Chapter 2

Historical background, population, origin and dialects of the Bodos
CHAPTER II

Historical background, population, origin and dialects of the Bodos

Historical background

The Bodos are one of the most important sections of the population of the plains tribes in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. They are Tibeto-Burman speaking tribes descended from the Mongoloid stock. According to S. K. Chatterji, "the Mongoloids have formed parts of the settled population of Assam since time immemorial, and they have come within the orbit of Indian civilization at a fairly early age, and now they form part of the Indian body-politic." The Bodos, one of the most important groups of Indo-Mongoloid tribes in northeastern India, particularly of Assam appear to have established early over the valley of river Brahmaputra.

The Bodos are mentioned as Kiratas in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and a number of literatures of the Aryans. S. K. Chatterji defines the word ‘Kirata’ as a name given to people who used to live in the caves of the mountains. According to R. M. Nath the word Kirata as a general term refers to the people of Mongolian origin, especially to the Bodos. Doubtlessly, the Kiratas were the non-Aryan tribes of Mongoloid origin. The Bodos were also one of the most important sections of non-Aryan tribes of north-east
India. Apart from the Bodos or Boros proper, the other group of Bodo tribes were the Koch, the Kachari, the Lalung, the Dimasa, the Garo, the Rabha, the Tipra (Kok-Borok), the Chutiya, the Moran, etc. They all belong to the Mongoloid or Kirata race who are said to have settled in the hills and plains of Assam. Assam is mentioned in the Mahabharata as the land of *Mlechhes* and *Asuras* that was, a non-Aryan country. This country was called Pragjyotisha in the age of the Mahabharata and later on, it was called as Kamrupa in the *Puranas* or *Tantras*. The extent of Pragjyotisha or Kamrupa however was varied in different times, but the Pragjyotisha as appeared in the Mahabharata, was extended in the west up to the river Karatoya and in the south to the Bay of Bengal.

According to the traditional and mythological belief, the earliest known king of Pragjyotisha was a non-Aryan chief named *Mahiranga Danav*. His non-Aryan name was probably ‘*Mairang*’. Still a hill on the Shillong-Guwahati road near Beltala is known as ‘*Mairang Parbat*’. Mahiranga Danava who was known to be the Kirata chief, was said to have been succeeded by *Hatakasura, Sambarasura* and *Ratnasura*. Mahiranga was called a *Danav* but his descendants were called *Asuras*. This shows that such titles *Danava* and *Asuras* were applied invariably to all the non-Aryans at that time. After these kings, there was a chief called Ghataksura, the ruler of the Kirats. The ancient name of the country was Kirata as mentioned in the chronicle of the Tippera kings and this tract lies in the sub-Himalaya region in between the Dud Kosi and Arun rivers. But Ghatakasura was overthrown and murdered by the *Naraksura*, the most powerful king of ancient Kamrupa. The rule of the Asura dynasty over Pragjyotisha was continued for a long period of time.

The migration of the great Bodo tribes into Assam is mentioned in the Mahabharata wherein they are referred as ‘*Mlechhas*’ and ‘*Asuras*’. In the north eastern parts of India, they were known as Kiratas but they were the Mongolian tribesmen who happened to be the earliest settlers of the region and ruled it for ages before the arrival of the Aryans. The kings of the Bodo race ruled the Kingdom of Tripura also as the ‘*Eastern Kiratas*’ found mentioned in the Sanskrit literatures of the epic era. There is also evidence in the pre-historic period that the Kingdom of Kamrupa was founded by the Bodos under the king Kumar Bhaskara Barman in the 7th century CE. The inhabitants of...
this kingdom are found to be of shorter stature and yellow complexion, having affinities with the tribes of south-west China. This infers that the kingdom was ruled by the Bodos under different dynastic names at different times in North East India.

According to the linguistic evidence the Kingdom of the Bodos at one time, was extended over the whole of the present province west of Manipur and the Naga hills, excluding only the Khasi and Jaintia hills. It is found that the names to many of the most prominent features of the province were given by them. The establishment of their colonies near the streams indicates that most of the river names in eastern Assam are said to have originated from the Bodo words. The water is called ‘di’ or ‘dwi’ in Bodo and so, most of the tributaries of the Brahmaputra and the rivers in the adjacent country to the west are named Dibru, Dikhu (Dwikhou), Dihing, Dibong, Dihong, Disang, Diphong, Dimla, etc.

The kingdom of the Bodo-Kachari however was stretched along the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra from the Dikhow to the Kalang, or beyond and also included the valley of the Dhansiri and the present tract of North Cachar hills at the beginning of 13th century CE. The Dikhow river remained as the boundary between the Bodo Kingdom and the Ahom kingdom. The Ahoms, a section of the Great Shan (Tai) race, entered into Assam crossing the Patkoi Hills from the south and east about 1228 CE. In 1490, the hostility between the Ahoms and the Bodos firstly took place and the capital of Bodo kingdom at that time was at Dimapur.

The success of the Ahoms in the battle between the Ahoms and the Bodo Kacharis in 1531 in the south, in the present subdivision of Golaghat district was an encouragement for the Ahoms to move forward into the Kachari capital at Dimapur on the bank of the Dhansiri, at the foot of the Naga Hills. They succeeded in capturing and sacking the Dimapur about the middle of the sixteenth century and placed their vassal Detsung on the throne after the Kachari king Khunkhara fled capital city. But the new ruler’s loyalty to the Ahoms did not last long as quarrel erupted between Detsung and the Ahom king Suhungmung. The ransacking of Dimapur by the Ahoms forced Detsung to flee, but he was chased and put to death. When they had been driven out of Dimapur and Dhansiri valley by the Ahoms in a fierce battle the Bodo- Kachari king shifted his capital.
to Maibong on the bank of Mahur river in the North Cachar Hills. Later on the name of the capital was changed from Maibong to Kirtipur by Satrudaman who celebrated to commemorate his success in destroying the Ahom garrison at Raha. Some remains of several temples surrounded by a wall are still visible at Maibong. It may be mentioned that the process of Hinduisation or Sanskritisation probably had already begun at Maibong among the royal family members and the court officials.

