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NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION



EIGHTH SESSION

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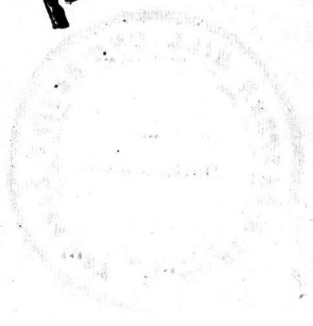
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PREFACE

The eighth session of the North East India History Association at the Kohima College, Kohima was indeed a milestone in the history of the Association. With this we have been able to hold at least one session in all the seven states of the region within eight years of the existence of our association. The session was attended by about one hundred and fifty delegates and sixty research papers were presented and discussed in the three-day session. It is for the first time that an academic gathering of this magnitude was organised in Nagaland. An additional feature of this session was a symposium on "Indian History Congress and Historical Research in the North-East" organised by the Association to mark the Golden Jubilee celebration of the Indian History Congress in which the key paper was presented by Dr. O.P. Kejariwal of the North-Eastern Hill University.

The present volume is the proceedings of the Seventh Annual Session of the North East India History Association held at the Kohima College, Kohima on October 27-29, 1987. Professor Gangmumei Kabui of Manipur University presided over the session which was inaugurated by Shri Shikiho Sema, Minister of Education, Government of Nagaland. Shri H. Gupta, Principal, Kohima College did us a great honour as Local Secretary of the session. Principal Gupta, his colleagues and the students made excellent arrangements for the conference and stay of the delegates. Besides its high academic contents, the delegates shall cherish the fond memory of the session for warmth of the reception extended by the organisers. Our thanks are due to the authorities of the Kohima College and the Government of Nagaland.

I am personally thankful to my colleagues Dr. O.P. Kejariwal, Dr. J.P. Singh, Dr. Milton S. Sangma, Dr. Gautam Sengupta and Dr. D.R. Syiemlieh for the help in editing and publishing the volume.

We are also thankful to the Indian Council of Historical Research for the generous financial assistance extended to the Association.

(J.B. Bhattacharjee)

Shillong General Secretary
The 1 July 1988 North East India History Association

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BORO AND BODO

Bijoy Daimary

The Boro, belonging to Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group of Tibeto-Burman language family constitutes one of the major communities of Assam. 'Bodo' is another nationality name conferred by Brian Hodgson on this community and to the whole group of languages of which their language is a member. Ever since the publication of Brian Hodgson's works, the two terms 'Boro' and 'Bodo' have been parallely used, both by foreign and Indian writers, causing perplexity in the writings pertaining to this community. The absence of a specified pronunciation of this term seemed to have created confusion among the writers of later period. No attempt has so far been made to look into the correctness of these terms. This paper is a humble attempt to study the views advanced by different authors as well as an effort to make a proposition in regard to the choice between these names.

As mentioned above, Brian Hodgson was the author to confer the generic name 'Bodo' on the Boros and other cognate tribes belonging to the same language family, which has however been used both as a generic and nationality name by the authors of later period. Brian Hodgson does not give any basis in support of his adoption of this term. R.M. Nath is one of the authors who has made an attempt to trace the origin of the word 'Bodo'. He has devoted a little portion of his work, published in 1948, in which he ascribes the members of this community to be the emigrants of 'Bod' country of Tibet. In his opinion, the inhabitants of various parts of 'Bod' country were known as the "Boddo-Ficha" or "Boddo-cha" which means children of the 'Bod' country, who were later on known as the 'Boddo' or 'Bodo'.² This theory, thus attempts to establish the application of the term 'Bodo' by tracing a linkage with the Tibetans.

The observation of R.M. Nath has however some drawbacks which invite reassessment of his theory. The word 'Bod' is an English transliteration of the Tibetan word Pö, ö is being pronounced as in German. Pö is the name given to the central part of the country. It is from the word Tö Pö that the term Tibet is said to have been derived. Thus, the word 'Bod' is an English transcription of the word Pö which more or less corresponds to to present day pronunciation and not letter-for-letter representation of the Tibetan spelling. Hence, the term 'Bod' as a word does not mean country in Tibetan language. From this point of view, it is likely that the term 'Bodo' has been originated from the word 'Bod'. Another weak point of his theory is that R.M. Nath does not mention the name of the particular language in which "Boddo-Ficha" or "Boddo-cha" mean children of the 'Bod' country. Such an explanation would otherwise have given credibility to his theory. The presence of such obscurities may make one restrained from accepting his theory without question.

