CHAPTER IV

MOVEMENT FOR LINGUISTIC IDENTITY:

Human beings, alongside their development, create medium of communication by which the members of the group exchange their thoughts and ideas. Every group has a medium of intra-communication of its own. The more organized the groups are, the more developed their means of communications. As the groups grow in their knowledge, art, trade and social values, languages become more and more important and useful means of communication. It is through language that human society is organized and engages in productive activities. The need of communication between different ethnic communities and organizations, for productive activities or otherwise, forces the human organizations to create new languages. In the process, better and higher activities have come to being in the modern world. Languages have thus become indispensable and integral part of the human civilization, without which unifies social action has become impossible.

Language however has not remained confined to its original structure, but has overgrown to become emotive reflection and cultural heritage of the group. It has emerged not only as a means of communication but also as a cultural bond and unifying force of a group. Once subjective self-consciousness is attained through modernization, language becomes the vital symbol of consciousness and communal solidarity of the community. Language is also related to social and political power. The status of a particular language in the educational system or in the offices of the administration defines the political and social position of that community.
Language, as a powerful mobilizing symbol plays a major role in the nationality formation of a community. For an ethnic community attaining subjective self-consciousness, language has often been the vital force, mobilizing the community into communal solidarity. It plays different roles under different situations, particularly, in a multiethnic nation like India, where a tendency of dual nationalism, one at national and the other at the regional linguistic level are present. In such situations, the language of a dominant ethnic community is often super-imposed, undermining the languages of the ethnic minorities, resulting into resistance and assertive movements by those communities. In the regional level, like in the case of the Assamese, the language has been the prime-mover of their nationality formation, often even attempting to impose it on other ethnic communities of the province. Multilingual ethnic communities sometimes organize themselves into a nationality through the use of a link-language. The multilingual Nagas, identifying themselves as one nationality is the best example of the region. But the Punjabis, despite having a common language, broke themselves up into three cultural groups. Marxist scholars emphasise on the need of having a community language for nationality formation. But in reality, this is not always true. The purpose of community language can largely be served by wide-spread multilingualism or by the use of a link-language. Switzerland, the nation-state of multilingual Jews, the United State of America, with number of ethnic groups; or in that case, India, with one link-language for multilingual nationalities, are a few of such examples.174

In the case of the Boros too, language has been the strongest identity bond and the single-most factor of nationality formation. It not only survived

174 Amalendu Guha, Nationalism: Pan-Indian Regional in a Historical Perspective, Presidential Address, 44th Session of Indian History Congress, Burdwan, 22nd to 24th December, 1983.
the bruises of centuries of assimilation, but also became the life-line of Boro nationality consciousness. In fact, the very dawn of Boro nationality consciousness broke with Boro intellectuals’ strive to preserve and promote their culture, particularly the language. The literary works of the early 1920s were the pioneering steps towards this direction. Besides enriching the language, the literary works of this period became instrumental in mobilizing the Boros into consciousness and communal solidarity. Even at this stage of awakening, the Boro writers said to have laid emphasis of the need of having a “national literature” of their own. In the post-Independence Boro search for identity, language played even a greater role. When the politics of this community was in a state of doldrums, it was the language that brought the Boros together to struggle for the status of their language in the educational institutions, and later on, in the offices of the State. In fact, it was the quest for linguistic identity that prepared the ground for the political movements of the later years. A brief account of the pre-Independence Boro literature and its impact on the Boro nationality formation has already been given in the previous chapter. This chapter, therefore, deals only with the post-Independence literary activities and their contribution to the nationality formation of the Boros.

Constitutional Provisions on Language and Education:

India as a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural nation state cherishes multiculturalism, which it expects to percolate through the principle of ‘unity in diversity.’ In cognizance to the principles of multiculturalism, the Constitution proclaims guarantees to all its citizens social, political, economic, liberty of status and opportunity etc. The

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fundamental rights engraved in the Part Three of the Constitution and the Articles 29 (1) and 30 (1) for the safeguard of the linguistic and religious minorities are complementary to India's proclamation for a democratic and secular nation state. The Seventh Amendment Act of 1956 enacted the Article 350A, which gives directives to every state to provide education to the linguistic minorities in their mother tongue in the primary stage of education. The Article 350B of the same Amendment Act, empowers the President to appoint a special officer called Linguistic Minority Commission, to investigate and keep vigilance on the operation of the safeguard of the linguistic minorities. However, multiculturalism is not only a symbolic segregation, but also a value based concept and an ideology, having power to mobilize the people on nationality line. It is this cognizance to the linguistic minorities that has become indicative to their existence possible emergence into nationalities. In fact, not long before, the very principle of India's multiculturalism came under scanner for scores of times under increasing regionalism. The first of its kind happened in 1953, when under popular movement, the Union Government was forced to create the State of Andhra Pradesh for the Telegu speaking community out of the former Madras Province by the Andhra State Act of 1953. The creation of Andhra Pradesh opened the flood gate to the formation of linguistic states. Movements for linguistic states began in various parts of the country. Grave as it was, the situation envisioned the Central Government to forming the State Re-organization Commission in 1955 to look into in-depth, the feasibility of re-organizing the states. The Commission recommended for the creation of new states on the basis of linguistic and cultural homogeneity. According to the recommendation, under the State Re-organization Act of 1956, as many as 14 states and 6 Union Territories were created. Till 2000, total number of states rose to 28 and that of Union Territories to 7.
State Policy of Homogenization:

The democratic system of political set up, gives upper hand to the majority community over the minorities. The political leaders on their part make utmost effort to consolidate their position by encouraging and supporting the interests of the majority. The State Governments take advantage of the Article 345 of the Constitution and adopt, by enactments, the language of the majority as the official language of the state. Though the Central Government directives on language and education are reaffirmed by instituting commissions periodically and making fresh directives for the use of regional languages in the state offices, enforcement of such regulations have fallen in the hands of the majority community. Under such circumstances, alienation of the minorities continues and their sense of deprivation, sooner or later, forces them to assert for their rights; be it linguistic, educational, economic, or political.

Assam has not been exceptional to these developments of the time. The Assamese, who have been majority in population, showed determination of maintaining their position in every possible way. The first of such attempts of the Assamese may be seen in the manipulation of the census reports, where an unprecedented rise in the Assamese population was recorded contrary to an unnatural fall in the population of the minority communities. Immediately after the adoption of the Constitution, which under the Article 345 empowers the State Government to select any language or languages, the Asom Sahitya Sabha began clamouring for the adoption of the Assamese as the official language of the state. The Assam Government, under the pressure of the Assamese intellectuals, passed the

176. Census of India, Vol. 12, I-A.
Official Language Bill on 24th October, 1960. This move of the Assamese was widely opposed by the non-Assamese speaking communities of the state and it became the single-most factor for the break up of the province into number of linguistic states. In another instance, in 1972, the Gauhati University announced its decision to introduce Assamese as the medium at all level education in the state. The homogenization policy of the Assamese and the Assam Government however proved counter-productive. Their successive language and educational policies widened the rift between the Assamese and the other communities of the state. But the Assamese were determined to see their dream come true. In the words of S Chaklader, “The Assamiyas took no lesion from these developments. They were determined to push their language down the throat of the non-Assamese.” In 1986, came what as considered “the most devastating circular” of the Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA), whereby introduction of Assamese as the Compulsory Third Language in all educational institutions of the state was announced. This was followed by the Asom Gana Parishad Government’s notification announcing Assamese language as the pre-requisite for the appointment in the Government and semi-Government jobs.