The records in the Vansabali of the Darrang Rajas state that the Bodo-Kachari king had to face another strong force within Chilarai, the brother and general of the great Koch king, Nar Narayan about the middle of the sixteenth century. By this time, the greater part of the Nowgong district and North Cachar Hills is said to have constituted of the Kachari kingdom and their rule was gradually extended into the plains of Cachar. In 1706 CE the Kachari capital, Maibong was again occupied by the Ahom king Rudra Singh with his big army. The Kachari king Tamradhaj fled to Cachar and took shelter in the plains of Cachar at Khaspur where a new capital was established. But at Khaspur the Bodo-Kachari seemed to have increasingly come under the influence of the Hinduism around this time. Later on, the Kachari king, Krishna Chandra and his brother Gobinda Chandra were formally converted to Hinduism by making a public profession of Brahmanism in 1790 CE. They were then declared by the Brahmins to be Hindus of the Kshatriya caste. The king also could claim to be descended from Bhima, one of the heroes of Mahabharata. From this time, they were identical with Hindus of the Kshatriyas caste but the conversion of the royal family members was then followed by his subjects.

There was an internal uprising in the northern hilly tract of Cachar where the last Kachari king Gobinda Chandra had to face. This rebellion was raised by Tularam for killing of his father, Kohi Dan, a servant of the Kachari king. In 1819 CE the Kachari kingdom was occupied by the Manipuri prince, Charajit Singh. Gobinda Chandra finding no alternative way fled to Sylhet in order to save his life. On the request of the Kachari king, the Burmese attacked and defeated Charajit Singh, but this led to a war between the British and the Burmese. The Burmese was defeated in the war and the Kachari kingdom was restored to Govinda Chandra. At that time Gobinda Chandra shifted his dwelling from Khaspur to Haritikar. Four years later in 1830 CE he was assassinated without any
heir. After two years in 1832 CE, the Kachari kingdom was annexed by the British Empire under Doctrine of Lapse policy and Cachar was also absorbed in the British dominion.\(^{18}\)

Near the modern Sadiya, the line of Chutiyas, a branch of Kachari race ruled the country in the east of the Subansiri and the Disang rivers. During that time, they had a prolonged struggle with the Ahoms. But the Chutiyas were defeated by the Ahoms and in the later period, the intermix of Chutiyas with the Shan blood Ahoms was such an extent that one third of them recorded their sub-tribes identifying themselves as Ahom-Chutiyas at the census of 1891 CE.\(^{19}\) Afterward, they became largely Hinduised after mixing up with some other tribes.

Apart from the Chutiya kingdom, there was a Koch Bihar or Kamata kingdom which was ruled by the Koche, a section of the Bodo-Kachari race. Their vast kingdom was stretched from the Dikrai river in the east to the Karatoya river in the west. Since the time of Biswa Singh, the eldest son of Haria Mandal, his descendants and subjects all were converted to Hinduism and they were known as Koch-Rajbangshi. Later on, they changed to a caste for rising in the Hindu social ladder after proselytizing to Hinduism under the patronage of the Koch kings, Biswa Singh and Narnarayan.\(^{20}\) It is doubtless to say that the Koche are the sanskritised Bodos who discarded their tribal character after embracing the Hinduism.

The Koch king Narnarayan in the west patronized the neo-Vaishanavite religion. For many years, Srimanta Sankardev staying at the royal palace of the king Narnarayan in Koch Bihar spread neo-Vaishanavite religion and also founded satras. The spread of this religion contributed to the evolution of a liberal Assamese society in Assam. The people of that time, those who were Hinduised were influenced by the prayer process of Srimanta Sankardev. Meanwhile, a large number of the Bodo people adopted ‘Ek-saran-nam dharma’ of Srimanta Sankardev and became Sarania after merging completely with Assamese mainstream. The Sarania abandoned the social customs and traditions, old religion, culture and language of their tribes after adopting the Aryan culture. They have now identified themselves as the Sarania Kacharis in Assam. They self actualized themselves to be more refined in custom, tradition, food and drink than their brethren.
who adhered to their traditional religions. Thus the traditional Bodo society underwent a
process of assimilation and a large part of their community population was transformed
into Assamese speaking Hindus. As a result, the population of the Bodo community was
reduced considerably. Besides, there was also a few number of the Bodos who became
Muslim after adopting Islam religion and forsook their own culture, language and
original identity.

Despite professing Hinduism, a large part of the Bodo community did not give up
their traditions, culture and language. They still held on to their old traditional faith and
religion in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. A considerable number of the Bodos was
converted to Christianity and gave up some of their traditional social customs, traditions,
age old beliefs and practices of the traditional Bodo society. On the other hand, the
advent of the Brahma dharma of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma in the early years of the
20th century marked a turning point in the history of socio-economic and cultural changes
of the traditional Bodo society. The Brahma religion, however, has set its deep root in
Vedic philosophy. One of the most important works of Brahma dharma was the
sanskritization of rituals and culture of the Bodos. Apart from this, a good number of the
Bodos also followed the Satsang religion of Sri Sri Thakur Anukul Chandra and other
Hindu sects from the last decade of the 20th century CE. The influence of Hindu culture
on the Bodo society brought many changes both good and bad at various institutional
levels. However, the changes and innovations could also be seen occurring in religious
rituals of the traditional Bodo religion since the last century.

Population

There is no authentic report available for the population of the Bodos in Assam.
According to the census report of 2001 CE, the population of the Bodos was 1,352,771
and it was constituted 40.9% of the total scheduled tribe population of Assam. As per
the census report in 1971 CE, the total population of Bodos was 6,10,459. But this
population figure was not accepted by the Bodo socio-political organizations to be
perfect. According to the leaders of organizations the population figure furnished in this
census report was very less. For this reason, the leaders of the Bodo organizations
rejected the population figures furnished in the census reports of 1971 CE and termed it
to be as vague and far from the truth.\textsuperscript{24} The Bodo organizations, however, claim that the population of the Bodos is not less than 5.2 million by the year 2000 CE, but this population figure stipulated by the Bodo organizations also cannot accepted without cross examination.

