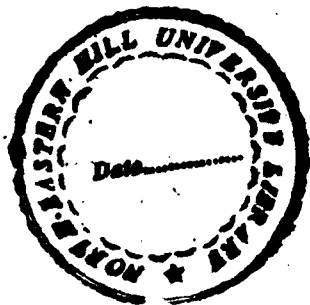


**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**



**FOURTH SESSION
BARAPANI, 1983**

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Edited & Published by
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On behalf of
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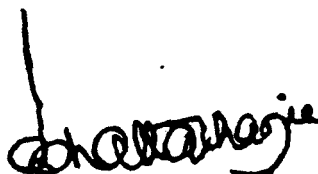
PREFACE

It is my pleasure to introduce the Proceedings of the Fourth Session of the North East India History Association held at the Union Christian College, Barapani on December 19-21, 1983. Dr. S. K. Barpujari, Senior Research Fellow, Indian Council of Historical Research and formerly Reader in History, Gauhati University, presided over the Session which was inaugurated by Dr. B.D. Sharma, Vice-Chancellor, North-Eastern Hill University. Shri S. K. Austin John, Principal, Union Christian College did us a great honour as Local Secretary for the Session.

We are grateful to the authorities of the Union Christian College and the members of its History faculty for inviting the Session and the generous hospitality offered to the delegates. It was indeed an experiment to hold a session in a college, which has been a privilege of the Universities for similar organisations. The success of the session has greatly inspired the sister institutions and the organisers for the future. The entire college community, including the teachers, students and the residents of the beautiful campus have contributed to this grand success.

This volume contains papers that were presented at the Barapani Session. The summaries received before 30 November 1983 were published in the Abstracts of Papers volume which was distributed at the Session. I am thankful to the members of the editorial committee, Mr. Shyamadas Bhattacharyya, Dr. G. P. Singh and Dr. Milton S. Sangma for their help in editing the papers.

It is gratifying to note that the Proceedings volumes of our earlier sessions have been well received in the academic circles, and I am confident the readers shall find considerable new materials and fresh approaches for studies in the History of North East India in this volume also.



Shillong

The 25 October, 1984

(J. B. Bhattacharjee)

General Secretary

North East India History Association

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The Boros : Their Origin, Migration and Settlement in Assam

R. N. Moqahary

The Boros, Bodos, Boro-Kacharis, Plain-Kacharis or Meches, by whatever names one may choose to call them are the same people and form a sub-section of the Bodo-Naga section under the Assam-Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan speech family.¹ Today, they constitute an important section of the population of the plains of Assam, and are called by different names at different places of North-East India. In the Brahmaputra valley proper, the people call themselves *Bodos* or *Boros*; in Goalpara district* of Assam and Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal, they are called '*Mech*' by their neighbours while those living in, and to the east of, Kamrup** are called as '*Kachari*', pronounced as *Kosari*.²

By whatever name they may be called by their neighbours and wherever they may live, they are the same people and everywhere they speak the same language with few local peculiarities, and the people very seldom call themselves by any name other than *Boro* or *Bodo*. Hence, so far the people are concerned, the term '*Mech*' as their tribal name is obsolete now. Martin Montgomery asserts that the proper name of the '*Kacharis*' is '*Bodo*'.[†]

It is important to note here whether the actual name of the people under our review is *Boro* or *Bodo*. It is undoubtedly *Boro* meaning 'great people' and not *Bodo*, by which many of the people themselves call. It is clearly the misuse of the term '*Bodo*', the name applied to the whole race consisting of many tribes of North East India, and the Boros are one of them. Grierson contends that the term *Boro* is mispronounced as *Bodo*, the name given to the whole group of languages of the Tibeto-Burman family.³

* Goalpara District has been split into Goalpara, Dhubri and Kokrajhar districts.

** Kamrup district has been bifurcated into Kamrup and BARPETA districts, in 1983 by the Govt. Of Assam.

† M. Mountgomery, Eastern India, Vol. V, P. 1.

Before we proceed further, it is necessary to make it clear whether the Boros evolved on the very soil of Assam or came from elsewhere outside. S. K. Chatterji asserts that so far it has not been proved that any kind of man evolved on the soil of India.⁴ This means that all men in India came from outside. This also means that the *Boros* too came to Assam from outside.

Origin of the Bodos

As regards the origin of the *Bodos*, opinion differs, R. M. Nath holds that the group of immigrants who followed the Austriacs to North East India were from the north of the Himalayas and North West China. This country was known as *Bod*, meaning land of snow, and a section of its inhabitants were known as the *Bodosas*, meaning children of Bod country. These *Bodosas* were subsequently known simply as *Bodos*.⁵ Grierson writes that the Tibetans in early days called their country *Bodyut*, their language *Bodskat* and a Tibetan person a *Bodpa*.⁶ John Bowle refers to a Tibetan plateau which its inhabitants called *Bod*.⁷ Edwin Atkinson also mentions *Bod* country comprising central Tibet and *Bodpa*, meaning a Tibetan person of *Bod* country.⁸ The above informations suggest that *Bodpas* derived their name from *Bod*. It, therefore, follows that the *Bodos* who were also the inhabitants of *Bod* country derived their name from *Bod*.

