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Supplementary to A Descriptive Analysis to the Boro Language.

A List of Research Papers on Boro Language and Culture written in English by Shri Pramod Chandra Bhattacharyya during 1954-64.


In addition to these, Research papers in Assamese, on Boro language and culture are published in the journals like Assam Sahitya Sabha Patrika, Ramdhenu.
The Languages of Assam

By Prof. P.C. Bhattacharya.

Reprinted from B. Borooah College Magazine,
Vol. III. part III 1955
Assam has been rightly described as a philologists' paradise. It is sweet to dream of a paradise, but it is difficult to enter within. The languages of Assam, like the State itself, cry for better illumination before the people of the world. These tongues of men, very primitive indeed, seldom came to the forefront in pre-historic and historic periods before the advent of British regime. In various periods of human habitation in this north-eastern State, there have been so many swarms of people entering the country, known to the scholars as Austric, Dravidian, Sino-Tibetan (Kirata) and Aryan. The fusion of these language-culture groups resulted in, what is now known as, the Assamese (Aso-miya). From a linguistic point of view, we can trace diverse speeches of Assam belonging to a few distinct groups to which languages of the world are classified. The languages of Assam as now stand can be viewed from racial peculiarities also. The race is not a trustworthy label for a language. American English language is spoken by different races in U.S.A. Assamese, the primier language of Assam, has also been accepted by people of diverse races such as Aryans, Chutiyas, Morans, Ahoms, Kacharis and later Muslims.

The languages of Assam such as Bhutiyia, Aka, Dafla, Abor-Miri, Naga, Chutiya, Boro, Garo, Khasi, Manipuri, Lushei etc. in addition to Assamese language became the subject of analysis during the British administration. But these attempts were mostly for the smooth running of the government. The Christian Missionaries propagated and studied Assamese and other tribal languages for the good of religious interest. In various Censuses of Assam excepting that of 1941 the question of languages on the basis of mother tongue was taken up though there was sometimes considerable amount of tampering and also limitation. The Linguistic Survey of India is no doubt a very bold attempt for linguistic analysis taken up and completed during the first twenties.
The Languages of Assam

of the present century. Imperial Gazetteer of India and different District Gazetteers also touched upon the importance of languages in brief. The languages of Assam thus possess a large amount of written records mostly from the pen of British officers engaged in Indian Civil Service and Superintendents of Census operations. There are a good number of monographs of Assam tribes viewed from anthropological interest and Outline Grammars of different languages with specimens of vocabulary to help learning of the languages for administrative and practical utility. Most of these works need scientific polishing and closer analysis. No doubt these provide enough of materials for scientific study. The Missionaries did some linguistic work on Assamese and other languages mostly at grammatical and lexical level. Anandaram Dhekial Hooankan, Hem Chandra Barua and a few others took up systematic work on Assamese language for its proper assessment. The language was stake during the first few decades of British rule in Assam owing to its reinterpretation by a section of neighbouring people coming from Bengal seek a better means of maintenance and standard of living under the government. The only scientific attempt in modern times on the Assamese language with its non-Aryan background is from Banikanta Kakati in his invaluable work: Assamese, Its Formation and Development. Materials incorporated in this work were his first-hand collections so far as the Assamese language was concerned, but as for the illustrations of Austro-Asiatic (Khasi, Munda, Malayan and Santali) and Sino-Tibetan (Boro) languages, he had to depend on the earlier works of scholars mostly British and foreign. He had little command on those tribal languages surrounding the Assamese and forming a substratum to it. In spite of this limitation as to the first-hand field work this magnificent study will be a searchlight for years to come.

1.1 The study of language in India is as old as the Vedas. A language is everybody's business of life. That is why the common man does not pause to ponder over it in detail. We seldom think deeply on a matter which is very natural and common to us like air, water, land, sky etc. The study of language on a scientific level was appreciated by Vedic scholars long before the advent of Panini, the greatest Grammarian that the ancient world could boast of. The linguistics as a science is not very old. It is a development of near about a century. The study of a
language is divided into two broad phases, historical linguistics and descriptive linguistics. The enormous bulk of India's linguistic studies mostly belongs to the domain of historical linguistics which comprises traditional and outline grammars, comparative grammars, lexicons, rhetoric and prosody with semantic analysis. The descriptive study is largely intended for languages which are mostly unwritten and oral in nature. The various Austric and Sino-Tibetan languages of India and Assam fall in this category. The American Indian languages are also convenient for descriptive treatment. The modern methods of descriptive study of a language are being experimented in U. S. A. and England for past fifty years. Most of the processes are still in a test-tube stage.

The so-called tribal languages of Assam can be best studied from a descriptive point of view. The study may be divided into phonology, morphology, syntax and vocabulary. Assamese is the central language belonging to Indo-Aryan group of the great Indo-European family of languages. The other languages surrounding Assamese speakers have influenced them in the domain of phonology, morphology, syntax and vocables. B. Kakati has adequately dealt with the subject of non-Aryan influences on Assamese phonology, morphology and vocable from apparently historical point of analysis. The study of syntax and semantics is yet to be started. Assamese being the foremost language spoken by the majority of the people has also interacted upon the rest of the languages spoken in Assam. The proper study of it is to be taken up at an early date. The influences of Hindi, Bengali and English languages are also matters of scientific investigation.

1. 2. The languages of Assam have some salient characteristics from the point of their structure. In matter of phonology they display some peculiar characteristics like the preponderance of glottal stop, tone, syllable stress etc. The Boro (Kachari) language which is an important Sino-Tibetan speech possesses tones. The Garo (Achik) language possesses glottal stops and important syllable features. The Lushei language has also significant tones. Various Naga languages are to be tested by competent scholars respect of phonological details. Assamese and other languages like Hindi, Bengali belonging to the Indo-Aryan group of Indo-European family do not have significant tones. The Austric languages such as Kha
The Languages of Assam

Iynteng (Pnar) (also Jaintia ?) Santali, Munda, Kol, etc. are said to possess no significant tones so far as our present knowledge goes. For languages like Assamese, Hindi and Bengali we have significant stress with syllabic division. The languages belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family present many curiosities so far as their phonology and syllabic structure are concerned. Most of these Sino-Tibetan languages have significant tones with syllabic features. This Sino-Tibetan field is still fertile and awaits competent cultivators for fruitful harvest. The Dravidian languages like Tamil, Malayalam, Kanarese, Gondi, Telegu etc. are not spoken by indigenous people of Assam. These speeches are in the lips of coal, oil and tea-garden labourers. These speakers are temporary dwellers or indentured labourers for mines and tea-gardens of Assam coming from other parts of India. Those who settle after the period of contract is over generally embrace the foremost language of Assam, i.e. Assamese, which is the non-official lingua franca among the people of Assam for centuries in respect of trade, transactions and social contacts. No descriptive attempt at the analysis of languages spoken in Assam is undertaken systematically so far. That is why observations on their phonemic and morphological structure cannot be made authoritatively but tentatively.

