

SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE BOROS OF ASSAM
A Study of Oral History

ABSTRACT

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BY

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INTRODUCTION

The North East India comprises many tribes with diverse cultures mingling into the mainstream of India's national life. If any one is to see the unity in diversity, it is in this far flung enchanting part of India wherein natural beauty and calm atmosphere far from the maddening crowd and ignoble strife, a composite culture has emanated from the symphony of cultures of different tribes. Though their cultures may be crude in the modern sense of the term, there are charms and beauties reflecting originality and deep pathos of hearts of the tribal people. The rythm of their dances and the rhapsodies of their musics always reverberate the hills and dales of this region. Many reasearchers both Orient and Western, found in this tribal culture the same meaning of human life as found in other civilised cultures. Tribal culture, therefore, is not entranged from other developed cultures of the universe. Indian culture embraces all of them as it seeks a unity in diversity.

Assam, in particular, presented a picture of multi-racial groups of people with diverse historical and cultural background. Of these racial groups, the most important one is the Kirata or Mongoloid, who constitute the third basic element in the formation of the Indian people along with the Negroids, Austrics, Dravidians and Nordics. S.K.Chatterji described Assam as a reservoir of the Kirata or the Mongoloid people in India.¹ The Bodo speakers of the Tibeto-Burman Branch of Tibeto-Chinese Speech family belong to the Mongoloid group and have drawn their tribal elements from the Boros, Dimasas, Garos, Rabha, Koches, Chutiyas, Tripurries, Hojais, Lalungs etc.² forming distinct tribes of North East India by themselves with different cultural traints. Of these tribal group of the Bodo speakers, the Boros are an important section of the population in the plains of Assam whose identity and culture are little known to the outsiders.

1. S.K.Chatterji, The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India, p 9.

2. G.A.Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. III, part II pp 1-17

The Boros, a constituent tribe of the great Bodo race of North East India, who in turn belongs to the Tibeto-Burman Branch of the Tibeto-Chinese Speech Family are an important section of the population of the plains of Assam, and have spread all over the Brahmaputra Valley and the contiguous areas of North Bengal, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland etc. Outside India, They are also found in Mymensingh district of present Bangladesh. The people are known to their neighbours as Kacharis. At places in Assam and Bengal, they are also called Meches by their neighbours. The people, however, call themselves Bodos or Boros. Similarly, those living in North Lakhimpur and Nowgong districts and those in North Cachar district prefer to call themselves Sonowals and Dimasas respectively. The Boros, the Sonowals and the Dimasas who originally belonged to the same tribe, today form distinct tribes by themselves with distinct culture and languages.

AIMS AND SCOPE

The present work deals with the Boros, their social and cultural institutions. The most striking feature of these people is that till this day, they have preserved their own language and traditional socio-religious beliefs and practices. Out of the thirteen outstanding characteristics of the Mongoloid culture as enumerated by W.C.Smith,³ P.C. Bhattacharya observed that the Boros have at present five modified characteristics common to other people, namely, (i) they have habit of betel chewing, (ii) they have aversion to milk as an article of diet, (iii) they have simple weaving loom, (iv) they have a large shield used in war and (v) they often change their residence in isolated regions with crude form of agriculture.⁴ The main thrust of the thesis is, therefore, to explore traditional socio-cultural structure and how the social and cultural practices influenced their life style. The study also throws some light on how the tradition bound folk life is yielding to the forces arising out of close contact with technologically and industrially oriented society. The thesis is intended to give a fair idea of the range and type of society and culture of the people, now in the process of transition. This includes the extent of sanskritisation of the people and the impact of the Christianity on the traditional Boro society and culture. The study also brings within its scope the struggle of the people for the preservation of their identity

3. W.C.Smith, AO Naga tribes of Assam, quoted by P.C.Bhattacharya, Boro Language,

4. P.C.Bhattacharya, A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language, p 18 .

through politics and language. The recent movements for the fulfillment of their political aspirations, adoption of the Boro language as the medium of instructions and its recognition as an associate official language, and the recognition of the Roman script for the Boro language and literature form special feature of this work.