The Assamese themselves have thus been, to a large extent, responsible for the polarization of the ethnic communities of the state. Given the situation, it is almost certain that the minority communities assert themselves demanding their rights, whether educational, economic or political, or even to the extent of demanding an administrative unit of their own.

179. Memorandum to The Three Member Expert Committee on Bodo issues, submitted by the All Bodo Students’ Union and the Bodo Peoples’ Action Committee, Kokrajhar, 8th April, 1991.
Formation and Role of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha:

The history of an organized Boro language movement began with the formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) a literary organization, on 16th November, 1952, at Kokrajhar. The convention, somewhat pan-Boro in character, was attended by the representatives of Boros living in Nepal, Bhutan and also by the delegates of closely allied Tripuri and Dimasa tribes of Tripura and North Cachar respectively. Late Joybhadra Hagzer of Dimasa community was elected the first president of the Sabha. The convention, besides other, resolved to use Assamese as the script for the Boro language provisionally, till it was decided otherwise by the Sabha. The formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha was the ultimate outcome of two years’ hectic mobilization undertaken by the Boro intellectuals of Dhubri, the headquarters of Goalpara district. In the 1950s, a sizeable number of English educated Boros, many of whom were engaged in Government services, lived in Dhubri. Mr. Modaram Brahma and Gaurikanta Brahma, who later on became re-known literary figures of this community, were a few among them. They were touched and inspired by the reforming spirit of the time, particularly, when they were so close to Bengal, the epicenter of reformation. The ongoing intellectual awakening make them realize the importance of the language and the role played by it in bringing renaissance in the community or nation. This realization prompted them to form a precursor literary organization known as the ‘Boro Literary Club’ on 28th September, 1950. The new organization began its activities with Late Indramohan Brahma and Mr. Rajendra Nath Brahma as its president and secretary respectively. The objective of this budding Literary Club was to inculcate nationality consciousness among the Boro youths of the township.

through their literary and social activities. However, they soon realized that
confining the activities of the Literary Club within Dhubri alone would not
serve the purpose of the community. They therefore decided to form a larger
literary organization which would include all the Boros of Assam and
elsewhere. With this objective in mind, the leaders of the Literary Club
organized a convention at Korajhar on 26\textsuperscript{th} September, 1952. Their call
received overwhelming response from the Boros all over the country. In the
meantime, another socio-cultural organization Called \textit{Boroni Onsai Afat} had
come into being under the leadership of Mr. Samar Brahma Choudhary and
Mr. Prosenjit Brahma. The leaderships of this organization also attended the
convention. The convention resolved to form a literary organization for the
Boro community as a whole. For this purpose, the convention formed a
'Preparatory Committee' with the responsibility of looking into the related
matters. Mr. Jogendra Basumatari was made the Chairman of the committee.
The 'Preparatory Committee', having decided to go ahead with the
resolution of the convention, constituted a 'Reception Committee' on 7\textsuperscript{th}
October, 1952, with entrusted responsibility of making the necessary
arrangements for the proposed meeting. The Reception Committee
scheduled the proposed convention on the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} November, 1952.
The convention thus held, assumed somewhat pan-Boro in character, having
had delegates not only from different parts of Assam but also from Tripura,
West Bengal, Nepal and even from Bhutan.\textsuperscript{182} The convention was chaired
by Mr. Dharanidhar Basumatari M. L. A., and also was attended by Rupnath
Brahma, the 'grand old-man' of this community. As was the desire of the
Boro intellectuals, on the second day of the convention, that is, on 16\textsuperscript{th}
November, 1952, the 'Bodo Sahitya Sabha' was formed. Initially, the office
of the Sahitya Sabha was managed by its President Mr. Joybhadra Hagzer
alone. Other officials were inducted only in the Haflon conference, held on

\textsuperscript{182} Jogendra Kr. Basumatari, op. cit., p. 55.
12th and 13th January, 1953. In this conference, Mr. Sonaram Thousen of the Dimasa community was selected as the General Secretary, while Mr. Jogendra Basumatari as the Joint Secretary of the organization. Thus, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, a literary organization of the Boros came into existence.

At this stage, the prime concern of the Sabha was to move the government for the introduction of the Boro language as the medium of instruction in the primary schools of the Boro majority areas of Assam. The BSS passed a resolution to this effect and resolved to take up the matter with the State Government. The first memorandum was submitted by the Sabha on 26th February, 1953, to the then Chief Minister Bishnuram Medhi. The two men delegation of Chatish Chandra Basumatari and Birendra Brahma duly apprised BSS desire to the Chief Minister.183 There was however no immediate response from the Government. The demand was reiterated in the 1954 annual conference of the Sabha, held at Mahakalguri, West Bengal. Between the years of 1955 and 1962, the BSS appears to have maintained low profile. No record, referring to its demand for Boro medium may be found during this period of seven years.

The Assamese language movement of 1960, seeking introduction of Assamese as the official language of the state appeared to have given a new lease of life to the BSS. The effect of the Assamese language movement was quick and decisive on the hill tribes of then Assam. The non-Assamese communities of Assam plains also expressed their strong indignation by partaking in the convention of All Assam Non-Assamese Language Conference at Silchar, on July 2, 1960. The Conference passed a resolution

183 Ibid, p. 56.
registering its strong opposition to the language policy of the Assam Government. The resolution reads;

The Conference of the Non-Assamese speaking people of Assam strongly oppose the move to impose Assamese as the official language for the State of Assam and that the status quo based on intrinsically multilingual character of the state must be maintained for the peace and security of eastern region of India.¹⁸⁴

Attended by the representatives of different tribes and communities of both hills and plains, this conference manifested the polarization of Assam population on ethnic line.¹⁸⁵ In reaction to the Assamese language policy, the hill tribes demanded English as their official language, the people of Cachar demanded Bengali for their district and the Boros demanded Hindi as the official language for the whole state of Assam.¹⁸⁶ The repercussion of the Assamese Language movement thus threatened the very integrity of the state itself. Though the non-Assamese communities of Assam plains could not exploit the situation to their advantage, the fall-out of the language movement created a wide-spread fear of Assamese domination among the communities... a fear that became one of the main subjective factors of their search for separate identities.¹⁸⁷

The Assamese language movement appeared to have awakened the BSS from its dormancy, provoking it to restart its language movement afresh. During seven years of Sahitya Sabha's inactivity, the language issue was kept alive by a section of Boro intellectuals, especially, by the Boro

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¹⁸⁵ Ibid.
Hard-pressed by the public opinion, the Sahitya Sabha submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister titling ‘Scheme for the Introduction of the Bodo Language in the Schools Situated in the Bodo Speaking Areas.’ This memorandum gave a detail scheme prepared on the basis of population in various districts of Assam. The memorandum also furnished a detail scheme relating to the appointment of teachers, formation of the Text Book Committees and also advised the Government to select the schools having 20 per cent Bodo students in it. The BSS however could not remain dormant for too long. The occasion came on the 16th November, 1962, when thousands of men and women gathered at Kokrajhar to commemorate the birth day of the Sabha. The crowd raised slogans in unison and unceasingly, demanding introduction of their language in the schools of majority Boro populated areas. The magnitude and the spirit of the gathering might have been a boaster to the morale of the Sahitya Sabha. It was at this juncture of time that a favourable development had taken place. Bimala Prosad Chaliha, who was not opposed to the Boro cause, became the Chief Minister of the State. He did not reject the Boro demand forthwith but constituted a ‘Study Committee’ with delegated power of looking into the feasibility of the Boro demand, as well as, making necessary recommendations. The Study Committee, headed by the Forest Minister, Rupnath Brahma, submitted its report in February, 1963, in favour of the Boros. On the recommendation of the Study Committee, the Chief Minister, in a ceremonial function, held at Kokrajhar on May 18, 1963, announced Government’s decision to introduce Boro language as the medium of instruction in the Primary level of the Kokrajhar Higher