2.0. In the Census of 1951 one hundred and twenty languages and dialects are recorded as mother-tongues in Assam. This figure is no doubt alarming. But on close observation we find that the number will be less by more than three dozens. This is due to the misconception regarding the difference of a language and a dialect. Some racial, religious and parochial considerations have also cropped up in that calculation. The Census Superintendent is to some extent conscious of the situation: "Some of them (one hundred and twenty languages) are new language names (e.g. Jaintia in United K. and J. Hills, Hairamba in Cachar which are not mentioned in the previous Census Reports or in the Index of Language-names by Sir George A. Grierson K. C. I. E. According to the instructions of the Registrar General, India, no attempt was made to effect a classification of the actual returns. There is no need to go into the distinction between languages and dialects; where the citizen has taken the trouble to give a distinctive name, it is a distinctive "mother tongue" so far as the census is concerned." But a linguist cannot accept this theory of mother-tongue entered as a distinctive language. There are serious objections to the nature
of entries as distinctive mother-tongue and grouping by families as have been done in 1951 Census. Kol should be grouped under Austric instead of Tibeto-Chinese (Sino-Tibetan) family. The various entries as Boro-doan, Mikir-doan, Kachari-doan are popular terms which should have been merged with Boro and Mikir languages; Kachari is nothing but the Assamese name for Boro. Again, Mech should have been added to Boro (Boro-Bodo-Kachari of Census). Hairamba is the part and parcel of Dimasa (Hills Kachari). Sanskrit is nowhere a mother-tongue though it is a distinctive language. These are only a few of the major cases. The absence of clear concept as to the language versus dialect of the untrained enumerators, other racial, religious and social factors have obscured the linguistic utilities of the Census figures to a considerable extent. The previous censuses also suffered from this disease.

2.1. The number of Sino-Tibetan languages of Assam is no doubt numerous in comparison to the rest. These languages also deserve better counting and analysis. Even the great work like the Linguistic Survey of India is inaccurate as to the proper assessment and classification of Sino-Tibetan languages. A modern scholar like Robert Shafer has aptly pointed out: “And Sten Konow, a Norwegian scholar primarily interested in Iranian languages was engaged by the British government in India to handle the non-Aryan languages for the Linguistic Survey of India. Konow was fully occupied in making grammatical analyses from the specimens of text of the many non-Aryan languages and dialects that he had little time for anything else. Konow had very little to do with Chinese and Daic for the Linguistic Survey, and since the Sino-Daic numerals correspond so closely that even an amateur can see the resemblances, it was only natural for him to accept the “Chinese-Siamese” division for these languages that he knew so little.” The number of Sino-Tibetan languages and dialects stands at about 300 of which one-fourth belongs to the area of Assam. But this number will be less at closer analysis.

2.2. According to the Census of 1951, we give below speakers of different languages in Assam, Manipur and Tripura. Manipur and Tripura have been dealt in the same volume in the Census. From linguistic point of view Manipur and Tripura are very near to Assam. For the ease of analysis, language-speakers are tabulated under seven heads:—
The Languages of Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Assam</th>
<th>Manipur</th>
<th>Tripura</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Assamese</td>
<td>4,972,493</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bengali</td>
<td>1,719,155</td>
<td>2,859</td>
<td>374,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hindi</td>
<td>335,688</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>37,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Austric Family</td>
<td>491,991</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>3,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sino-Tibetan Family</td>
<td>1,159,210</td>
<td>179,275</td>
<td>76,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+377,191</td>
<td>+129,379</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Manipuri) (Tripuri)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dravidian Family</td>
<td>81,328</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4,058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Indo-European Family</td>
<td>281,042</td>
<td>3,203</td>
<td>11,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(other than 1, 2, 3,)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Unclassified Languages</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td>13,347</td>
<td>2,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9,043,707</td>
<td>577,635</td>
<td>639,029</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Speakers of the Austric family should increase by 71 in Assam and 94 in Tripura and the equal figures should be deducted from the speakers of the Sino-Tibetan when we rightly place Kol in the former family. Kochbehar (Coochbehar), Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling are closely related to Assam from the point of linguistic, cultural and social similarities, though these are now in West Bengal. The medieval renaissance of the Assamese language, literature, culture was possible under the patronage of the Kings of Kamatapur and Kochbehar.

2.3. As for the distribution of the languages we note that Goalpara district, which forms the western border between Assam and West Bengal, has 62 percent Assamese speakers against 17 percent Bengali speakers. The rest of the speakers belong to Boro, Garo, Rabha etc. of the Sino-Tibetan family. The district of Kamrup has 79 percent Assamese against 15 percent Bengali, other speakers include Boro, Garo, Rabha, Mikir etc. of the Sino-Tibetan family. The districts of Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur have 78%, 69%, 84% and 65% Assamese speakers respectively. Khari and Syteng are the major languages of United Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Various Naga languages like Ao, Sema, Angami, Lhota, Chakiasang etc, are spoken in the district of Naga Hills. Lushei, Garo and
Mikir are the principal languages of Lushai Hills, Garo Hills and United Mikir and North Cachar Hills respectively.

In the Frontier areas known to be NEFA (North East Frontier Areas), complete census was not taken. Aka, Miri, Mishimi, Abor, Dafla, Boro, Naga are some of the outstanding languages of these areas. Assamese and Nepali (Khaskura) speakers are also not negligible in these areas. In Manipur, Meithei language (Manipuri) has 65 percent of the total speakers and in Tripura Bengali speakers constitute 59 percent while Tripuri language has 20 percent. In the West Bengal districts of Coochbehar, Darjeling and Jalpaiguri Boro (Mech) Nepali (Khaskura) speakers constitute a considerable percentage though fewer than the Bengali speakers.