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

No comprehensive work has been done on the subject which gives an impression that this particular group of people of Assam could not draw any attention of the scholars for study. Kachari Buranji edited by S.K.Bhuyan is a compilation of Assam chronicles and primarily deals with the Kachari rajas and their relations with their contemporary powers, such as, the Ahoms, Jaintias, Koches, Tripuris etc. from the earliest time down to the eighteenth century A.D. Similar is the case with a score of History of Assam brought out by a number of historians of repute, among whom special mention may be made of Edward Gait. Sidney Endle's monograph The Kacharis is a source book and a scholarly work and is perhaps first of its kind. It is a study on the cultural life of the people with special reference to the district of Darrang. C.C. Sanyal's monograph The Meches of North Bengal is essentially a work on the Boros of the district of Jalpaiguri of West Bengal. Boro Kocharir Somaj aru Samskriti (Society and Culture of the Boro-Kachari) and Boro-Kocharir Jana Sahitya (Folk Literature of the Boro-Kachari) written in Assamese language by Bhuben Narzi are splendid and portrays traditional cultural institutions of the people. Boro-Kocharir Sangkipta Parishoy by Rup Nath Brahma, and Boro-Kocharir Samskritir Kinchit Abhas by Dhuparam Basumatari highlight the basic cultural elements of the people. Besides, the Boro Sahitya Sabha, a premier literary organisation of the Boros brings out souvenirs in its annual sessions bearing essays on various aspects of the people.

CHOICE OF THE SUB- JECT FOR STUDY

The choice of this subject for study is influenced by a number of factors. First, as noted earlier, not much of the Boros and their culture is known to the outsiders, the reason being that the people so far have not been a subject of intensive study in respect of those brought within the scope of this study. Secondly, the works cited earlier are now clearly outdated. The Boro Society, since the publications of those works, have undergone a great transformation as

a result of its daily contacts with the culturally more advanced people; and hence fresh investigation about the people and their cultural institutions at grass-root level is called for. Thirdly, the present candidate with this particular social and cultural background is deeply interested in this area of intellectual pursuits.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The study gives an insight into the tenacy and make up of this particular socio-cultural unit. The importance of the subject of study can be considered in larger context of Assam and the Assamese culture. Assamese culture is a composite one and the true essence of it can not be understood without a study of history and culture of its constituent elements.

DATA

A high percentage of data used for this thesis comes from folklore. As regards the scope of a folklore, P.Goswami quotes the Folklore Society of London as having put down that the folklore was first coined by W.J.Thomas in 1846, and since then it has established itself as generic term under which are included traditional institutions, art and craftsmanship, customs and rites connected with marriage, inheritance, birth and death, festivals, agriculture, fishing and hunting, cattle rearing, popular beliefs in spirits, fairies, witchcrafts, spells, lucks, omens etc. It also includes within its scope myths and legends, stories, songs and dances, proverbs, rhymes and local traditions. All these fall within the scope of a folklore if they are handed down in folk memories.⁵ The primary source of data on which this work is based are drawn from such folklore. The Boro folk-literature is rich in folk songs and dances, proverbs, rhymes and poems, tales and anecdotes, myths and legends, rituals, novels and dramas, and other local traditions handed down from generation to generation. Of these, some are written down and published and some are simply handed down and preserved in folk memories. The themes and beauties of these folklores reveal their mode of life and attitude towards Nature. In collecting these data, effort has been made to select the most authentic and commonly current in the mouth of rural folks. Care has been taken to analyse and interpret them in proper perspective without being biased, and show how these folklores reflect the true colour and the life-style of the people. Besides, records, proceedings, bulletins issued and preserved by the Plains Tribal Council of Assam and the Bodo Sahitya Sabha supplied useful data. The Secondary source of data

5. P.Goswami, Ballads and Tales of Assam, p 2

The secondary source of data consists of published works, namely, journals, periodicals, news papers, census reports, Gazetteer etc. Work previously done on the subject have been consulted and used for references.