In 1981 CE, the census was not conducted in Assam because at that time there was an anti-foreigners agitation launched by All Assam Students Union which strongly opposed the conducting of census.\textsuperscript{25} The leaders of the Bodo organizations however claim that their population should be near about twenty lakhs, and estimate the total plains tribal population to be more than 37 lakhs by 1981 CE. This population figure however was worked out by the organization on the basis of population figure furnished by the census report of 1901 CE and multiplying it with the growth rate of a decadal population for the last eighty years.\textsuperscript{26}

However, the discrepancy in population figure is believed to have occurred due to the deliberate falsification of the census figures by some census officials. In view of irregular trend in the decadal census of India conducted in Assam, it is also believed to have presented the Hinduised Bodos and Bodo Hindu converts as Assamese in the census report. This is evident from the addition of a number of the Bodo Hinduised or those Bodos who speak Assamese language into the fold of Assamese. Such process of adding up the Bodo converts into their fold has reduced the number of Bodo population in the Government official record. The duplicity of the census officials who were mostly Assamese may be referred as one of the census officials associated with the census operation in 1881 CE observed, “The separation of Hindus as an ethnological class is open to objection that it includes a large number who are not Aryans”. He also observed that “the increase in Assamese population in Kamrup and Darrang is so great as to suggest a suspicion that a large number of Koch has turned themselves into Kalitas”.\textsuperscript{27} It shows that the free and fair census for the population of the Bodos in Assam was not conducted by the Census Commission of India.

It is true that the Koches are the Hinduised Bodos because of conversion to Hinduism from amongst the Bodos. But the Kalitas consist of one of the most important social castes in the Assamese community. Among the Bodo converts, the highest position
was occupied by the Koch in the Hindu social hierarchy and the rest were at the initial stage of conversion. But most of the Bodo converts could not attain the higher rank in the Hindu caste ladder. They were also not able to re-assimilate fully into the culture of their original fold. Consequently, in the later years they identified themselves as the separate independent communities of the Bodos. Doubtlessly, the process of assimilation and conversion greatly helped the Assamese community to increase the number in their population and thus showed less number of Bodo population in the census report. The survey conducted by the All Bodo Students Union and the Bodo People’s Action Committee in the North Bank of Brahmaputra in 1990 CE also claims that 70% of the total population was of the Scheduled tribe origin and of them 51% was Bodos.28

It may be mentioned that in the census report of 1881 CE, the tribal population was indicated into three categories in Assam plains, namely the tribal population influenced by Hinduism was 3, 23, 303, tribal population in the process of conversion figuring 82, 889 and the tribal population fully converted to Hinduism was 3, 95, 902.29 The process of conversion thus drastically reduced the number of Bodo population. The presenting of non-Aryan converts as Assamese irrespective of their tribes has been the process of infringement which continued throughout the successive census. This is clearly evident from the successive census reports which give the inconsistent population figures of these communities. According to the Census report of 1881 CE, the population of Bodo people including of all cognate tribes was 8, 94,885 and in 1891, it rose to 10, 58,496, but it fell to 6, 17,989 in 1901. Similarly, in the census report of 1961, their population figured at 12, 28, 450, and in 1971, it reduced to 6, 10,459.30 The exact figure of population of the Bodos was not recorded by the census officials. This clearly exhibits the anomalies of the census report of the Government of India in presenting the most authentic documents regarding the population of the Bodos in Assam.

Origin

The origin of the Bodos is a matter of controversy. The fact that the Bodos of the Brahmaputra valley call themselves as the Bodo or Boro and in some instances they are known as Boro-Kachari or Kachari is remarkable. The word ‘Bodo’ is a generic term, firstly used by Brian Houghton Hudgson to refer a group of language family.31 Hudgson
however, himself did not give any reason for the use of the term ‘Bodo’. Since long past the Bodo had been a major language of the Bodo group of tribes. The Bodo ethnic group of tribes consists of Bodo or Boro, the Kok-Borok (Tipra), Deuri, Dimasa, Sonowal, Moran, Matak, Garo, Rabha, Thengal, Mech, Lalung (Tiwa), Chutia, Dhimal, Hajong and other cognate tribes of the same race and same ancestry. This generic name was invariably applied by some other scholars to the Bodo group of languages and the tribes as well as sub-tribes belonging to the Bodo group. J.D. Anderson states that the exact sound of the term represented by spelling is ‘Bada’ or ‘Bara’ or by ‘Bodo’ or ‘Boro’ (the ‘o’ has the sound of the English ‘o’ in ‘hot’). In this regard, we can relate to the observations of Ajoy Roy that the conventional spelling of the word is ‘Bodo’ where the letter ‘d’ is pronounced not as ‘d’ in the word ‘dodo’ but as a hard ‘r’ corresponding to in Assamese or in Hindi devanagri’. This infers that the use of letter ‘d’ as ‘r’ is varied, and it is notable that the Bodos do not use to pronounce the letter ‘d’ as hard ‘r’ in their language.

According to G.A. Grierson the Bodo identified themselves as the ‘Boro-fisa’ or ‘Bodo-fisa’ meaning the ‘children of the Boro race’. The word Bodo or Bara is the name by which the Mech and the Kacharis call themselves. The Bara folk who lived to the west of the Kamrup district were called Mech by their Hindu neighbours.

