- 1962: Two Rabha folk songs were recorded in H.M.V. Rabha folk dance performed in Republic Day Celebration in Delhi.
- 1972: Participated in Indo-Soviet Cultural Meet at Patna, Bihar.
- 1979: Participated Republic Day Celebration at Delhi.
- 1981: Participated in the National Level Cultural Conference in Tamil Nadu.
- 1985: Wrote script for 35 mm first Rabha documentary 'Baikho' under the direction of Indrajit Narayan, produced by Directorate of Welfare of Plain Tribes, Assam, Guwahati.
- 1986: Participated Apna-Utsav at Delhi.
- 1987: Received Artist Pension from Government of Assam.
- 1989: Conferred Sangit Natak Academy Award on Tribal Music, Assam.
- 1990: Achieved Artist Award from government of Assam.
- 1992: Broadcasted A.I.R. Play 'Rengoni' and 'Morheful'.
- 1993: Broadcasted A.I.R. Play 'Kukur Aru Lakhuti'.

Felicitation :

- 1977: Assam Sahitya Sabha, Abhyapuri Session.
 1980: All Rabha National Council, Birubari Session.
 1990: All Rabha National Council, Jatia Session.
 1990: All Assam Students' Union.
 1990: Dudhnai Purbanchal Rabha Samaj.
 1990: Dudhnai Purbanchal Rabha Yuba Satra Samaj.
 1990: Dudhnai Purbanchal Rabha Samaj.
 1992: Pub-Ajagor Rabha Samaj, 39th Session.
 1993-94: Uttarpurbanchal Sanskriti Songhoti Utsav,
 Sankar Dev Kalakshetra, Guwahati.

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Note : Based on interview held on 20.1.1996.

JOGENDRA NATH BANTHO

The first half of twentieth century was a critical period so far the socio-political development of India is concerned. It was a period of transition, especially for the backward communities where social changes and transformations were unabated. In this period of transition late Jogendra Nath Bantho a great personality was emerged in Rabha community. He was a conscious social activist, patriot, reformer, sports organizer, social organizer and litterateur. An energetic and enthusiastic person with extra caliber, Bantho was one of the pioneers of the Rabhas in the field of social activity and literary development.

Jogendra Nath Bantho was born on 27th September 1927 at Naguwapara village of Garo Hills in the foothills of Meghalaya adjoining to Lakhipur sub-division of Goalpara district in Assam. His father was Narad Chandra Hajong. Jogendra Nath had two mothers, the elder was Lepaishowri Hajong and the young one was Chaktai Bantho. He was the fourth son of Chaktai Bantho who had five sons and two daughters. His elder mother had also one son and three daughters.

Since childhood Jogendra Nath Bantho was extra ordinary in nature. His mental growth was far advanced than that of his physical growth in his infancy. He could run when he was hardly seven month old. As a boy he was not comparable with his fellows. He showed extra

caliber and courage in every aspects of games and sports. A clear leadership aptitude had emerged since his childhood days. Jogendra Nath Bantho started his early education at Lakhipur L.P. School after completion of pre-primary in his own home. After completion of M.E. school examination from Lakhipur he got admitted in Prithiraj Higher Secondary School, Goalpara. In 1943 he passed matriculation examination and got admitted in Cotton College. In 1945 while studying Intermediate course he got involved in freedom movement of India. In the course of freedom struggle he extended his helping hand to the leaders of different states in various capacities. As a freedom activist he was imprisoned many time. Being a courageous, strong and stout youth he was very active in freedom movement. He was against the habit of salute honour by the Indians to the Britishers. When he was in Gauhati an Englishman was turned down from his horse driven cart. He was chased by the police for his offense and he escaped from the scene hiding in the godown of a Marawari businessman.

Jogendra Nath returned to his native village when the freedom movement came to an end. He began his professional life as a Headmaster of Trikiilla M.E. School. At that time there was no such school in and around Trikiilla except a primary school at Bordaldanga. It was the selfless and dedicated service of Bantho that the Middle English School became a centre of learning for the backward neighbouring villagers. Apart from this, he also rendered his yeoman's service to the establishment and development of Trikiilla High School. In 1968, Bantho had to shoulder the responsibility of President of Managing Committee when the school was in venture

stage with numerous problems like permanent building, quarter, hostel, etc. Besides these commendable contribution at Trikiilla he also had the credit of establishing a Middle English School at Naguwapara, his own village. He also served the school as Headmaster for a couple of years.

Jogendra Nath Bantho after several years of dedicated service as a teacher and social worker and also according to the wish of the people of the locality he had to enter in the politics of Meghalaya state. In 1952, in order to bring political consciousness of the tribal communities he got involved in District Council and elected as a Member of the Garo Hills District Council. When he was a member of District Council people of the area insisted him to work in the state level so as to bring maximum development of the region. Being inspired by the public demand, in 1978 he contested in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly election from Trikiilla Constituency and won the seat by defeating Moni Rabha the standing M.L.A. He became Chairman of Meghalaya Housing Board and implemented several welfare programmes. As an M.L.A. he initiated developmental works like establishment of Trikiilla State Dispensary, construction of roads, establishment of branch office of Co-operative Apex Bank. etc.

Jogendra Nath Bantho, besides being a politician, was a great Rabha social activist and reformer. He is a saga of constant struggle for bringing the ignorant and illiterate people of the community in which he was born. He was against the untouchability and the prevailing social taboos in the Rabha society. It is worthwhile to mention that Jogendra Nath Bantho's another remarkable

social mission was the freedom and emancipation of the Rabha community from the clutches of Zamindari system which had far rooted in the entire Mechpara (Lakhipur) area and the neighbouring areas. He was founder President of Meghalaya Rabha Jatio Sewa Sangha. Besides, he was also one of the 23 member Committee for writing constitution of 'Mechpara Madhyanchal Rabha Samaj'.

Jogendra Nath Bantho was a pioneering Rabha litterateur and scholar. In the early part and even in the middle part of twentieth century the Rabhas had very limited published works. During this period Jogendra Nath Bantho devoted himself in research oriented works on the socio-cultural and ethnic aspects of the Rabhas. A number of articles were published in different souvenirs and journals. His remarkable contribution towards Rabha ethnic study was inspired by the establishment of 'Rabha Jatio Yuva Sangha' in 1942. The 3rd annual conference of 'Sangha' was held in 1948 at Boko which was presided over by Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha in the Open Session and Aniram Basumatary, a tribal leader in the cultural session. In the said annual session, a strong cultural branch was organized to explore the historical as well as cultural history of the Rabhas. He had also been nominated as a member of the committee. Since then, he tried to explore the Rabha historical and socio-cultural perspectives. As a result of his effort in 1956 he published 'Rabha Jatir Etibrito'. This book is the first one to analyse the ethnic milieu and historical perspectives of the Rabhas, written and published by a native people. The book was highly inspired by works of Dr. S.K. Bhuyan, Mr. Gait, Rev. S. Endle, Major A. Playfair, Dr. Greirson, Dr. B.M. Das and Dr. Dharendra Narayan Mazumdar. Beside this, 'Pocket Rabha Sabdokosh' (Pocket Rabha Lexicon, 1996),

published by Bebak Rabha Kaurang Ransem and 'Rabha Katha Chongkai Chap' (1988), published by Rabha Literature Development Society, Meghalaya are his remarkable literary contributions. Bantho had also to his credit a number of unpublished works on Rabha-English Dictionary, Tinta Bhasa Sikha', 'Got Siksha', etc.

