CHAPTER - 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Boro- its identity, population and homeland

There are numerous races and tribes with their different languages and cultures in the state of Assam. The Boros form a very important section of these races, and they contributed considerably under different names and in different places, to the growth of the civilisation of Assam. They are one of the earliest settlers of Assam who built a powerful kingdom with their capital at Dimapur in Nagaland and then at Maibong and Khaspur in the district of Kachar. Their dominion extended up to Sadia on the east and up to Korotowa river in the west. According to Captain Fisher the Boro-Kachari's Kingdom comprised Assam, Sylhet, Mymensing and the valleys to the east of the Brahmaputra river. Sir Edward Gait says that the Major part of Assam and the North East Bengal formed a great Boro kingdom. He also opines that the Boro-Kacharis are closely allied to the Koches, Chutias, Lalungs, Garos and Tipperas, According to Professor D. Maral, Boro, Deuri, Dimasa, Garo Kakborak, Koch, Moran, Rabha, Tintekiya Koch, And Tiwa are sister languages under Boro-Garo section of Tibets-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan language family.¹

In West Bengal the Boros are known as Meches. According to the view of Rup Nath Brahma, the Boros living on the banks of the Mechi river which is still flowing in Nepal State at foot of the Himalayas, are called Meches after the name of the river.² In lower Assam they identify themselves as Boros. The word Boro probably originates from 'Borok' which means
‘Man’ in Tipperah or Tipra language which is obviously a language of the great Bodo group of languages. According to S.N. Wolfenden the word ‘Bārāfīsa’ (children of the Boros) comes from the Tibetan word ‘Bbrug-butsa’ which means the children of the people living in the plain land having no trees and plants. In other parts of Assam the Boros are known as Kacharis.

The total population of newly created area under Boroland Territorial Area Districts (B.T.A.D.) is 29,07001, out of which total Scheduled Tribe population is 10,50,600. In the district of Kokrajhar total population is 8,48,104; total Scheduled Tribe population is 2,84,213; in the district of Chirang total population is 4,46,408 out which Scheduled Tribe population is 1,83,876; in the district of Baska total population is 4,72,467, out of which Scheduled Tribe population is 3,39,825 and in the district of Udalguri total population is 4,00,018 out of which total Scheduled Tribe population is 2,42,686.

As per 2001 census of Assam the total population of Assam (provisional report) is 26638407 (Male: 13787799; Female: 12850608); while total population of Kokrajhar district is 905764; total Scheduled Tribe population is 304985 (male: 154143, female: 150842).

The Boro language is spoken in the Boroland Territorial Council (B.T.C.) area of Assam, Karbi Anglong district, in a few places of south of Goalpara, Barpeta, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sonitpur, North Kachar district and a few places of North Bengal, Bhutan, Nepal, some hilly districts of Bangladesh, and Arunachal Pradesh also. Presently this language is considered as associate official language of Assam. More recently through the accord of
B.T.C. the Boro language has brought under the VIIth Schedule of the constitution of India.

The process of distribution was experienced in the North-Eastern region of India, a region supporting large concentration of Scheduled tribes and a legion of ethnically differentiated tribes, though on a much smaller scale and somewhat different in quality. The Boro community, which is widely distributed as a plain tribe, has been experiencing a great redistribution of its population both in the past as well as in the present. The population and their homeland is confined to the areas of Boro concentration, it was felt necessary to understand the process of redistribution at micro level by identifying district level patterns in ethnic composition, growth and density for the state as a whole so as to find out if the process of redistribution is widespread or confined to some pockets only. The quantum and quality of population redistribution has been different in this part of the state compared to others.

As a whole the tribal zone (specially the Boros) in Assam extends from Assam-Bengal Inter-state Boundary in the west to Darrang district of Assam in the east, in the north Indo-Bhutan International boundary to the Brahmaputra River in the south. The Boro people mainly dominated this tribal zone. Other castes especially the Santhals and the ethnic Assamese, Bengali etc. are very less in number compared to the total population of the area.

The Boros as the most numerous communities cover the widest area. They are found in every district, but occur in greatest numbers in the lower and Middle parts of the Brahmaputra Valley, namely in the five
contiguous districts of Kokrajhar, Dhubri Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup and Darrang. It may be mentioned here that the newly created districts under B.T.A.D. area of Assam from the districts mentioned above are four in number namely - 1. Kokrajhar 2. Chirang 3. Baska and 4. Udalguri.

