

RACE AND SETTLEMENT OF BODOS

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ABSTRACT:

The Bodo tribe is the prominent and oldest tribal groups in North East India who are believed to be one of the earliest inhabitants in Assam. They have powerful kingdom at Dimapur, Maibong and Khashpur. They belong to Indo-Mongoloid people who were inhabited in the Brahmaputra valley, North Bengal as well as East Bengal. The Bodos have been maintaining their distinctive cultural traditions customs, belief, social system, dresses, ornaments, songs, music, etc. and could not keep any record of their history due to the lack of literate forefathers in early days. But on the basis of their oral history, folk tales, folk songs, etc. as they have rich folktales, myths, legends, songs, proverbs, culture and tradition, the history of the Bodos may be reconstructed.

Keywords: Inhabitants, Maibong, Khashpur, Brahmaputra valley, Customs, Folktales.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the study is to highlight and study the historical background of the Bodos associated with their settlement. With the sole objective of understanding the migration and settlement has been developed in this paper.

METHODOLOGY:

The methodology adopted in this paper is inter-disciplinary approach which included consulting number of written sources as well as interview method. The people who have knowledge about the history of the Bodos and various associated with settlement. The technique of anthropological data collection, participants, interview method are adopted. The collection of data has been analyzed both quantitatively and the qualitatively wherever necessary.

INTRODUCTION:

The prominent and oldest tribal groups in North East India who are believed to be one of the earliest inhabitants in Assam are the Bodo tribe. They have powerful kingdom at Dimapur, Maibong and Khashpur. (Bhattacharya, 1997: p. 16.) In the words of S. K. Chatterji, the Bodos belong to Indo-Mongoloid people who were inhabited in the Brahmaputra valley, North Bengal as well as East Bengal. (Chatterji, 2007: pp. 45-46.) In different historical period, they entered into contact with other races which led to cultural assimilation and racial fusion. (*Ibid.* p. 13.) They have their home in different parts of North East India mainly in Assam with their typical cultural and linguistic traits. B. K. Baruah also advocated that the Bodos are most important tribal group of the Tibeto-Burman race which had formed the many important section of the non-Aryan peoples in the Brahmaputra valley. (Baruah, 2003: p. 7.) There is no class division in the society of Mongoloid races from past to till today which is totally different from the Hindu society. The Indo-Mongoloid Bodos are known in varied name in different places. The Bodos who are inhabited in the region between the Sonkos River

and the Brahmaputra River are known as Meches, Kacharis in the Kachari hills, Dimasa in Dimapur, Tripuri or Kok Borok in Tripura and so on. (Mochahary, 2001: p. 5.)

ANALYSIS:

Since the ancient days, the Bodos have been maintaining their distinctive cultural traditions customs, belief, social system, dresses, ornaments, songs, music, etc. The Bodos could not keep any record of their history due to the lack of literate forefathers in early days. But on the basis of their oral history, folk tales, folk songs, etc. as they have rich folktales, myths, legends, songs, proverbs, culture and tradition, the history of the Bodos may be reconstructed. *Bathou* is the traditional religion of the Bodos. However, due to the cultural contact with other Indian societies and other parts of the worlds, many of the Bodos had been converted into the other religion like Hinduism, Christianity, etc. The Bodos have also well-established social and cultural system with self-sufficient economy. For the survivable of the Bodo community, the language and literature of the Bodos are only the means for existence. (Basumatary, 2014: p. 6.)

To signify the greater Bodo races as well as the particular indo-Mongoloid branch, they used the Bodo word. The physical structures of the Bodos are yellowish complexion, prominent cheek, bones and snub nose. They are mainly settling down in Sikkim, North Bengal, Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Ladhak of Kashmir etc. (Mondal, 2011: p. 4.)