Jogendra Nath Bantho had peculiar life style. His youth time was full of romance. He loved Tansen Dharai, a local girl. His love episode is still famous among the Rabhas of the locality. Bantho, however, married Baseswari Rabha daughter of Rupson Adhikary and Bhogeswari Rabha of Haluwapara village in Lakhipur. Jogendra Nath Bantho died on 23rd December 1990 at the age of 73 in his own residence. He left behind his wife, two daughters, son-in-laws and grand son and daughters.

The visionary efforts of Jogendra Nath Bantho made him a great socio-cultural activist. He will be remembered for his pioneering scholastic works in the field of Rabha literature.

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Informant:

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JANA NETA SARAT CHANDRA RABHA



In the early and middle of twentieth century when entire India was passing through a critical period, there emerged a great leader of masses. He was late Sarat Chandra Rabha who devoted whole of his life to console and guide the downtrodden and hapless. A man of strict ideology and philosophy Sarat Chandra Rabha was one of the greatest pioneering social activists and reformers of the Rabhas. Besides, he was also a promising and dedicated leader of communist movement in Assam. He was a man of multifaceted personality. Since the days of his boyhood he was actively involved in the activities of social reformation with Rabha youth organizations, engaged himself as a teacher, became a politician and Member of Legislative Assembly, served as a leader of tribal development, became a front line leader of Rabha autonomous council demand movement and held the post of Chief Executive Member, Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. Sarat Chandra Rabha's motto of simple living and high thinking and also his ever readiness and helping attitude for the welfare of the common people attributed him to be termed as a 'Jana neta' (leader of masses).

Sarat Chandra Rabha was born on 5th February 1923 in a small sleepy tribal village of Nawapara in Dimajakhili area under Hatimura Mauja of Dudhnoi

Revenue Circle in Goalpara district. His father was Thanuram Rabha and mother was Bhaduli Rabha. He was the youngest among the three brothers namely Ramesh Rabha, Khargeswar Rabha and Sarat Chandra Rabha. As he was born in the month of autumn he was named as 'Sarat', meaning autumn. Sarat Chandra Rabha began his early education at Hatimura Lower Primary School and completed primary education in 1935. In 1937, he got admitted at Krishnai M.V. School and completed the course in 1941. On completion of M.V. school education he got admitted at Habraghat High School in 1942. In this year, the Quit India Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi for India's independence was in momentum. Sarat Ch. Rabha who had the urge for social service right from his childhood was highly influenced by such movement and joined the movement actively. The young Sarat since his school days used to interact with social workers, teachers and senior fellows. He used to read novels, short stories, books on Marxism and other philosophical master pieces. The extensive reading habit that he imbibed in the young days had exerted far reaching impact on his career and activities. In 1942 when he was a student of Habraghat High School he joined in 'Rabha Yuvak Sangha'. As Sarat Chandra Rabha was highly influenced by the philosophy of pioneering Indian Social reformers he wanted to create a healthy society by uplifting the socio-economic condition of the people in general and the Rabhas in particular. In order to fulfill his mission and vision he swung into action by intensifying social movement. In 1944, as a major attempt of such movement, Sarat Ch. Rabha along with the members of 'Dimajakhili Youth Club' initiated legal action against child marriage and succeeded in the

mission by banning such illegal practices.

Sarat Ch. Rabha had to envisage hurdles in the process of his schooling as he was actively involved in social movement. In 1945, he got admission in P.R. Govt. H.E. school but could not appear the matriculation examination as he was expelled from the school for his alleged anti government activities. So his formal education came to an end. In 1945, while he was in Goalpara he joined as a member of communist party and got involved in active communist movement. In the course of this movement he met Bishnu Prasad Rabha for the first time in the state level conference of 'Krishak Banuwa Panchayat' organized in the month of January 1945 at Bhanguripara village in South Kamrup. He was highly influenced by Bishnu Prasad Rabha's thought provoking and encouraging song presented in the congregation. Besides, his mind was further ignited when Bishnu Prasad Rabha personally talked to him on the need of revolution for the emancipation of the downtrodden tribal community and asked him to join R.C.P.I.

Sarat Chandra Rabha, beside being an active communist activist, he also rendered his service to the masses as a teacher. He joined at Badhapur M.E. School as an Assistant Teacher on 5th May 1946. But he had to tender his resignation from the school as he continued to work as an active R.C.P.I. activist. With the imposition of government restriction on R.C.P.I. on 1st March 1948, Sarat Ch. Rabha left teaching job. He yet again involved in organizational work and began to roam here and there throughout Assam. He even not visited his house. However, he attended in the annual session of Goalpara district Rabha Youth Club at Bardamal with Bishnu Prasad Rabha. On that day he visited his ailing mother

in the village. On 22nd March, 1948 Sarat Ch. Rabha married Rebika Rabha, the daughter of Jahas Rabha of Miyapara village in Meghalaya. The marriage ceremony was performed in Brahma Samaj ritual. But immediately after a few days of marriage he began to move throughout the state and intensified organizational activities without giving much importance to family life. In 1950 he returned to his native village and then he started party level organizational work covering Goalpara district. The party became more stronger under his relentless effort. On 15th August he was imprisoned for leading a communist protest rally organized against the observance of independence day.

On 21st August, 1951 he got released from the jail. He had to face serious family trouble just after his release from the jail. His imprisonment led to the unrest among the family members. In order to bring normalcy in the family he started cultivation by assisting his elder brother. Apart from cultivation he joined as a teacher in Dimajhakhili M.E. School in 1955. After a few years of teaching and social works in the area he became a prominent leader of Goalpara district. In 1957, he was nominated as a C.P.I. candidate for Goalpara Constituency in Legislative Assembly election. So he got released from the teaching job that he was holding and in that election he was elected as a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA). In 1962 Rabha again contested for MLA from the same constituency but lost in the hand of Congress candidate Hakim Rabha of Dudhnoi. In the same year, just after the Assembly Election, the Government began to arrest communist leaders on security reasons following Chinese aggression of India. Sarat Ch. Rabha was also arrested under National Security Act and imprisoned him

for one year and fifteen days. He was released from imprisonment on 27th December 1963. Rabha had a tough time for his political career as there was widespread misconception among the masses on the question of Chinese support by communist leaders. So it took a couple of years to restore the public confidence and with full self-confidence he began to concentrate on party activities. In 1966, Sarat Ch. Rabha was again imprisoned along with C P I leadership under National Security Act for 27 days from August 15. He was imprisoned on the ground of his leadership role in 'the Food Movement' launched by C.P.I. throughout Assam. He took initiative in such movement at Goalpara. As per advice of the movement leader he broke open the warehouses of businessmen who artificially created food shortages in the state. As a result of the movement the unwarranted food crisis was brought under control successfully. Sarat Ch. Rabha while in jail heard the news of his mother's demise. He was shocked by the news.

In 1967 before commencement of Assembly Election in Assam, the Goalpara Legislative Assembly Constituency was reorganized into three constituencies namely Goalpara East, Goalpara West and Dudhnai (ST) constituency. In that year Sarat Ch. Rabha was nominated as a C.P.I. candidate and he won the seat defeating Hakim Chandra Rabha, the seating M.L.A. Sarat Chandra Rabha contested elections in the year 1972, 1978, 1983, 1985 and 1991 but his attempts remained unsuccessful. So far the Assembly election of 1983 is concerned, it was a very critical election in which Sarat Chandra Rabha contested. Despite all Assam Students' Union's boycott call and threat to political parties, Sarat Rabha took part as a candidate and in election campaign agitated A A S U

activist attacked him and wounded seriously along with his associates and bodyguard. Sarat Ch. Rabha, in his political career as a pioneer and frontline communist leader had to experienced so many odds. However, he never subdued his morale. He continued his struggle for justice and equality by using political power.