The Bodos racially belong to the Indo-Tibetan group of the Mongoloid stock. S.K. Chatterji mentions the Bodos (Baras) as Kiratas or Indo-Mongoloids. Fr. Matthias Hermanns also made references of the Bodos and their allied tribes in the term of ‘Indo-Tibetans’. On the basis of racial and physical affinity, the Bodo-Kacharis had the Mongoloid features having the strong cheek bones, slit eyes, a slight growth of hair on the body and scant beard. They are shorter and stockier than the Indians of the northeast. Their country is known as the Bod. The word ‘Bod’ is supposed to be the name of the homeland and some regions of their country are found in the name of Hor-Bod, Kur-Bod, La-Bod, Tse-Bod, and Tsang-Bod. According to R.M. Nath, when Buddhism spread into the Bod countries, especially the southern part inhabited by the Buddhist lamas, it was known as ‘Bsti’ (Lamas) ‘Bod’, and later on it was transformed into Bsti Bod-Tibod-Tibet, etc. But Kameswar Brahma describes the inhabitants of the Bod
country as the 'Bodo-ficha' or 'Bodocha' or 'Bodosa'. 'Bodo' means Bod country and 'ficha' or 'cha' means the children, thus leading to the formation of the word Bodo-ficha or Bodocha meaning the children of the Bod country, which is supposed to be Tibet. This suggests that later this word may have further corrupted to the current name of the tribe 'Boro'. H.B. Chhetri Atreya suggests that in the course of time, those among them who moved out from Bod country to regions far and wide in search of more and better land, ended up with their name simply as Boddo-Bodo-Boro. The Bodos linguistically included a large group of speakers of the Tibeto-Burman speeches of the North and East Bengal, Assam, Burma, like Bodos or Boros of Brahmaputra valley, Meches of lower Assam and West Bengal and also Rabhas, Tripas, Lalungs, Sonowals, Mising, Deuris, Chutiyas, Hajongs, etc. The language of the Bodos is 'Bodo' or 'Boro' and their origin had roots in the Chinese and Tibet languages. Thus, it may amply be said that the term 'Bodo' represented a race or a language community speaking the Sino-Tibetan Bodo language.

The Bodos were constituted of a larger ethnic and linguistic group of the Brahmaputra valley called Bodo-Kachari. But the origin of the Kachari has also been a matter of controversy till recent past. There are different views of the different scholars on it. 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 he could not give exact information in this regard. But on the basis of the feature and general appearance he further describes them to be of the Mongolian type and this would point to their original home being somewhere in Tibet and China.

According to E.A. Gait the word ‘Kachari’ seems to have been derived from a Sanskrit word ‘khachar’ meaning a boarding region or the neighbouring place. B. K. Barua also relates the word ‘Kachari’ with the Sanskrit word ‘Kaksata’ which is a theoretical formation similar to Sanskrit Kirata. The derivation of the Kachari from Kosarui has no meaning and thus has no merit. It is evidently just an assumption that perhaps no historical facts can prove it. And the use of the word Koch to explain the Bara race however is also not acceptable as the term Koch had already acquired a specific use namely to mean the Bodo converts to Hinduism. L.A. Waddell also describes the term
Kachari as an inhabitant of the Kachh or sub-montane marshy tracts. However, a section of the scholars tried to give the tribes the name Kachari, derived it from the present Cachar district, which also appears unlikely as the word Kachar is a Sanskrit word meaning border region. Another section of scholars are also of the view that the word ‘Kachari’ is derived probably from the words of Bodo language, i.e., ‘koro’ means head, ‘cha’ means son and ‘hari’ means clan or sub-tribe. In this sense, the Kochari was a great Bodo clan. In ancient times the Bodo race had established an extensive kingdom in the valley of river Brahmaputra. It was widely observed that the use of the word ‘Bodo’ and ‘Boro’ however brings out two categories of Bodo people, the former meant the whole race whereas the later meant only the current descendents of Boro or Mech speaking section of them. Both the words Bodo and Boro are found being used interchangeably as evident from the names of many organizations, such as Bodo Sahitya Sabha, All Bodo Women’s Welfare Federation, All Bodo Students Union, Boro Women’s Justice Forum, etc. The people of this community prefer to identify themselves as either ‘Boro’ or ‘Bodo’. It is clearly evident that the use of both the words is invariably equivalent and meant the same. The generic name ‘Bodo’ firstly used by B. H. Hudgson, is accepted as a racial name by a section of Bodo writers and politicians, but a large number of the ordinary Bodo people still prefer to call themselves as ‘Boro’. The language spoken by the Bodos is known as Bodo or Boro. Generally the origin of the nationality of this race is traceable to the language spoken by them. Thus it may be inferred that the people who led the present movement for asserting their right of political self-determination preferred to use the term ‘Bodo’. They are now largely concentrated in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam known as Bodo, Boro, Boro-Kachari and Boroficha or Borosa. They are also known to the people as Mech or Meche in Goalpara, Nagaland and in some parts of North Bengal of the present West Bengal state of India. They are widely scattered over a large areas in the north eastern India and in some parts of neighbouring countries, like Nepal and Bangladesh. It may be pointed out that historically, the Bodos were the same racial group of Dimasas who were treated as a sub-tribe of the Boro group until 1961 CE in the electoral roll.
Migration and settlement