TOOL OF DATA COLLECTION

The tool of data collection consists of interviews with the selected informants having sufficient knowledge and information of the traditional and modern institutions of the people, participant observations, testimonies of individuals, case studies etc.

METHODOLOGY

As the thesis is based on the collection of data from the fields in the Boro concentrated areas, such as Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Darrang and Kamrup districts of Assam, analysis and interpretation of the folklores, and the description of the factual data, the method followed in preparing the thesis is empirical in its study, and analytical and descriptive in treatment.

HYPOTHESIS

A few hypotheses have been formulated in the thesis. For instances, the present investigator has attempted to establish that the names like Pragjyotisha, Kamrupa, Assam, Kamakhya, Umananda, Brahmaputra and those of many other places and rivers of Assam are of Boro formations. An interesting hypothesis formulated in this thesis is author's contention that the Boro mythological Jara Pagla and Vedic Jara are synonymous.

ORGANISATION

On the basis of data, the thesis, has been organised into seven chapters apart from list of contents, preface, introduction, epilogue, appendix and full bibliography.

Chapter 1 opens the thesis with a discussion on the origin of the people. The Boros being one of the splinters of the Bodo race of the Mongoloid group, originated from Bod, now known as Tibet or Tibbot. They migrated from

their original homeland to Assam and Bengal the route followed by them being mountain passes and river courses of North East India. The Boro tradition refers to the Choraikaling Pass on the North of North Lakhimpur district of Assam. This establishes the migration of the Bodo peoples into Assam from the north east. At first, they occupied the foot hills of the northern hills where they grouped themselves into principalities under different Chieftains. Gradually, some of them moved towards the east, some towards the south and some towards the west, and finally spread throughout the Brahmaputra Valley as far as the district of Mymensingh of present Bangladesh. In the Brahmaputra Valley, they established kingdoms at various places at different times with varying fortunes. In this chapter, it has been established that the name Bodo is derived from Bod, Kachari from Khachar at the foot hill of Nepal Mech from Mechi river in Bengal and that Boro is the corruption of Bodo. The Dimasas call themselves by this name as they lived and established kingdoms on the river banks, In the present chapter, it has also been established that the names Asom, Pragjyotisha, Kamrupa, the Brahmaputra, Lohit or Lauhitya, Kamkhya, Umananda and many other names of places, and river of present Assam are the sanskritised forms of original Boro names.

Chapter II discusses the people—their characteristics and material cultures. Their physical features are described as short head, a broad nose, flat and comparatively hairless face, a short but muscular figure and yellow skin. On the basis of this physical characteristics, the Boros are classified into the Mongolian group having the closest range of linguistic affinities with the Garos and the Tripuris.

According to Census of Assam, 1951, the total number of the Boros in Assam stands at 1,70,000; according to Census of 1961 2,40,343 and according to Census of 1971, 6,10,459 souls excluding to 2,570 people returned as Meches. The Boro elites, however, consider these figures erroneous based on faulty enumeration.

As soon as the people descended on the fertile lands of the plains of Assam and Bengal, social formation began among them. They built their houses with locally available materials and skill. In building up their new homestead elsewhere, they were guided by folk beliefs in the matter of selecting the site. First they built store house at the selected site followed by the construction of the main house that usually stands on the north of the homestead in which the head of the family lives. The main house is divided into three compartments, such as, Kofra, okhong and ishing.

They took to shifting cultivation at earliest stage of their agrarian economy in Assam Bengal. Their material needs were few and consisted of few agricultural implements of iron, earthen or metallic utensils and few ornaments for women which they obtained from the Hindu traders in the local markets in exchange of cotton and oil seeds. Rice was their staple food and wheat was not known to them even by name. As they settled permanently at one place, permanent Boro villages grew up followed by larger state formations. They then took to settled agriculture, plough cultivation, cattle rearing, cottage industries-art and crafts with locally available raw materials and skill. The Boro women are best known for weaving their typical traditional costume known as Dokhona, embroidered chaddar, endi chaddar etc. The endi chaddar which they weave out of endi or silk worm cocoons is highly priced even among the Hindu neighbours. They are traditionally in the habit of brewing rice beer called Zou or Zumai, and consume it liberally on all social and religious gatherings as well as in their private houses.