In the course of his political ups and downs, Sarat Ch. Rabha had the opportunity to visit a couple of foreign states which could be termed as token of recognition to his dedicated political career as a communist leader. He was the lone member from Assam to the eleven member tour groups from Communist Party of India to Russia in 1980. In this tour package he could travel Russia for thirty two days. Another tour of the same nature was conducted in 1983 wherein Sarat Ch. Rabha toured East German for twenty one days. The said tour programmes abroad had generated a lot of experienced on socio-economic development aspects so far the visited countries and his own country are concerned.

Besides a leader of masses, Sarat Chandra Rabha was a Rabha social activist, organizer, poet, writer and reformer par-excellence. Since his childhood he had been concerned with the socio-economic development of the tribal communities.

Sarat Chandra Rabha's commendable contribution towards the socio-political development of Rabha community through his social work and communist politics could be recognized from the fact that he had been selected unanimously as president of prestigious Nikhil Rabha Jatio Parishad (All Rabha National Council), the apex body of all Rabha Organisations in 1980 at Birubari

Session in Guwahati. He continued to hold the presidentship of the said organization in the two other sessions at Kulshi in Kamrup and Dariduri in Goalpara district.

So far the socio-political development of the Rabhas is concerned, he had the credit to shoulder the responsibility of President for Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Demand Committee constituted in the convention of the Rabhas inhabited in Assam, Meghalaya and West Bengal held on 21st and 22nd July 1992 at Salpara village of Krishnai in Goalpara district. In order to organize the district and regional level committees he had to visit extensive Rabha inhabited villages which were very much familiar to him. The painstaking agitational programme through peace and democratic process of the Demand Committee under the leadership of Sarat Ch. Rabha and All Rabha Students' Union went on for about three years. The demand was, however, fulfilled by signing an accord between the government of Assam and the Demand Committee as well as the All Rabha Students' Union on 10th March 1995. But surprisingly Sarat Ch. Rabha, President of Demand Committee was not nominated as Chief Executive Member, as Rabha's political affiliation did not permit him to become the first Chief Executive Member (C.E.M). He also did not like to compromise with his political affiliation. So the vice-president of the Demand Committee, Saibasachi Rabha was nominated to the post of C.E.M. Sarat Chandr Rabha was highly dissatisfied with the move and remained aloof from interim Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (R.H.A.C.). On 21st April 1995, the joint steering committee of R.H.A.C. and A.R.S.U. adopted a resolution by nominat-

ing Sarat Ch. Rabha as Chief Executive Member of interim council based on certain condition. But the joint steering committee's meeting held on 15th July 1995 at Tribal Rest House, Gauhati nominated Saibasachi Rabha as C.E.M. as Sarat Ch. Rabha had not ready to resign from his C.P.I. membership. However, the interim council was ultimately formed and oath taking ceremony was held on 20th July 1995. Sarat Ch. Rabha, though deprived from such a coveted post he never comprised with his ideology.

Sarat Ch. Rabha's political association with R.H.A.C. and other umbrella organizations did not come to an end even though he remained outside the interim council. In fact, the dissatisfaction of a section of Rabha people and reaction of narrow politics led to the formation of "Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad" (Rabha Land Security Council) under the presidentship of Mr. Dwijen Rabha in the convention of the Rabhas held on 8th August 1995 at Janamandir premises in Dudhnoi, Goalpara. However, Mr. Rabha resigned from the post of presidentship due to ill-health and Sarat Ch. Rabha was entrusted with the responsibility of the president. In 1996, as pre-poll strategy, the 'Suraksha Parishad' extended their support to the four-party alliance led by Assam Gana Parishad in the context of boundary demarcation, finance and legislative empowerment, power transfer of various departments, solution to tribal land problems, etc. to R.H.A.C. The alliance won the election and formed the new government on 15th May 1996 under Prafulla Mahanta as Chief Minister. On 12th June 1996, the new government through a notification Saibasachi Rabha led R.H.A.C. was dissolved. Such a move was challenged by lodging a case at Gauhati High Court and as a result of which the government could not form the R.H.A.C. for a long time.

However, after due consultation with 'Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad' an interim council was formed in which Sarat Ch. Rabha was nominated as C.E.M. On 4th July 1997 Sarat Ch Rabha and other Executive Members took oath in a formal ceremony. He became the second Chief Executive Member of R.H.A.C.

He tried his level best to bring maximum welfare of the people inhabited within the Council's jurisdiction. Many welfare plans and programmes were executed under his able leadership. But during his tenure as C.E.M. the culmination of insurgency problem and governments faulty measures led the entire state to a trouble situation. In R.H.A.C. too the uprising of several insurgency outfits had exerted far reaching detrimental impact on the process of development. However, during such social juncture, Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council under the able leadership of Sarat Ch. Rabha could be able to convince the insurgent youths of Rabha National Security Force (R.N.S.F.) and brought them into mainstream by arranging are-laying ceremony organized in front of the office of R.H.A.C.

Sarat Ch. Rabha, besides a Rabha political leader, was a great social reformer. He took a serious view on widespread consumption of alcohol by the tribal society and he tried to form public opinion so that a alcohol free society could be established. He was also a tribal leader of excellence. He devoted himself for the welfare of tribal society at large. In 1973 he was elected as Vice-President of 'Asom Tribal Sangha' and in each executive and general meeting he had been able to convince the people through his logical arguments as a visionary leader. Subsequently in 1985, he was elected as president of the

organization at Jagiroad session.

Sarat Ch. Rabha was also a leader of co-operative movement in Assam. In 1983 he was elected as president of Goalpara district Co-operative Society. Apart from this, he also held the post of Chairman of an Agricultural Bank and South Goalpara Khandsari Mill located at Darangiri.

A man of dedicated life for the welfare of the masses, Sarat Ch. Rabha was always ready to help the people in need. The life of Sarat Ch. Rabha is a saga of constant struggle and achievements. A man of high tolerance capacity, he had to withstand the tragedy of his daughters sudden demise. In 1971, when he was M.L.A. and attending Assembly session in Shillong his two daughters namely Lenina and Dhanada expired one after another in two consecutive days. Similar tragedy was reported on 8th January 1995 when he was in an executive meeting of C.P.I. at Guwahati. In the next day he found that the death body of his wife waiting for his final farewell.

Sarat Chandra Rabha, a born communist was never think for his personal gain and welfare. During his tenure as an M.L.A. he had not enjoyed the life and save money for his own welfare. He even had not kept his family members in M.L.A. hostel. A man with diverse quality, Sarat Ch. Rabha had the credit of writing poems, travelogues and articles on socio-cultural aspects of the Rabhas. Though Sarat Ch. Rabha had no published book to his credit he used to write in journals and souvenirs. The article on 'Baikho Pujar Agnipariksha' published in the souvenir of 'Bebak Rabha Kurang Runchum' and 'Pub-Germanat bish din', etc. are worth mentioning. Besides, the travelogue written on his first foreign visit (to

German Democratic Republic) he also wrote 'Utkantha' a verse in letter form to his wife, wherein the writer expressed his feeling of love from a foreign land. It may be mentioned that Rabha visited Russia in 1980 as a member contingent of 32 days long 'Communist Party of India's' goodwill mission from India to Russia. A few lines of 'Utkantha' written by Sarat Chandra Rabha are as follows:

"Krishna Sagar aji kiyo" santo?
Saagarparar chochi mohanagar santo
Aiya nisha na bajigaise matra
Iman sonkale chochi mohanagar
Aji kiyo baru hol stabdho santo?
Chario fale nimao mao
Sagarar samudhur botaho nochola hol,
Dhaur gorjonar abiroto chando naikiya hol".