188. Letter to Rupnath Brahma, the Education Minister, sent by the Shillong unit of the BSS, dated 15th September, 1960.
189. Memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam, by the BSS, dated 28th September, 1961, Shillong.
Secondary School. This decision of the Government was later on extended to the other Boro areas where population factor was found feasible. Introduction of Boro language as the medium of instruction was a significant achievement for the Boros. Particularly, in the prevailing Assam situation, where fear of Assamese domination had become apparent in the minds of the non-Assamese population of the state.

Initially, Boro medium was introduced only in the Primary level, after which, the Boro medium students were expected to switch over to Assamese medium in the Secondary stage. The State Government was bound by its responsibility to supply special kind of text books to those students. But it failed to produce such text books within speculated time. This was what the BSS was perhaps looking for. It responded to the situation by launching an agitation demanding extension of Boro medium into the Secondary stage. The State Government, being short of its own commitment, gave in to the Boro agitation launched from February 28 to March 11, 1967. The Government constituted an ‘Expert Committee’ under the chairmanship of the Education Minister, the Additional D.P.I., the Joint D.P.I. (Plains Tribal Education), the D.D.P.I. Mr. B.R. Kachari and Mr. B N Brahma, the Assistant Inspector of Schools (Plains tribal Education) as its General Secretary, to examine the feasibility of the demand. They were assisted by three representatives from the Boro and other tribal organizations, one representative from the Finance Department and by the Secretary, Board of Secondary Education, Assam. The Expert Committee was to make suggestions and recommendation on the following points; (a) to draw up a phased programme for the up-gradation of Boro medium to the Secondary Stage of Education, (b) to recommend the placing of regional

192 The Assam Tribune, ay 19, 1963.
193 Letter issued by the Secretary to the Government of Assam, Education Department, Sillong, dated 8th April, 1968.
language, Hindi and English in the curriculum, to recommend principles for selecting schools for introducing Boro medium, (c) to recommend about the preparation of the text books and other ancillary literatures and (d) to recommend about the inspection and supervision of the schools. In the report, the Expert Committee, apart from other things, recommended upgradation of Boro medium to the Secondary stage. The report of the Expert Committee received State Government’s consent and thereafter, in a ceremonial gathering at Kokrajhar on September 23, 1968, the Chairman of the Expert Committee himself in a ceremonial gathering at Kokrajhar announced Governments’ decision to up-grade Boro medium upto Class VII of the Secondary level. The problem of up-gradation came up once again in 1972, when Boro medium students passed Class VII and their admission to the next higher class was due. Warranted by the situation, the BSS once again resorted to agitation in 1973. In the same year, the State Government yielded to the BSS demand. The introduction and gradual upgradation appeared to have been a significant achievement for the Boros so far as their move for linguistic identity was concerned. It not only enriched the language but enabled the Boro students to have education in their mother tongue, without having to learn in Assamese which the Boro intellectuals considered as an imposition on them. The first batch of the Boro medium students ultimately appeared the HSLC examination in 1976.

Another development of significant importance, in the history of Boro language movement was the recognition of Boro as one of the Major Indian Languages by the Gauhati University in 1977. Boro quest for

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194 An undated letter issued by the Assistant Inspector of Schools (Plains Tribal Education), Kokrajhar, Assam.
195 Press Note No. BSS/PN/1/73, issued by the BSS, undated.
196 Letter from Mr. B Das, Under Secretary to the DPI, Shillong, Assam, Vide No. EMI/16/ 267, dated Dispur 26th June, 1973.
197 Letter Vide No. G/VC/COM/17/77, issued by R K Baruah, Academic Registrar-cum-Controller of
linguistic identity made yet another score, when in 1985, hard pressed by the All Bodo Students’ Union, granted Boro language the status of an Associate Official Language of the state.\textsuperscript{198} Records show that towards the end of the 80s and in the beginning of the 90s of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the Sahitya Sabha maintained low profile, adopting Luke-warm policies. Recognition of Boro as an Associate Official Language of the State had been the ultimate result of prolonged agitation of the Students’ Union alone.

Within a period of three decades, the Boros thus made a remarkable headway in their search for linguistic identity. Schools imparting education in their mother tongue, giving recognition to Boro as the Major Indian Language or granting the status of an Associate State Official Language to their language, unmistakably put the Boros in an advantageous position, in their struggle for a separate identity. They became more or less independent of the Assamese in educational matters. The only Assamese lineage prevailing was perhaps the script which the Boros had hitherto been using for their language. However, going by the trend of Boro nationality formation, it was almost evident that a move for an alternative script, replacing the Assamese, was not too far to come.

**Movement for the Roman Script:**

Adoption of Assamese script was debated among the members of the Sahitya Sabha and therefore, its use was made provisional, till a more suitable script was found and agreed upon. Hence, since the inception, the

\textsuperscript{198} Examination, Gauhati University, dated 26\textsuperscript{th} May, 1977.
\textsuperscript{199} The Sentinel, April 5, 1985.
BSS said to have been examining the suitability of different scripts for the Boro language.¹⁹⁹

The chapter of script controversy was reopened by the Boro students and social workers of Shillong. In the 1960s, there had been a popular feeling among the Boros of Shillong, favouring adoption of Roman script for their language.

With the patronage of the leading personalities like P C Brahma, Moniram Mosahari, U C Brahma, J K Rajkawar and J B Hagzer, their feeling was soon transformed into an aspiration of the community. Having established considerable ground, the student leaders and the social workers raised the Roman script issue in the BSS conference of 1964. Thereafter, the script issue was mounted year after year, till the Sahitya Sabha was forced to take it up officially.

**Historical Background:**

The European writers were the first to use Roman script for the Boro language. The earliest instance is found in Brian Hudgson’s *Miscellaneous Essays Relating Indian Subjects*, published in 1846, in which he incorporated 1800 Boro words, including loan words and about 500 verbs.²⁰⁰ Rev. Sydney Endle, who wrote *The Outline Grammar of the Kachari (Boro) Language as Spoken in Darrang District*, was another author to use Roman script for the Boro language. Published in 1884, his book contains illustrative sentences, notes, reading lesions and short vocabulary in Boro language, written in Roman script. His authentic monograph, *The Kacharis*

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¹⁹⁹ Saptahik Nilachal, November 27, 1974.
published in 1911, includes a large number of folk-lore and traditions written in Boro language using Roman script.\textsuperscript{201}

According to some records, between the years of 1904 and 1936, the British Government used Roman script in the Boro medium schools of then Assam.\textsuperscript{202} But it was discontinued during the 'Swaraj movement' when a call was given to boycott things that were British.\textsuperscript{203}

The BSS option of possible switching over to a more suitable script, kept an open door for proposals of choices to come in. One of such proposals came from the All India Boro Christian Literature far back in 1956, which argued Roman as the "most suitable script for transcribing Boro language in its phonetical order."\textsuperscript{204} The members of this literary organization backed their argument by citing examples of the hill-people, who had been using Roman script for their languages.

