CHAPTER THREE

THE RACIAL BACKGROUND OF THE TRIBAL : BORO

I. ORIGIN OF THE WORD "TRIBE"

The word "Tribe" evokes different meaning for different people. The very term has not been defined in the Constitution and there is no satisfactory definition anywhere. Article-366(25) of the constitution of India has defined "Scheduled Tribes" means such Tribes of Tribal communities or parts of groups within such tribes or Tribal communities as per deemed under Article-342 to be the Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of the constitution.

A layman thinks about them as ordinary forest or hill dwellers who are colourful folk famous for their dance and songs, to other group of people who are concerned about as an administrator or academicians the term "Tribe" means a group of citizens who are the special responsibility of the President of India. Generally speaking they are endogamous organisations with a simple social structure and self contained economy. There is a minimal contact with other group. They live in seclusion, are governed by their own social norms and largely manage their own affairs.

The minimum definition of a "Tribe" as suggested by W.J. Perry "is a group speaking a common dialect and inhabiting common territory".
The word "Tribe" is defined by different writers in many ways. A "Tribe" is a collection of families bearing a common name, the members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain tabos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed a well assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation.

According to anthropologist "Tribe" means a class of ancient people who are not well to do about agricultural processes, temporary dwellers for "Jum" cultivation undevelops culture etc. Therefore after attaining freedom Indian constitution included a class of people who are backward in social, economical and educational sides into a Tribe section and made some improve and saveguard them in all aspects.

II. GENERIC CONNOTATION OF THE TERM "BODO"

The Bodos are a race of the Mongolian people who are described to be inhabitants of a country north of the Himalayas and West of China. This land is known as Bod. The word "Bod" is supposed to mean a Home-land. It is also said that there were many parts of the country known as Hor Bod, Kur Bod, etc. The inhabitants of Bod country are known as the Bodo-Ficha or Bodosha or Bodosa which means Bodo-Land and Ficha or Cha-means Children, hence children of the Bod Country. Later on they come to be known as simply Boddo-Bodo-Boro.
According to R.N. Nath, when Buddhism spread into Bodo countries, specially the southern part, inhabited by the Buddhist Lamas, was known as Bosti (Lamas), Bod and later on it transformed into Bsti-Bod-Tibod-Tibet.

Linguistically the Bodos include a large group of people who are the speaker of the Tibeto-Burman speeches of the North and East Bengal, Assam and Burma. Their identity is not uniform as an ethnic group. Different names are used to designate them: They are the Bodos or Boros of the Brahmaputra Valley, Mechens of lower Assam and West Bengal, Rabhas, Garos, Dimasas and Kacharis of Cachar district, Tipras, Lalungs, Sonowals, Hajangs, Mishings, Deuris, Chutiias etc.

The generic name Bodo was first applied by Hadgson. The exact sound is better represented by spelling it "Boda" or "Bara", "Bodo" or "Boro" is the name by which the "Mech" or "Mos" and the Kacharis call themselves. Like other tribal names in Assam the name probably once meant a male members of the tribes. In the closely allied Tripura language "Bara" still means a man and a Kachari or Mech will call himself a Bara-Fisa-a son of Baras to distinguish him from say a simsa that is a Bhotiya or Chin-E-Sa, a son of China. the "Bara" who live in the East of the district of Kamrup are called Kachari. The meaning of the word Kachari is derived from the word "Khero" and "Hari" Khero or Khare means head Hari means a clan. From that sense "Khorosas-hari" or "Kachari" means a great nation or clan.
Hence in general term "Bodo" is a generic name of the people which means all the Tibeto-Burman (Bodo) speaking group of Sin-Tibeto origin.

III. SPECIFIC CONNOTATION OF THE TERM "BORO KACHARIES"

The Bodos, of Cachar district (In North Cachar) call themselves Kacharis. According to S.K. Chatterjee this group of Bodos assumed their name from the district of Kachar. The meaning of Kachar is lowlands or border lands and is originated from the Sanskrit Kaksa-Vata-Kachada-Kachar.