3.0. Scholars like B.S. Guha and S.K. Chatterji are of opinion that the population of India possesses 'six main races' with nine sub-types. These six races are the Negrito or Negroids, the Proto-Australoid or Austric, the Mongoloid or Kirata, the Mediterranean, the Western Brachycephals (the Alpinoid, the Dinaric and the Armenoid) and the Nordic. The Negritos are said to come from Africa in prehistoric times and they spread over the greater part of India, traces of of them being found among the Nagas of Assam and a few wild tribes in South India, in addition to the Andaman Islands. They absorbed other peoples like the Proto-Australoids. According to S.K. Chatterji, these Negritos "probably invented the bow and evolved a cult of the ficus tree and formed some belief in an after-death path to paradise which was guarded by an avenging demon: this cult of the ficus tree evidently was taken up by the subsequent races of India." (Kirita-Jana-Krit, p. 5) The Proto-Australoids or Austric people came to India after the Negritos. They were food-gatherers like the Negritos and possibly invented the digging stick and the hoe for agriculture. They were noted for elephant-taming in India for the first time. Thus they have distinct contributions to Indian culture, details of which have been discussed in a valuable work like "Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian in India" (translated from French by P. C. Bagchi, University of Calcutta). Scholars like Sylvain Levi, Jean Przyluski, Jules Bloch, S. K. Chatterji, P. C. Bagchi and B. Kakati have suggested not less than two hundred Sanskrit and other Indo-Aryan words including Bengali and Assamese traceable to the Austric
origin. It is interesting to note that words like alabu (Assamese: lāu, Eng. gourd), bāna (Eng. arrow, Kuri (Eng. twenty), āngula (Eng. plough), āngula (Eng. tail) and place-names like Kamboja, Kāmalankā, Kāmākhyā, Kāmarūpā and many others belong to Austric languages. Khasi and Synteng (Pnar) also Jaintia (as recorded in 1951 Census) are Austric languages belonging to Assam, though the people who speak these languages are racially Mongoloids. Other Austric languages spoken in present-day Assam are Santali, Savara, Munda, Kharia, Kherwari and Kol. These people are later comers in modern times.

3.1. The Mongoloid or the Kārita race came to India from China, Tibet and Burma in various periods. With the exception of the Khasis, Syntengs including Jaintias other Mongoloid people speak different languages and dialects of the Sino-Tibetan (Tibeto-Chinese) family. The Mongoloid contribution does not appear to be extensive or deep in other parts of India except Nepal, North & East Bengal and Assam in comparison to the Austric and the Dravidian, but their contribution has got a pan-Indian implication. The Mongoloids constitute a strong substratum in the population of north-eastern India including Assam, Manipur, Tripura, North and East Bengal and they are famous in history for their chivalry and political glory though they have considerably merged into Aryan elements in the long run. They have patronised the Aryan culture and civilisation including the development of Assamese language and literature.

Different kings of Varman, Sālastambha, Pāla, Ahom, Kachāri, Chutiya, Koch, Khasi and Jaintia, Manipur and Tripura dynasties have independently ruled in Eastern India through various periods of history before the establishment of the British government. The dynasties of Nepal, Kochbehar, and Manipur still preserve their royal glory. The present-day Sino-Tibetan speakers have still preserved a large number of languages which possess various dialects and cognates worthy of closer observation and systematic research. Some of the important languages as evident in 1951 Census are: Aka (Hruso), Abor, Dafla, Mishimi, Mīri (Mishing), Boro (Plains Kachari), Dimasa (Hills Kachari), Garo (Achik), Rabha, Lalung, Meithei (Manipuri), Naga (Ao, Lhota, Sema, Angami etc.) languages, Mikir, Lushei, Tai, Khamti Bhutiya. Mention must be made to some prominent languages, now in the state of extinction, like Ahom, Deuri Chutiya, Moran, Koch (Raj-
A scientific and systematic classification of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages is given by Robert Shafer (Word Vol. 11, No. 1, April, 1955). This classification is better and more valuable than that of the Linguistic Survey of India (L. S. I.) which did not cover the entire Sino-Tibetan field. The number of languages and dialects referred to in the L.S.I. will definitely diminish in closer analysis. W. C. Smith in his Ao Naga Tribes of Assam: a Study in Ethnology and Sociology has enumerated thirteen outstanding characteristics of the Tibeto-Burman tribes of Assam which are remarkable and matters of deeper analysis for a proper understanding of backgrounds of culture in Assam and Eastern India. These characteristics like head-hunting, common sleeping houses for unmarried men of the village which are prohibited to women, dwelling houses built on posts and piles, disposal of the dead on raised platforms, a sort of casual marriage or freedom in case of courtship and marriages, betel-chewing, aversion to milk as an article of diet, tattooing by pricking, absence of any powerful political organization, the simple loom for weaving cloth, residence in hilly regions with a crude form of agriculture, use of a large quadrangular or hexagonal shield and double-cylinder vertical verge are still prevalent among some tribal races of Assam. These people have influenced the Aryan Assamese speaking masses a great deal. The betel-chewing, freedom of marriages, simple loom for weaving are also traits of Assamese culture. S. K. Chatterji has elaborately discussed the contributions of of Mongoloids in his famous monographs "Kirata-Jana Kṛiti" and "The place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India." The study of Mongloid (Sino-Tibetan origins to various words of day to day use in Assamese language and also various river names, places-names of Assam has been inaugurated by B. Kakati in his magnificent work. But many languages of Sino-Tibetan family like Garo, Bor', Miri, Naga, Lushei, Meitei etc. are still to be explored for better and more definite results. The Sino-Tibetan (Boro) formations are suggested to the origin of words like Brahmaputra, Kamakhya, Kamarup, Luming Luit, amati (an Assamese rite observed in the month of Ahār) apart from usual river-names and place-names like Dihong, Dmow, Di-hong, Di-khow, Hajo, Dispur, Hākma, etc. by Shri Bishnu Rabha, a talented artist and Shri Dhupa Basumatari, an enlightened litterateur both well
conversant with Boro language and culture. This phase of Sino-Tibetan study is gradually creating interest in Assam.