"Hei priyotoma -
tarbabe hiya more howa nai bisadar mogon,
santo sagarot dekhisho tomarei hidaikhon.
Hidei dekhi tomar, mon hol mor asthir
Santo Krishna sagarko dekhilo tetiya
Asanto asthir,
Tomalai likha hol ai chithi, sagaror kotha bor gobhir."

Sarat Chandra Rabha is a genius of Rabha community. He has been a personality to whom the people of Goalpara in general would be indebted. Rich tributes have been paid to the departed soul and has published souvenir on the 'Sradha Ceremony' of the great personality. This human rights activist and leader of masses will be remembered for his commendable con-

tributions.

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Note: Based on talk and discussion and interview at different places.

HAKIM RABHA



Hakim Rabha was one of the pioneering political leaders and reformers of the people in general and the Rabhas in particular. A Rabha youth of pre-independence period who received higher education outside Assam and experienced the freedom movement in his college days, became an ambitious leader of masses. Born and brought up in a backward tribal community, he undertook reformation and society upliftment activities for the tribals and also particularly for the community in which he was born.

Hakim Rabha was born in 1912 at Thekachu village in Dudhnoi of Goalpara district. His father was Rajan Rabha and he was adopted by his step mother as his mother died early. His father remarried Goshabala Rabha. He began his early education at Thekachu L.P. school. After passing L.P. school he was admitted in Dolgoma M.E. school but he returned in the Dudhnoi M.E. school and from there he passed the M.E. school. On completion of M.E. school he got admitted in Sibsagar Polytechnic High School, which was under the banner of Banaras Hindu University. The school had the motto on 'Earning while Learning'. In 1942 he passed matriculation examination from that school. Then he got involved in the freedom movement of India under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi, Khogendranath Nath and Manisankar Basumatary. In 1942 he was arrested and imprisoned in jail for 6 months. After release from jail

he contributed his higher education and got admitted in Banaras Hindu University. In 1948, he took his B.A. degree from the Banaras Hindu University and returned home.

Hakim Rabha began his service life as an Assistant Teacher of newly established Dudhnoi M.E. school. There he served for about one year and got himself involved in politics, became an active worker of Congress party. In 1952, he was nominated as a candidate of Member of Legislative Assembly for one of the two seated Goalpara constituency and he was elected without contest. In 1957 also, again he was nominated for the second executive term and completed the full term. Yet again in 1962 he was nominated in the Assembly Election from the same party for the third consecutive term. This time also he won the seat by defeating Sarat Chandra Rabha, the C.P.I. candidate. He remained as an M.L.A. upto 1967. In 1967, though he was nominated and contested for the seat he however, lost the election against Sarat Ch. Rabha, a budding C.P.I. leader.

Hakim Rabha being a political leader of post independence time and transitional phase of development, concentrated in the developmental and welfare programmes of the government. During his tenure as an M.L.A. he executed a number of developmental works in his constituency. His contribution towards educational development of the region was worth mentioning. Among them the financial grant to Goalpara College, hostel and other building grants under tribal development fund, financial grant for Basic Training Centre, Dudhnoi, etc. were notable. Besides, all the L.P. schools in the district upto Lakhipur were brought under provincialised system

through his constant educational development effort.

As a political and social worker, he had far reaching influence in the entire Dudhnoi region. The developmental works were executed under his able leadership. He was extended helping hand by the influential persons of Dudhnoi namely, Suprasad Khakhlary, Naren Khaklary, Yudhisthir Hazawary, Prasana Rabha, Baul Member, Pujaruram Rabha, Bakhane Ram Roy, Mahim Roy, Haren Roy, Ashini Kr. Patgiri, Pabitra Kr. Sarkar, Narapati Basumatary, Mohot Hazawary, Nikunjo Basumatary, Mani Sankar Basumatary, Tarun Khakhlary, Sushil Roy, etc.

Hakim Rabha was very much concerned on the prevailing socio-culturo-economic condition of the Rabha community in particular. He had to organize public meetings of clans or social groups of the Rabhas to wean away the social taboos related to marriage and death ceremonies, social evils like too much consumption of rice bears and use of pork in social ceremonies. Besides, he also tried his level best to prevent the evil practices of superstitious belief on 'Daini'. As regards the consumption of rice bear in social ceremonies he initiated measures like 'Moth Nibarani' (prevention of alcohol). Rabha succeeded in his mission of eradicating some of such social problems. The Rabha society in Dudhnoi area began to solemnised the marriage and death ceremonies without the use of alcohol and pork. Such tradition was first introduced in the death ceremony of his father.

As a social worker and pioneering political leader and as a token of recognition and love to his selfless dedication, Hakim Rabha was honoured and awarded commendation papers in various institutions in greater Goalpara dis-

trict and public gatherings and annual sessions.

Hakim Rabha's political life was highly influenced by the eminent and great personalities of Assam like Gopinath Bordoloi and Bimola Prasad Chaliha. He wrote his biography in 1995 but could not complete the book because of his ill health. A young and energetic politician, Hakim Rabha was the pioneering leader in the dawn of free India. He will be remembered for his commendable contribution.

Note: Based on information and data provided by Mrs. Anandibala Rabha, wife of late Hakim Rabha, Thekachu, Dudhnoi, Goalpara.

HARIMOHAN SARKAR



Late Harimohan Sarkar was one of the towering personalities, socio-cultural activists and litterateurs of the Rabhas. He was a true researcher and scholar who profoundly loved indigenous folk music and culture. A teacher by profession, Harimohan Sarkar besides teaching in Middle School level used to collect folk materials like riddle, lullby, folk-songs which had been on the verge of extinction. He was a keen and minute researcher as well as an observer of Rabha socio-cultural aspects. A hard working person with strong social commitment, Sarkar was one of the pioneering Rabha socio-cultural activists especially an active social organizer, researcher and litterateur. He had keen interest on the anthropological study of the Rabhas, their genesis, historical backgrounds and settlements.

Harimohan Sarkar was born on 1st September 1942 at Shitolmari Bongaon village in Tiplai area under Rangjuli Revenue Circle. The village is situated in the foothills of Shitolmari Hillocks and is inhabited by the Rabhas. His father was Dashoram Rabha, a poor farmer. His mother was Uleswari Rabha, the second wife of Dashoram Rabha. Harimohan was born in such a auspicious time when the Quit India Movement was launched by Mahatma Gandhi. The parents had a great hope of becoming the newly born baby a great man in the future.

Harimohan Sarkar had Girija Rabha, Paresh Chandra Sarkar, Khirod Rabha, Niroda Rabha and Aruna Rabha as brothers and sisters.

