CHAPTER-IV

RACIAL GROUPS AND FOLK ETYMOLOGY

The term 'race' is used very loosely. The term is sometimes confused with religion and sometimes with nation and language. Many scholars have tried to give right concept of the term 'race'. One such definition on race was given by A.W. Green. According to him, "A race is a large, biological human grouping with a number of distinctive inherited characteristics which with a certain race'. He has said the importance of biological influence on classification of human groups. Harton and Hunt says, "A race is a group of people somewhat different from other groups in its combination of inherited physical characteristics, but race is also substantially determined by popular social definition".

Above definition has given importance in the classification of human beings on physical traits. Anthropologists have differed from each other in their opinion about race. Linnacous and Cuvier divided the human groups into three races. Huxley has divided race into five principal types. These are Negroid, Austroliod, Mongoloid, Xanthochroid and Melonochroid. Some Anthropologists have classified the human beings into four races i.e. Caucasian, Mongol, Negro, Austroalian. The Caucasian race is again subdivided into Nordic, Alpine and Mediterranean. Cole classified race into white, yellow, black and red colour. S.K. Chatterji has mentioned the types of race in context of India in his Kirata janakriti.
These are as follows.

1. The Negrito.

2. The Proto-Austroloid.

3. The Mongoloid, consisting of-
   i) The Palaeo-Mongoloids of (A) the long headed, and (B) the broad headed types.
   ii) The Tibeto- Mongoloids.

4. The Mediterranean, comprising
   i) The Palaeo- Mediterranean.
   ii) The Mediterranean and
   iii) The so-called ‘oriental’ types.

5. The Western Branchycephals, consisting of-
   i) The Alponoid
   ii) The Dinaric, and
   iii) The Armenoid

6. The Nordic.

   The Scholars tried to define the place from where they stayed first time.

   In the Gibi Bithai author has mentioned three major racial groups in the Chapter-XVII. These are Mongoloid, Negrito and Nordic. The singer poet has enlightened one readers with his own perception about the three racial groups and the position of the Mongoloid Bodos among them.

Negritos or Negroids:-

   About the Negritos S.K. Chatterjee says- “First we have in pre-historic times, the arrival of the Negritos; a dwarfish Negroids or Negro-like people from Africa.”5 Raj Mohan Nath says – about the Negritos that the next race of
people who influenced the culture of India were the Negroids who migrated from the south and the south west. The homeland of the Negritos was Africa. But later on they migrated to other countries of the world. Some of them Negrito people were food gatherers. In the Gibi Bithai Bihuram Boro says about the Negrito people. Their body colour is black due to the direct fall of sunlight. Sibrai created the human beings of the world. There was a time when the population of Asia reached beyond bounds and some part of its population had to migrate to Africa and got settled there. Before their settlement that region was covered by dense forest but after their settlement the forest area gradually diminished. The settlement of these people in the new region has prevented the regrowth of the cleared forest. This state of inability of regrowth had been termed as ‘zumphriganai’ in Bodo. It is believed that the word “zumphriganai” became “humfriga” afterwards and then “humfriga” became “Africa”. The continent became later known as Africa. Anything or place that couldn’t develop again is known as “zamphrigana” (degerminated) in Bodo. It is believed that from the word “Jamfriganai” long back it became “hamfriga” and lastly it is known as Africa continent.

In Bodo language “nargina tha” means settlement by searching land. It is said by the author that from the “nagirnatha” the ethnic term Negro was derived. Because according to the author this group of people migrated from Asia searching for security and peace of life.

Nordics:-

S.K. Chatterjee says “The Nordics, the true Aryans; were the last people to enter India; were the last people to enter India through her western gates in
pre-historic times. They were tall, fair, straight-nosed, blue-eyed and golden-haired, and they called themselves *Aryas*. The term Aryan is a linguistic term.

In *Gibi Bithai* the author has mentioned Nordics as *guphur subung*. *Gufur subung* means white people. These people are also known as *Aryan* and *Harsa*. According to author their complexion is white due to cold climate. Because the region where Aryans lived that place was very far from the Sun. So the region is very cool. The region where the *guphur subung* lived is called *harwphw* i.e., soft land. It is believed that from the word *harwphw* the term Europe was evolved.