The Assamese language movement of 1960 hastened Boro search for an alternative script. As noted earlier, language played a dominant role in the Assamese nationality formation. At times, the 'little Assamese nationalism' became fierce and aggressive, so far as the ethnic minorities were concerned.\textsuperscript{205} The Assamese language policies created fear of Assamese domination, forcing the ethnic communities to struggle for independent identities of their own. The Boros too found it difficult to undermine the Assamese idea of extending their culture and language on them. Hence, it became important for the Boros that they opt for an alternative which would

\textsuperscript{201} Rev. Sydney Endle, \textit{The Kacharis}, London, 1911, Pp. 54-121.
\textsuperscript{202} Pamphlet, issued by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, dated September 25, 1974.
\textsuperscript{203} Khungkhra, \textit{An Introduction of the Mishings and the Bodos}, Kokrajhar, 1982, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{204} A statement issued by the All India Boro Christian Literature, dated February 11, 1956, Bongaigaon, Assam.
\textsuperscript{205} Mrinal Miri (ed), \textit{Linguistic Situation in North East India}, Shillong, 1984, p. 3.
be not only suitable but also replace the Assamese script, which had been, in their opinion, a symbol of cultural domination on them.

**The Sequence of Events:**

The Roman script issue was brought to the BSS annual conference first in 1964, held at Mahakalguri, Bengal. In the following years, it was debated over and again, till the pressure mounted to a formidable proportion. Ultimately, the BSS gave in to the popular pressure and in the 8th annual conference held at Kokrajhar in 1966 (4th to 6th January), constituted a five member “Expert Committee”, to examine the feasibility of adopting the Roman script. The Expert Committee, consisting of Mr. Promaod Chandra Brahma, Jagadish Chandra Brahma, Jogendra Basumatari, Michael Basumata and Mr. Mohini Mohan Brahma, however failed to submit its report within the stipulated time. The BSS thereafter dissolved the Expert Committee and formed a ‘Bodo Script Sub-Committee’ in the 9th annual conference of 1968. Mr. Soisengra Mosahari was made the convener of the Script Sub-Committee. He was assisted by a team of eight members namely, Mr. Michael Basumata, Monoranjan Hahri, Maniram Mosahari, Bihuram Boro, Nagendra Brahma, Maguram Mosahari, Biren Narzinari and Mr. Tarun Basumatari.

The final sitting of the Script Sub-Committee, held in Gauhati, on 9th February, 1969, prepared the report and placed before the BSS in the Udalguri convention of 1969. The extract of the report reads;

> We the members of the Bodo Script Sub-Committee appointed by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha assembled on the 9th February, 1969 at Gauhati to discuss on the script question and to find out a solution to

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206. *Circular*, issued by Jogendra Kr. Basumatari, a founder member of the BSS, undated.
it. After a long discussion on the matter and examination of the opinions received from various organizations and individuals the authorized Sub-Committee has, by majority, decided in favour of the Roman Script on the following conditions.  

The Bodo-Script Sub-Committee made a ten point 'recommendations' in favour of the Roman Script for the Boro language. They were:

(1) The Roman Script is very easy and quick to learn. It is evident from the fact that 2 (two) years’ period is necessary to learn Assamese, Bengali and similar Indian Scripts, whereas no such a long time is required to learn the Roman Script.

(2) It is also easy and quick to write. The Roman Script saves time and energy. Because there are only 26 (twenty six) letters in the Roman Script whereas the re are more than 300 (three hundred) letters including compound letters and other variations in Assamese, Bengali or Devanagari Script. It is possible to write in Roman Script without lifting one’s hand whereas it is not possible in above mentioned scripts.

(3) It is suitable for easy mechanical manipulation i.e. typing, printing and sending massage etc.

(4) It is generally noticed that Assamese and Bengali type machines are lying idle in the offices. Also we came across reported news that type writers in Indian Scripts particularly in Assamese Script are in less in demand. It is also true that India needs a common and scientific script for many languages therein. That is why recently,

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the Central Minister of Broadcasting and Information Shri K.K. Shah called for a new and alternative Script for Hindi and other regional languages in India.

(5) The use of the Roman Script is commercially economic because it requires less time and labour and also costs less.

(6) The Roman Script is exclusively scientific as a medium for writing down scientific subjects and technological matters.

(7) It will maintain a uniformity of spelling and pronunciation amongst all the sections of the Bodo people of different places, States and Lands using different dialects and state languages. It will help to create a standard of the Bodo Language, that is, acceptable to all the sections of the Bodo people living in different places.

(8) The roman Script shall be a big factor in removing illiteracy and spreading education amongst the Bodo people, for they will learn easily and quickly.

(9) The use of Roman Script will serve as a link amongst all the Bodo speaking people living under the influence of different languages and scripts. Because the Roman Script is generally used in every state of India, besides other local scripts.

(10) It is an international script used almost in all the different countries of the world irrespective of caste, creed and colour. It is almost one and identical in shape and pronunciation all over the world, and as a result, this has made the Roman Script the most suitable medium of international communication. The Bodo speaking people living as they are in other countries outside India, such as Nepal, South Bhutan, East Pakistan and Western Burma will
have a facility of maintaining a link with their brothers and sisters in those countries if the Roman Script be used. Further, the use of the Roman Script will offer a scope to the Bodo Language for developing into an international language and literature.208

The report of the Script Sub-Committee was discussed in the BSS annual conference held at Mahakalguri of West Bengal in February, 1970. After threadbare discussion, the Sabha resolved to adopt Roman as the script for the Boro language.209 It also passed the Resolution No. 11, whereby a ‘Roman Script Implementation Sub-Committee’ was formed, of which Mr. Kanakeswar Narzari and Thaneswar Boro were made Convener and Chairman respectively.210 The Implementation Sub-Committee had three consecutive sittings. In the third and final sitting, met at Gauhati, on August 23, 1970, the Implementation Sub-Committee prepared the final report. In the report, the Sub-Committee suggested the Sabha to initiate the implementation by using Roman script for printing official circulars, pamphlets, and etc. The report also suggested for the arrangement of seminars and free classes to familiarize the script, mainly with the Boro teachers, Lower Primary and Middle English School children and the older batches of Boro writers. It also made an ‘eight point’ recommendations advising the Sabha to appeal the authorized writers, requesting them to rewrite the school text books in Roman script, to approach the Commission for Minority Languages of India for financial assistance for holding seminars and classes. The Sub-Committee also advised the Sabha to approach the Government for approval of the text books written in the Roman Script. It also suggested the Sabha to form a ‘permanent body of

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208 Ibid.
209 Minutes of the 11th Annual Conference of the BSS, held at Mahakalguri from 24th to 26th February, 1970.
210 Ibid.
experts' to advise the BSS in matters of the proposed implementation, spelling, pronunciation, formation of more words and terms, holding of extra-departmental examinations in Boro language from time to time. The eight point recommendation also contained the advice for using the existing Roman or English alphabets with few modifications. In the Clause 8 (a) of the recommendation, the Sub-Committee suggested the Sahitya Sabha to introduce the text books written in Roman Script from the Class I of the Primary Schools from the academic year of 1971.211