In upper Assam the Bodos are recognized as Sonowal or Thengal Kachari but Dimasas in North Cachar Hill. The Ahoms called Dimasa as Timasa which is clearly a corruption of Dimasa. Therefore, the name must have been allotted to them when they ruled over the Dhansiri Valleys. (Acharayya, 1980: cf.) However, in lower Assam, the Bodos are popularly known as Bodo or Boro Kachari. In North Bengal and in the lower ranges of the Himalaya, the Bodos are known as *Meches*. However, the origin of the generic term *Mech* is a controversial matter. Anderson stated that the name *Mech* was given to the Bodos of North Bengal. (Endle, 1911: p. xv, introduction.) The renowned scholars like G.A. Grierson, (Grierson, 1903: p. 1.) B. K. Baruah, (Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 7.) Rev. Sydney Endle, (Endle, *op. cit.*, p. xv, introduction.) Dr. Kameswar Brahma (Brahma, 2015: p. 4.) and Bhaben Narzi (Narzi, 2006: p. 15.) are also supported that the word *Mech* has been derived from the Sanskrit word *Mlecha*. According to Some scholars, the Bodos are known as *Mech* from the *Mechi* River because they settled on the North bank of the river *Mechi* in Nepal after migration from different places of China and Tibet. From the above description it may be noted that the Bodos living by the bank of the river *Mechi* flowing through Nepal are called themselves as *Mech* or *Meche*. The Bodos who are living to the west of the present Kamrup district or in and around Kamrup and Goalpara district of Assam are known as Boro. Whatever name they may be called by their neighbours, wherever they live, they are the same people and everywhere they speak the same language with few local peculiarities.

In 1847 Brian H. Hodgson first time used the generic term Bodo in his book entitled Essays on the Koch as an ethnographical term to a group of languages to refer the *Meches* of Darjeeling District. (Hodgson, 1847: p. lff.) It is a recent origin which was for the by this statement was confirmed by G. A. Grierson in the sense of generic name. (Grierson, *op. cit.*, p. 1.) But frequently it is used as a generic name of all the Tibeto-Burman speaking people of the Sino-Tibeto origin. The sub-tribe of the Bodos

are regarded as the Koc, the Kachari, the Lalung, the Demacha, the Garo, the Rabha, the Tipra, the Chutiya, the Maran and other tribes of the Mongoloid features. Rev. Sydney Endle advocated that 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. Therefore, it is stated that in feature and general appearance, the Bodos are approximate very closely to the Mongolian type and this would seem to point to Tibet and China as the original home of the race. (Endle, *op. cit.*, p. 3.)

To supply a little hint on the origin of man in their beliefs and thoughts the Bodos have been maintaining the tradition of conservative knowledge of the mythical, folklores and folktales. For the evolution of man, the beliefs and thought Bodo's highlighted on the role of the birds, egg and fish. From the belief, it can be understood that how the unicellular cell progressed through different multi cellular junctures to Homo sapiens to which the modern man belong. The scientific perspective behind the folktales and folklores of the Bodos can be interpreted as there was long evolutionary process of life leading to man, which clearly alludes to the ecological concept of the Bodos in ancient days. It is said that *Aham Guru*, who is regarded as the creator of the universe by the Bodos, ordered men to go to the earth in order to keep ecological symmetry with other living beings like ants, flies, animal, trees, etc. (Devi, 1998: p. 67.) This illustrates has a clear indication of having some philosophical knowledge of the Bodos on the evolutionary theory of creatures including the human being. The origin of the world, birds and animals, mankind, vegetation and the phenomena of nature have been elucidated through myths which have been orally handed down from generation to generation and explained the phenomena of nature through myth by the Bodos. While touching on the origin of the Bodos this view on the origin of man is agreed by many Bodo scholars like Dr. Kameswar Brahma, Dr. Anil Boro, Medini Choudhury, Premalata Devi and Kumud Ranjan Basumatary. (Basumatary, 2000: pp. 23-26.)