Chapter III dwells on the structure of the society. The organisation of the society is based on the totemic clan system which developed during the early period of social formation. The origin of the clan system is legendary, and the number of the clan at the earliest stage of their social formation was few, which later on rose in staggering number based on occupational designations. The people were bound by rigid totemic clan rules.

The pattern of family was joint family. The society is patriarchal, patrilineal in descent and patrilocal in residence. The patriarchal society has a few matriarchal elements as are evident from the fact that there are cases in which man comes to stay with his wife at latter's residence.

The consanguinal kinship is bilateral in which the kinship can be traced through the father as well as the mother. The Bhagis (patrikins) from the primary kin group while the Kurmas (matrikins) are considered as more affectionates. The affinal kinship is held in great respect and is dependable in time of need. As regards the Boro kinship terminology, it has thirteen terms of address and the same terms are used for reference for the consanguinal kin covering the circle of seven generations, namely, ego's generation, three generation above, and three generations below, the ego's generation. The affinal kinship terminology contains five terms of address and five terms of reference for the kin of wife's/husband's/wife's/husband's own and her/his first ascending generation and for the rest of the affinal kin, the consanguinal kinship terminology is applied. Besides, there is a form of fictional kinship system. The fictional kinship is identical with the consanguinal

kinship, the same terminology being applied although the members are not connected by blood. Again, the consanguinal and affinal kinship terms are conventionally used with all their ramifications among the people of the locality although the persons concerned are not related to each other in any way. This tradition among the Boros is an important factor in moulding a healthy social relations among the people.

Economy is primarily based on agriculture. They cultivated rice, cotton and oil seeds. Their agrarian economy was reinforced by limited trade conditioned by demand and supply, cottage industry-art and crafts based on locally available raw materials and skill. The cottage industry primarily includes rearing of endi worms, spinning and weaving, cane and bamboo works.

Chapter IV highlights the religious beliefs of the people. The traditional religion of the people was Bathou religion in which Bathou Borai and Bathou Buri (Mainao) are worshipped as chief male and female deities respectively. They attribute the creation to Obonglaori, a Supreme Being, who manifested Himself as Bathou Borai and created the Universe. Besides, they worship a starry host of lesser divinities and propitiate them with bloody sacrifices. They also believe in the existence of evil spirits to whom are attributed all sorts of calamities, sickness and misfortunes and propitiate them with sacrifices ward them off. They also worship the spirit of the ancestors and propitiate them with offering of good items on all ceremonial occasions, such as religious and social ceremonies. These vices and abuses of traditional Boro religion and society gave rise to a new and refined cult known as the Brahma Dharma founded by Srimat Panam Hansa Sibanarayan Swami, whose identity is in obscurity, but believed to be hailing from the Western direction of Assam. In this religion, Bramais the Supreme Being and Ultimate Reality, and Hom-Yagya and the recitation of the Gayatri Mantram are all that are required to lead one to Brahma. The name of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma goes down in history of the Brahma movement among the Boros as its preacher. Prior to the emergence of the Brahma Dharma among the Boros, the Christianity had already made a headway among them in different parts of Assam. The earliest Christian Missionary work among the Boros started by the Anglican Mission in the North Bank of the Brahmaputra valley around Tezpur of Darrang district as early as 1836. The church denomination the different sections of the Boro Christians belong to are Lutheran (NELC) Anglican (now known as Church of North India) Baptist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal etc.

Influence of Hinduism on the Boros is remarkable. Coming of Brahmaism, and other Hindu cults, namely, Sanatan Hindu Cult popularly known Sat Sangha founded by a Bengali Saint Anukul Thakur, Saiva Cult of Rita Muni, Sarania Cult etc. testifies the fact.