The BSS Central Executive Committee endorsed the report of the Implementation Sub-Committee in its meeting held on 22nd December, 1970 at Gosaigaon. The Executive Committee passed the Resolution No. 1 and No. 2, whereby it resolved to "introduce the Roman Script from the academic session of 1972, in conformity with the new curriculum of the Board of Secondary Education, Assam, in lieu of the academic session 1971 as suggested by the Script Implementation Sub-Committee, in its report Clause 8 (a)." and by the provision of the Resolution No. 2, the Executive Committee decided to entrust the necessary modification with the Central Text Book Sub-Committee and the Roman Script Implementation Sub-Committee jointly.212 As per the decision of the Central Executive Committee, a joint meeting of the Bodo Text Book Sub-Committee and the Roman Script Implementation Sub-Committee was held on January 10, 1971, in Gauhati. The joint sitting unanimously passed the Resolution No. 1, whereby it was suggested that "the existing Roman Script, English Alphabets should be accepted, as it is, for the Roman script Bodo Alphabets. The order, names and sound of its letters should also be retained for the time being, subject to further modification of and when more suitable and

212. Minutes of the Central Executive Committee of the BSS, held at Gosaigaon, on 23rd December, 1970.
appropriate names and sounds for them are found out." In the meantime, a joint meeting of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Boro leaders and educationists was held at Kokrajhar on 26th September, 1971, with Mr. Gauri Kanta Brahma, President of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Dhubri unit, to discuss various matters concerning the Boro medium schools. Apart from recording a note of resentment on the objectionable statement of the Chief Minister, the joint sitting passed the Resolution No. 2, welcoming "the decision of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha which is a representative organization of all Bodos to adopt Roman Script for the Bodo language." The sitting also formed a delegation of 16 strong to press their demand to the Chief Minister. The joint meeting also passed the Resolution No. 3, wherein it was recorded that, "the joint meeting of the Central Committee of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the Boro leaders and educationists discussed seriously the implementation of Roman Script for the Bodo language and unanimously of opinion that the Roman Script be implemented from the beginning of the education that is, Class 1 (according to the new curriculum) and in other cases the existing Assamese script be continued for the time. As far as practicable this will be given effect from the academic session of 1972.\textsuperscript{214} The official records of the B.S.S. however show that the Sabha failed to materialize its decision of implementing the Roman script from the academic year of 1972. This was perhaps due to Sabha's engagement in an agitation, launched for the upgradation of Bodo medium beyond Class VI. The urgency of this issue is recorded in the minutes of the B.S.S. Central Working Committee, held in 1972.\textsuperscript{215} Besides this, a press note, issued by the Sahitya Sabha also speaks about its engagement in an agitation launched in the months of March and

\textsuperscript{213} Extract of the Resolution No. 1 of the Bodo Text Book Sub-Committee and the Roman Script Implementation Sub-Committee, B.S.S., met on January 10, 1971, Gauhati.

\textsuperscript{214} Minutes of the Joint Sitting of the BSS, Bodo leaders and educationists, Kokrajhar, dated 26th September, 1972.

\textsuperscript{215} Minutes of the Central Working Committee, B.S.S., dated Gauhati December 12, 1972.
April, 1973, demanding up-gradation of the Boro medium.\footnote{Press Note no. BSS/PN/1/73, issued by the B.S.S., undated.} However, State Government’s decision to up-grade the Boro medium enabled the Sahitya Sabha to resume its move for the Roman script. A press note, issued after the March-April agitation of 1973, appealed to the Boros to press for their demand with more vigour and spirit as they celebrate the 22\textsuperscript{nd} birth day of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha on the 16\textsuperscript{th} November, 1973. It also noted that on that day of commemoration, the Boros should take a firm decision to “(i) implement Roman Script from the academic year of 1974, (ii) oppose imposition of Assamese as a compulsory third language along with Bodo medium education, and (iii) fight for the cause of the Bodo language and literature unto the last.”\footnote{Press Note No. BSS/PN/1,73. issued by the BSS, Kokrajhar, Assam, undated.}

The year of 1974 has considerable significance in the history of the Boro movement for linguistic identity. In this year, the B.S.S., in its annual conference held at Khelmati of Darrang district resolved to implement the Roman script from the academic session of 1974. The Resolution 11 containing Sabha’s decision reads;

\begin{quote}
This 15\textsuperscript{th} Annual Conference of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha ratifies the Resolution No. 7 of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha held at Salbari in the month of March, 1973 an unanimously has decided to implement the Bodo Primer \textit{Bithorai} In Roman Script in Class I of Bodo Medium Primary Schools from the academic year of 1974.\footnote{Extract of the Resolution No. 11, adopted in the 15\textsuperscript{th} B.S.S. annual conference, held at Khelmati, on 17\textsuperscript{th} 18\textsuperscript{th} March, 1974.}
\end{quote}

Accordingly, the B.S.S. on the 12\textsuperscript{th} of April 1974, introduced the Bodo Primer \textit{Bithorai} (Balab-se), written in Roman script in the Class I of
the Primary Schools. The same day, in an inaugural ceremony, the Sabha declared Roman as the common script for the Boro language and literature throughout Assam and elsewhere. It also appealed to all the Boro medium teachers to abide by the decision of the Sabha.\textsuperscript{219} The Sahitya Sabha, through a circular issued on the 1\textsuperscript{st} April, 1974, requested all the primary units of the BSS to organize inaugural ceremonies in their respective areas on 22\textsuperscript{nd} April, 1974, distribute the Bodo Primer \textit{Bithorai} and start teaching it in the schools from the same day.\textsuperscript{220}

Introduction of the Roman script without the prior permission of the concerned authorities brought the State Government to the scene. The Government, as a mark of disapproval, withheld payment of salaries to the Boro Medium Primary School teachers of those schools where the Roman script was found introduced. Orders were also issued for the stoppage of grant-in-aid to those schools. Consequently, payment of salaries and disbursement of grant-in-aid to those schools were stopped from June 1974. A delegation team of the Nalbari District Primary Bodo Teachers' Association, when inquired in the regional Board for Elementary Education, was informed that such step was taken to register Government's disapproval to Sabha's unauthorized implementation of the Roman script.\textsuperscript{221} Assam Government's decision to withhold payment of salaries and grants forced the Sabha to take a tougher stand by resorting to mass movement. Meanwhile, the BSS, by a circular, announced a four-phased agitational programme against the unfavourable action taken by the Government of Assam. The first phase of the agitation began with a day-long peaceful token strike on the 12\textsuperscript{th} September, 1974. This was to be

\textsuperscript{219} \textit{Circular}, issued by the B.S.S., dated 1\textsuperscript{st} May, 1974.

\textsuperscript{220} \textit{Circular}, issued by the BSS, Kokrajhar, dated 1\textsuperscript{st} April, 1974.

\textsuperscript{221} \textit{Bulletin}, of the Nalbari Primary Bodo Medium Teachers' Association, dated Baganpara, 19\textsuperscript{th} July, 1974.
followed by demonstrations in front of the Government offices, beginning from 18th September to 25th September, 1974. In the third phase of the movement, there would be picketing of the schools and other educational institutions from 23rd September to 26th September, 1974, to be followed by further picketing in the fourth phase starting from 27th September, 1974. The Sahitya Sabha's appeal for wide-spread participation was responded overwhelmingly. According to the priory drawn action plan mentioned above, in the first and second phases of the movement, the Boro students abstained from their classes and demonstrated in the premises of the Sub-Divisional and District offices.