The Kacharis are divided into several groups. In Upper Assam they are known as Sonowal and Tengal Kachari, Dimasa Kachari (North Kochar), Lalung Kachari and even the Rabha. The Dimasa means Dima-big water, that is Brahmaputra, Sa or cha-son or children, hence Dimasa-sons or children of the big water Brahmaputra.

On the other hand, in some districts like Kamrup, Sonitpur. Mangaldai, Barpeta, of Brahmaputra valley and Jalpaiguri of West-Bengal are known as Bodo-Kachary or Boro-kachari, although all of now are known as Boros.

THE MECH OR MECHE : The Boros of the North Bengal and Jalpaiguri districts of West-Bengal and Goalpara district of Assam are known as Mech or Meche. They are called "Mech" because they settled
IV. ORIGIN AND AFFINITY

Ethologically, the Boro Kacharis belong to a racial stock known as the Mongoloid, which forms one of the important Social elements in the Basic population structure of India. They are the descendents of the ancient Mongoloid family, the people who lived in Siberia and Mongolia around 2000 B.C. were known as Mongoloid. In courses of time these Mongoloid people were divided into three groups, one group of them went towards Europe who liked to settle in Turkey and Italy. According to some Historians, the people who are still living in Italy and Turkey are the descendents of Mongoloids. The second group migrated towards North America and Mexico and settled there. Again a small section of the second group went to Japan and lived there. The people who are now living in Erich, North Japan and Mexico are the people of Mongoloid group. The people who migrated from Siberia and Mongolia of the third group through South-west of China gradually settled in the Hoang-Ho valley and Tibet. After living for several centuries in Hoang-Ho valley of China and Tibet some of them migrated to the foot hills of Bhutan. At first, they were known in Tibet as "Bod". According to Dr. Sunitty Kumar Chatterjee and Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha the word Bodo or Boro was derived from the word "Bod".

During course of migration from the foot hills of Bhutan they changed their direction towards west and gradually settled in Cooch-Beher, Rangpur, Dinajpur districts of present West-Bengal. A section
of them went towards Garo Hills, Mymonsingh, Syllet (Bangladesh) and Tripura. The word Mymongshing or Mimansin is a Boro word, the meaning of which is to produce more rice (Mai-rice, Monsin-produce more).

Then they moved towards East and began to live in Cachar as Dimasa and Burman. A section of them went for to the East who are known as Moran, Chutia and Barahi.

Perhaps there were at least two groups of immigrants who entered through North and North-east to settle over the fertile valley of the mighty river Brahmaputra that is one entered through North of Bengal and Western Assam by the valley of the river Tista, Dharla, Sankosh and the other group entered through the river valley of Subansiri, Dibong and Dihang and settled in the eastern Assam where this group of Bodo Kachari race is known as Sonowal, Deuri, Moran and Chutia. "This Kochari race is much more widely distributed in Assam, Cooch-Behar within the limits of Assam boundary at least 10,00,000 people probably many more, who belong to the Kochari race, though many of the number in the latter years have become Hinduised and have lost the use of their mother tongue (S.Endle)".

From the point of physical features, complexation and language the Bodo-Kocharis have close affinities with the Dimasas, the Tipras, the Lepsas and the Limboos. They are differ in some material ways from their Hindu and Muslim neighbours alike in things material and moral. They are not a tall or handsome race and in general appear-
ance bear some resemblance to the Nepali, being as a rule shorter and stouter than the people of North-west India though well fitted to bear up against physical fatigue and hardship. In face and figure they shaw a distinct approximation to what is known as the Mongolian type, that is they have square set faces, projecting check-bones, with almond shaped eyes and scanty beard the moustache.

It is indeed not at all unlikely that the people known as Kocharis and to themselves as Boda (Bara) were in earlier days the dominant race in Assam, and as such they would seem to have left traces of this domination in the nomenclature of some of the physical features of the country that is, the Kochari word for water (di or doi) apparently forms the first syllable of the names of many of the chief rivers of Assam such as Diputa, Dihong, Dibong, Dibru, Dihing, Dimu, Desang, Dikhu and to these may be added Dikrang, Dipu, Digaru which are near Sadiya, the earliest known centre of Chutiya power and civilization (S.Endle).