The Bodos mentioned as Kiratas in the Mahabharata, belong to the Indo-Mongoloid stock. They are also described as the aborigines of Assam as early as in the Kalika Purana. Physically they are found to be of shaven heads, yellow skins, strong, ferocious, ignorant and addicted to meat and drink. They are the Tibeto-Burman language speakers of the North and East Bengal, Assam, and Burma. The original homeland of these speaking tribes or the people of the Mongolian race seem to be North-Western China of the ancient Tibet which was known as Bod. They were scattered from the upper reaches of the Yang-Tse-Kiang and Hwang-Ho rivers in different directions. However, from this original centre of dispersion the Bodos, like other Tibeto-Burman groups of people is said to have taken their route to northern or north-eastern India. Their movements however towards the east might have been as old as that of Aryans in the west at some period before 1000 BCE. Probably from 2000 BCE onwards the Sino-Tibetan speaking Mongolian tribes pushed south and west from their original homeland. Their infiltration into India took place mostly along with the western course of the river Brahmaputra. Some of these early Tibeto-Burman who had entered within the frontiers of India either along the southern slopes of the Himalayas through Assam or by way of Tibet and then by crossing the Himalayan mountainous barrier, established themselves in the Sub-Himalayas tracts as far west as Garhwal and Kumaon. During their movements, the Mongolian people were divided mainly into two groups, one group who penetrated in Assam was known as the Tibeto-Burman groups and other group entering Burma from the north-west was known as the Siamese-Chinese groups. Probably at one time these Mongolian people entered into Assam and Burma hills and some adjacent sub-mountainous and plain areas and river-plateaus of these two countries. Some of the Tibeto-Burman groups crossed the Tsangpo river in Tibet and later on, migrated to the west and scattered over the foothills ranges of the Himalayas along sides and some of them came down the western courses of the Brahmaputra and spread into the hills and riverbeds of Assam. Then other Siamese-Chinese groups migrated down the course of the Chindwin and that of other rivers to the south and settled in Burma and Thailand and the countries adjoining to them. The Bodos who were regarded to be the most dominant
and important Indo-Mongolian tribes, earlier entered into Assam and seemed to have established over the valley of Brahmaputra. Taking the great river Brahmaputra as the demarcation line during the course of time they were divided into two main groups, namely the Northern and southern group. One of the most important Bodo groups of immigrants entered through north-east Bengal and western Assam by the valley of river Teesta, Dharla, Sankosh where the powerful kingdom known as Kamrupa was founded later and the other group entered through the river valleys of Subansiri, Dibong and Dihong, and settled in the eastern Assam. This group of Bodo-Kachari race was known as Chutiyas and their capital quarters was located at or near the modern Sadiya. This section of the Bodo race still make a dominant population in these regions. Inhabiting the hills and slopes to the north of the river Brahmaputra the Bodo race initially extended through Central Assam. Powerful tribes are said to have ruled over the whole of Kamrupa at one time. The two groups of the Bodos, namely the Kacharis and Chutiyas in the thirteenth century ruled a large part of eastern Assam. In the course of time, they lost much of their energy and martial qualities from their long residence in the fertile and steamy plains of Assam and thus became indolent and weak. This later caused their defeat by the Ahoms coming from the east.

It is evident from the expansion of Bodo speakers that firstly they settled over the entire valley of the river Brahmaputra and from there, they changed their migration towards west and gradually settled in North Bengal, Cooch Bihar, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts of present West Bengal state. They may have pushed into North Bihar also. A section of them skirted the southern bank of the Brahmaputra and migrated towards Garo hills where a bloc of Bodo speech was formed as Garos. From the south of the Garo Hills, they spread in northern Maimonsing. A section of the Bodos who migrated to Maimonsing and Sylhet districts of present Bangladesh were mostly converted to Islam religion. Their area of occupation from Nowgong district in Assam was extended to Cachar district, particularly in the North Cachar Hills and into Sylhet districts of Bangladesh. From Cachar and Sylhet, they moved further to the south, to Tripura state where the kingdom was founded and from Tripura they spread into Comilla and probably also Noakhali districts and thus they occupied the mouths of the Ganges by the eastern sea. The whole of Assam including North and East Bengal, excepting only the Khasi and
Jaintia Hills, and the eastern parts inhabited by Nagas and the south-eastern parts inhabited by the Kuki-Chins, was the country of the great Bodo people. It may be referred that the peculiar characteristics of the language spoken by the Bodos appears to be closely related to the Chinese group of languages and probably their original ancestors were the residents of a region squeezed between eastern Tibet and western China. Hence, their race was of Sino-Tibetan in origin. They are now widely scattered over the Brahmaputra valley in Assam and North-Cachar Hills and the Cachar plains in south Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Garo Hills of Meghalaya, Tripura, north Bengal, south-east Nepal and also in some parts of Bangladesh.

Thus the Bodos were the original inhabitants of Assam. On the basis of their language and physical affinity, they are apparently the descendants of the Tibeto-Burman stock. The language spoken by the Bodo people presently inhabiting the valley of river Brahmaputra and outside the boundary of modern Assam indicates that in the long past they all shared a common ancestry of Bodo origin and so, the north-western China of the ancient Tibet which was known as Bod appears to be their original homeland.

Dialects

The Bodo language is consisted of a number of different dialects. Bodo or Boro is a language, belongs to the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese family of language. It is spoken mainly throughout the valley of the river Brahmaputra in Assam. The Bodo speech community is widely spread all over the North-eastern states of India, in northern parts of West Bengal and some adjoining areas of Nepal and Bangladesh. Linguistically, the Sino-Tibetan languages of the present day were divided into two groups or branches, namely, Tibeto-Burman and Siamese-Chinese. The Tibeto-Burman family is subdivided into four branches-(1) Tibetan (2) Himalayan (3) North-Assam and (4) Assam-Burmese. The Bodo language is regarded as one of the most important languages of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the Tibeto-Chinese family. The maximum special characteristics of its main stock were retained by the Bodo language. On the basis of comparison of the number of speakers in the world the speaker of the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese family of languages appears to have occupied the second place next to the Indo-European family.
The source of the Boro language was Tibeto-Burman and so, a brief tabular representation of the Sino-Tibetan language family following the Linguistic Survey of India and S.K. Chatterji’s classification is described below.

Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speaking family

- Sino-Tibetan proper
- Early modified of Sino-Tibetan
  - Tibeto-Burman
  - Siamese-Chinese
  - Man or Miao-tsze
  - Karen
  - Tibetan
  - Himalayan
  - North-Assam
  - Assam-Burmese
    - Bodo-Naga Group
    - Burmese-Kuki-Chin-Kachin-Lolo Group
      - Bodo (Boro)
      - Naga

Boro (Kachari), Dimasa, Garo, Mech, Rabha, Lalung (Tiwa), Tipra (Kok-Borok) etc.