**Mongoloids:**

The Mongoloid racial group is one of the prominent racial groups. According to S.K. Chatterjee the Mongoloid tribes represent three types:

(a) the primitive long headed Mongoloids (b) short headed Mongoloid (c) Tibeto-Mongoloids. The primitive long headed Mongoloids are found in sub-Himalayan tracts and Assam, short headed Mongoloids are found in Burma and Chittagong. The Tibeto-Mongoloids are found in India. They are fairly tall and highly developed tribe.

In the *Gibi Bithai* author has elaborated upon the mongoloid race. According to the author they are permanent dwellers of the Asia continent. They defeated other ethnic groups and became *munggwlao* i.e., very famous in the world. It is that believed from the word *munggwlao* > *Mongol* > later on Mongolian was derived. The complexion of the Mongolian or Mongoloid people is yellow.
Folk etymology:

Bihuram Boro was an etymologist. He has written various articles on tracing the origin of words. He has traced the various names of the places which are helping in searching own terms. The following articles are cited as example:-

1. A few traces of Bodo words-

Bihuram Boro has endeavored to trace the origin of the names of various places, name of the Gods and goddesses in his Gibi Bithai. It was found that the author has retained the old names in the naming of some things. While in some cases he coined his own. Hence, few dissimilarities have been detected between the author’s etymology of words and those of the folk etymologists. The etymologies of words in the Gibi Bithai are given below:

Sin (China):

In Bodo China is called as sin. How the word sin is originated it is narrated by the author in chapter XVII, of Gibi Bithai. Once upon a time the Mongolian Group of people travelled in search of new land having rivers and trees. They knew that water is the main source of life. It helps in the growth
trees, animals, fish etc. So, they used to live near the banks of rivers. They believed that water is everything without which survival is impossible. It is the \textit{si} (soul) therefore another name of the water is \textit{si > sin}. Later on from that word \textit{sin} the present \textit{sin} (china) is originated.

\textbf{Himalay}:

The Sibrai dwelt with his consort Sibrui in a \textit{hamalao}. \textit{Hamalao} means big, highland, long area of land. According to the author the word \textquote{Himalay} is derived from the \textit{hamalao}. But in Sanskrit the \textit{Himalay} word is derived from \textit{him-alloy} (house of ice) Himalay.

\textbf{Nigro}:

According to Bihuram Boro the word \textit{Nigro} is transformed from the \textit{nagritha}, again \textit{Nagritha} is derived from \textit{Naigritna thanai}. It means settlement after searching land. When the Mongolian, Negro and Aryan people settled in the same place, then there was scarcity of food among them. They fought with each other for food. So, some of them fled in search of new land towards the south of Asia. Later on this group of people came to be known as Negro and that land is known as Africa. Due to the direct fall of sun-rays in Africa people became black skinned. Therefore the Negroes are generally black.

\textbf{Tibot (Tibet)}:

The land where the Buddhists live is known as Bod. Bod means homeland. The various parts of the country are known as Horbod, Kurbod etc. the area dwelt by Buddhist Lama was known as Bsti (lama) Bod. Later on from the Bsti Bod-Tibod-Tibet was derived. According to Bihuram Boro, Tibot is a
Bodo word. *Ti* means water and *bot* means stock i.e. the place where water is stored. He has located “Tibot” in the northern side of the Himalaya.

**Kherai:**

“*Kherai*” is religious festival of Bodos. About the origin of the word “Kherai”, there are different views among the scholars. According to Dr. S.K. Chatterji, Tripuris have a “*Kherpuja*”⁹. In this puza they worship the mother earth. He found similarity between the Tripuri. “*Kherpuza*” and Bodo “*Kherai*”. According to Mahini Mohan Brahma, the word “*Kherai*” was derived from the “Khuriabrai”¹⁰. Sibrai was known as “*Khuribrai*” when Sibrai was angry he looked very cruel. So, in short the word “*kherai*” is derived from *khuriabrai*.

The author of *Gibi Bithai* has explained the origin of the word Kherai in Bodo. *Kher* means to pray the supreme power¹¹. Again in the *Gibi Bithai*, the author has narrated about the origin of *kherai* in the Ch -XXXII. How the *Kherai* was originated¹². The term *Kherai* is very closely related with agricultures, but now-a-days this term has very close relation with the Bathou religion. Any celebration of *Bathou Puza* or any prayer is known as *Kherai*.