The Bodos are the race of the Mongolian people who were known to be the inhabitants of a country to the north of the Himalaya, China and Tibet. This land is known as Bod which is supposed to mean a homeland. Edwin Atkinson stated that Bod country was included in central Tibet and Bodpa which the Tibetan called as Bodyaut. (Atkinson, 1973: p. 24.) Lior Bod, Kur Bod etc. were also mentioned as a part of Bod country in the works of other scholars. (Mushahary, 1983: p. 43.) It is said that Bodpa is derived from the word Bod and Bodo came after the Bod country. (Nath, 1978: p. 15.) As a result, the term Bodo/Bodho/Boddo/Boro is supposed to be creating from the name Bod. The Bod country may be identified with the Bodo-Ficha or Bodocha or Bodosa which means children of the Bodo country. Boro Phica (children of the Boros) came from Hbrug-bu-tsa, a Tibetan word signifying children of the people living in the plantless regions. (Wolfenden, 1929: pp. 581-583.) In the later period, they are called as Boddo/Bodo/Boro. (Singh, 1986: p. 48.) Mohini Mohan Brahma writes that the Bodo word seems to be invented from the word Borok of Tipperah language which means 'Man' who speech the Bodo. (Brahma, 1954: p. 7.)

Ramayana and Mahabharata indicated that the Indo-Mongoloid people who lived in the Eastern and North Eastern India during the epic age of were known as Kirata. S. K. Chatterji has recognized the Tibeto-Burman Mongoloid people who are inhabited in the southern slopes of Eastern Himalayas in Eastern India with the Kiratas of ancient India. (Chatterji, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-38.)

Gangmumei Kabui mentioned that the present Bodo-Kachari, tribes of Assam the Nagas, the Kukis and the Meiteis of the eastern hills are also the descendent of the Kiratas. (Kabui, 1991: p. 17.)

S. K. Chatterji identified that the Kiratas of ancient India with the Tibeto-Burman Mongoloid and also holds that they might have peopled in the southern slopes of Eastern Himalayas in Eastern India around the beginning of first millennium before Christ. (Chatterji, *op. cit.*, p. 22.) The similarity of the Bodos with the Kiratas also shows about as the ancestor of the Bodo in Ancient Indian literature. (Singh, 1990: pp. 112-113.) Many of the scholars have been supported the identification of the Bodos with the Kiratas. (*Ibid*, p. 45.) It has been agreed that the generic word Kirata indicates the people belonging to Mongoloid origin who are inhabited in the Indian sub-continent and the Bodos are considered to be one of the subdivisions of the greater Kirata group. (*Ibid*.) It is also stated that the Bodos and other similar tribes who are living within and outside Assam are considered to be the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group and great stock of Mongoloid race. They are identical with the Kirata of the epic era. The renowned scholars like B. K. Kakati, P. C. Bhattacharya and Bhaben Narzi also supported on the Kirata origin of the Bodos. Ancient Sanskrit literature confirmed that the Indo-Mongoloids or Kacharis or Bodos were the Kiratas and they were exterior the Hindu Varna fold. Bakul Chandra stated the Bodos are offspring of the Mongoloid origin Kiratas and Cinas. (Chatterji, *op. cit.*, p. 26.)

The origin of the word Kirata is a controversial matter. However, they have been mentioned as non-Aryan tribes of the Mongoloid origin of the Himalayas and North East India who had connection with the Chinese, Bhotas or the Tibetans and other Mongoloid sections. (Kakati, *op. cit.*, p. 42.) Kaksaka which indicate the people of the frontier area is the derivative form of the word Kirata. The term Kirata probably derived from the word Cirata or Cirayita which is known as Kirata-tikha Prakrt= Cilaaitta or Ciraa-tta, a very bitter plant that grown in the lower region of Himalaya which is used for medicinal purposes by the non-Aryan people.

