

Rev. T. J. Keith once observed in one of the issues of the *Missionary Magazine* of 1875 that the Garos "had no conception of what God is, or what a book is like, or what reading and writing mean than a blind man has of colour". While it can not be accepted that Garos had no conception of God, it may be said that they had no conception of reading and writing except among those on the borders of the plain areas of Assam and Bengal. Those Garo chiefs who had their respective kingdoms along the north, north west and southern border of the present Meghalaya State, might have the tradition of reading and writing in a non-Garo language as they used to maintain an intimate socio-political relation with the neighbouring chiefs of Kamrup and Bengal, and had subjects of different communities under them. But the tradition of reading and writing in Garo language came only after the advent of British power and of the American Baptist Missionaries in Garo Hills.

Garo is the language of the majority community of the Garo Hills district of Meghalaya and is one of the Bodo group of Sino-Tibetan languages. Mr. Grierson in his Linguistic survey of the Assam-Burma branch of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of India considered Bodo group of languages as one group within the Sino-Tibetan. Dr. Robins Burling observed that "Garo along with other Bodo languages is related eventually to most of the other Assamese hill languages and to Tibetan and Burmeseand form a well-defined group linguistically; with the possible exception of the rather obscure branch called chutia, the Bodo languages can be readily classified under three headings, Garo, Koch and Bodo proper". P.C. Bhattacharjee and R. Burling made the estimate that two of the groups, Garo and Bodo proper, separated from each other about two thousand years ago. i.e., they were same before that period. And the third division—Koch, branched off from the ancestor of Garo and Bodo even before that time. (Lexico Statistic dating of Boro-Garo linguistic separation' by Bhattacharjee and Burling, 1956). Koch group of languages is believed to include the nearly extinct language of Cooch-Bihar of Bengal, of Rabha and the different division of the Koch of Garo Hills. Dr. R. Burling further observes that the Koch group also includes 'Atong' which is spoken by a group of people of Garo Hills

N.E. Affairs
Annual 1973

An Outline History Of Garo Literature

By Parimal Chandra Kar

generally reckoned by themselves and other Garos to be Garo but whose dialect is not mutually intelligible with Garo proper. Ruga is also another such divergent Garo dialect like Atong, but is under a heavy influence of Garo proper. Like Ruga, even Garaganching is not wholly similar to other Garo dialect but has few features similar to Atong or Koch, and is possibly another of that Koch group. This is however, *subject to further scrutiny.*

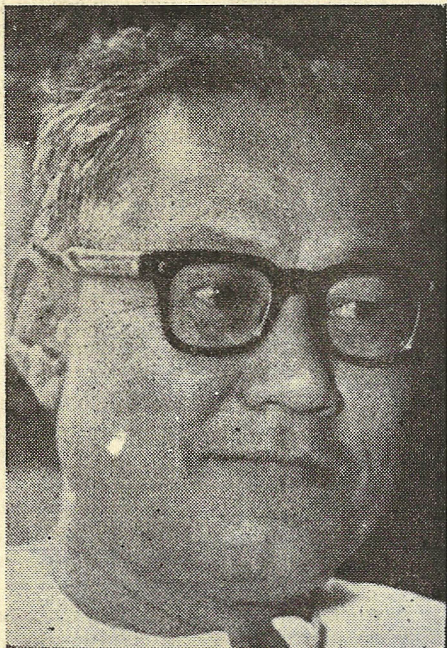
The Garo-group of languages is found in a single compact area of Garo Hills and consists of several dialects, other than Atong, and Ruga, like Akure or Awe, Clisak Dual, (Materi Dual) Ambeng Chibok, Gara Ganching, Matabeng etc. With these may be added another called Megam found along Garo-Khasi Hills border, which seems to represent a fusion of Garo and Khasi though Dr. Grierson classified it as a branch of Khasi language. It is really unintelligible to an ordinary Garo. Dr. R. Burling classified all these dialects under two broad divisions—Abengs, mostly spoken in the western hills and the Achiks spoken else where in the hills except in those areas where

Atong and Ruga are spoken. Of the latter group, Chisak and Awe are less dissimilar to each other and more extensive. They got into the written Garo language and incidentally became the language of the Tura Society. The American Baptist Missionaries came first in contact with the Awe Areas, learnt and developed that dialect into a written language. Most of the Garo literateurs are also from the northern hills and border areas of the district, whereas the southern hills were the last to be annexed to British territory and covered by the Baptist Missionaries.

Earlier Attempts

Earliest attempt at compilation of Garo words is known to have been made by Francis Hamilton in the 6th volume of his work—"Account of the District on zila of Rangpur" in the year 1800. This was not placed at the disposal of the reading public. That attempt was followed by the work of Late Ramnath Chakrabarty who was the Garo Sarbarakar of the British Government posted at Singimari. He was the only local officer in the immediate charge of the then Garohills called Garrowana, under the supervision of late W. J. Williamson who used to administer the area as its Assistant Commissioner (1865-1867), from Goalpara. Sri Chakrabarty compiled "*the vocabulary of the Garo language: English-Bengali-Garo*", for administrative purposes. Rev. Dr. M. Bronson compiled his "*Phrases in English and Garo*" in 1868, which was followed by W. J. Williamson's "*A vocabulary of the Garo and Koch dialects*" in 1869. Rev. T. J. Keith published his "*Dictionary of the Garo language: Garo and Bengali-English*" in 1873. Rev. Ramke Momin produced the best of Dictionaries, "*Bengali-Garo Dictionary*" in 1887. All these had been of great help to many missionaries, Indian and foreign, in translating the books of Christian theology from English or Bengali to Garo language. These works also provided the necessary ground work for the development of Garo language.

But these were of little help to the Garo students of the Damra and Rajasimla Schools, which had been the earliest among the schools for the Garo in Garohills. They needed Primers for learning the language which could not be arranged for till 1868. A sum of Rs.250/- was granted by the Government for the preparation



Assam Chief Minister,
Mr. Sarat Chandra Sinha

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- To Eradicate Unemployment
- To Secure Social Justice
- To Promote Economic Progress
- To Uplift Socially and Economically Backward Classes
- To take over Wholesale Trade in Wheat and Rice

(Issued by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations,
Assam, Shillong)