On the other hand, a group of scholars, like G.A. Gierson, Rev. Sidney Endle, J.D. Anderson and others have strong advocacy in favour of the term Bara, Bada, Boro, and Bodo as the nationality name of their community of which the nearest sound may be represented by spelling Boro. G.A. Gierson, in his monumental work "The Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. III, Part II" while dealing with this linguistic group observes, "The generic name Bodo was first applied by Hodgson to this group of languages. The exact sound is better represented by spelling it Bada or Bara. Bodo or Bara is the name by which the Mech or Mes and Kacharis call themselves."⁴ Rev. Sidney Endle who came to Assam in 1864, worked among the Boros since 1869, is another authority who has done extensive study

on this community. His introductory chapter, incorporated in the Census Report of 1881, notes about the amount of greatness they attach to the words Bara or Borophisa by which they call themselves (children of Bara).⁵ The same author, in his monograph 'The Kacharis' published in 1911, observes that the people of this community were known as the Kacharis to others and Boro to themselves.⁶ Reference should also be made to J.D. Anderson who in his introductory chapter to Endle's above mentioned monographs writes, "Their name for their race is Boro or Bodo (the ϕ has the sound of the English O as in 'Hot')." Despite differences in spelling, the basis of their argument is that the generic name of this linguistic group or the nationality name of the community under study should be Bada, Bara or Bodo, Boro but not Bodo. In their opinion, a dotted 'D' (D) or a dotted 'R' (R) may be used in order to produce the exact sound of its Indian counterpart.

Absence of a written literature of ancient time has greatly added to the acuteness of the controversy. Though the Boros were once dominant rulers of various parts of Assam, they have left no written records which otherwise would have provided some scopes to look into the matter. The Ahom Buranjis which deals primarily with the history of the Ahoms mention this community as Kacharis - a name that was given to them by the Hindus. It is only the first enquirers to testify that the members of this community took no little pride in calling themselves Bara or Baraphisa (children of the Baras), a name by which they call themselves to this date. A solution to this controversy may perhaps be found by relying on the existing use of this term. The validity of the Term Boro as the generic and nationality name may be made more concrete by referring to another closely allied Tippera or Tipura community who call themselves 'Borok', meaning 'men' - 'K' being a suffix used in almost

all the nouns in this language. In Boro language too, the logical meaning of the term Boro tends to be 'men'. For, in the sight of the Boros they only are 'men', others are not. This ideas are more apparent in the olden days, though still prevalent in the interior villages of this community.

It is likely that the term 'Bodo' adopted by Brian Hodgson is an English transliteration of the word Boro. The Britishers are often seen using the letter D when an Indian word R with strong sound is transcribed in their language. A few of such examples may be seen in words Biri, Kannara and Gauram which are written as Bidi, Kannada and Gauda in English. The term Bodo may be the outcome of the same phenomenon. The Grierson's opinion, Bodo is only a mispronunciation of the word Baro.

The above discussion on the views of different scholars may make one more inclined to advocate Boro as the generic and nationality name of the community under study. The prevailing use of the term as the nationality name of this community stands to be an evidence. The use of the term 'Borok' as the nationality name of the closely allied Tippera or Tipura community is another glaring evidence to justify the validity of the term. Contrarily, Hodgson's application of 'Bodo' and later theorisation of R.M. Nath suffers obscurities. Hodgson himself does not give any explanation or argument in support of his adoption of the term, while R.M. Nath's theory appears to be erroneous from the orthographic point of view.

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1. G.A. Grierson, *The Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. III, Pt. II, (Delhi, 1903), p.1.
2. R.M. Nath, *The Background of Assamese Culture*, (Gauhati, 1948), pp.6-16.

3. R.A. Stein, **Tibetan Civilization**, (London, 1972), pp.16-17.
4. G.A. Grierson, **Op.cit.**
5. S. Endle, "Notes on the Kacharis" (Para 118) incorporated in the Census Report of 1881 as reproduced in the Census of India, 1961, Vol. 2, Assam, Part V-A, p.10.
6. Sidney Endle, **The Kacharis**, (London, 1911), p. 4.
7. J.D. Anderson, "Introduction" to S. Endle's **The Kacharis etc.**
8. Grierson, **Op.cit.**
9. **Ibid.**, Vol. I, Part I (Introductory), p. 63.