Some connect the origin of the name *Bodo* with that of Lord Buddha. From India, Buddhism spread into different parts of the world; viz. Korea, Japan, China, Bhutan, Mongolia etc.⁹ Austin Waddel assigns the spread of Buddhism in Tibet to about 640 A. D.¹⁰ It is suggested that many inhabitants, in fact a great majority of them, accepted Buddhism and the *Bodosas* were no exception, and having accepted the Buddhism, assumed the name *Buidofisa* or *Buddosa*, which was in course of time corrupted into *Bodosas* or *Bodos*.¹¹ This is improbable on some valid grounds. Even if we accept this theory for the moment, question arises as to by what name they were known before the Buddhism spread into *Bod* or Tibet. There seems to be no answer to it. The traditional religion of the Boros in Assam is *Bathouism* and not Buddhism. The supreme God they traditionally worship is Bathou-Borai, often identified with Hindu God Shiva, represented by *Siju* (*Euphorbia splendens*) installed at the courtyard of the homestead of each worshipper.¹² This suggests that the Boros came to Assam with their own traditional religion and not as Buddhists. Moreover, as we have noted earlier, the Buddhism spread into Tibet around 7th century A.D., which is much after the migration of the Boros to

Assam. The Bodos are believed to have been followed to Assam by the Aryans whose arrival in this land has been approximately assigned to 1500 B.C. The Boros therefore must have come to Assam around 3000 B.C. to 2500 B.C. This date precedes even the birth of Lord Buddha. It is, therefore, futile to suggest a hypothesis that the Bodos derived their name from that of Buddha and the hypothesis that they derived their name from *Bod* is more tenable.

Whatever may be the truth, it was Bryan Hodgson who first gave this generic name to a group of Tibeto-Burman branch of the Tibeto-Chinese speech family, in which Grierson includes the Kacharis (Boros and Dimasas), Koches, Garos, Rabhas, Chutiyas, Tipperas, Hojais, Lalungs and other allied tribes of North East India.¹³

The name Boro

We have earlier referred to the Bodos as having derived their name from *Bod* which was their original homeland. Now the question arises as to how the name *Boro* originated. R. M. Nath writes that some section of the Bodo tribes derived their tribal name from that of particular parts of the *Bod* country whence they migrated at a later date. For instance, he refers to the Koches and the Meches as having derived their tribal names from those of Kucha and Mecha areas within the *Bod* country and retained these names as their tribal names after they had migrated to Assam.¹⁴ If this theory is relied upon, it appears that this particular section of the population of *Bod* country preferred to retain their national name *Bodo* as their tribal name after they had migrated to Assam and the name *Bodo* was perhaps spelt as *Boro*. Grierson holds that the sound of *Bodo* can better be represented by spelling it as *Bada* or *Bara*¹⁵ pronounced as *Boro*. Again we have references to the terms *Bara-fisa*, meaning children of the Baras and the term *Bara-fisa* must have been subsequently termed simply as *Bara* pronounced as *Boro*. Dr. P. C. Bhattacharya writes that like other tribal names in Assam, the name *Bara* perhaps meant *man* or a *male member* of the tribe. For instance, in Tripuri language, *Barak* or *Borok* means a *man*. He again refers to S. N. Wolfenden as having contended that the Tibetan *Brog* meaning 'steppes' is the root source of the origin of the name *Boro*. He writes that *Brogpa* means 'inhabitants of steppes' in the Tibetan language and equated the term *Bara-fisa* to *Brog-bu-tsa* meaning the "the descendants of the steppes".¹⁶ The term *Bara-fisa* can quite certainly be reconstructed from Tibetan *Brog-bu-tsa* which must have subsequently underwent a transformation into *Brogsa* leading to corresponding

transformation of *Bara-fisa* into Borosa, and then into Boro.