Chapter V brings into focus the laws and customs. The people have five traditional social laws known as Bads, namely, Agorbad, Daokibad Kaoliabad, which provide the basis of the present social laws incorporated into what is known as Boroni Pandolipi (Social Laws of the Boros). These written social laws are supplemented by the local usages which are at variance from locality to locality.

In marriage, they were clan exogamous as well as clan endogamous depending on tradition of a particular locality as suggested by the folk songs. There is no evidence to suggest that the clan exogamy and clan endogamy of marriage was practised side by side in the same locality in the past. They were, however, tribal endogamous in marriage. Although monogamy from of marriage is the rule, Polygamy is not absent altogether. Marriages by engagement, service, forcible intrusion of the girl and adoption are the traditional and socially recognised systems of marriage. Besides, marriages used to be held by abduction, elopment and purchase with cash which had no social sanction. The proceedings of a normal marriage, viz , marriage by engagement is a lengthy process and consist of formal proposal from boy's side through a go-between and offering of Khongkhon (gift), engagement, settlement of all implications of the marriage including bride price, and marriage ceremony. The traditionalists perform marriage by Hatasuni, according to which the bride cooks rice and curry of pounded rice and serves to the assembled guests beginning with the groom whose food is usually placed on a Hata, meaning a big wooden spoon. The people professing Brahma Dharma perform the marriage ceremony by Hom-Yagya and the recitation of Gayatri Mantram or Brahma Gayatri at the marriage pendah. The Christians perform the marriage according to the Christian Marriage Act. Remarriage of widow is permitted. Polyandry, child marriage and cross-cousin marriage have no place in the society. Divorce by mutual consent is permissible and is affected by tearing a pan leaf by the spouses. High standard of morality and chastity is expected of every man and woman, contravention of which entails a penalty to the offender, such as, fine, physical inflictions, excommunication etc. The child birth takes place at home and the expectant mother is attended on by the village old women who by their standard have necessary ideas of the post natal care for the mother and the baby . In case of complications, village quacks and ojhas are called in. A brief period of about seven days is observed as unclean after the birth. Cremation as well as burial are the forms of disposal of the dead. In case of unnatural death, burial is the only method of disposal. The family property is

inherited by the legal sons and the daughters have no legal right to inheritance. Adoption is a creditable job and the adopted child is as good as legal one and is entitled to a portion of the family property.

Chapter VI introduces to the readers the fairs and festivals, folk songs and dances, games and recreation, bachelor dormitory and polity under the monoclature finer Aspects of Life. There are no festivals that may exclusively be called religious or social in character. The so-called religious festival are social in character due to the mass participation and lavish eating and drinking. Similarly, the so-called social festivals are religious in character due to the worship of deities with sacrifices. The two great traditional festivals are Kherai and Garza. Kherai is annually celebrated en-masse outside the village for about seven days and seven nights. A domestic Kherai may also be performed at a particular household as necessiated by sick man's recovery. Garza is another community worship performed within the village for the purification of the entire village and its community. The Hapas Hatarnai ceremony is performed by a household on entering a new house or a new homestead after having shifted from some other place or village. The Boros celebrate Bihu festivals along with the Hindu neighbours for an obvious reason. cultures-Aryan and non-Aryan. They celebrate primarily two Bihu festivals-Domachi, a post harvest festival and Boisagu, a New Year festival. The celebration of these festivals is marked by eating and drinking, songs and dances accompanied by musical instruments, such as Kham (drum), Shifung (flute) jota (Cymbal), Gongina (Jew's harp), torkka (bamboo split), clapping of hand etc. In Bihu festivals, the cattle and cowherds play important roles.

The people have their own world of songs and dances. The songs are varied in theme and have social and religious purposes. The folk songs consist of marriage songs, love songs, Bihu songs, devotional songs, songs of patriotism and valour etc. The Bihu songs mainly centre round the expression of sentiments of young lovers. The Boros are rich in typical folk dances which include among others Barlampha and Bairati dance during marriage, welcome dance, Bihu dance, peacock dance, butterfly dance etc. Besides, during the community Kherai festivals, doudini (female oracle) performs sixteen different dances, each being dedicated to a particular deity who receives place in the Kherai worship. The songs, dances and the musical instruments go in perfect rythm. These songs and dances which in early days were confined to the rural folks only have now earned nation-wide popularity and acclamation.

