



An Ethno-Socio-Cultural Study Of Rabha In The North Bengal Of West Bengal

Khabir Ahmed Research Scholar, Department of Sociology Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam University, Indore. Email: ahmedkhabir81@gmail.com

Dr. Sathi Roy Mondal Assistant professor at Department of Sociology Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam University, Indore. [Email: sathibira29@gmail.com](mailto:sathibira29@gmail.com)

Abstract

The present paper aims at providing a preliminary description of the endangered linguistic identity of the Rabha community of West Bengal through historical point of view. According to UNESCO (ISO 639-3), this is a severely endangered language in India. Rabha consists of an indigenous community in the northern part of West Bengal. Historically major population of Rabha community were distributed around different regions of North Bengal, particularly in the districts of Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur and the plain areas of Darjeeling district and Cooch Behar. Other than North Bengal, they are now living at Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Kamrup, Shonitpur and Darrang districts of Assam; and West Garo-Hills district of Meghalaya and Bangladesh. They are also scattered in a small number almost in all other districts of Assam and six other states of North Eastern India. The 2011 census of India put the number of speakers at 31,119. There are many debates on the origin; ethnic identity of the Rabha, in spite of that it is agreed by most of the scholars, and historians that the Rabha originated from Rabha, a tribal community belonging to Tibeto-Burman language family (Grierson, 1903).

Key words: linguistic identity, Rabha community, endangered language, cultural history.

1. Introduction

Rabha is a Tibeto-Burman language that the Rabha people speak in the Northern part of West Bengal. It is an indigenous community of northern part of West Bengal, a major community that particularly resided in Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, the Darjeeling district's plain areas and the Cooch Behar.

Grierson (1903:100) has put them in the Bodo sub-group of Assam and West Bengal branch of the Tibeto-Burman language group. Many of the tribes and sub-tribes of this language group have lost their speech, and nowadays, most of them have preferred to speak Bangla language as mother tongue. Rabhas are one of such tribes who are divided into different clans or branches. These Rabhas branches are Rangdani, Maitori, Totla, Kocha, Bitolia, Dahuri and Shong& etc. The first three branches are said to be superior

to others, especially concerning social status.

2. Methodology

The study is based on an extensive fieldwork in some selected North Bengal districts of West Bengal. The fieldwork was conducted in three districts of North Bengal in West Bengal. They are-

1. Cooch Behar (Tufanganj and Buchamari village)
2. Alipurduar (Kamakkhyagurr, janab asati)
3. Jalpaiguri(Jaldapara and forest area)

Beside this, Data primarily has been collected based on researcher's own encounters with people in different situations. Data has been collected through interviews with the Koch speakers as well as relevant literature of this area.

1. Method: Interviews, audio-visual recording and questionnaire
2. Participants: About 30 informants (equal number of male and female subjects).
3. Age: This study has adopted Labov's (1963) age grouping and the age group in the study has been divided into five segments:

- 14to 30 yrs
- 31to 45 yrs
- 46to 60 yrs
- 61and to above

Interaction with people included picture story test, voluntary story telling session, and the various random interviews with people. The observations were recorded by a qualitative questionnaire.

4. House type

They include old-fashioned features such as buildings, figures, dimensions and designs of buildings, apartments, sheds, sheds and craft shops, materials used and tools and techniques.

Sites were selected, placing different buildings on the site and the use of buildings and different parts of the building were the main concerns of the village families. Most of the houses are built of bamboo and some are plastered with slate walls. Household activities are the focus of the fireplace. The most favourable months to build a house are from March to April.

5. Food

Rice is Rabha's main food in their daily life. They eat rice for their breakfast, lunch and dinner as well. They cultivate beans, various kind of vegetables in their and they catch the fishes at local pond in the villages. They survive with their traditional food. The main food prepared by them is as follows: Chapati Rice (Rangachchhu), Powder Rice and

Poppy Rice are also rummage-sale at unalike intermissions. Local rice beer 'chokot' is a thing for each and every function. This thing is made from rotten rice. The best thing is that they get a qualitative rice-beer which is called chokot. Still, they also try to make many kinds of homemade rice bear is considered a nutritious beverage for overall healthiness and well-being. Many food items like leafy vegetables, tender bamboo stalks are boiled with plenty of water and salt and eaten with rice. Pork, mutton, eggs, dried fish and rice powder type lentils (bamchakali) are also their delicious dishes.

6. Dress

Rabha's traditional attire is an important of his material culture and justifies special reference. Rabha would love to dress up with the colorful design. Current scholars have experimental that they more often used red and green cloth. But, their most favorite color is the red; beside this they preferred to wear white, black, yellow, purple etc. They claimed that these colours are holy for their respective occasions. When we asked that why they have chosen to wear of greens, they found that since they work mostly in husbandry, the clothes get dirty fastly that is why they have to wash their clothes almost daily.

7. Musical instrument

The Rabhas make their musical instruments with bamboo, wood and leather, they use leather in their Kham (drum) other instruments are- Kara or Karanal (a six-foot long flute), Baidog or Badungduppa, Tentak or TemekaBangshri or Bashi etc.

8. Occupation

Generally, Rabhas are based on agriculture. So, the village economy depends upon the production of the paddy. From the very beginning, they have been cultivating paddy like Asu, Phorma, Bilsa and Sali etc. and looking at the season they also grow jute, mustard, pulses, sugarcane etc. vegetables like potato, cabbage, chilly (winter vegetable), brinjal, radish etc. are also grown up. In their agricultural pursuits, men and women equal partners. Fishing, livestock, sericulture of manufacturing of bamboo and cane goods are some of their subsidiary occupations.

Conclusion

However, ethno linguistics study is a wide area covering the relationship between language and culture, language and cultural mind, language and social systems, language and communities' ethos and values. The present study is collected in a restricted domain with a purpose of showing how classificatory methodology is a adopted in a cultural conscious way by the people belonging to the Koch community as a whole.

This study has certain limitations. An attempt has been made to show some aspects by way of relating language and culture and for revealing the way in which cultural consciousness of a commonly revealed through language.

Overall, the present study is an attempt to relate the cultural consciousness of Rabha

with living reality called Rabha language taking some delimited areas for exposing the above discussion.

Work cited :

Abbi, A. (2001). A Manual of Linguistic Fieldwork and Structures of Indian Languages. Freebadsts & Muenchen Germany: Lincon Europa.

Census of India. (2011)/ www.unsusindia.gov.in

Chatterji, Suniti Kumar 1926. The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language. Calcutta: Rupa& Company. Vol.I , 1986

Grierson.G.A. 1903.Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. V (Indo-Aryan Family - Eastern Group),

Part I. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass. 1968.OA AAA

Grierson, G. A (ed.) (1903-28) "Linguistics Survey of India". Voll- III, pt. III, Reprinted 1967-68, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi- Varanasi, Patna.

Labov, William. 1963. The social motivation of a sound chane. Word 19. 273-309

Saha, R.M. (2015). The cultural heritage of the Rabhas. Kolkata: Anjali Publications.

UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages. 2003. Language vitality and Endangerment, UNESCO.