Dr. P. C. Bhattacharya refers to a Boro legend which depicts the origin of the Boros directly from *Shib-Borai* or *Shri-Borai*, often identified with Hindu god Siva.¹⁷ The tradition goes that Ahami Guru or Anan-Binan Gosai¹⁸ and also known as Obonglaore, the infinite God, became tired of His formless (Nirakar) existence and so he desired to appear and live in the universe in the form of flesh and blood. Accordingly, He shaped Himself in human form and appeared in the atmosphere of the Universe with his five organs of knowledge and five organs of action. The five organs of action consist of Akai (hand), Ating (foot), Kuga (mouth), Kigra (anus) and Hasugra (urinary track), and the five organs of knowledge consist of Koma (ear), Gontong (nose), Megon (eye), Shalai (tongue) and Bigur (skin). The heavenly voice connected with this great event as found in the Boro legend goes thus :

Laoba laosum

Kaoba Kaosum

Ada Gosom

*Doiao Barsom.*¹⁹

Rendering : *Lao* stands for organs of knowledge, and *Ba* means five. *Laoba Laosum*, therefore, refers to five organs of Knowledge. Similarly, *Kao* means parts or pieces and *Ba* means five. *Kaoba Kaosum*, therefore, means five parts of the body or five organs of action. *Ada* literally means elder brother, but suggests a deeper meaning, i.e., first, noblest ; *Gosom* means heart ; *Doiao* means into the river and *Barsom* means jump.

The complete meaning of the above expression, therefore, goes thus : Omnipotent God appeared into this world in the form of man with all his human characteristics, but filled with the noblest or holiest heart, to live a worldly life. The Omnipotent God after having appeared as the first man, named himself as *Shib-Borai* or *Shri-Borai*. He is also known as *Jiw Boarai* or *Siw Borai*. *Jiw* or *Siw* means 'soul' or 'life', and *Borai* means 'old' in wisdom. It is believed that the name *Shib* or *Jiw* or *Siw* was later Sanskritised into *Siva*. This proposition appears to be tenable in view of the significant phonetic similarity between *Shib*, *Siw* or *Jiw* and *Siv*. *Shri-Borai* created his wife *Shri-Buri* from his right hand flesh and then the universe. After having created the universe, he created his first man, and called him *Mon-sin-sin*, meaning 'the ripest of all in knowledge and wisdom'. The Boros believe that they are the descendants of this first man *Mon-sin-sin*. Some identify

Mon-sin-sin with Shri-Borai himself, and therefore, claim their descent directly from Shri-Borai and call him Mech Harya²⁰ or Boro Harya. However, on close examination of the events as mentioned above, it appears that this legend is the one of creation of this Universe as a whole rather than that of the creation or the origin of the Boros alone.

Origin of the names Mech and Kachari

We have noted earlier that the Boros are called by different names at different places of Assam, such as, the 'Kachari' and the 'Mech', and it is in the fitness of things to highlight the circumstances under which these names came to be applied to them by their neighbours. As regards the origin of the name '*Mech*', Charu Chandra Sanyal writes that a section of the Boros in course of their movement in Assam, moved towards the west along the foot hills of the Himalayas up to the river *Mech* between India and Nepal, settled down along the bank of the river, and were called 'Mech' after the name of the river. This is corroborated by the popular belief among the Boro folks. However, there are other stories as regards the origin of this name. In the opinion of R. M. Nath, the Meches derived their name from 'Mecha' the name of an area within the Bod country. Dr. P. C. Bhattacharya traces a Lepcha and Rai tradition, according to which, the 'Meches' are the descendants of one named Mechel,²¹ one of the three brothers, born of the same parents named *Purango* and *Simnia* of Nepal,²² and the descendants of *Mechel* came to be known as the *Meches*.

As regards the origin of the name *Kachari*, a name given to the Boros by their neighbours, there appears to be a consensus of opinion that the name Kachari is derived from *Khachar*. However, the identification of this Khachar differs. Edward Gait traces a Limbu legend from Hertbert Risley's 'Tribes and castes of Bengal' which relates the origin of the name 'Kachari'. According to the legend, the 'Kacharis' were originally known as the 'Meches' and in course of their migration, they inhabited the 'Kachar country', the name given by the Nepalese to the tract between the Brahmaputra and the Koshi rivers, and these people were later on called 'Kacharis'.²³ This theory finds eminent support of C. C. Sanyal who states that a section of the Boros under the name 'Meches' as we would see later in the succeeding pages, moved towards Nepal and settled down in the 'Kachar country' at the foot hills of Nepal and subsequently came to be known as the '*Kacharis*', very definitely after the name of the country.²⁴ S. K. Chatterji holds that the Boros were given the name 'Kachari'