As regards the games and recreation, the children play a number of games as a means of recreation, such as, Bata (Stick game), Shilla (kite game), Badua or Dom (water game), Gor, (pebble game), Gila (seed game) etc. The little girls play on the dusty roadside baking cakes of dust with help of curry-bowls, Besides, Amai-Zumai, a kind of hide and seek game is popular among the little girls. The older people find their recreation in gossip congregating together at suitable places, such as, market place, road side vendor, neighbour's house etc. in the evening time after day's hard work and on holidays. The maidens, though do not have any spectacular item of game to play, derive their recreation from the songs which they sing while going to fetch water from the river or stream, bathing in the river, fishing, collecting wild vegetable and fruits in the company of friends.

Bachelor dormitory system, though exists, is not as well organised institution and is simply a device of unmarried men or women of sleeping together at one house belonging to a household. Men and women make separate arrangements in separate households. This sleeping apartment is the centre of recreation of young men and women for a brief period before they retire to bed. Before retiring to bed they indulge in various recreational activities, such as, games, songs and dances, tale telling, playing of musical instruments and various forms of fun and frolic provoking joy and laughter.

The earliest state of the Boros was perhaps established in ancient Kamrupa. A section of them established their sovereignty at Sadiya. From Sadiya they shifted to Dimapur, on the bank of the river Dhansiri and thence to Maibung in North Cachar Hills. The final phase of their state formation was experimented at Khaspur, in the plains of Cachar. The British annexed the Boro Kingdom in three instalments, viz., in 1831, 1834 and 1854.

Each village community is under a village council headed by a Gaobura or Grah (headman) who was in early days known to their Hindu neighbours as Chou-dhuri. In early days he was responsible not only for keeping peace and order, arrests of criminals and the administration of justice, but also to collect the revenues assessed and the payment of the same to the government they were under. The Boro Samaj is a larger organisation constituted by a numbers of villages and act as *an* arbitrator in cases referred to it by the village council. The Boro Mahasanmillan is a state-wide organisation that works for the upliftment of the community in the state. The Boro Mohila Samiti launched by the women in

comparatively recent time devotes itself to the task of welfare of the women in particular and the community in general. Since its inception, the Mohila Samiti is discouraging the traditional practices of accepting the bride price at exorbitant rate, brewing and drinking of rice beer etc. Even since the introduction of the Panchayat system, it has been growing into an important body and law enforcing authority and deals with cases referred to it either by the individual or the village council. It also undertakes community development projects. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha is a premier literary organisation and works for the upliftment of the Boro language, literature and education of the Boro people in their mother tongue. The Plains Tribal Council of Assam is the latest political organisation which works for the political interests of the plains tribals the Boros and the Mishings (Miris) of Assam.

Chapter VII discusses the people in transition under the caption changing trends. It has been observed that the tradition-bound folk life of the Boros is yielding to forces arising out of close contact with technologically and industrially oriented society and thus undergoing a considerable transformation in every aspect of life. In material culture, there is a great change. A well-to-do family no longer depends on locally available materials for building houses and now they have modern houses of brick and C.I. Sheets etc. In dress, they have learnt the use of dhoti, shirt, trouser, coat, shoe etc. Even the farmers in the most interior villages are found to be more decent in their dress. The women and school and college going girls are found to have started wearing saris and mekkela chaddars in addition to their traditional dress Gold plaited ornaments and cosmetics are no longer unknown to them. The traditional joint families are structurally breaking into extended nuclear ones. The marriage which was formerly an exclusive business of the parents in matter of choice of the partner is now a matter of contract between the girl and the boy themselves. The practice of collecting bride price is going out of fashion, and instead the boys are demanding lavish gifts from the girl's parents though not in the form of dowry. The women are gaining positions of importance in the society and are given honourable parts in all social functions. The girls are now given equal opportunities with the boys in matter of education. Apart from agriculture, the family economy is now based on limited trade, cottage industry etc. The educated young men and women have taken employments under the government and supplement to their family income. The people who largely depended on the village quack and ojhas for diagnosing and curing the diseases are now taking the advantage of modern scientific medicines. The society is no longer bound by the