Harimohan began his early education at Shitolmari Bongaon L.P. School located in the village. After passing L.P. school he was admitted at Tiplai M.V. school in class IV. A problem was arisen when he was about to get admitted in the said class. According to the then prevailing rule if a pupil wants to read English as a subject one had to pay a fee. Harimohan had a great intention to read Minor with English. But he had been advised to read the higher course without English by his uncle Gobardhan Sarkar who was the Headmaster of that M.V. school. The Headmaster knew that the parents had no capacity to pay fees for English course. This had disheartened Harimohan to a great extent and began fasting. His such intention of reading English had promoted the guardians to think seriously over the matter and requested the school authority to consider the fee by writing an application to Mr. Sadhu Chandra Nath, President of the school. Though he was admitted in the Minor course he had to appear in a special selection examination to be held after three months. If he could pass the examination he would get concession in fees. He appeared the examination and secured good marks and accordingly he got the concession. Thus he continued his study in first and second group and passed the examination from Dudhnoi Examination Centre securing second division. On completion of M.V. school examination he was admitted to Rangjuli High school in 1958. At that time Rangjuli High School and Hekra High School (now Higher Secondary both) were the only nearest High schools available for higher study in the locality. At that time about 10 km long stretch of road from Tiplai to Rangjuli was full of jungle, there

were the fear of wild animals. But Harimohan Sarkar had no means to stay in the hostel as his family was economically not sound. However, amidst struggle he passed the Matriculation examination from Rangjuli High School in 1959.

It may be mentioned that it was a matter of concern for a needy family like Harimohan Sarkar to continue for higher study. The household had no efficient earning members and also had very small landholding as agricultural land to support the family. His elder brother engaged himself in cultivation to educate his younger brother. The entire family members had a great intention to provide higher education to Harimohan Sarkar. Thus, he was admitted in Pragiyotish College and passed intermediate examination in 1962. He further continued his education at B. Borooah College and took B.A. degree from the same college.

Harimohan Sarkar's life was full of struggle. However, his undaunted spirit led him to face the challenges and he succeeded in establishing himself. While in college he took up teaching job looking back to his family condition. Though he had the intention for further study he could not do so.

Harimohan Sarkar began his professional life by joining as an Assistant Teacher in Salpara M.V. school near Dhupdhara on 8th March 1961. Then he got transferred to Digholi M.V. school, Dhupdhara. After serving about ten years in these two schools again he was transferred in Tiplai M.V. school in 1971. He continued as an Assistant Teacher in Tiplai M.V. school upto 1989 and he was promoted to Headmaster and joined at Goruchatka M.V. school on 11th December 1987 and

served till 29th May 1993.

Harimohan Sarkar while working as teacher in Dhupdhara area began to study folk-culture and tradition of the Rabha and Boro community and also the cultures of different communities. He collected folk materials which were on the verge of extinction like 'Bhahurangi' of the Rabhas, riddles, proverbs, lullaby and other folk literature available in eastern part of Goalpara district and south Kamrup areas. He knew the techniques to extract those hidden folk literatures from illiterate people particularly from the 'Pati Rabhas' in the region. Through his extensive research oriented study he published a book entitled 'Bahurangi Geeter Achalat' in 1965. The book though small in volume was a precious contribution in the field of folk-literature. The book was appreciated by Benudhar Sarma the ex-president of 'Asom Sahitya Sabha'. Sri Sarma while commenting on the book said, 'this compilation is the result of Sriman Harimohan Sarkar's endeavour and his interest on ancient culture It is an asset which can not be burnt'. He also collected the folk-songs related to religious rituals and festivals and in 1970 published the second book entitled 'Tukuria geet'. Yet again in 1980 published a poem compilation 'Ami Sare Asu' and 'Hatbulani'. In 1989 he published another remarkable research oriented book, 'Rabha Samaj Aru Sanskritir Abhas'. The book published by Binapani Rabha with financial assistance of the Tribal Research Institute, Assam, Guwahati was a major contribution in the field of Rabha socio-cultural heritage study. It was a pioneering work devoted to ethnic and historical perspectives of the Rabhas which throws light on population, literary, folk-culture including historical and legendary ballads - 'Naluwa Chaluwar geet', 'Randana Chandanar

geet', 'Tukuria geet', 'Haimaru geet', 'Marai geet', 'Juna geet', 'Boromahi geet', etc. Besides, the historical and legendary beliefs, folk-tales and historical significance of place-name of a few Rabha inhabited places have been discussed. In the book the scholastic aptitude of Harimohan Sarkar is well established as the volume is a systematic analysis with the application of research methodology without having a research guide. Sarkar had also to his credit a number of journals and souvenirs as editor. Beside these, he also worked as a local correspondent in the 'Saptahik Nilachal' published from Gauhati. The literary contribution of Harimohan Sarkar towards Assamese literature was highly commendable. In the grass-root level, he worked as General Secretary of 'Rupjyoti' branch of Asom Sahitya Sabha located at Dhupdhara, Goalpara. He was the Executive Member of 'Asom Sahitya Sabha' for three consecutive years from 1968 to 1971. Apart from this he was a life member of this apex literary organization of Assam.

Harimohan Sarkar was one of the pioneering socio-cultural activists and organizers who devoted himself for the development of the Rabhas. He had to shoulder the responsibility of General Secretary of 'Rabha Satra Sanmilan' from 1958 to 1960 and Rabha Jatio Parishad from 1975-76. During his tenure as Secretary he organized annual sessions and convention throughout Assam and Meghalaya. He had the credit of editing the souvenir published on the silver jubilee session of 'Purbanchal Rabha Samaj' in 1986. He became the president of the Bebak Rabha Kurang Runchum (All Rabha Sahitya Sabha), the prestigious organization and post of literary body from 1986 to 1993. While he was in such literary field he was associated with a couple of literary organi-

zations and institutions. He became a member of 'Anandaram Barua Institute of Language and Culture (ABILAC)' and was a convenor of 'Bhasa Samannai Samiti'.

White 'dhoti' and 'punjabi' clad in immaculate order, bright in complexion, humorous in nature, Harimohan Sarkar was a man of simple way of life with high ambition. He worked especially for the literary development of the Rabhas and Assamese society in general. A highly enthusiastic person in the field of socio-cultural and literary works he had to suffer with a sudden health problem while attending B.R.K.R's session at Dudhnoi and died on 29th May 1993 after fifteen days of medical treatment in Guwahati at the age of 51. He left behind his mother Uleswari Rabha, wife Mrs. Binapani Rabha, two sons and two daughters. His eldest daughter, Miss Dipika Rabha is by now serving as a lecturer in the department of Assamese Bikali College, Dhupdhara, Goalpara. Sarkar's mission for the welfare of the Rabha society is highly appreciated by people from every section of the greater Assamese society. His socio-cultural and scholastic work will continue to inspire the Rabha community in particular and Assamese society in general.

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Note : Informant

1. Mrs. Binapani Sarkar, wife of late Harimohan Sarkar, age - 55 years.
2. Miss Dipika Rabha, daughter of Late Harimohan Sarkar, age- 28 years, Bongaon, Tiplai, Goalpara.

ANANDIBALA RABHA



Srimoti Anandibala Rabha is a household name in the south western part of Assam. A daughter of Upper Assam and a bride of Lower Assam, Anandibala Rabha is a symbol of integrity. Mrs. Rabha is one of the pioneering woman political leaders and social activists of Assam. The wife of an illustrious and pioneer political leader, Anandibala Rabha has been able to follow the path that her husband sets. In fact, she happens to be the first Rabha woman to become an M.L.A. and still today none of the Rabha woman can break the record. A popular woman with simple nature and always in helping attitude, she is popularly called as 'Anandibaido'. She has been a source of inspiration and guiding force for the Rabha women in particular and women folk in general.