3.2. The Mediterranean people otherwise known as Dravidians are noted for their civilisation in India prior to the Aryans as evident in the remains of Harappa, Mohen-jo-Daro and other places in South Punjab and Sind. It is difficult to ascertain whether these people settled in Assam or not. But the presence of some Dravidian words and formations in place-names of Assam shows that these people also expanded to Assam and possibly became absorbed in the common masses of Assam. The present-day speakers of Dravidian languages in Assam like Tamil, Malayalam, Kanarese, Oraon, Gondi, Telegu etc. are late-comers as labour-forces for tea-gardens and mines of Assam under the British rule. Most of these languages have been carefully analysed and studied and principal four of them are recognized by the Constitution of India.

3.3. The Western Brachycephals, it is said, came after the Dravidians and perhaps mingled with the Aryan ‘language-culture’ group. The Aryan speaking Nordics (Aryas) noted for their great and original civilisation came to India “not earlier than 1500 B.C. probably nearer 1200 B.C. than 1500 B.C.” (S.K.Chatterji). They came to Assam fairly at an early date and established their Aryan speech, Assamese, in a fertile soil ploughed deep by Austric and Sino-Tibetan speech-families. Assamese is distinct and peculiar in respect of other Aryan languages like Bengali, Hindi, Oriya because of the preponderance of Austric and Sino-Tibetan vocables with so many phonetic peculiarities. Scholars like Endle, Anderson, Gait were surprised to see the resemblance of Assamese syntax to that of Boro: “I can think of no other two languages in which it would be possible to translate a long statement word for word out of one into the other and yet be idiomatic.” (Anderson: A Collection of Kachari Folk-Tales and Rhymes.

3.4. Of the Aryan languages spoken in Assam, Assamese is the language spoken by the majority. This language has the credit of levelling so many barriers and differences to give the people a unity in diversities. This language has been a medium of expression for trade, commerce, political relations and social contacts between two races such as Austric and Mongoloid, Mongoloid and Aryan, Aryan and Austric. In different melas (fairs) of Assam borders, Assamese in a crude form serves as the lingua franca for trade, commerce and exchanges among Bhutia, Nepali, Bengali, Assamese,
Hindustani, Munda, Santali and the like. Hutton gave his sound argument that Assamese had the rightful and proper claim to be a medium of expression among people speaking various Naga speeches. The problem of languages of this polyglot state of Eastern India deserves special consideration and attention. The proposal for the expansion of Hindi against Assamese in the North Eastern Frontier Areas of Assam has not been based on linguistically sound argument. Any administrative plan should be in conformity with tradition and culture of the people judged from scientific and impartial outlook. Either Hindi, Bengali or any other language of Indo-Aryan group does not possess the necessary advantageous position to serve as a lingua franca in Assam. Hence is the need for giving Assamese language the status of the State language in Assam for easier interchange of ideas and culture.

4.0 The above is a random survey of the languages of Assam viewed from the present day set-up of the State as envisaged in the Constitution of Indian Union. Assamese is one of principal languages of modern India recognized by the new Constitution. To develop a regional language like Assamese, and also to expand the de facto national language of India i.e. Hindi, there must be mutually contributory effort in an area where numerous languages of altogether different families (Austro, Sino-Tibetan and Aryan) have played their roles. The various Austro and Sino-Tibetan languages should be preserved as mother-tongue in respective areas in addition to the facility of being the medium of instruction in the primary stage and an alternative vernacular in subsequent stages. Assamese as a regional language of greater importance is to be regarded as the State language for day-to-day administration and educational-cultural contacts beyond the local areas. Hindi as the national language of India and English as an international language have their distinct roles. The Government of India has recently entrusted the question of Official Language to a competent commission and the problems of languages need wise thinking.

4.1. The languages of Assam as well as India should be surveyed newly in the light of modern linguistic developments. The learning and teaching of languages also need modern methods and time-saving techniques. With the growing consciousness among the people of the need to preserve and to cultivate their own languages, it is sure that the government by the people will have to provide all possible facilities for their study, analysis and cultivation.
Lexico-Statistic Dating of Boro-Garo Linguistic Separation

BY

ROBBINS BURLING

AND

PRAMOD CHANDRA BHATTACHARYA

For the past few years a number of American linguists and anthropologists, particularly Morris Swadesh, have been experimenting with a new technique known as "Glottochronology" or "Lexico-Statistic Dating". This technique is designed to give actual dates to the times when related languages diverged from one another. In this paper we give the results of our application of this method to two Tibeto-Burman languages of Assam, which are generally considered to be quite closely related: Garo, which is spoken in the Garo Hills, and Boro (variously known as Kachari, Mech) spoken in a number of regions in the plains of lower and middle Assam. Since, so far as we know, this is the first use of this method in India, it may be worthwhile to explain it in some detail.

The method makes use of a vocabulary list of one hundred basic lexical items such as: hand, eye, two, fire, eat, etc. (See below). Every language on earth is believed to include close

1. The work on Garo was made possible by funds granted by the Ford Foundation of New York. The Foundation is of course in no way responsible for the results. The work on Boro is due to a research scholarship of the Government of Assam in Gauhati University under the guidance of Dr. B. K. Barua and Dr. Sukumar Sen.

2. The technique was developed in its early stages in: Morris Swadesh, Lexico-Statistic Dating of Prehistoric Ethnic Contacts, Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 96:452-68 (1952). Robert B. Lees, The Basis of Glottochronology, Language 29:113-27 (1953). The most extended recent account of which we are aware was a symposium of articles which appeared in the April 1955 issue of the International Journal of American Linguistics, Vol. 21, No. 2. This included an important article by Swadesh refining and revising the technique and it is upon this later article particularly that we have based our method: Morris Swadesh, Towards Greater Accuracy in Lexico-Statistic Dating, International Journal of American Linguistics, 21, 121-137 (1955).
semantic equivalents to these. It was first hypothesized that as any language develops over centuries and millenia, the terms standing for the items in this list are replaced at an approximately constant rate. That is, the same number of new lexical items are substituted for the old in any standard period. Whatever the language, and whatever the circumstances of its speakers, approximately the same proportion of these basic root morphemes should remain at the end of a given period. This does not mean that the older form is necessarily lost completely from the language, but simply that a new one has taken its place in the central meaning of the item on the list. Nor does it mean that the items remain identical. Phonemic shifts will alter the form of most or all of the items, but a fixed percentage should have entirely new forms substituted for the old. If this assumption is true, it would follow that two languages diverging from a common ancestral tongue, should, so far as this basic vocabulary is concerned, diverge at a steady rate, so that after a thousand years for instance, a fixed and predictable percentage of the basic root morphemes of the two languages will be cognate.