The movement was however called off temporarily at the end of the second phase, in response to the call given by the Boro Ministers and the Legislative Members. In their mediation, a joint memorandum was submitted to the then Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha, on 24th September, 1974. In the memorandum, the Sahitya Sabha reiterated its demand for the Roman script and also appealed to the Government to make payment of salaries to the Boro medium school teachers. The Government however did not concede the demands of the Sabha, which compelled the B.S.S. to resume its movement from the 27th September, 1974.

The third phase of the movement, though lasted for a short period, from 27th September to 28th November, 1974 only, it appeared to have been the most spirited agitation in the history of Boro language movement. There are records showing Boros of all walk joining the agitation in large number. Thousands of Boro volunteers demonstrated in front of the Sub-Divisional and District head offices. Incidence of police firing was first reported from

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222 Pamphlet, issued by the B.S.S., Kokrajhar, dated 25th September, 1974.
223 Memorandum, submitted to the Chief Minister of Assam, by the B.S.S., Dated 24th September, 1974.
224 Pamphlet, op. cit.
the Goalpara district, where of 18th and 19th November, six Boro volunteers and two C.R.P.F. personals were killed. The official sources reported that the police resorted to firing in order to “disperse about 10,000 armed tribals who stormed the Sub-Deputy Collector’s office at Bijni in Goalpara District” and that “disturbance spread to Kokrajhar and Gosaigaon townships of the district when about 15,000 tribals armed with lethal weapons demonstrated in front of the office of the Sub-Deputy Collector and Block Development offices. At Udalguri, in the district of Darrang, one person was killed in police firing and on the 25th November, more then six hundred Boro volunteers were arrested. At Tangla, Rowta and other adjoining areas, situation remained tense while at Rangia, police resorted to lathi charge to disperse the demonstrating crowd.225

The B.S.S. version of the report gave a different picture. In a press statement, the president of the Sabha noted that on the 18th November around 3000 Boro volunteers were demonstrating peacefully in front of the Sidli Sub-Deputy Collector’s office. A band of C.R.P.F. jawans fired at them. Narrating the incidence of Bijni, which took place on the following day, the president noted that around 10,000 demonstrators gathered in front of the Sub-Deputy Collector’s office, which, according to the B.S.S. observer, did not carry any lethal weapon as accused in the official report. On the basis of the B.S.S. observer’s report the president argued that if 10,000 volunteers were really equipped with lethal weapons, the number of injured C.R.P.F. jawans would be much higher then seven. Another argument of the president was that the picketers had among them a large number of women and in their presence; the male picketers would have not taken the risk of confronting the C.R.P.F. jawans. According to the observer,

the C.R.P.F. jawans fired on a crowd of 10,000 creating panic and consequent stamped in which seven C.R.P.F. jawans were injured. On the contrary, on that particular day, three volunteers were killed in police firing and more than 10 were injured. Till the day of issuing the B.S.S. statement, as many as 10 volunteers had already lost their lives in police firing.²²⁷

At this stage of the movement, the Assam Government, attempting to find a negotiated settlement of the Boro problem, invited the B.S.S. for a talk. The B.S.S., whose members had already experienced the adversity of the movement, accepted the offer of the Government. Thus, a talk between the Education Minister Harendra Nath Talukdar and B.S.S. representatives, headed by its president Ramdas Basumatari was arranged on 28th November, 1974. In the talk, the Education Minister agreed to look into the matter on condition that the B.S.S. suspended the agitation to create congenial atmosphere for further negotiation.²²⁸ It was also agreed in the talk to have a final round of discussion, date of which was to be fixed in consultation with the Chief Minister and to be communicated to the BSS.

A COMPROMISED SOLUTION:

The Sahitya Sabha, as a gesture of good faith, suspended the agitation from the very next day of their first talk with the Education Minister, that is, from November 28, 1974. In the talk, responding to the BSS President Mr. Ramdas Basumatari’s reiteration of the demand for the Roman Script, the Minister said that the script issue would be discussed only after the end of the agitation. Thereafter, another round of discussion was held between the Education Minister and the representatives of the BSS. The

²²⁷ Ibid.
²²⁸ Minutes of the talk held between the Education Minister and the B.S.S. representatives, dated Dispur 23rd January, 1975.
discussion ended with a decision of having a final round of talk with the Chief Minister. As desired by the BSS, a discussion between the Chief Minister and the BSS representatives was held on 14th February, 1975, at Dispur. Two other Ministers, including the Home Minister Mr. Hiteshwar Saikia was present in the talk. The ultimate conclusion of the talks was that the State Government alone was not in position to decide without involving the central Government as education was listed both as state and concurrent subject. The Chief Minister expressed that the script issue had to be examine "in the spirit of better understanding, closer relationship amongst the various people living in the state and national integrity. Besides, the state Government the Central Government should also be involved in it." He also agreed to have further discussion with the BSS after coming back from Delhi. The outcome of the talks made it apprehensive to the B.S.S. that the State Government was not willing to solve the script issue in favour of the Boros. Such apprehension of the Sabha became all the more apparent when the Asom Sahitya Sabha, a major platform of the Assamese intellectuals failed to come to a consensus with the B.S.S. in this regard. Besides, a section of the Assamese intellectuals raised a formidable barrier of opposition by airing their opinion in the daily news papers and magazines, which might have added to the Boro apprehension.

As the hope of solving the script issue at the state level was fast disappearing, the B.S.S. had no other option but to turn to the Centre for solution. But the Sabha soon discovered that the Centre too was equally unrelenting. It already had a priory determined proposal of sanctioning Devanagari script for the Boros. The proposal was communicated to the

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229. Minutes of the Talk held between the Chief Minister and the B.S.S. on the 14th February, 1975, at Dispur
231. Nilachal, November 10, 1974 & November 27, 1974; Dainik Asom, November 10, 1974; Mahajati, November 17, 1974; The Assam Tribune, December 1, 1974, etc.
B.S.S. on several occasions, once through Mr. Dharanidhar Basumatari, the lone M.P. of this community and the other, through the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi herself. Hence, the talks with the Centre were equally disappointing, without bringing-forth the result, desired by the B.S.S. The Sabha now found itself between two unyielding Governments; the State which was determined to see Boro continuing with the Assamese script and the Centre, championing national integrity by imposing Devanagari on them. Finally, the B.S.S. representatives, Ramdas Basumatari and Thaneshwar Boro gave in to the Centre on 9th April, 1975. The two representatives, during their stay in New Delhi, agreed to accept the Devanagari script for the Boros. They prepared a scheme for the introduction of the Devanagari script and submitted to the Central Government.\textsuperscript{232} It is said that the two representatives had no prior permission of the B.S.S. to prepare the ‘Proposal and Scheme’, nor they were authorized to accept the Devanagari script on behalf of the Sabha.\textsuperscript{233} The Devanagari was officially adopted by the Sahitya Sabha in its 16th annual conference at Dhing on April 25, 1975.\textsuperscript{234} With this, the Boro movement for the Roman script came to an abrupt end.