1.2 Historical Development of Boro.

Boro is of a Tibeto-Burman language family and is one among the 1634 mother tongues (excluding 22 major Indian Languages) spoken in India. Boro belongs to the great Bodo family of Assam-Burmese group of Sino-Tibetan speech family, Boro branched off from its parent stock as per the descendence tree diagram given in the next page.
Different Branches and Sub-Branches of Sino-Tibetan Language Family.

Karenic (Karenic etc. Languages are available in Central and West Mynmar)

Boric

Burmese Mruise Nungise Kuchinese Chirelish Luish

Kukis Taman Bodic Sinic Manic Daic

(North-East Assam and Taying of Tibet, Midu) Tibetan languages except North-East Assam)

Nagis

[ Mosang Sange

Namsangia

Mutonia Banpara

Chingmengnu (Tamlu)

Angwanku

(Mulgeng, Tangkhul, Kupme)

Northern Naga

Eastern (Sime, Rengma, Angami)

Meitheleli

Mikir (Karbi)

Southern (Tso, Sinbuk, Khami)

Lakher

Old Kuki

Lange

Mutonia Banpara

Chingmengnu (Tamlu)

Angwanku (Tableng)

Mulung

Chang

(Marign, Tangkhol, Kupme)

Northern Naga

Eastern (Sime, Rengma, Angami)

Meitheleli

Mikir (Karbi)
The Boro dialect areas divided by Dr. Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya may be re-structured according to the change brought out due to further divisions and re-arrangement of the prevailing districts. These are the dialects current in (1) Kokrajhar, Chirang and Baska districts known as North-Eastern dialect area, (2) Goalpara (Formerly South Goalpara) and South Kamrup extended up to Garo Hills of Meghalaya state, which is known as South Western dialect areas, (3) Darrang-Udalguri and Lakhimpur Districts extended up to Arunachal Pradesh, which is known as North-Central Assam dialect area and (4) Nawgaon, North Cachar and Karbi Anglong Districts known as Southern Assam dialect areas.

Since Boro is spoken over a wide area belonging to different geographical and political regions it is all but natural that it has number of dialect varieties. Of the four dialects mentioned above the dialect of Kokrajhar area is considered to be the standard language. It is spoken in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri, Bijni area and it is fairly understood by the speakers of all other dialects.

1.4 Scripts used to write Boro.

The Roman scripts in modified form were used by the Christian Missionaries to write the Boro language towards the last part of the 19th century in preparing Boro text and religious books relating to Christianity. The Boro people used Assamese and also Bengali scripts towards the first part of the 20th century to write the Boro language. Towards the beginning of the last quarter of the 20th century the Devanagari scripts were used by the Boro
people to write their text books for school and college education. This was the trend of the historical development in the acceptance of Boro scripts.

Obviously Boro had no scripts of its own. Even then question arises: How could the Boro kings inside the greater Assam in those days be able to rule their great kingdom in discipline and order without having written constitution and written transaction with their neighbouring states or countries? No historical record or document is available so far as evidence to answer this question. Even then it is said that the Boros has a kind of scripts known as ‘Deodhai Hangkho’ (Deodhai Script) to be used to fulfil their purposes. The specimens of these scripts were available till now in the inscriptions of stone pillar wreckages and main gate of Royal palace of the Boro (Kachari) kings in Dimapur, now in Nagaland.

Dr. Promod Chandra Bhattacharya also writes in his doctoral thesis, “Bishnu Prasad Rabha, the famous artist of Assam, told that in ancient times there was a kind of Deodhai scripts among the Kacharis (Boros and Dimasas). Mr. Rabha represented in writing the Deodhai alphabet as gathered from an informant of Dimapur area which was noted for Kachari reign and remains representing the art and architecture.

It is said that the Deodhai scripts are comparable to original Brahmi scripts used by the Hindu Brahmins in India.

Looking forward the future of the Boro tribe, Boro language, and Boro Medium the All Boro Sahitya Sabha has accepted the Devanagari scripts which is used for Hindi, the national language, as common scripts.
1.5 **Typological Sketch.**

The typological sketch to write the Boro language is similar to the Devanagari scripts accept one pronunciation in the language which is in the I.P.A. /ʊ/ is represented in Devanagari script by ओ (ऋ) in the short form, which is very peculiar and frequent pronunciation in the language. The modified form of this script has anonymously been adopted in the Bijni Session of Boro Sahitya Sabha in 2005 as /ɹ/.