The tabular representation cited above shows that the Bodo (Boro) language belongs to the Bodo (Boro) sub-section of the Bodo-Naga section under the Assam-Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family.\(^6\)

The branching-off of these various tribes or groups from the original stock in the north-eastern plains and lower hilly regions seemed to have occurred at different times.
under different circumstances. Hence the distancing and alienation of these various groups from the original stock and from each other had also been affected at different levels and in different degrees. Some common strands are easily visible in the languages and cultures of the Bodo group of tribes. In the course of time, these various scattered groups acquired variations in their language, custom, culture and even to some extent physical features through inter-marriage and close association with other local inhabitants as well as snapping of close association with their original kinsman. The most important group of tribes of the Tibeto-Burman race belonging to the non-Aryan people of Assam was the Bodos. The Bodo group of speech community is Bodo (Boro) or Boro-Kachari, Dimasa, Rabha, Tiwa (Lalung), Tipra (Kok-Boro), Chutiya, Koch, Hajong, Garo, etc. Most of them still speak different dialects although with a varying degree of similarities.

Following Robert Shafer’s classification a brief tabular representation of the Sino-Tibetan speaking family is described below.

```
Sino-Tibetan speech family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sinitic (Chinese)</th>
<th>Dai (Thai or Tai)</th>
<th>Karenic</th>
<th>Burmi (Burmese, Lolo, etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manic (Miao-tsze) Bodic (Tibetan &amp; its dialect)</td>
<td>Baric</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barish</td>
<td>Nagish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North central</td>
<td>South central</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moran</td>
<td>Lalung (Tiwa)</td>
<td>Bodo (Boro)</td>
<td>Mech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

It is evident from Robert Shafer’s classification (figure above) that the Bodo (Boro) belonged to the western branch of the Barish section under Baric division of the
Sino-Tibetan family. The western branch as per description of Robert Shafer included various languages, such as Lalung (Tiwa), Bodo (Boro), Dimasa, Tipras, etc. Of all these languages, the Bodo was predominantly widespread in Assam. It is not possible to trace the linguistic roots of the language spoken by the people which are liable to be changed with the passage of time and their alien contacts due to their regional shifts. The change of language means the change in every linguistic element, especially the sound, grammar, words and meaning. The major change occurs in the elements of words in every language of the world. Both the addition and loss of the linguistic elements make the language change. The change in language can be observable if somebody compares one and the same language of two or more periods. A few specimens of words along with their meaning commonly used by different sub groups of Bodos derived from a common stock may be cited here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Bodo (Boro)</th>
<th>Garo</th>
<th>Dimasa</th>
<th>Mech</th>
<th>Kok-Borok (Tripuri)</th>
<th>Tiwa (Lalung)</th>
<th>Rabha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Ang</td>
<td>Anga</td>
<td>Anga</td>
<td>Ang</td>
<td>Ang</td>
<td>Ang</td>
<td>Ang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>Nwng</td>
<td>Na</td>
<td>Nwng</td>
<td>Nwng</td>
<td>Nwng</td>
<td>Na</td>
<td>Nang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>Bi/Be</td>
<td>Ua</td>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>Be</td>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>Be</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My</td>
<td>Angni</td>
<td>Angni</td>
<td>Ani</td>
<td>Angni</td>
<td>Ani</td>
<td>Angni</td>
<td>Angi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His</td>
<td>Bini</td>
<td>Uni</td>
<td>Boni</td>
<td>Bini</td>
<td>Bini</td>
<td>Bini</td>
<td>O-ni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We</td>
<td>Jwng</td>
<td>Chigang</td>
<td>Jung/Jine</td>
<td>Jwng</td>
<td>Chwng</td>
<td>Ching</td>
<td>Ching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Ai</td>
<td>Ama</td>
<td>Ma</td>
<td>Ai</td>
<td>Ma</td>
<td>Ma</td>
<td>Aya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Aba/Apha</td>
<td>Apa</td>
<td>Baba</td>
<td>Apha/Ab</td>
<td>Pha</td>
<td>Baba</td>
<td>Pha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Dwi</td>
<td>Chi</td>
<td>Di</td>
<td>Dwi</td>
<td>Twi</td>
<td>Ti</td>
<td>Chwka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Junat</td>
<td>Maburung</td>
<td>Mih</td>
<td>Junat</td>
<td>Malimata</td>
<td>Marat</td>
<td>Kriminibakja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Mairong</td>
<td>Mi</td>
<td>Mai</td>
<td>Mairong</td>
<td>Mai</td>
<td>Mai</td>
<td>Alai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye</td>
<td>Megen</td>
<td>Mikhron</td>
<td>Mwthai</td>
<td>Megen</td>
<td>Mokol</td>
<td>Mo</td>
<td>Neken</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus some similarities are observed in the use of common words and their meanings which indicate close relation among the different tribes of the Bodo group in
the remotest past. The corresponding words of the language having a similar meaning between Garo and Bodo in sound (phonemes) are that the hard sound in Bodo word becomes soft in Garo. For instance, 'apha' or 'aba' (father) in Bodo is spoken as 'apa' in Garo which indicates difference of 'ph/p'. In Dimasa too, Bodo's hard sounds and clusters become soft and simplified like, 'za' (to eat) in Bodo is spoken as 'zi' in Dimasa and thus difference is 'a/i'. Likewise, the hard sound in Bodo becomes soft in Kok-Borok, - 'hajw' (hill) in Bodo is spoken as 'hasu' by Kok-Borok having difference 'z/s'. In this sense, the Bodo sub-tribes appears to have originated from the same stock of Sino-Tibetan language family, although a few differences are noticed in their language and culture among them.

Area and growth

The Bodo tribes are said to have constituted the bulk of the population of hills and valleys of Assam since long past. They migrated and settled in the north-eastern region of India from the Western China near the Yang-tsze-Kiang and Huang-ho rivers, and from there, they came down along the courses of the river Brahmaputra, the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy, and entered India and Burma. A number of Mongoloid tribes speaking Sino-Tibetan languages may have pushed south and west from their original homeland in Western China from pre-historic times, but their large scale movements reportedly began in early part of the first millennium BCE onwards. They are all speakers of languages and dialects belonging to the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family with the single exception of the Khasis and the Jaintias (Syntengs) of present Meghalaya. The wide range of extension of their language suggests that the Bodos firstly settled over the entire Brahmaputra valley, and extended west into North Bengal, especially in Koch Bihar, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts. The Bodos, as they spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley, North Bengal and East Bengal formed a solid bloc in North-eastern India and formed one of the main bases of the present-day population of these tracts. They may have pushed into North Bihar also but the Indo-Mongoloids who entered into North Bihar might equally have been either Bodos or 'Himalayan tribes allied to the Newars'. But as regards the expansion of the Bodo language, B.K. Barua mentions that the Tibeto-Burman speakers, especially the Bodos are said to have constructed their