On the other hand the ancient Indian literatures specially the ancient Aryan Sanskrit literatures, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana describe the Indo-Mongolian and the Sino-Tibetian people as "Kiratas". The Kalika Purana describes the "Kiratas" as having short stature, golden colour shaven head, rough skin and addicted to meat and drink.
V. THE PLAINS TRIBES OF ASSAM

The Plains Tribes (Scheduled) of Assam refer to nine different communities namely the Boros, the Kocharis including Sonowals, the Burmans of Cachar, the Meches, the Miris, the Deories, the Rabhas and Hajais and Lalungs. These communities as a matter of fact, are divergent ethno-cultural groups having their own religious beliefs, social customs and practices. Most of them speak their own language and dialects. The Tribal Population of Assam can be studied according to 1971 census. It is as a whole 16,06,648.

VI. AREAS OF BORO CONCENTRATION

Boros are living in a scattered manner throughout the North-eastern region of India. There are some small Boro Pocket areas also outside India i.e. Burma, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sikkim and Bhutan.

The state of Assam is the main abode of the Boros. Their main concentration is now on the North bank of the river Brahmaputra starting from Dhubri and Kokrajhar district, Goalpara district in the West to Dhemaji Sub-division of Lakhimpur district to the East. This North tract of Assam covers the following areas:

a. North and Eastern part of Dhubri district, the whole Kokrajhar district and Northern most part of Goalpara district.
b. Northern parts of Barpeta and Nalbari Sub-division and Northern most part of Guwahati Sub-division in the district of Kamrup.

c. Northern part of Mangaldai and Tezpur Sub-division in the district of Darrang.

d. Northern parts of North Lakhimpur and Dhemaji, Sub-divisions in the district of Lakhimpur.

The area of this Northern tract of Assam will be about 10,000 (Ten thousand) square miles or 640,000 (Six hundred forty thousand) square kilometers.

The region covers about 10 (ten) lakhs Boro speaking population with a density of about 100 persons per square mile or per square kilometers.

Besides there are some pocket areas of Boro concentration in the Southern bank of the river Brahmaputra and these are as follows:

a. Dudhnoi-Dhupdhara areas in the Southern part of Goalpara district.

b. Dupdhara-Boko-Chaygaon areas, Chaygaon-rani areas, and South-Guwahati-Sonapur-Khetri area in the Southern part of Kamrup district.
Problems of Plains Tribal Women's Education in Kokrajhar District

c. Jagiroad-Morigaon areas and Rupahi-Dhing areas of Nowgaong district.

d. Southernmost part of Sibsagar district.

e. North-eastern part of Dibrugarh district.

f. Howraghat-Langhin areas of Karbi-Anglong district.

According to S. Endle, the origin of the Kachari race is still very largely a matter of conjecture and inference in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history. However, on the basis of the Mongolian affinities of the Kocharies, he would point out to the Tibet and China as the original home of the race (The Kocharis - P.3 1975). In this context Dr. Bhuyan observes that there is found to be a diversity of opinion regarding their Pre-Assam habitat as contemplated by some authorities to be in Tibet and China ("Kachari Burmaji") (Ed P-XIX - 1951). What ever be their Pre-Assam habitat, it has now been established that they are the original dwellers of Assam and the later immigrants then the Aryans. This fact has been corroborated by K.L. Barua in his "Early History of Kamrup" where he states that after the arrival of the Aryans into the Indian soil, hordes of later Mongolian poured through the North-east corner. These later Mongolians were described to be the Kiratas in the Mahabharata and Ramayana.
It may further be noted that while Fr. Mathias Hermanns includes the Boros and their allied tribes in the term "Indo-Tibetans" Dr. S.K. Chatterjee calls them Indo-Mongoloid in his "Kirata-Jana-Kirti" to cannote at once their Indian connection and their place within the cultural milieu in which they found themselves as well as their racial affinity (Dr. Bhatta). According to Rai K. L. Barua, the Kachari, Koches, Rabha, Mechis, Mikirs, Lalungs, Garos, Nagas, Kukis and the Chutiyas are the present day representatives of these later Mongoloid and the tribe speaking Boro languages seem to have occupied the plains of Assam for very long time.