The Bodo Sahitya Sabha’s decision to adopt the Devanagari script created wide-spread reaction among the Boros. Particularly, the younger members of the Sabha strongly opposed it. The Dhing conference, where the B.S.S officially accepted the Devanagari script, witnessed uproar of opposition, the younger members even attempting to assault the two representatives physically. Finally, a compromise was arrived at on one

\textsuperscript{232} Proposal and Scheme, submitted by the two BSS representatives to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, New Delhi dated April 9, 1975.

\textsuperscript{233} Interview with Mr. Kanakeshwar Narzari, founder member of the B.S.S., dated April 2, 1989, and Mr. Maniram Mosahari, founder member and the ex-president of the Sahitya Sabha (taken during the M. Phil. Research work).

\textsuperscript{234} Minutes of the B.S.S. annual conference, held at Dhing, on 25th to 27th April, 1975.
condition that the use of the Devanagari script would be provisional and thus, leaving a possibility of reviving the script issue in future.

Articles and letters, decrying Sabha’s decision appeared in different newspapers, mostly accusing the two representatives for their arbitrary action. A section of the Assamese intellectuals expressed their opposition to the acceptance of the Devanagari, along with an advice of continuing with the Assamese script. The opposing members of the B.S.S. however did not make an organized attempt to undo the decision of the Sabha. At this juncture of time, the question before the B.S.S. as a whole was perhaps to make a better choice between the two scripts, rather than engaging themselves in infighting and further decimation. The B.S.S. chose the Devanagari for the obvious reason of their desire to free themselves from the Assamese linguistic nationalism. Whatever was the reason, the B.S.S. decoded to go ahead with the implementation of the Devanagari script, which, according to the Centre was “not estranged from the mainstream of education.”

Reasons behind the Compromise:

Critics analyzed the failure of the Roman script movement from various angles. The eyes of the critics first fell on the B.S.S. leaderships themselves. Scores of critical write-ups against the B.S.S. leaderships, particularly, against the two men delegation who signed the agreement with the Centre, appeared. In the opinion of the critics, Boros were the victims of their leaders themselves. In their observation, the B.S.S. leaders lacked

236. Ibid, 2nd May, 3rd May and 14th May issues.
strong determination and steadfastness, which would otherwise pull them even through the most severe situation.

Opposition of a large section of the Assamese intellectuals appeared to have been a severe blow to the Boro script movement. Many Assamese intellectuals put separatist colour to it and suspected foreign hands behind it. For instance, a column in the *Saptahik Nilachal* described the movement as “a manifestation of strong anti-Assamese feeling” and related it to the ‘Udayachal’ demand of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam, terming them as “the two sides of a coin.”238 He also pulled strings attempting to show involvement of the missionaries in the Movement.239 Another eminent scholar of the state Mr. Mohendra Bora concluded his booklet, *Ahomor Janajatya Bhahar Lipi* (Script for the Tribal Languages of Assam), with a suggestion of continuing with the Assamese script “without politicalising the issue.”240 There were still other Assamese intellectuals who were even opposed to the introduction of the Devanagari script. For instance, the Asom Sahitya Sabha, which is the main platform of the Assamese intelligentsia itself refused to give recognition to the B.S.S decision of accepting the Devanagari script.241 In Baganpara, the School Inspector, H Ahmed was found distributing Boro text books written in Assamese script, even long after the issue of Government order for replacement. Besides, the Assamese teachers of the Baganpara Primary School protested the use of Devanagari script and threatened to stop the payment salaries to the Boro teachers.242 Such an opposition of the Assamese intellectuals might have influenced the decision of the State Governemnt.

238 *Saptahik Nilachal*, December 11, 1974.
239 Ibid.
240 Mahendra Bora, *Ahomar Janajatya Bhahar Lipi* (Script for the Tribal Languages of Assam), undated.
The State and the Central Governments played the roles of their choices. The state Government preferred playing safe by throwing the ball into the court of the Centre. Though education is a state subject, the Assam Government, in sheer dereliction of its Constitutional responsibility, referred the matter to the Centre. Therefore, the Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha, despite his laud proclamation of guardianship over the state education, waited for the final direction of the Centre. The attitude of the central Government was equally disappointing for the Boros. Like the Assam Government, the Centre too was more concerned with the expansion of the national culture by imposing Devanagari script on them. It was the pressure of the Central Government that ultimately compelled the B.S.S. to give in. Once officially adopted, introduction of the Devanagari script in the Boro medium schools began.

The Later Developments:

Though there had been hue and cry against the acceptance of the Devanagari script, the B.S.S. and the All Bodo Students' Union workers ultimately gave themselves to the commitment made by the two Sabha representatives. After receiving official communication from New Delhi, the B.S.S. Executive Committee, along with the members of the Central Action Committee and the student activists met at Boroma to discuss the matter. The meeting discussed the Delhi offer in threadbare, amidst uproar of opposition. After prolonged deliberation, the meeting resolved to go ahead with the implementation of the Devanagari script in the Boro medium schools. It also resolved reserving its right to renew the movement for the Roman script if the State and Central Governments failed to abide by the terms and conditions, to be put forward by the Sabha and if they failed to be

sincere in the implementation of the Devanagari script, as it had already been agreed upon.\textsuperscript{244}

In the following year, the B.S.S. in its annual conference held at Boroma, passed the Resolution No. 5, whereby the Sabha resolved to continue with the use of the Roman as an “Associate Script in journals and official purposes” and decided to implement the resolution since the day of its passing.\textsuperscript{245} When ‘National Emergency’ was declared between June 1975 and January 1977, many Boro hard-liners were put behind the bar under M.I.S.A. Without the opposition of the hard-liners, implementation of the Devanagari script became easier. By the time they were released from the jail, implementation of the script had already made considerable headway.

**Declaration of Boro as a Major Indian Language and an Associate State Official Language:**

By the year 1977, the first batch of the Boro medium students’ appeared the HSLC examination which ensued yet another problem for the B.S.S. It foresaw the plight of the Boro medium students, having to join the college, without their language being upgraded to the status of the Major Indian Language (MIL), or without the ability of switching over to the Assamese medium as they had no knowledge of that language. Apprehending this situation, the Sahitya Sabha moved the Gauhati University to upgrade Boro to the status of the Major Indian Language. The move of the B.S.S and the Students’ Union bore fruit when in May 1977; the Gauhati University announced its decision to recognize Boro as one of the Major India Languages.\textsuperscript{246} Recognition of Boro as one of the Major Indian

\textsuperscript{244} Minutes of the joint meeting of the B.S.S. Executive Committee, the Central Action Committee and the All Bodo Students’ Union, held at Boroma, dated April 12, 1975.

\textsuperscript{245} Minutes of the B.S.S. annual conference, held at Boroma, from 2\textsuperscript{nd} March to 4\textsuperscript{th} March, 1976.

\textsuperscript{246} Letter from Mr. B.K. Baruah, Academic Registrar-cum-Controller of Examination, Gauhati University.
Languages was a significant leap in the Boro struggle for linguistic identity. This declaration ultimately led to the opening of a diploma course in Boro language, in the same University, which was later on, upgraded into a full-fledged department for post-graduate studies in Boro language, in its extended campus at Kokrajhar.