Anandibala Rabha was born in 1936 at Nasungi village under Thengal Mouza in Jorhat District. Her father was late Sukharam Hazarika, a religious minded person and Mandal of Mejanga Panbari Tea Estate. Her mother was late Bahoni Hazarika. She started her primary school education in Rangajan L.P. School and appeared scholarship examination at Titabor. After completion of primary education she was admitted in Titabor M.E. school. On completion of M.E. school study she was admitted in Jorhat Girls' High School. While reading in class IX in

that school she was appointed as teacher in Titabor M.E. school. Later on, she passed the Matriculation examination from Titabor High School. Then she took admission in J.B. College, Jorhat. When she was in intermediate course she took basic training at senior basic training centre at Roha. On completion of training she was appointed as teacher in Titabor Basic Training Centre. Anandibala Rabha was very active in social activities since her school life. She was Union Secretary from class VIII onwards. She was also involved in political activities since her early professional life. Anandibala Rabha got married with Hakim Rabha, a political leader of Goalpara district and after marriage she joined as Headmistress of Dudhnoi Girls' High School. She also studied at Goalpara college and passed B.A. from that college in 1965. In 1972 she was nominated as a congress candidate of Member of Legislative Assembly from Dudhnoi Constituency and won the seat by defeating Sarat Chandra Rabha, C.P.I. candidate. Again in 1978 she was nominated but lost the election in the hand of Jagat Patgiri, a Janata party candidate. Anandibala Rabha as a political leader took leadership in every aspects of women welfare and developmental activities. She became the founder secretary of 'Goalpara District Mahila Samiti', As a woman political leader she initiated several developmental works of the constituency. The Dudhnoi College was brought under the deficit Grant-in-Aid system during her tenure as M.L.A. She has been nominated as member of Dudhnoi College for several times. Mrs. Rabha has to her credit of becoming member of Goalpara district Mahkuma Parishad, Member of Assam Pradesh Congress committee, president of Goalpara district Congress (S), etc. Besides, she was involved with almost all the women organizations so far established during the last part of the century in Goalpara

district right from Dhupdhara in the east to Jaleswar in the South West. She has always been ready for any sort of women welfare in the district. Besides, women welfare activities she has also been associated with Rabha Social Organizations. She has to her credit a Montessori School run by herself.

The untimely demise of her adopted son Santanu Rabha greatly shocked the iron lady of the Rabhas. This pioneering woman politician, social worker par excellence and leader of masses will be remembered and she will continue to inspire the womenfolk of the Rabhas in particular and Assamese in general.

Note: Based on interview held at the residence in Thekachu village.

MONI RABHA



Sri Monindra Rabha, better known as Moni Rabha is a household name among the Rabhas. He is a constant source of inspiration for the Rabhas inhabiting in Garo Hills of Meghalaya and Assam. A man with strong determination for socio-cultural and political emancipation of the backward tribal community like the Rabhas, he since his young age initiated stringent measures. A visionary, Rabha is an active social activist and litterateur of the Rabhas. He has been associated with almost all the social organizations in Meghalaya and Assam. Mr. Moni Rabha is a successful political leader of Meghalaya who has the credit of becoming the Deputy Speaker and Speaker of Meghalaya State Legislative Assembly and also the credit of representing the Assembly seat for maximum term since 1972. He is a man with multifaceted personality, a poet and litterateur. He is a writer who devoted to creative and folk literary works.

Moni Rabha was born on 1st November, 1944 at Trikikila in West Garo Hills of Meghalaya. His father Gaogaram Rabha and mother Jagri Rabha were well known for their open mindedness in the village. In childhood days Moni Rabha was known as Mockel and the Muslim villagers called him as Mockeluddin. Little Monindra began his early education in Trikikila and passed Matriculation Examination in 1959. He also

passed I.A. in 1962 and then joined at Drangiri M.E. school as teacher. In 1965, he was joined as Assistant Teacher at Bapujinagar High School in Goalpara after passing B.A. Examination in the same year. Moni Rabha then joined at Trikikilla High School in his home place as Assistant Teacher. He was also the In-charge Headmaster when Headmaster was on leave. When he was holding the post as In-charge Headmaster of the school, Meghalaya State was reorganized and created a new district in the name of West Garo Hills in 1971. At that time, there was a growing demand from the public of the locality to contest in the State Assembly election from West Garo Hills as a candidate. In the meantime he was also selected for B.T. training course and had the intention of appearing M.A. final examination. He had no intention to contest in the election. So he requested Jogendranath Bantho, a prominent educated youth of the locality and his close relative to contest the election but he refused to contest the election. Moni Rabha under constant pressure from the people of the locality contested the Assembly election of Meghalaya held in 1972 and won the election by defeating Md. Nurul Islam. As a successful politician of the region, Moni Rabha has been served to the capacity of Speaker in the Meghalaya State Assembly. Rabha has served the Meghalaya Assembly as minister in different portfolios like irrigation, border trade, forest and environment, etc. He was Cabinet Minister for five years. Despite holding distinctive ministerial post and actively involved in State politics, Mr. Rabha has simultaneously been engaged himself in literary activities. Moni Rabha, since the first half of sixty's has been contributing to the Rabha and Assamese literature by writing in journals, souvenirs, newspapers and by publishing books. He is basically a poet and an essayist. His literary works among others

include poem, language and literature of the Rabhas, dictionary on Rabha language, book on social and customary laws of the Rabhas, etc.

Moni Rabha's published works are as follows:

Books

1. 1963 : 'Sathar' 1st published.
2. : 'Binani' poem – 1st published.
3. : 'Mor Porichoi' poem – 1st published.
4. 1970 : 'Rabha Bhasa Siksha Padhoti' 1st published.
5. 1972 : 'Rabha Buranjir Pratidhani' 1st published.
6. 1975 : 'Rabha Sanskritir Dhara' – 1st published.
7. 1994 : 'Rabha Bhasar Fokora – Yozona Aru Jatuwa Thas' – 1st published.
8. 1994 : 'Rabha Samajor Samajik Ain Aru Dandabhidhi' – 1st published
9. 2001 : 'Haimaru Chay' – 1st published.

Apart from these published books, Rabha has a high number of unpublished manuscripts ready for publication. Among them mention may be made of Dictionary on Rabha language (more than 15,000 words, written in Rabha-Assames-English), Mondakini, Gunjan, Shillonger dawar (all poem), Kalidasar Meghdoot (translated), Chapkini Khurang (Rabha poem), Mayur Kuwari (Rabha folk tale), Tribhasa (word meaning), 'Buburenga' (compilation of Rabha songs), 'Kimbadantir Sadhu' (legendary folk tale), 'Rabha Buranjir pam khedi', 'Rabha Lokogeet Sangraha', 'Rabha Bhasar Khandabaika – Jatuwathas', etc. His book 'Sathar' is the collection of folk songs being presented in the 'Baikhu' festival of the Rabhas. Like 'Bihugeet' the 'Sathar' has the elements of

folk tradition which can bring feelings of love among the Rabha boys and girls. In 'Rabha Buranjir Pratidhani' the historical perspectives of the Rabhas, their ethnic affinities and cultural heritage have been analysed in systematic manner. His latest publication – 'Haimaru Chay' is a collection of ballads relating to Dadan Marukshtri, the legendary hero of the Rabhas.

Moni Rabha has been conferred 'Rebanath Sarma' award by a leading Guwahati based literary organization – 'Guwahati Sahitya Kanan' for his literary contribution. The pioneering political leader and great litterateur will continue to inspire the Rabha community.

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Note : Partially based on interview.