This bold assumption was first tested on languages whose history for a considerable period is known, Indo-European, Semitic, and Chinese. The assumption has been surprisingly well borne out, and for the most recent list of one hundred test items, an average of 85.4% of the basic root morphemes are found to survive in their original meaning after 1000 years. If two languages were separated from each other just one millenium ago, we would then expect that each one would retain about 85% of the original morphemes. Since in a few cases the same morpheme may be changed in both the languages, the two modern languages may be expected to resemble each other in (85.4%)² or about 73% of the cases.

This relationship can be generalised in the following equation:

\[ t = \log C - \log r^2 \]

where \( t \) is the time (usually expressed in millenia) since the separation of two languages. \( C \) is the percent of cognate elements found when lists from two languages are compared; \( r \) is the “retention index” or the percentage of cognates that are expected after a unit of time which, as shown above, has been established by control studies to be about 85.4% per millenium. Therefore, given \( C \), the percentage of cognates found in basic morpheme lists of comparable languages, then it is a straightforward calculation to find the time since separation of these languages. An example of the method is given below.
In collecting the lists, a number of precautions must be observed. First, the colloquial, every-day word or morpheme must be used even when it is known to be borrowed from another language. Literary or elegant equivalents must be avoided since these may be archaic and would bias the result. There should be only one form for each item, the commonest, every-day equivalent. Only if two forms are equally common in the sense of the item, can both be included, and then the calculation must be modified. It is desirable to use a transcription on phonemic lines, since the items must be compared as to whether they are cognate or not.

In scoring the items for cognition, account must be taken of sound shifts, but if two forms are clearly related, in spite of irregular changes, such as transpositions and analogic changes, they should be called cognate for counting purposes. Again if the main element is cognate, they should be counted as plus in spite of affixes or modifiers which may vary. Genuinely doubtful items may be omitted and the percentage of the more certain forms which are cognate used for the test.

One other factor may bias the result somewhat. If the two languages remain in partial contact or re-establish contact after the original divergence, borrowing from one to the other may make them appear more closely related than they really are. Forms which are known to be similar because of recent borrowing should be considered as non-cognates, but it may not always be possible to recognise every such case. Therefore, for languages whose speakers remain in contact, the real date of divergence may be somewhat longer ago than it appears by this method, but it is hoped that the discrepancy will not be great.

The following is the list of basic vocables of Boro and Garo given as translation-equivalents of English words. These basic vocables are transcribed phonemically. The materials are gathered from informants speaking a particular form of dialect. First we give an English word, then the Boro and Garo followed by plus or minus indicating cognate or non-cognate respectively as the case may be; the question mark (?) implies a doubtful case.

3. The Boro, as spoken by Shri Bhabendra Narzi of Rangia, Kamrup District, originally coming from Goalpara District, has been transcribed on phonemic lines with the I.P.A. alphabet slightly modified. The examples are tested with Shri Surendra Boro of Kamrup District also. The writer owes greatly to Dr. S. K. Chatterji and Prof. J. Burton-Page of the School of Linguistics, Poona, for technical help. This form of speech is easily understood by the speakers of Lower Assam valley. There are phonetic peculiarities in respect of these phonemes.
The brief reading convention is as follows: /p, t, b, d, g, m, n, q, l, r, j, w, i, a, o, õ, u/ are segmental phonemes. /p, t, k/ are strongly aspirated at the beginning and middle of a syllable; before high vowels /p, t, k/ are spirantized and become unvoiced bilabial/alveolar/velar fricatives respectively. Finally, /p, t, k/ become unaspirated ejective plosives without releases. /c, q, l/ are typically Boro phonemes with alveolo-palatal positions with a considerable range. /l, j, w/ do not occur initially in a syllable. /j, w/ are semi-vowels, sometimes euphonic glides. The phoneme /o/ has two important allophones [ʊ] and [ɔ] with half-open and half-closed back positions.

/ʊ/ is an unrounded, high-mid back vowel uttered with slightly spread or almost neutral lip positions. The allophones are not given here.

Length and stress are subordinate to tones. The vowel length is an attribute to tone and has not been marked in phonemic transcription. The syllable-stress which is dominantly initial and always falls on the basic stem-morphemes, never on the affixes or modifiers, are not marked in our transcription. The syllable divisions are necessary to show the pressure of tone which is inherent to the language syllabically. The glottal stop [ʔ] is a tonal feature usually associated with high tone. The vowel length [ ] is also a tonal attribute to low tone. The glottal stop and the vowel length are shown phonetically wherever necessary.

There are three significant tones: high, low, and mid. For monosyllables: (a) high pitch rising from mid to high is marked with [\'] placed before the initial letter of the syllable; (b) low pitch falling from mid to low is marked with [\ ] placed before the syllable; (c) mid pitch with mid level utterance is left unmarked. For disyllables we have (a) high pitch, [\'] signifies rise from mid to high in respect of second syllable: tone pattern being midlevel and rise [\-]; (b) low pitch, [\ ] signifies fall from midlevel to low in respect of second syllable; tone pattern is midlevel and fall [\-\]; (c) mklevel pitch of both syllables is left unmarked. In words of more than one or two syllables the tone mark is placed before the tone bearing syllable. (Bhattacharya).