1.6 **Assamese's Identity and Homeland**

Assamese is one of the 22 major Indian Languages entitled in the Schedule VIII of the constitution of India. It is presently spoken as a mother tongue in the valley of Brahmaputra in Assam; an eastern state in the territory of India, and is the official language and medium of instruction in the state of Assam. As per 2001 census 26638407 people of Assam speak Assamese as a mother tongue. The people who speak Assamese call them an oxomija.

1.7 **Historical Development of Assamese.**

Assamese belong to the great Indo-Aryan family and it has descended from Old Indo-Aryan Languages through Middle Indo-Aryan Languages, an outlined in the diagram given below:
Old Indo Aryan Language
(from 12 Century B.C. to 6th century B.C) 
_____________ Vedic and
Middle Indo- Aryan
6th Century B.C to 10th century A.D.)
Neuro Indo-Aryan
(10th Century A.D. onwards)

Assamese Bengali Oriya Magadhi Maithili Hindi 
Gujrati, Punjabi, Sindhi, Bhojpuri etc.

Although Assamese entered its formative stage in the 10th century A.D., its written evidence of the literary tradition is available from the later part of the 13th century A.D. Early Assamese literature reached its epoch in the hands of Sankardeva (1449-1568 A.D.) later in the 16th and 17th century A.D. prose style literary tradition emerged declaring its glorious literary progression.

Assamese entered its modern era in the mid 19th century A.D. with the introduction of the printing technology and starting of monthly journal Arunodoi by the American Baptist Missionaries. With the exposure of the Native Assamese Scholars to western literary tradition in the later part of the 19th century A.D., Assamese literary tradition diversified in various modern literary forms and flourished considerably. Now Assamese in the various manifestations is as rich as any other Modern Indian Languages.

1.8 Dialects of Assamese

Assamese is proud of having manifests a number of dialectical variations, the break up of the Assamese dialects is given below.
Of these, the Upper Assam dialect has been considered as the prestigious one; the speakers of various dialects for inter-community communication and formal discourse switch over to the Upper Assam Dialect. It is also used in mass media. This also represents the standard Assamese language.

1.9 **Assamese Script.**

Assamese is written in the script which could best be described as Assamese-Bengali Script. This script has a history of 1500 years. Its origin is traced back to Brahmi script of Indo-Aryan tradition which writes from the left to the right. Following the extract literature the development of Assamese Script could be outlined as under:

- Brahmi Script
- Kushan Script
- Gupta Script
  - Kashmiri
  - Gurumukhi
  - Devanagari
  - Kutil
- Kamrupi Script
  - Gujarati
- Assamese Script.
There has not been much documentary evidence to establish Assamese script as a direct descendant of the Kutil script. As of date the Assamese script, the Bengali script and the Maithili script are more or less the same and they show almost one to one correspondence with the devanagari script. One important point may, however, be noted here that against one ख in Devanagari Assamese has developed two letters namely ख and ख. There is also two small differences between the Assamese and the Bengali script. Bengali uses ল for Assamese ল and Assamese has ল, a letter for the semi vowel /ə/ and Bengali has no character parallel to ল.

1.10 Concluding Remarks.

Both the Assamese and Boro people are living in the state of Assam, as well as whole North-East India since pre-historic era. Both the Assamese and Boro people have been correlating and co-existing from the ancient times. Though the Assamese and Boro language are belonging to different language families, both of them influenced each other, and this is obvious.
Notes and Explanations


2. Brahma R.N. “Bodo Jatir Parichay”


4. Total Scheduled Tribe population under B.T.A.D. area does not mean the total Boro speaking people but most of them are Boro speaking people.

5. Source: Asomiya Pratidin, Bongaigaon Edition Monday, the 24th January, 2005. page no. 3

6. The data of Kokrajhar district is shown from the source of Office of the Statistical Department, Kokrajhar of old Kokrajhar district before creation of B.T.A.D.

7. As per 1971 Census altogether 1652 languages are spoken as mother tongues in India. Out of these 22 languages have been identified as major languages and are included in the VIIIth Schedule of Constitution of India, leaving 22 languages the remaining 1630 languages.

8. Tabular Representation of the Sina-Tibelan Languages (following the ‘Linguistic Survey of India’) widely discussed and followed by Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji of Kirata-Jana-Kriti Ch. 22 pp. 24-25.


distribution of Boro dialects.


13. Grierson (1903), Chatterjee (1986) and Kakati (1962) had traced the origin of Assamese along this line of descentance.

14. Goswami (1987) has presented a detailed account of the development of Assamese Script. Some earlier works like that of Neog (1964) wanted to establish the identity of Assamese script as descendant of Kamrupi script, quite distinct of Bengali script.