LISTI RABHA RONGKHO



Listi Rabha Rongkho, a popular name among the Rabhas is a towering personality, a social activist and reformer of modern Rabha society. He is a constant source of inspiration for the Rabhas. Listi Rabha is also a pioneering Rabha litterateur and poet. He has the credit of editing the first Rabha journal 'Champai', which has earmarked as the milestone of Rabha literary periods as pre-champai, champai and post-champai, etc. A pioneering social organizer of 'Mechpara Madhyanchal' Rabha Samaj, Listi Rabha Rongkho has been associated with almost all the apex Rabha Socio-Cultural organizations.

Listi Rabha Rongkho was born in the year 1945 at Satabari village under Lakhipur Revenue Circle of Goalpara district. His father was Late Nageswar Rabha, better known as Nakeng Ram Rabha, a villager of Satabari who used to pile up woods under a 'Nageswar' tree. His mother was late Rukchek Rabha. He had two brothers and he was the youngest. Listi began his early education at Satabari Lower Primary school and got admitted in Baida M.V. School. On completion of M.V. School education he got admitted in Baguwan High School and passed matriculation examination in 1964. He then took admission in Goalpara College for Intermediate Arts course. On completion of Intermediate course he took admission in the same college to study B.A. with Honours in Economics. In 1968 he passed the degree course

with Honours. He also took his Post Graduate Degree in Assamese (literature Group) as a private candidate from Gauhati University in 1992.

Listi Rabha had a poor family background in his childhood days. He had to help his parents in cultivation. In 1998 his elder brother, Harendra Rabha expired and this led to household problems. So he had to extend his helping hand to the parents whose occupation were agriculture. Listi Rabha got married Pramila Rabha in 1973. They have four sons and five daughters.

Listi Rabha began his professional career as a teacher in Satabari M.E. school. He was also the founder Secretary of the school. In 1968, he joined Baida High School as an Assistant Teacher and he was promoted to the post of Headmaster in September 1970.

Listi Rabha, since his childhood had the urge for social service. As he was born and brought up in one of the most backward parts of Assam, mainly dominated by Rangdani and Maitori clans of the Rabhas along with other ethnic communities. Besides being an enlightened and learned person of the society and the socio-cultural environment of the locality demands him become a social worker and reformer. He concentrated himself on the social upliftment of the Rabhas which had myriad problems of development.

Listi Rabha Rongkho launched revolutionary movement which was not religious in nature rather it could be termed as social reformation. In the sixties and seventies the Rabha Society in greater Lakhipur (Mechpara) and Meghalaya had to experience a sort of social taboo arising out of cross marriage between the Rabhas and the Garos.

The orthodox Rabha society of the time did not give social recognition to such cross-marriage couples. They had been kept separately from the society and they were known as 'Domasha'. Such untouchability prevailing in the society had negative effect on the Rabha society. Listi Rabha realized the crux of the problem and tried to solve the problem of 'Domasha' by arranging meeting with 3-4 Mandals (village heads). The 'Domashas' were punished and imposed fine, thus they had been socialized. In the process a number of 'Damashas' were brought back to Rabha society.

The Rabhas inhabiting in the Mechpara (Lakhipur) area were highly influenced by the Rabha society formed in the eastern part of Goalpara district in the name of 'Dudhnoi Purbanchal Rabha Samaj'. In 6th April, 1975, a meeting was convened at Dadan temple, Baida under the presidentship of Malendra Rabha of Medhipara. In the meeting, after introduction of Mandals of 17 villages, Listi Rabha emphasized on the need to form a greater Rabha Society in that region. His appeal was supported by Kamlakanta Rabha, Mahendra Rabha and Sachindra Rabha. Such appeal of the social activist was accepted by the gathering and a social organization in the name of 'Mechpara Madhyanchal Rabha Samaj' was formed with Latsing Kumar Rabha as president and Sachindra Rabha as General Secretary. Listi Rabha was one of the five members committee constituted for drafting 'Bidhi Bidhan' (constitution) of the society. Other members were Narendra Rabha, Furen Ch. Rabha, Britishan Rabha and Sachindra Rabha. Besides this pioneering effort, he was also a driving force in the establishment of 'Dadan' Temple at Baida which was proposed to establish at Hatisalla.

So far the socio-cultural milieu of the Rabhas inhabiting in Mechpara area is concerned, Rabha Rongkho played a catalytic role in keeping the rich customary rules intact. He was very much concerned with the growing tendency of Hinduised marriage system in Rabha society. He raised question on the issue in the meeting held on 18th February 1988 which was widely discussed by the members and resolved to keep the customs and culture without jeopardizing its distinctive values. Listi Rabha Rongkho, for his commendable contribution towards socio-cultural development of the Rabhas unanimously selected as president of 'Mechpara Madhyanchal Rabha Samaj' in its 13th annual session held at Chatosigiri on 2nd and 3rd April, 1986. Listi Rabha was also a pioneering organizer. It may be noted that All Rabha Students' Union was organized under the presidentship of Listi Rabha Rongkho at Goalpara College on 12th February 1980. It was first organized in the name of All India Rabha Students' Union. Besides, he had the credit of representing as a organizer who initiated talk with the then Chief Minister of Assam Mr. Hiteswar Saikia for inclusion of Rangdani Rabha language as an associate language of Assam.

Listi Rabha's contribution to the literary field of the Rabhas is remarkable. He is one of the pioneering Rabha litterateur and poet. In sixties he introduced himself by initiating creative literary works which were published in souvenirs, journals, etc. His first published book on poem is 'Saisabra Antham' (1974). In 1981 he also brought modern trend in Rabha literature with the publication of 'Hursai Hursai'. Listi Rabha has also credit of writing first Rabha Novel 'Feshok Taurangkai Tao', which was published in 'Jatini Khurang' in 1973.

Listi Rabha's commendable contribution as well as pioneering literary work towards the development of Rabha literature can be attributed to the four volumes of 'Champai' June 1978, December 1978, October 1980 and February 1982 published by 'Champai Huri' Baida under his editorship. This literary magazine being first of its kind is considered as a landmark in Rabha literature. His other remarkable literary works are 'Eshi Ushi Tangkai Shay' (1991) published by 'Rabha Adhayan Chakro', Dudhnai, 'Ahem Prime' (2002), 'Fen Khurang' (Rabha Grammar) 2003, 'Chag Pidan', etc. Rabha has also a number of unpublished literary works to his credit. He has also contributed a large number of articles in different magazines, journals, souvenirs, newspapers, etc. published in Assam. In 1976, Listi Rabha Rongkho also participated in the workshop on Politeness Exchange organized by Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, alongwith Rajen Rabha and Baneswar Rabha from Rabha community.

Apart from these literary activities, Rabha Rongkho has also the credit of writing 'Asamini Rasong - Gabur Jyoti Prasad Agarwala' (2003) a biography on Jyoti Prasad Agarwala along with Dr. Upen Rabha Hakacham in Rabha language.

Listi Rabha Rongkho is a man of simple life style with tough personality. A least-talk person is an ideal teacher and also an efficient administrator. The untimely death of his wife Pramila Rabha in 1999 deeply shocked him. However, he continues to render yeoman's service for the development of Rabha society. His mission and vision on the welfare of the community and creative literary activities as well as scholastic work will inspire the Rabha community.

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Note: Based on exclusive interview on 26.2.2000 at Baida.