The Garo is transcribed according to my phonemic analysis of the dialect spoken in Tura, and I am particularly indebted to Millickson K. Marak of that town for his patience as I explored his dialect. It should be pointed out, however, that the Tura dialect is similar to that of the northern edge of the hills, from where many Tura residents have come, and the dialect spoken in the surrounding villages is quite different. In choice of symbols, the transcription gives precedence to simplicity over precise phonetic refinement. Suffice it to say here that the phonemes for which the symbols stand have some phonetic similarity to conventional values, but they are not necessarily precisely the same as those simple symbols representing the I.P.A. or any other system. It should be explicitly stated, however, that phonemic tone distinctions which are present in Boro are completely absent in Garo. The hyphens indicate syllabic divisions, the position of which is phonemically important. I hope before too long to publish my full phonemic analysis. (Burling).
The following list of equivalents between the two languages may clarify some of the cognates listed: Garo c and s correspond to Boro ̃ and ç respectively. Initial h in Boro is lost in Garo, while final k in Garo is modified in Boro, usually to a phonetic glottal stop which is a feature of high tone. Distinct phonemes in Boro, ò and i, and r and l, have fallen together in Garo to i and r, respectively, though the latter have allophones approximating the phonetic values of Boro's distinct phonemes. Some final n’s of Boro are changed to r’s in Garo (phonetically close to l, and usually written that way in the conventional spelling). Boro gə- and Garo -a are affixes, which are not found as such in the opposite language, though Garo occasionally retains a gi- merged with the base. Initial gr- of Garo becomes simply g- in Boro. There are occasional inserted stops in Garo following i (ò of Boro) and preceding other stops or affricates, as in /gıt-čak/ red, corresponding to Boro /gə-čə/.

According to our test then, there are 51 cognates, 41 non-cognates, and 8 (eight) doubtful cases in our selected items. Leaving aside the doubtful items, there are about 55% cognates, which according to the equation shown above works out to equal a time span since separation of the two languages of almost 1900 years.

This date would indicate that about 1900 years ago, or perhaps a bit more, allowing for some contact between the two languages after their divergence, Garo and Boro constituted a unified language. This date is approximately that at which Indic speakers are thought to have established themselves in Assam. It is frequently assumed that before this time the inhabitants of much of the Brahmaputra valley and possibly in some of the hills around were Boro speakers and if our date is correct, we may surmise that the Indic speakers encountered an area of fairly homogeneous speech. Quite possibly it was these new migrants who actually separated the various speakers into different areas so that from that time on, the language spoken in what is now the Garo Hills developed in the direction of modern Garo. It seems very difficult to reconcile these facts with the belief that either the Boros or the Garos came from anywhere else at any time much later than the beginning of the Christian era. There seems no good reason to suppose that Garo has not been spoken for all or most of this time in much of the present Garo area. Perhaps in this time they have come under the influence of the Khasis and uniquely for a Sino-Tibetan speaking people in Assam, acquired the
matrilineal social organization from them. Alternatively, the
language may have displaced Khasi without a great population
shift and the people retained certain elements of their social
organization. More reasonably, the truth may lie between the
two extremes. Some people speaking a Boro language may have
entered the Garo Hills about 2000 years ago, mixed with the
previous occupants, and the mixture eventually has come to be
known as Garo. There seems no good reason to believe that any
group recognizably Garo ever lived anywhere else but in the Garo
Hills, but rather the Garos are to be considered as the product
of the various elements which have fused in their present home­
land. Except in the sense of inquiry into the origin of certain
Garo cultural items, it is futile to ask as is so often done, “What
is the origin of the Garos?”

Those Boro speakers who were living in the plains at the time
of the Indo-European appearance, have naturally come under much
more heavy influence of the plains culture. Indeed today in race,
religion, social organization, and to a considerable extent in lan­
guage also, the present Boros of the Brahmaputra valley show
much closer approximation to the general North-Indian plains
civilization than do the Garos. The two millenia since their
separation from the Garos, in which they have had more or less
continual contact with Indic speaking immigrants is surely ample
for such influence. Perhaps the surprising thing is that the lan­
guage retains such vigour over such a wide area as it in fact does.
GLIMPSES FROM BORO FOLK SONGS

By

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1. In the course of my studies in Boro language of Assam, I have had opportunities to listen to many a folksong presented in accompaniment with typical Boro instruments. I like to present below three Boro folksongs on love and romance not from the musical point of view, but from a minor linguistic approach. Boro is an important Sino-Tibetan speech spoken in the districts of Assam valley, and northern districts of West Bengal. This language is usually known as Bojo or Plains Kachari. But the people call themselves Boro and their speech is nationally known as Boro [bɔː ɾɔː]. According to the census of India, 1951 the Boro speakers of Assam (including Dimasa, Hairamba and Boro-Kachari Dowan) are estimated at about two lakhs. The language has three main dialect-regions: Western (Northern districts of West Bengal and a few portion of Goalpara), Central (most of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong), and Southern (North Cachar and Mikir Hills and some areas of Cachar district).

2. The texts of these songs represent the form of Boro speech spoken in the central dialect-regions. The first two songs are gathered from Shri Madaram Brahma of Kokrajhar, Goalpara (Assam) in 1953. Shri Brahma is a Senior Government Officer and is related to Hon'ble Shri Rup Nath Brahma of Assam cabinet. This form of speech spoken in Goalpara is easily understood in western and central dialect-regions. The reading of these songs is given by Shri Bhabendra Narzi in normal voice quality. Shri Narzi comes from Rangia, Kamrup (Assam) and he has been attached to the School of Linguistics, Deccan College, Poona since 1955, as a Boro informant. The third folksong is procured from Shri Narzi.

3. The brief phonemic writing conventions of these texts are given below:

/p, t, k, b, d, g, m, n, ɾ, ɾ;/ c; z; i; e; a; ə; ʊ/ represent segmental phonemes. There are three significant tones in the language. These tones associated with features of length, stress, and voice quality represent three

*The writer is doing research in the University of Gauhati under the guidance of Dr. B. K. BANERJEE and Dr. Sukumar SEN.
suprasegmental phonemes. A syllable has been described as the minimum unit of a Boro utterance. A syllable possesses one of the six vowel phonemes as its nucleus with or without single or cluster consonantal phonemes associated with one of the three suprasegmental phonemes. The glottalization is a phonetic feature associated with tones.

The tones are termed as high, mid and low. The tonemarks in case of high and low tones are shown before the relevant syllable. The mid tone has not been marked in this transcription.

For high tone // we have usually clear voice with short syllable nucleus with final glottalization, rarely we have clearer musical voice with overlong syllable duration; there is association with high level of pitch, pitch may rise from mid to high, sometimes from low level to high:—

/\bi/ [\br\?], he; /\za/ [\d\za\?], eat. /\ha/ [\ha::], what is it? (emotional context).