The 'little Boro nationalism' and its search for linguistic identity did not end there. Having gain convincing foot-hold in the educational arena, the B.S.S. began clamouring for the recognition of Boro language as the Associate State Official Language. The move officially began with the constitution of the Committee for Bodo Associate Official Language in the B.S.S. annual conference held at Bijni in 1978.\textsuperscript{247} The Committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. Ramdas Boro, Convener Mr. Thaneshwar Boro and assisted by three other members, submitted a five point report of feasibilities and recommendations. They were:

1. Bodo as a mother tongue of about 15 lakhs Bodo people of North-east India including northern Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. Moreover, it is understood by about 1 lakh non-Bodo population of the region.

2. It is a medium of instruction upto Secondary level and MIL upto college level under Gauhati University.

3. Bodo medium is now running in about 2350 primary schools throughout Assam, where nearly 3 lakhs Bodo students are imparted education. And around 3500 Bodo teachers earn their livelihood

\textsuperscript{247} Minutes of the B.S.S. annual conference, held at Bijni, on 12\textsuperscript{th} an 13\textsuperscript{th} November, 1978.

Vide No-G/VC/COM/17/77, dated 26/5/77, Gauhati.
from these schools. In the numerical strength of educational institutions too, Bodo medium schools' position is sound, first being Assamese and then followed by Bengali.

4. Besides the Government of Assam has involved 18 personals of inspecting and administrative staff, including 1 Deputy Director of Public Instruction and 2 Assistant Inspector of Schools for Bodo medium education. Moreover, the number of Bodo medium schools is being increased by seeing the growing demand of the masses.

5. Lastly, the most important point is that Bodo is a subject in the departmental examination of Assam Public Service Commission and it is also one medium of admitting students in Sainik School, Goalpara. And that, Bodo has been recognized as a medium of instruction for Primary level only in 1962, within a short span of time, it has made rapid progress. As such, it can be used as an Associate Official Language.248

After having deliberated on the report of the Committee, the Sahitya Sabha resolved to move the Government for their demand. It resorted to 'prayer and petition' tactic and submitted memorandum to the Government. However, during the Janata regime there was no significant progress in their move for an Associate Official Language. During this period, the two spearheading Boro organizations, namely the Plains tribals Council of Assam and the All Bodo Students' Union stood divided over farmer's alliance with the Assam Janata Party. The Council, after joining the coalition, compromised its demand for a separate state with that of an

248 A Report on Feasibilities of Bodo as Associate Official Language submitted by the Committee for Bodo associate Official Language, to the B.S.S., dated 16th February, 1979, Kokrajhar, Assam.
autonomous apparatus, which was strongly opposed by the Student body. The differences became so acute that it brought split in the Council, the hard-liners clustering themselves into a new political party. This political development had great influence on the B.S.S and the Students’ Union, reducing both of them to near dormancy. Under such circumstances, no forceful agitation could be in the offing.

However, with the change of leadership in 1982, The Students’ Union appeared to have regained its lost vigour, strong enough to catalyze the B.S.S. to revive its activities. In fact, after the change of leadership, the Students’ Union played the key role in the Boro move for Associate Official Language. The student body submitted memoranda, gave representations, and in fact, it was the untiring move of the Students’ Union that exerted enough pressure on the State Government to declare Boro as the Associate Official Language on April 4, 1985 in the Assembly. Once officially declared by the State Government, the Students’ Union and the B.S.S. put pressure for its implementation. It became one of the major issues in the 92 points charter of demands of the Union. However, though the pressure has been on, its implementation has not yet been done by the Government till the recent times.

The Boro language movement had often been a challenge and response to the language and educational policies of the Assamese. For instance, the Assamese language Act of 1960 and the language movement of 1972, leading to the introduction of Assamese as the State Official Language and as the medium in all level of educational institutions of the state, were considered as threats to their language and identity by the Boros. And hence,

in response to the Assamese language policies, the Boros launched successive language movements for the introduction of the Boro language as the medium of instruction, for the adoption of the Roman script in place of Assamese, or for the recognition of their languages as the Associate state Official Language. Similar kind of language policies were adopted by the Asom Gana Parishad Government after it came to the power in 1986. The Gana Parishad Government, by circular, issued from the office of the Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA), dated 28th February 1986, made Assamese a compulsory Third Language for the non-Assamese students of the state. It also made Assamese a prerequisite for any Government job, in violation of the Clause 7, of the Assam Language Act 1960, which prevented the State Government from indulging in any kind of discrimination, on the ground of Language.  

The Assamese language policies built up the situation for the Boros to launch an agitation for a separate state. The student body submitted a 92 points charter of demands, in which the demand for a separate state and the language issues found prominent place. Revival of the Roman script issue was one of the important points in the charter of demands. The point no. 45 of the charter stated that the wounds, inflicted by the outcome of the Roman script movement were yet to be healed. Referring to the Government’s decision to the introduce Roman script for the Mishing language, the Union demanded introduction of the same script for the Boro language as well. Thus, the Roman script issue once again surfaced in the agenda of the Students’ Union and its impact fell heavily on the policies of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha. In the following years, opinion in favour of the Roman script continued building up. Ultimately, the B.S.S., under the popular pressure,

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251. As referred to in the Language Policy of the All Bodo Students’ Union, published by the Union, Kokrajhar, dated September 9, 1986. p. 79.

252. Ibid.
passed the Resolution No. 4, in its 32nd annual conference, held at Tangla in 1993, whereby the Sabha resolved to form an Expert Committee, “to examine the previous records as well as to find ways and means for using the script again.” The Sabha directed the Expert Committee to a report within a stipulated time of six months. Accordingly, the Expert Committee was formed and report submitted within the stipulated time. With this, the Roman script issue, once again, assumed priority in the action plan of the Sahitya Sabha. The same conference elected Mr. Maniram Mosahari as the president of the Sabha, — a person considered as the mastermind of the last Roman script movement of 1972-75.

In the mean time, the experiences of the yesteryears had, to some extent, changed the mind set of the Assamese intellectuals and politicians, enabling them to accept the hard-fact that the Boros had, by far, established themselves as an independent entity, and that they could no longer be subdued linguistically and politically. It was this changing attitude of the Assamese that enabled the Asom Gana Parishad Government to recognize Roman as the script for the Boro medium schools. The Education Minister, Mr. Thaneshwar Boro himself, in a ceremonial function, held in the Sahitya Sabha Guest House, Gauhati on 12th April, 1997, announced inaugural of the Roman script for the Boro language.

However, prolonged movement for language and administrative autonomy, consequent emergence of rival political and armed groups, divided the Boro population on party, region and religious lines. As a result, when Roman script was granted to them, a section of the Boro population

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253. Ibid.
254. Ibid.
rejected terming it to be a foreign and Christian script. While still other, irrespective of their faiths, found it to be the most suitable script for their language. They however failed to come to a consensus, which kept adoption of the Roman script in abeyance. Circumstances thus, brought Boro movement for the Roman script to an end, revival of which will depend on the leaderships and the kind of ideologies they adhere to.

The Boro language movement however went on despite script debacle. Though the pace might have often been slow and deviant, the original goal of the movement was not sidetracked. The agitating Boro organizations, whichever it was, tagged the language issue along. It was this feature of their movement that brought the Boro language thus far. The Boro language took its last leap on February 10, 2003, when the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) signed an accord with the Centre, whereby inclusion of the Boro language in the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution was agreed upon. In the following year, the bill, pertaining to the inclusion of the Boro language into the schedule of the Constitution received President’s consent. This slated the Boro language on a par with other advanced languages of the country.