colonies mainly near about the streams in Assam, and this is evident from the addition of the prefix ‘di’ or ‘dvi’ the Bodo word for water in the name of the rivers and places. Most of the identical names of rivers and places are found mostly of Bodo origin although it was slightly changed or altered due to intermixture of different language speaking people living together, but that points out the settlement of Bodo people on the bank of rivers in Assam. Even the name of the place not associated with rivers also shows the dominant influence of the Bodo language in Assam. For instance, the place name ‘Hajo’ in Kamrup district is derived from the Bodo word ‘hajou’ meaning hillock.

The Bodo language seems to have close relation to the Bodo-Naga group of languages which was still current in Assam and Nagaland. Among all the related branches of the Bodo group of speakers, a close affinity was found to prevail in between Bodo (Boro) and Dimasa because of their political relation they had till the end of the Kachari kingdom. The maximum originality of their language was retained by Dimasa because of its long existence in the secluded hilly areas, but the Bodos inhabiting in the plain areas, especially the Brahmaputra valley, lost many of its originality by changing some of its linguistic elements because of its co-existence with the Indo-Aryan Assamese people. Besides, it may be referred from a lexico-statistics or glotto-chronological count of Boro and Garo languages that the dialect spoken by the group of Bodos suggests that Boro and Garo detached from each other about two thousand years ago from an ancestral common language. Dimasa or Hills Kachari spoken in North Cachar of the Surma valley branched off from the ancestral common language not more than one thousand years ago. Thus, Dimasa appears to have similarity more closely to Boro than Garo. It may be mentioned that till the establishment of the Ahom kingdom in Assam in the thirteenth century CE the Bodo language was current during the reign of Bodo-Kachari kings. It appears that in the whole of the plain areas of Assam particularly of the Brahmaputra valley the Boro Language was used by the Bodo-Kachari kings for maintaining the political contact, to communicate with local as well as foreign agencies. During this time there was a kind of script called ‘Deodhai Hangkhw’ which the Bodos used in their writings. The use of some specimens as relevant to script written on Boro language existent now in the inscriptions of stone pillar wreackages and the main gate of royal palace of the Bodo kings in Dimapur, now in Nagaland, a state of India, and Kashpur.
historical ruins show the prevalence of their Deodhai scripts in ancient times. Probably many of these documents were destroyed by the Ahom kings. Besides, many of the Kachari kings and queens admired the Hinduised form of religion and perhaps discouraged the preservation of their Kachari language. But due to widely scattered groups of Bodos all over the state, the Bodo-speaking Bodos are still said to have unassimilated with the Aryans-Assamese and Bengali speaking people of the Assam plains. They are now the speakers of proper Bodo or Boro language and largely inhabitants of the northern valley of river Brahmaputra extending from the district of Dhubri in the west to Lakhimpur district in the east.

Dialects and their variations

The Boro language is spoken in Assam extending from the district of Dhubri in the west to Sadiya in the east with variations in dialects in degrees. The present area where large Bodo populations inhabit spreads from the district of Dhubri in the west to Sonitpur district in the east. However the Mech dialect which is prevalent in the Jalpaiguri and other adjacent districts or areas of West Bengal, have closer and regular correspondence with the Bodo speakers. According to P C. Bhattacharya the Boro language consists of the four dialectal areas in Assam. These areas are:

(1) North-west dialect area mainly contains two forms of speech of sub-dialects, viz., the North-Kamrup and the North Goalpara. The former includes the districts of Nalbari, Barpeta, Baksa, and the latter covers the districts of Chirang, Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar and Dhubri.

(2) The dialect area of South-west comprises the districts of Goalpara, South Kamrup and extends up to Garo Hills of Meghalaya. The differences of dialect areas between the north-west and the south-west dialect exist in the matters of phonology, morphology and vocabulary.

(3) North-Central Assam dialect area covers the districts of Darrang, Udalguri, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and extends up to a few places of Arunachal Pradesh.
The dialect area of Southern Assam includes the districts of Nowgong, North Cachar Hills (Dimas Hasao) and Karbi Anglong, but the sub-dialectal differences appear more or less in this dialect.

It has been observed that a fifth dialect area may be added to the above list of four dialect areas of the Bodo language. This dialect may be called the Eastern dialect area covering all the districts of eastern Assam, viz., Golaghat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tinsukia and parts of Nagaland.

The dialect current in the area of north-west differs from that current dialect in south-west in the structures of sound, grammar and words. For instance, in the north-west dialect the Bodo word ‘phwi’ (to come) is spoken as ‘phai’ in the south-west dialect, and the dialect ‘bisi’ (wife) in north-west, is spoken as ‘bizi’ in south west. Likewise, the Bodo word ‘nwng’ (you) of north-west dialect is spoken as ‘nong’ in south-west dialect, and the word ‘alasi’ (guest) in north-west dialect, is spoken as ‘bunda’ in the south-west dialect. Besides, in the grammar too, a significant difference is found in between the north-west dialect and the south-west dialect. Thus, according to the areas more or less sub-dialectal variations is prevalent in their form of speech in the levels of structure of phonology, grammar and vocabulary. Besides, the dialect of north-central Assam areas so called the dialect current in Darrang, Udalguri, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur districts and Arunachal Pradesh had also variations in the structures of phonology, grammar and vocabulary. But the influence of Assamese over the dialect current is prevalent in the districts of Darrang, Udalguri, Sonitpur, Kamrup, Barpeta, Nalbari, Nowgong and all the districts in eastern Assam. Their variants from the dialect current in the districts of Kokrajhar and Dhubri are discernible as the later is being influenced by the Bengali and Hindi to some extent. But the dialect current in the districts of Darrang and Udalguri maintained a close proximity with that of North-Kamrup dialect than those current in other district areas. Of all these dialects, Kokrajhar dialect was selected as standard language for the Bodo people. The fact is that majority of the educated Bodo people and leading persons belonged to Kokrajhar and their dialect was found to be suited to communicate the ideas in the field of different subjects. Despite, some writers are still seen to have used the old system of their dialect in the writing.