The word Kirata is mentioned in the Yajurveda, namely Sukla-Yajurveda and Atharvaveda (*Atharva Veda*, X 4.14.) for the first time. According to Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, "Kiratas were the people living in the caves and mountains in the Eastern Himalaya region and of low status who were outside the Aryan fold during the Vedic age." The Ramayana also explains that the residence of the Kiratas were in the Eastern region of India. This information is also found in some of the Puranas addressing the Kiratas as the settler in the hills of Eastern India. Kiratas are also mentioned in Samhitas as a people dwelling in the cave of mountains. From the viewed, it is clearly pointed out that the Kiratas have been settling in this land since ancient time.

Periplus who identified Kiratas as the dwellers in the hills of the Assam and Burma is spelt the Kirata as Kirrhadae. Ptolemy stated that the Kirrhada (Kirata) also lived in Tripura, Sylhet and Cachar. E. T. Dalton specified that the Kiratas of South-East Bengal and Western Assam belonged to the Mongolian race. (Dalton, 1872: p. 103f.)

When Fa Hien visited India during the time of the Guptas he supplied some hints of the Mongoloid people so called Kiratas. Thomas Walter and S. Beal also specified that Hiuen Tsang, another Chinese pilgrim who came to India during the time of Harsha Vardhana left some valuable clue of the hill people of Assam who were considered as Mongoloid Kiratas with dark yellow

complexion. As a result, it can be said that the tribal people of North East India who had yellow complexion could be identified with the Kiratas of ancient India. (Beal, 1969: Vol- II, p. 196.)

It is found that the Kiratas of Eastern region had golden complexions, extraordinary strength, nomadic, cannibals and fair looking with sharp pointed hair as per the literary evidence. (Sasao, pp. 201, 299-303.) These people were found in the forest of the Assam, caves and swampy areas, sea coast extending up to the East Bengal and both sides of the Lohita River since the early days.

The Indo Mongoloid people of Mongoloid features of North East India are believed to have been migrated from different places of South East Asia, Tibet, Burma, etc. It has been mentioned by many scholars who worked on history, anthropology, sociology, linguistic, archaeology, etc. that the people of North East India who belonged to Mongoloid stock including the Bodos had their origin in South East Asian region and China. Ancient India literature and classical Greek and Latin literatures have also mentioned the tribes of North East India as Kiratas. As a result, the Bodos of North East India are genuine to have been indicated as the offspring of ancient Kiratas. On the basis of the available sources it may draw a possible conclusion that the Bodos who's another name is Kachari are absolutely equivalent to the Kiratas of ancient India. According to Martin Montgomery, the proper name of the Kachari is Bodo. (Montgomery, 1976: pp. 1, 459.) However, the present Bodo neither called themselves as the Kachari nor the Kirata but they are represented themselves as the Bodo or Boro or Bodo-Fisha, the people who speak Sino-Tibetan Bodo language. (Boro, *op. cit.*, p. 5.)

The primitive homeland of the Bodos who belonged to Mongoloid race was surely and certainly to be the upper Hoang-Ho region of China. They started moving towards the south-west way to India. The human movement became a general phenomenon which is found from various sources and eyewitness since pre-historical times. First they settled in the territory of South-Eastern Himalayas to reach India before reaching India. They marched towards the Brahmaputra valley as well as Koch Behar, Garo Hills, Cachar and Tripura from southern Himalayas in around 8th century AD. In around 7th century AD, most probably the Bodos might have arrived Lhasa. The areas to the Southern Himalayas are called as Bod or Pot by Tibetan which means land of the snows. W. I. Singh notified that the word Bodo is derived from Tibetan term Bod or Pot which means areas to the southern Himalaya. The early Christian era can be considered as the arrival period of Bodos in the Sub-Himalayan region. Before Bodos, Pa a similar tribe reached India through a different route. Scholars like S. L. Barua and R. C. Mazumder stated that in around 6th century AD, a tribe known as Mon also came to eastern Himalaya from upper Hoang-Ho which is regarded as subsequently immigrants in that region. This tribe was called Mon-Pa by the Tibetan who settled in the areas of South-Eastern lower Himalayas. (Barua, 2002: p. 235.)