totemic rules and the people of any clan are now free to profess any occupation for their livelihood. The totemic clan system therefor has lost all his totemic significance and stands simply as surname. The people who were strictly clan exogamous or endogamous in marriage are now neither endogamous nor exogamous. Tribal endogamy of marriage is no longer hard and fast rule. A change is noticeable in their religious beliefs. The traditional deities are indentified with the Hindu gods and goddesses, and the traditional rites and practices are being replaced by vedic rites and practices atleast among those who have accepted the Brahma religion. Apart from their own traditional festivals where they worship and propitiate their deities with sacrifices, they are also found taking part in the celebrations of various Hindu festivals, such as Durga puja, Kali puja, Saraswati puja etc. and they do so as much as to call themselves Hindus. The Christianity has introduced further changes among the converts in their way of life. The traditional rites and practices—religious and social and a good number of cultural elements including folk songs and dances not consistent with the Christianity are being discouraged and hence discontinued. The coming of Brahmaism among a section of the Boros has given rise to an elitist class of people and has brought about certain amount of social reformation among the people. The people are now politically and culturally conscious as it is evident from the recent movements for their language, script and administrative autonomy, and the leaders of these movements are primarily drawn from the elitist class.

EPILOGUE

The thesis concludes with an epilogue giving a resume on findings and how the thesis has probed into the historical validity of the oral traditions popular among the Boros regarding their social history. It has brought into focus that the Bors originated from Tibet; that, the Bodo race of which the Boros are one of the splinters derived its name from Bod and that the name Boro is the corruption of Bodo. They migrated to Assam due to mobile character of the ancient tribes and in search of productive and extensive areas of cultivation and settlement, the route followed by them being the mountain passes and the river courses originating from Tibet. They first settled at the foot hills of the northern Hills where they grouped themselves int principalities under different Chieftains. Different sections of them moved in different directions and finally spread and

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settled down in the fertile lands of the Brahmaputra Valley. On the basis of linguistic affinal and folk data, it is found that a large number of tribal groups of North East India and North Bengal are the splinters of the same race.

The Boros have undergone a considerable socio-cultural transformation over the centuries through the process of assimilation with different communities around them, the Hindu influence being the most important factor of social change. Hinduism, however, did not interfere with the basic social structure and the way of life of the Boros. In fact, the tribe has retained its traditional traits, customs and beliefs accomodating a great lot of Indo-Aryan practices. Hinduism actually brought in a benign moderating impact on the social history of the Boros. On the other hand, the Boro culture and language have influenced the Hindu neighbours. The Boro god Bathou Borai or Sibrai has been accepted as one of their gods under the name Siva and have glorified him with epithet SIVAM SATYAM SUNDARAM, and have placed him in the third rank of the Hindu Trinity under the name Mohesvara. The Boro textile designs have captured the imagination and appreciation of the Hindu neighbours many of whom have started using the Boro woven cloths. Besides, they considerably learnt the Boro language which has not only facilitated the commercial transactions but also helped establish a healthy social relations between the Boros and the neighbouring communities.

They took to settled agriculture, plough cultivation and cattle rearing as soon as they descended on the plains of Assam and Bengal. The cottage industry-art and crafts were based on locally available raw materials and skill, and the trade with the neighbouring communities conditioned by demand and supply, reinforced their agrarian economy.

The clan and village leadership developed during the early period of social and larger state formations in Assam and Bengal.

The introduction of the Brahma religion among a section of the people gave rise to an elitist class which has provided leadership in the recent movements for the preservation of their identity through language and administrative autonomy.