For mid tone we have normal clear voice, associated with medium pitch with variable quality of syllable nucleus (usually short or half long) and there is absence of glottalization in the syllable final position. The pitch is either mid-rise or mid-level. The tone is left unmarked in phonemic transcription.

/\hor/ [\h\b\r\'], night; /\c\or/ [\c\o\r\'], iron; /\ce/ [\ce\'], one.

For low tone /\ we have usually less clear or breathy voice associated with low pitch and longer syllable duration without the feature final glottalization. The pitch falls from mid to low or high-mid to low.

/\\bi/ [\\bi:], to beg; /\\za/ [\\d\za:], to be; /\\hor/ [\\h\b\o\r\'], to hang down.

These three level of tones contrast each other, and in spite of a considerable range of phonetic feature, the Boro utterances are syllabically brought under a tonemic analysis. Tone is inherent to each syllable of the Boro words of main system; loan words and usually unknown foreign words at the first stage remain tonally neutral. But the process of naturalization slowly goes on work and in a later stage, the loan words and uncommon foreign words are garbed in Boro phonology and they acquire the usual features of tones postulated above. These are observations from our study of Boro mono-syllabic and disyllabic words in isolation. The modification of tones at syllable and word boundaries has often been noticed. The writer is grateful to Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji for bringing first these ideas in 1953 and to Prof. John Burton-Page for favour of offering a methodology to work out tones in 1955.
As for the segmental phonemes, /p, t, k/ are initially strongly aspirated, less aspirated as a member of the consonant cluster and never aspirated in syllable final position occurring as unreleased stops. /c, z/ are alveolo-palatal spirants with affricated allophones with ranges from dentio-alveolar position to alveolo-palatal position. /6/ is an unrounded mid-vowel with a considerable range, typically Boro in production. /u/ has also allophones uttered with unrounded lips. This short analysis of Boro phonemes is expected to do something in correct reading of the following texts. The proper names are tonally not marked in our transcription. These are shown in italics.

4. The text of each song is followed by a translation-meaning with an eye to the context of situation. The social and philological aspects of Boro Folksongs are not discussed in this elementary paper.

(1)

ci/kla: /dōi/ /nō /təŋ/lai gōn
ai/a /rai lai gōn,
‚or /lai/nō /təŋ/lai gōn
‚apa /ia /bn laigōn.
/əi /əi /ada larubandaru. 
/ada larubandaru.

\cɛn’ra: zinga/ da/ci zinga/ da/ci
 aŋbadi /hōu/a /ta na ɪəo, 
zinga /da/ci a’gōi zinga/ da/ci
zinga /da/ci a’gōi rōndacimōndaci.

Maiden: “If I go to fetch water (and thereby to meet you alone in secrecy), mother would reproach me; if I go to bring fire (from a neighbouring house and thereby to meet you secretly), father would beat me.

O my elder one (lover) Larubandaru,
O my elder one Larubandaru!”
(In a tone of helplessness).

Youth: “Don’t be sorry, be not sorry,
(do not meditate these things)
O my younger one (beloved) Rōndacimōndaci,
when there is a youth like me;
(who is in your love)
O my sweet one!”
Maiden: "When you go to cut the fuel
at the foot of the hills,
bring me dry fish and meat,
O my hero Porbacu, my elder one!"

Youth: "Certainly, certainly, O my sweet Gangcri
Will I bring you these things.
Prepare for me more liquor (ţou),
and conceal in the midst of cloth-heap,
and keep ready the boiled rice
of sweet scented paddy (after you husk it).
O my precious Gangcri, my sweet one,
these will I bring for you."

"The hololokha vegetable
grows on the hill,
so you grow in my heart.
You are the only maiden
who happens to be the mate of my life."
Maiden: “O my elder one!
don't be sorry,
be not melancholy;
you shall purchase
a bottle of perfumed oil,
a pair of bracelets
and a dazzling garlands;
so that I can have these
just after my arrival at your house!”

5. These songs present a few Boro words of diverse interests. The word, \( \tilde{a}da \) literally means my elder brother, here it denotes the lover; so also the word for younger sister (\( a'g\ddot{o}i \)) has its special meaning here as the lady love. The philological interpretations of a few Boro words like /d\ddot{o}i/, /ha/z\ddot{o}/, etc., and their probable influences on the formation of Indo-Aryan river-names and toponomy are reserved for future discussion.
Kāmākhyā is an Indo-Aryan toponomy which has a considerable
celebrity all over modern India for the famous shrine of Mother Goddess
Kāmākhyā. She is, as an incarnation of Durgā, associated with Śiva.
Kāmākhyā is worshipped in the temple at Nilācalā, a hill near Gauhati, on
the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra. With the name of the cult of
Kāmākhyā, the older name of the State of Assam, Kāmarūpa, is also
connected in various myths and legends.

The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā propagates the Śākta cult of Tantric
worship in the north-east part of India. The State of Assam with a
considerable portion of neighbouring Bengal, Bhutan and Burma was known
in the earliest period of Indian history as Prāgjyotisa, and later on as
Kāmarūpa since the time of Naraka, an Asura King, who instituted the
worship of Kāmākhyā and renamed the country under his domain as
Kāmarūpa in place of Prāgjyotisa. Banikanta Kakati in his monograph,
The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā, gives an overall picture of the Śākta
worship in Assam inhabited by various tribes of extra-Aryan origin. He
opines in this context thus: "The term Kāmarūpa/Kāmākhyā symbolised a
new cult, and in exaltation of it, the land itself was rechristened. It has
also been said in the same Purāṇa (Kalika Purāṇa) that the land Prāgjyoi-
tisa was formerly reserved by Sambhu for his own domain; thus suggesting
that before the introduction of novel cult of Kāmākhyā, with association of
magic and incantation, the religion of the land was Saivism."1 Kāmākhyā
is the presiding deity over the land of Kāmarūpa. According to the Pauranic
legends, the organ of generation of Sati fell on the hill of Nilācalā when Śiva
carried her dead body from place to place. It is regarded as one of the
fifty-two Śākta Pīṭhas of India dedicated to the Mother Goddess.