The migration of Bodos to the Brahmaputra valley was most probably be around 8th century AD. However, this statement is needed further examination and proper treatment with the consultation of the available sources. Many of the historians have regarded the Bodos as the descendants of the Kiratas in ancient India. As a result, the migrations of the Bodos in 8th century AD is a matter of the question and debatable and cannot be considered as totally accurate as we have noticed that Mongoloid tribes of North East India

including the Bodos are believed to be the descendent of ancient Kiratas who were in India right from the Vedic period or even before that. They were driven away from Sibsagar to westward by Pongs for which they had to settle in north Cachar hills and Cachar where they were known as Kacharis. The Bodos who have migrated towards the South to Tripura were assigned the name Tripuris or Kok-Borok in the early part of the 16th century AD. The arrival of the Bodos to Tripura in the 16th century AD viewed of W.I. Singh may also be necessitated to be re-examined on the ground that both the Kacharis and the Tripuris are the people of same stock who used the word Pa (father) and Ma (mother) to call their parents. Therefore, it can be said that Kacharis and Tripuris are the same stock. For father and mother they also used the word Pha and Ma like the Bodo. The Tripura kings and queens end with the word Pha and Ma respectively. From the point of view it clearly shows that the Tripuri and Kachari have the same origin. In ancient time Tripura was known as Kirata-Desha for the fact that Adi Dharmapha nineteenth generation upwards of Chang-Thun-Pha became the king of Tripura in 64 Tipperah Era in 654 AD who was also known as Dungurpha or Hari Roy (640-670) A.D. (Singh, 2009: p. 137.)

According to Rev. Sidney Endle, “the Kacharis were the original autochthonous of Assam.” Anderson have described that the Bodos were the aborigines of the Brahmaputra valley in the introduction part of the Sidney Endle’s book of *The Kacharis*. Like the other tribes of the ancient India, the Kiratas have been depicted as aborigines who have been inhabited originally in the Gangatic plains in Madhya-desha, in the wild tracts on the banks of different rivers and their tributaries of the Kailasa Mountain near the lake of Manasorovara and its adjoining areas. In many ancient literary texts, they have also been portrayed as the dwellers of mountain regions and the forest of the Northern and Eastern Himalayan border land, Vindhya region and many parts of the North-Western, Central and Western India as well as Deccan in ancient time. However, they have been look upon as immigrants. The impression of immigrants on them may lead to wrong notion as the fact remains that they were by and large autochthonous. These statements give evidence that the Bodos evolved on the very soil of Assam.

CONCLUSION:

The Bodos who belonged to the Indo-Mongoloid race have their own language like other tribes of the world. They speak Tibeto-Burman language of the western branch of Baric division of the Sino-Tibetan family. (Singh, 2008: p. 67.) Linguistically this language may be classified into two groups- (i) Tibeto-Burman and (ii) Siamese-Chinese. The Tibeto- Burman includes central Tibetan speech, Eastern Tibetan, Sikkimese Tibetan, and Bhutanese. The Himalayan groups of Tibetan- Barman speeches consist of Newari, Magar, Gurung, Lepsa, and Sunwari. The North Assam groups of Tibeto- Burman speeches comprise- Aka, Miri, Abor, Dafla and Mishmi. The Assam Burmese group Tibeto- Burman speech of North and East Bangal, Assam and Burma contain- The Bodo speeches – the Bodo, Mech, Rabha, Garo, Kachari, and Tipra (Tripura), the various Naga dialects; the Various Kukichin dialects, the Kachin- Lolo group of northern Burma and Burmese. The Siamese- Chinese branch of Sino- Tibetan group includes various dialects like Dai or Thai, Lao, Shan and Ahom of Assam. (Chatterji, *op. cit.*, p. 21.)

Bodo language is recognized as medium of instruction in schools of Bodo populated areas and it is extended up to the University level later on in 1963 AD. In 2003 AD Bodo languages has included in the eight schedules in the constitution of India. (Siiger, 2015: p. 1.)

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