**Bathou:**

The term Bathou was defined by Moda Ram Brahma as *Ba + itham + thou = Bathou*, which means five, three and deep. God is in five principles- Solidity, liquidity, heat, air and Soul. He has three functions, viz, creations, maintenance and taking back again¹³. Dhuparam Basumatary says on the origin of Bathou as follows:- “*the main essence of the religion of the Bodo Kacharis, the original inhabitants of Asam or Kamrup who worship Bathou as their chief deity is mwnba – gwhou = “Bathou”. “Mwnba” means five
and “gwthou” means deep philosophy. The blending of the two syllables “Ba” and “thou” taken from the words “mwnba” and “gwthou” respectively has resulted in the formation of the word “Bathou”. Thus, Bathou is the amalgamation of five deep philosophies.”

The author of Gibi Bithai, Bihuram Boro has discussed the term “Bathou” and about its origin in Chapter –IV. Bathou mungni gudi (origin of the term Bathou). According to the author, bar (air), ha (land) dwi (water), or (fire) and nokrug (sky) are the first creations of God. These things are very very important to form the world. Without these things nobody can survive. “Aa” is another name of land. Again water is known as thi, di and tui. The other name of sky is nukhung. So the term Bathou is formed by the combination of letters of that words. From bar (air) “b” ha (land) “aa”, doi (water) “th”, or (fire) “o” and nukhung (sky) “u”, i.e. b-a-th-o-u = Bathou.

Assimilation and Inter culturalism in handling Hindu and Bodo mythology:

When people belonging to two different cultures come into contact, then they tend to exchange some of their cultural elements with each other or they simply merge with each other. This process is known as assimilation. According to Park and Burgess “Assimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, attitudes of each other persons or groups and by sharing their experiences and history are incorporated with them in a cultural life.” Again Bogardus defines “Assimilation is a process whereby attitudes of many persons are united and thus develop into a united.” There is another definition by Nimkoff according to which “Assimilation is a process whereby individuals
or groups once dissimilar become similar, and identified in their interest and outlook." Modern social scientists tend to use the term interculturalism to suggest the meaning of contact between two or more cultures.

Assimilation is found in Gibi Bithai, of the Hindu and Bodo myths. The Bodo myths are already discussed in the chapter-II of the work. But it is found that, there are such Myths which are referred in the Vedas and Puranas. The Myths of Brahma, Bishnu and Siva are assimilated with the Bodo myths of Sibrai, Barmali, Laukhar gosai in the Gibi Bithai.

The Vedas and Puranas are the main sources of the Hindu mythology. "Veda" signifies knowledge. Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sama-Veda and Atharva-Veda. Among the Vedas Rig-Veda is the oldest one.

The two epics – Ramayana and Mahabharata are also the main sources of the Hindu mythology at present day.

Brahma

Brahma is a Puranic God. He is known as creator and father of Gods and men. Among the great Hindu gods, He is the first person in Hindu triad. In the Mahabharata and some Puranas, Brahma is said to have appeared from a lotus which sprang from the navel of Vishnu. Saraswati is the wife of Brahma.

The Legend of Brahma is cited in the Chapter – XXXI of Gibi Bithai. According to the author Brahma looks after the people of Harwfw (Europe). When the population of Europe became higher then Siva could not control them alone. Therefore, god was prayed and asked to give a consort on earth to see the people of Europe.
According to the author, Brahma is known as Arma, Borma and Barmali. Who has six heads and very handsome appearance. He came in the world after Siva and Vishnu. Brahma's duty is to look after the Aryan people. According to Bihuram Boro He is inferior to Siva.

As legend of Brahma says Siva was the first deity, but He could not maintain alone from the Kailash, which is far from the Europe. So he requested Bathou to give a consort to maintain the people of that continent. As a result of Shiva's prayer, Brahma was born from the navel of Vishnu.