The Boros are one of the earliest settlers of Assam. The Boro-Kacharis of Assam is a branch of the great Boro group of the Indo-Mongoloid family falling within the Assam-Burmese linguistic section. They are the sections of the Tibeto-Burman speech family. The original home of the Boros according to G.A. Grierson was the North-western China between Houngh-ho and Yengtse river. From this part of the world the Boros penetrated into North-east region in several waves till recently. Thus the whole of North-eastern India was peopled by this speech family. Ethnologists have divided the Tibeto-Burman family of language into Naga, Kuki, Chin and Boro. The Naga, Kuki and Chin occupy the hill areas of the North-eastern region bordering Burma and the Boros formed a dominant language spoken by majority people occupying the plain portion as well as hills of the North-eastern region. G.A. Grierson, includes the language of the following tribes as branches of Boro.

At present Boro and Mech occupy Kamrup district, dorrang district, Kokrajhar district, North-Bengal district and some parts of Goalpara and Dhubri districts. Rabhas are presently inhabiting some parts of Kokrajhar, Dhubri and Goalpara districts. Lalung are occupying the Morigaon district of Assam, Dimasas, Garos and Tipperas are presently occupying North-cachar Hills district some parts of Assam, Meghalaya, Bangladesh and Tripura state respectively, Chutiyas had been inhabiting upper Assam. But they have become completely Hinduised. As such, Boro includes all the surviving languages spoken by the non-Aryans of North-eastern region. Therefore, different sections of Boro speech family inhabited not only in the seven states of North-eastern India, but also in West-Bengal, Bangladesh, Nepal and the adjoining regions of Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur.

VII. BORO POPULATION IN ASSAM

The total population of the tribe in Assam is 6,10,459 as per 1994 census which accounts for 45.52% of the total state population.

The numerical strength as per population census of 1994 of the Boros of Assam can be shown as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Boro Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01.</td>
<td>Dhubri</td>
<td>13,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02.</td>
<td>Kokrajhar</td>
<td>1,90,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.</td>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>28,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04.</td>
<td>Barpeta</td>
<td>45,897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.</td>
<td>Nalbari</td>
<td>74,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.</td>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>19,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.</td>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>81,761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.</td>
<td>Sonitpur</td>
<td>16,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.</td>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>18,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Jorhat</td>
<td>2,002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Nowgaon</td>
<td>8,511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>1,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Karimganj</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>North-Cachar Hills</td>
<td>4,993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,33,713</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As per population census of 1971 the total tribals of Assam is stated as 16,066,48 of which has Boros formed majority with 45.52% (S.Encle "The Kachari"). (Bhuyan M.K.) statistical hand book, Assam
VIII. BORO POPULATION IN KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT

Kokrajhar is the most Boro populated area under Bodoland Autonomous Council of Assam, from the year 1994 of 20th February it is known as Bodoland Autonomous Council. The census of 1991 (BAC) is clearly shown that out of seventeen districts of Assam, Kokrajhar (BAC) is the top most Boro populated area or district. It's total population is 8,00,659. The Boros are populated in different places like Srirampur, Raimana, Kachugaon, Gossaigaon, Dotma, Haltugaon. Fakiragram, Kokrajhar, Basugaon, Sidli and Guma. The total Boro population is 1,90,841 in Kokrajhar district. (According to 1994 census).

In this work special reference is related to mainly the Boro and the Rabha as plains Tribes of Kokrajhar. Therefore, an attempt is made to study about the Boro speaking and Rabha people of the Brahmaputra valley. Other Boro speaking groups like Garos, Dimasas, Tipras, Lalungs, Sonowals, Deuris, Chutiyas etc. are not covered by this study here.

The area of the Kokrajhar district is 7,463 Sq.Km. Its total population is 8,00,659 and its density per Sq.Km is 229.