The development of Boro language

The Bodo language is said to have different dialects spoken by the people living in different areas. In the western part of Assam, the dialect spoken by the Rajbangshi was a kind of admixture of language especially, Assamese, Boro and Bengali. In the districts of Bodo populated areas also, the Boro language is spoken by some of the non-Boro speakers as lingua franca to communicate for the purpose of business and other cultural adjustment. During the colonial period for the first time, Roman script was used by the Christian missionaries for writing the Boro language. In 1884 CE, the first one Bodo grammar named 'An Outline Grammar of Kochari or Mech language' was written where Sidney Endle used to describe the principles of the Boro grammar and the Boro language spoken in the erstwhile district of Darrang. Along with the preaching of Christian faith the Christian missionaries learnt the Boro language and its dialects being spoken in the different areas of Assam. They were the first to have started to use the Boro language in preparing the Bodo text books and the religious books towards the last part of the 19th century CE. After that, some magazines and books were brought out by the Bodos in manuscript forms. In 1920 CE, the Bibar was the first published magazine in Boro language edited by Satish Chandra Basumatary as its first issue from Kokrajhar.  

For the first time, on 28th September 1950 CE, one Bodo literary organization named as “The Bodo Literary Club” was formed by the Bodo intellectuals of Dhubri subdivision of undivided Goalpara district with a view to creating literature in the Bodo language and to include the language in the academic curriculum of schools in Bodo inhabited areas. But after working for one year the members of the organization realized that only the workers of Dhubri areas were not enough to fulfill their mission rather they needed active cooperation of the Bodos of all parts of the country. Subsequently, on 16th November 1952 CE the Bodo literary Organization, so called “The Bodo Sahitya Sabha”, abbreviated BSS, was founded for the cause of preservation and development of Bodo language. According to the demands made by Bodo Sahitya Sabha the Boro language was introduced as medium of instruction in the primary level of schools from 1963 CE and upgraded to the secondary levels in the subsequent years. In 1977 CE, it was included as the Modern Indian language under the Guahati University in Assam and it
also became as an associate official language of Assam Government from 1984 CE according to Assam Official Language Act. Some Bodo intellectuals of Bodo Sahitya Sabha examined the script suited for their language and after thorough studies, they decided to accept Roman script for the Boro language in 1970 CE. Accordingly, in 1974 CE for the first time the Boro Primer Bithorai (Balab-se) written in Roman script in class I for Boro Medium Primary Schools in its own accord was introduced by the Sabha. But according to the persuasion of the Central Government of India, Devanagari script was accepted for the Boro language officially by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1975 CE. After that, the Devanagari script was used to write the Bodo language in Boro literature and academic curriculum. Consequently, a large number of books for Bodo Modern Indian language in Devanagari script were produced from 1989 CE. Despite, both Assamese and Roman scripts continued to be used for writing in Boro language to some extent. The Christians Bodos still use the Roman script to write the Boro language in their text books and religious books.

Thus Bodo is a linguistic offshoot of the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan family of languages. It is evident from their folk songs and folklores that the Bodo language was very old and rich language. Although the dialect of Bodos had undergone various changes from time to time since ages, the originality is still alive and intact. The growth and development of Boro language has been one of the prominent developments in Assam. This is evident from the inclusion of the Boro language in the 8th schedule of the constitution of India as a scheduled language in 2003 CE recently and also it has been recognized as an official language of the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts in Assam.
Notes and References

1. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar (1991): The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India, Gauhati University, pp. 5-6.
8. Gait, Edward Albert, op. cit., p. 27.
16. Endle, Sidney (1911): The Kacharis (Bodos), Delhi, p. 6; Gait, Edward Albert, op. cit., p. 257.


27. Ibid, p. 71.


34. Roy, Ajay, op. cit., p. 2.


36. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, op. cit., pp. 45-46 (No. 2).


42. Endle, Sidney, op. cit., p. 3.

43. Ibid.

44. Barua, B. K., op. cit., p. 7.
47. Waddell, L.A. (1901): The Tribes of Brahmaputra Valley, Delhi, p. 44.
50. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, op. cit., p. 9 (No. 1).
51. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, op. cit., p. 36 (No. 2).
52. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, op. cit., p. 9 (No. 1).
53. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, op. cit., p. 26 (No. 2).
55. Endle, Sidney, op. cit., pp. 4-5.
56. Acharyya, N. N., op. cit., p. 65.
57. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, op. cit., p. 46 (No. 2); Brahma Chaudhury, Bijaya Laxmi (1993): Bodos (Kachari) at a Glance, Bongaigaon, p. 1.
59. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, op. cit., p. 22 (No. 2).
64. Baro, Madhu Ram, op. cit., p. 49.
65. Chhetri Atreya, Harka Bahadur, op. cit., p. 44.
66. Baro, Madhu Ram (2007): Assamese and Boro; A comparative and Contrastive study, Guwahati, p. 35.
67. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, op. cit., pp. 20-21 (No. 2).
68. Ibid, pp. 45-46.
69. Barua, B. K., op. cit., p. 76.
70. Roy, Ajay, op. cit., p. 15.
71. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, op. cit., p. 45 (No. 2).
75. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, op. cit., p. 17 (No. 1).
76. Bhattacharya, Pramod Chandra, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
77. Baro, Madhu Ram, op. cit., pp. 32-33 (No. 60).
81. Baro, Madhu Ram, op. cit., p. 46 (No. 60).