Prakash Rabha



A simple man, always immaculately dressed in a 'dhoti' and golden coloured 'punjabi', Prakash Rabha is an active socio-cultural activist of the Rabhas. He is a man with multifaceted personality, a true lover of Rabha art, culture and native language. A man with profound knowledge in Rabha language and literature, Prakash Rabha is one of the pioneers of Rabha drama movement and a social organizer par-excellence. This writer had the opportunity to meet Mr. Rabha for the first time in a special workshop on 'Rabha terms and Terminology' organized by 'Rabha Bhasa Parishad', Dudhnoi at Baida Nehru Vidyapeeth on 4th July 1998. The writer was fascinated by the knowledge he possessed particularly in Rabha language, admires him for his multidimensional qualities. He has distinguished himself as a pioneer of Rabha theatre (Drama) movement, an actor, an artist, a great social worker and organizer, a sentinel of Rabha cultural artifacts, a musiologist, an educationist and a poet.

Sri Prakash Rabha, a man of highly artistic nature, talented and adroit writer was born on 1st January 1951 in the humble family of Late Hisab Rabha and Nidan bala Rabha of Amguri, a sleepy Rabha village of Depalchung in Goalpara district. The village where he was born, is under the famous historical 'Mechpara' region which is famous for its 'Jamindari' system of administration and land management. It is one of the most backward areas of Goalpara district, located under Lakhipur Rev-

enue Circle. Prakash Rabha began his primary school education at Baida upto 1962 and he continued his M.E. school education under acute economic hardship and had to earn a living by cultivation and also by selling milk. In 1966, he got admitted in Baida Nehru Vidyapeeth High School. In 1971, he passed Matriculation Examination from the same High School. After passing matriculation Examination he got admitted at Goalpara College and passed Pre-University Examination in 1973. On completion of Pre-University course he began to search for a job as his family economic condition did not allow him for higher education. Then he took up the job of L.P. School teacher and began a new life.

Prakash Rabha, since his boyhood days was very much interested in 'Jatra' (a kind of open drama) and theatre. When he was in High School education he often engaged in 'jatra', 'Gan' and drama activities of the locality. Since then he used to write plays especially one-act-plays in the initial period and also concentrated in writing of full volume plays. Besides writing plays, he also took active initiatives in staging them in different programmes of the locality and schools. It may be mentioned that he wrote the plays both in Rabha language and Assamese. Among his plays 'Nubare Mankai' was the first One-Act-play written in 1970 and it was staged by him. This was followed by another social play 'Nilichandan' (1976) staged in the annual conference of 'Mechpara Madhyanchal Rabha Samaj' written by him. Besides, 'Bidai Champa', 'Sonamai', 'Saitan Aru Churi' all social plays were staged in 1977, 1980 and 1981 respectively. Moreover, plays of different nature like 'Phul Aru Bhul', 'Paiki', 'Debokoina Radhika' and 'Sambhu MLA' were written and staged in various parts of the

locality. Among these 'Sambhu MLA' was exclusively a humorous play.

Prakash Rabha after writing and staging of social plays, dramas befitting to the socio-cultural outlook and scenario prevailing in the Rabha society, began to realize the need and also the feasibility of establishing a commercial theatre in the locality. So, a commercial theatre group in the name of 'Sonajuli Theatre Group' was established under his leadership in the year 1993. So far the theatre group has the credit of staging a couple of plays including 'Monmaina' (a social play), 'Kamili Champa' (Maid servant Champa), 'Bus Gari Thakala' (broken Bus-a humour play) etc. Mr. Rabha has been associated with 'Naita Dal' (Drama Group) of his locality and also the group in Trikikilla, Meghalaya. Mr. Rabha is also a life member of 'Asom Naita Sanmilan'. It is needless to say that, Prakash Rabha, is one of the pioneering socio-cultural activists of the Rabhas. He is actively associated with several Rabha socio-cultural organizations like the "Rabha Kristi Sanmilan", 'Rabha Bhasa Parishad', Dudhnoi and Bebak Rabha Kurang Rungshum (All Rabha Sahitya Sabha). He was selected as the General Secretary of B.R.K.R. in the Silver Jubilee session at Boko in Kamrup. Mr. Rabha has also been actively associated with 'Rabha Nidarshan Kendra' (Rabha Museum) established at Amguri. Such centre was established by the people of the locality by collecting the age old traditional socio-cultural elements of the Rabhas from nook and corners of Rabha inhabited areas. According to the organizers of this centre collection of such rare cultural and historical components of the Rabhas was a challenging task. The organization, however, has succeeded in their mission. Mr. Prakash Rabha has been the

President of this museum. The centre is endowed with variegated socio-cultural and historical articles, such as rare traditional dresses, ornaments, traditional weapons, utensils, musical instruments, different articles of day to day use, artifacts on handloom, handicrafts, old coins, etc.

Mr. Prakash Rabha is not only a dramatist, playwright, actor, social organizer but also a highly esteemed poet and litterateur. So far he has contributed a number of poems and articles written in Rabha language in different souvenirs, journals, books published from Assam and Meghalaya. He has the credit of working as a co-writer of the book entitled, 'Nursery Rymes in Rabha' published by Central Institute of Indian Language (CIIL), Manasagangotri, Mysore, edited by P.N. Dutta Barua in 1977. Besides, a number of souvenir and journals have been edited by him. He had the credit of editing the first journal written in Rabha language entitled 'Jatini Khurang' in 1973. "Silpi Prasanna Pamar Geet" - a journal was also edited by him with Bhaben Rabha in 1984. In 1993, he also edited a journal - 'Dorshon Shag' of Goalpara district Rabha Sahitya Sabha. Mr. Rabha has also written a folk tale 'Rangsiri Sampai' which is published by State Resource Centre Assam in 2002. The book is bilingual - Rabha and Assamese and it is about the tale of a Rabha heroin. He has been associated with Bebak Rabha Kurang Rongshum (All Rabha Sahitya Sabha) and shouldered the responsibility of General Secretary in 1999-2000 to 2001-2002 session. Mr. Rabha has the credit of editing 'Rabha Stuti Mantra Geet' a collection of hymns and devotional songs of Rabha's traditional worships published by BRKR in 2001. Mr. Prakash Rabha being an exponent of Rabha social plays and pioneer of commercial theatre movement he was highly appreciated by the people for such efforts.

The drama movement that initiated by Prasanna Kr. Pam was actified and popularized by Prakash Rabha. The plays written and staged by him have far reaching impact on the Rabha society. Among his several well-staged plays, a few were highly acclaimed and evoked widespread sensation in the Rabha society. Such plays like 'Nilichandan', 'Sonamai', 'Paiti', 'Mon Moina' were worth mentioning. Of these, 'Paiti', a full volume play was the most favourite play of the audience. Besides, 'Nilichandan' has brought a revolution in the Rabha society. It was a serious play devoted to social believes of the Rabhas on deity. Another play 'Sonamai' staged successfully was on general and usual way of love and affection for the youngsters. The play happened to be a popular ones. 'Paiti' was another popular play wherein the exploitation of the downtrodden and poor labour class people by the rich middle class in the Rabha society was well depicted in the play. Despite having a rich drama potential and prospect in the Rabha society, the Rabha Drama suffers due to vary many reasons, lamented Mr. Prakash Rabha. According to this theatre exponent the Rabha theatre has not been able to survive as the people of the community often try to compare with other well developed and sophisticated theatre counterparts. The people like to entertain the theatre in the same standard which the Rabhas have been obviously lagging far behind the others. However, Mr. Rabha is optimistic for a bright Rabha theatre tradition in the days to come. Mr. Rabha was felicitated by several organizations for his commendable contribution towards the drama movement and development. In 1997, he was felicitated by Goalpara District Journalist Association for his contribution as a dramatist. A man of multifaceted personality, Mr. Prakash Rabha is a source of inspiration for the Rabhas.

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Note : Based on exclusive interview held on 4.7.1998 at Baida, Lakhipur in Goalpara district.