**Vishnu:**

Vishnu is second person among the Hindu Tri murty. His wife is Laxmi (Lakshmi). As a deity, His duty is to preserve the creation. In Puranas it is found that Vishnu assumes avatara to protect creation of the world at different times. The numbers of his avatars are not clear. In Mahabharata, there is mention of as many as ten avatars. In Bhagvata purana mention sixteen and twenty two avatars. As per the general belief of later Vaisnavism there are ten avatars. These avatars are:

1. Rama
2. Krishna
3. Matsya
4. Kurma
5. Varaha
6. Nrsinha
7. Vamana
8. Parasurama
9. Balrama
10. Kalki
The avatars of *Vishnu* is to destroy the evil elements of the age. So, he took different avatars at different periods. The nine avatars of *Vishnu* have been already accomplished and one more avatar i.e. the *kali Avatara*, is still due. The god Vishnu is mentioned in the *Gibi Bithai* in few places. According to the author *Vishnu* had come to the world as requested by *Sibrai* to *Lord Bathou*. He is also part of almighty God. His power and function are not less than *Sibrai* and Brahma, though He may come third in count. His existence in the world is to look after the people of the *Hamphriga* (Africa) Continent. Since, it is inconvenient for Sibrai to look after the entire population of the world. *Vishnu* entrusted to look after the black people of Africa.

The verse describes the appearance of *Vishnu* according to which He has a very beautiful appearance. God had bestowed him with charming eyes, nose and further adorns himself with garlands. His body colour is black. He has four arms holding *Khauri* (Shell), *Sorkhi* (Chakra), *Phami* (Lotus) and *Goda* (Club) by whom he slew his enemies.

**Siva:**

*Siva* is the third deity of the Hindu triad\(^{23}\). His wife is *Parvati*. *Siva* seems to be developed out of the Vedic god *Rudra* (the terrible)\(^{24}\). He is known as *Mahadeva*, *Maheswar* and *Sankara* in the epics and Puranas. Siva is the destroyer in prevailing Hindu myth. But some myths tell us that He is saviour also; because He drank poison at the time of *Amrit monthon* (churning) and saved mankind from perishing from the world. *Siva’s* throat became blue due to the effected of poison *nilakantha*\(^{25}\).

According to Bihuram Boro *Siva* is *Sibrai*. In the *Gibi Bithai*, *Siva* is the first deity among the trinity. He has five faces and *Parvati* (*Sibrui*) is His
wife. *Siva* lived with his consort at *Kailash*. All the administration of the world is done from the *Kailash*. Bathou is almighty God and *Siva* is the representative of Him. Among the triad *Siva* is the first, Vishnu is the second and Brahma is the third creation. According to Bihuram Boro *Siva* looks after the soul up to three stages. i.e. birth, before the birth and after death. That’s why He is known as *barigontham* (owner of three abode). Vishnu looks after the long life and Brahma looks after the joyful life.

The *Siva*, Vishnu and Brahma were the parts of God, this idea will be clear from the following verse:

*Rangrasi Maithai hazi,*

*Barigongtham,*

*nwng saseyanw phanaphantham.*

i.e. *Rangrasi* (Brahma) *Maithaihaji* (Vishnu) and *Barigongtham* (Siva), they are three in one.

There is a myth about the acceptance of *Siva* as the most powerful God among the trinity. As per direction of God, *Siva* looks after the Mongolian, Vishnu looks after the Negro people and Brahma looks after the Aryan people. The Negros and Aryan people forgot to worship *Siva*, who is first among the three deities. They prayed to Brahma and Vishnu as their supreme God. So one day Aryan people gave a sacrifice in the name of Brahma, Siva appeared near the sacrificial place in the guise of a beggar so as to make the place of worship impure. Seeing a beggar at their holy place they became very angry and chased him away. But *Siva* became angry and terrible. He danced for a longtime which caused a fearful earthquake on earth. As a result everybody’s life was at jeopardy. At last Brahma and Vishnu had to pray *Siva* and accept Him as the most powerful deity. Only then, lord *Siva* stopped his
dance and so stopped the earthquake too. Since then He was accepted as the first God.

References:
1. A.W. Green, Sociology, p-240
2. Horton and Hunt, Sociology, p-389
3. Ginsberg, Sociology, pp-57-58
6. Raj Mohan Nath, Background of Assamese culture, p-10
7. S. K. Chatterjee, Kirata jana kriti, p-11
9. Ibid, p-136
10. R. Basumatary, M. Hazowary (edit), Borophōrni dhōrōm arō santhōuni bithai, Bandba santhou, p-21.
11. Bihuram Boro, Sōrbang subung Bihuram Boroni sōrzi, BSS publication, p-144.
12. See the chapter-VII.
15. Park and Burgess, Introduction to the science of sociology, p-735.
16. E.S. Bogarduss, sociology, p-533.
17. Ogburn and Nimkoff, A handbook of sociology, p-261.
20. Ibid, p-93.
22. Ibid, p-91.