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*S Article contributed to the Turner volume.
† The writer is an Assam Govt. Research Scholar in the University
Gauhati under the guidance of Dr. B. K. Barua and Dr. Sukumar Sen.
PRAMOD CHANDRA BHATTACHARYA

"Kāmarūpaṁ deviṅśtraṁ kutrāpi tatsamaṁ na ca/
Anyatra viralā devī kāmarūpe grhe grhe///
Kāmākhyāṁ mahāmāyāṁ yaḥ pūjayaṁ mānavaḥ/
Sarvakāmamīha prāpya paraloke śivo bhavet///

(Yoginitantra, 1/2/6/ Verses 152-3)

KAKATI suggests that the formation kāmā- in Kāmākhyā is of extra- Aryan origin. He gives a long list of Austric formations from different languages and dialects as correspondence to the element kāmā in Kāmākhyā:

ke-moyd/ke-moit, ghost; ke-mut/ke-muyt, grave;
khmoch, corpse, ghost; komuoch, corpse; kamoi, demon;
kamoiit, devil; kamui, grave; kamet, corpse;
kambru/kamru, a lesser divinity of the Santals.

"The formation Kāmākhyā or Kāmākṣi may be a Sanskritisation of such non-Aryan formations as khmoch, komuoch. In that case all the Austric formations would lead on to the conclusion of the place having been connected with some one’s dead body. The Pauranic legend makes it the burial ground of a part of Sati’s dead body."

KAKATI also holds the view that Kāmarūpa may be an Aryanisation of kamru-t(d) or kamru pau, meaning the place of the Santali god, Kamru or the hill of the god, Kamru. Thus the land of Kāmarūpa suggests some sort of connection with necromancy and Tantric practices. The legend of Kamadeva who was burnt by an angry look of Siva and then recovered his original form has been criticized as a Brahmanical invention with a childish explanation.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji refers to the shrine of the Great Mother at Kāmākhyā near Gauhati which, he considers, has attained India-wide celebrity much later, probably after the erection of the present temple by king Nara-narāyaṇa of Koch Bihar in the second half of the 16th century. The name Kāmākhyā, he admits, is in all likelihood of pre-Aryan origin. He observes: “This name has been explained by B. K. KAKATI as being Austric in origin; so also the place-names Kāma-rūpa, Kāmātā and Kāmilla (Comillah). But it seems more probable that these names are Bodo, to
start with, and are from a tribal name before they became associated with localities. There is an element of Kam or Kām which occurs in all these names, which also occurred in the name of the most western tribe of the Bodos, the Koches (modern Koc, Kōc, from an earlier *Kāwoca, or *Kāmoca, Sanskritised as Kāmboja in the 10th century in a North Bengal inscription: cf. Origin and Development of the Bengali Language, I, p. 69).

According to the Kālikā Purāṇa Devi (Durga) secretly came to Śiva for her amorous satisfaction, so the Goddess was named Kāmākhyā. The formation Kāmākhyā is in Sanskrit composed of these elements: kāma/ kāmā + ākhyā; the variant forms are Kāmākṣi, Kāmā, Kāmeśi, Kāmeśvarī, Kāmadā, Kāmini, Kāntā, Kāmāngadāyini; all these forms denote the same Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā. Besides the Kālikā Purāṇa, the Yoginītantra, the Hara-Gaurī Samvāda and a few other Sanskrit works describe the Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā and her worship in details.

From my analysis of the Sino-Tibetan Boro language of Assam, I present below the following formations from the spoken Boro and other cognate languages in respect of the toponomy Kāmākhyā.

(1) Kamaika (phonetically 'kam-ai-ka/'kham-ai-kha) is the name of a principal goddess who is still worshipped at the Kherai ceremony of the Boroos who are following primitive religious belief. The morphemic elements are: kam (kham), to burn; -ai, my mother; -ka (-kha), to bind; these elements suggest a meaning, “my mother with power to burn and to bind”.

The goddess Kamaika (Khamaika) finds her place near the god, Bathou (Bathou) who are regarded as creators by the Boroos with deep devotion. This information is based on the writings of Shri Dhupa Ram Basumatari and Shri Bhabendra Narzi. Both of them are Boro speakers and writers as well. Shri Basumatari connects the word Kāmākhyā with the elements “kaññai-bima-ka” (kaññai-bima-kha) meaning “the mother who herself gives birth to this creation”. He narrates a Boro legend of the creation in support of his suggestion. I find it difficult to equate the morphemes for the formation, Kāmākhyā.

S. C. Das in his A Tibetan-English Dictionary enters the place-name Kamakhyā as Ka-ma-chā or Kamutsha. It is evident that element ma/kama or the like occurs in different forms available so far. In

Dimasa, kham means to burn, to get burnt, to be on fire; in Garo, kama means to burn, to catch fire.

The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā was worshipped by the Chutiyas, a section of the Boros living in the eastern Assam, as Tāmreśvarī or Kecākhāṭī (the eater of raw flesh). Shri Bishnu Prasad Rabha, a Boro talent and a reputed musician of Assam informed me that the three shrines of Kāmākhyā in the Upper Assam near Sadiya, in the Middle Assam, near Silghat, and in the Lower Assam, near Gauhati, are the holy places of the primitive Boros. A minor goddess, Bullibri (Bhullibri) is also worshipped by the Boros in the time of the Kherai ceremony. The Assamese river-name Bharali/Bharalu comes from the name of this Boro goddess. The river Bharali (Bullibri) exists even to-day in some modified names near about the three shrines of the Mother Goddess.

(2) The name of the land as Kamru (Khamru) is also known to the Boros. A Boro legend refers to Kamru in connection with the separation of the Dimasas from the Boros by the mighty river, Brahmaputra.

Kam (kham) + bru (gabru) may, in Boro, lead to Kamru, meaning a stretch of burnt land. Shri Dhupa Ram Basumatari suggests that Kāmarūpa may be a Sanskritisation from the Boro formations; kamru (khamru) + ub (ubzi khañbai), meaning to have rebirth from burning.

The formation Kāmākhyā/Kāmarūpa has a strong correspondence to the Sino-Tibetan Boro formation kam- (kham-) plus some affixes. There may be a fusion of the Hindu legend of Siva and Sati with their Boro parallels of Batou (Bathou) and Kamaika (Khamalika). However, I just put forward a Sino-Tibetan approach to the above topic.

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