after the name of the present *Cachar* district of Assam after they had moved to that place.²⁶ This is quite improbable in view of the fact that they were known by this name long before they came to settle there. Gait asserts that the district of Cachar might have got its name after the name of its principal tribe. i.e, the 'Kacharis' and it is very certain that the 'Kacharis' did not get their name from *Cachar*. They are known by this name in many parts of the region far removed from *Cachar* and were so called long before a section of the tribe took possession of that district. He also refers to a tradition to the effect that the plains of the *Cachar* originally belonged to the Tippera kingdom and was presented by a king of that country to a 'Kachari' Raja who had married his daughter. However the details of the matrimonial alliance and the kings involved in such a deal are not known, because the history of the 'Kachari' kings after the death of Suradarpa Narain is shrouded in mystery for about sixty years. R. M. Nath writes that the 'Kachari' king placed the administration of the newly acquired territory under a Deputy and the area was named '*Kachar Zilla*' meaning district of Cachar. Thus it is evidently clear that the district of Cachar derived its name from the name of the ruling tribe -the 'Kachari', and not that the 'Kachari' derived their name from that of the district of *Cachar*. It is, however, not known for certainty when this name was first applied to the people, but it appears that the earliest reference to the name are found in the annals of the Ahoms, which is the first official compilation of the Assam chronicles, and the earliest use of the name 'Kachari' in their (Ahom) records, claims Edward Gait, is in a letter of appointment by Raja Kirti Chandra, dated 1658 sakain which the 'Kacharir Niyam' or the 'practice of the Kacharis' is referred to. (Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 300, Edn. 1967 and R. M. Nath, *The Background of the Assamese culture*, p. 74.) The following popular saying current among the Boro folks indicates the possible derivation of the name Kachari, their early home and settlement in Assam :

- * *Joujma Futma, bifa Hajoma*
- * *Dilaoma Dihungma, bima Bulungma*
Bathoualai bandoba, Sijoua lai gorongba
Dao daoali bima gaodali
Dang dali rongjali, jajo aodali
- * *Pra Ari, Korosu Ari*
- * *Jong pari lari lari.*²⁶

Rendering : * *Of all the mountains, highest and whitest*

- Is the Father (referring to the snow-clad Himalayas)*
- * *Of all the rivers, longest and biggest*
- Is the Mother (referring to the Brahmaputra)*
- * *We are Korosa Aris, First born sea race*
- * *Our line is continuous.*

(Only relevant sentences with asterick mark have been rendered into English).

The above saying is very old as it appears from its language and expression. It is of mixed languages of the Boros, Tipperas and the Dimasas. The saying drives home a number of points whose historical significance can not be overlooked. First, the mixture of languages of three distinct tribes of the present North East India harmoniously blended together in the saying goes a far way to show that they are of common origin and belong to the same linguistic stock. Secondly, reference to the Himalayas as the father of all mountains in the saying possibly suggests the Himalayan region to be their original home. Thirdly, the saying refers to the Brahmaputra river as the mother of all rivers in the region and this reference very definitely means to suggest that these tribes the Boros, the Dimasas and the Tipperas after having entered Assam settled down on the bank of the Brahmaputra Valley. Fourthly, the reference to the term 'Korosa Aris' in the saying seems to suggest that they called themselves 'Korosa Aris' meaning the 'first born people' or 'the first settlers' of the Brahmaputra valley. Lastly, they claim that they are a sea race and are living on the bank of the sea for a very long period of time without any interruption.

Pre-Assam Habitat

As noted earlier, the reference to the Himalayas in the above Boro saying indicates that the pre-Assam habitat of these people was somewhere in, or near, the Himalayan region. This is not improbable. We have also noted in the preceding pages that the Boros are of Tibetan origin. Besides, the opinions of a good number of authorities on the subject further strengthen the historical value of the saying. Rev. Endle writes that the Mongoloid features and the appearance of the people seem to suggest Tibet and China—the two Trans-Himalayan countries to be the original homes of the race.²⁷ The fact that the Boros are ethnically Mongoloids, and linguistically belong to the Sino-Tibetan speech family needs no further reference. S. K. Chatterji locates the original home of the Sino-Tibetan speakers to the north west China, the head waters of Huangho and Yang-tsekiang rivers and observed that the Mongoloid tribes of the Tibeto-Chinese speech family appeared to have

been pushing south and west from their original homeland from pre-historic times.²⁸ The Imperial Gazetteer of India states that the upper courses of the Yangtsekiang and the Huangho rivers in the North West China were the original home of the Tibeto-Burman races.²⁹ Depending on the above views corroborated by the folk traditions as stated above, it can conclusively be stated that the original home of the Boros was in the Bod country, now known as Tibet, a Trans-Himalayan country, and the place where they acquired their national name 'Bodo'.

The reference to 'Korosa Aris' in the saying suggests that in a very dim past, the Boros called themselves *Koros*. *Aris*, meaning 'the first born people' or 'the earliest settlers' of the region. In the Boro language, *Koro* means 'head', *Sa* means 'child' and *Ari* is the clan or race suffix. The compound word *Korosari* (*Korosa Ari*), therefore, means the 'first born race or the people. The term *Korosa* is usually applied to the first born child. For instance, the child A is immediate elder to child B is expressed as: Child A is Child B's *Korosa*. It is not improbable that when the Boros came in contact with the Aryans, the former identified themselves to the later as *Korosaris*, meaning 'first settlers' of the region, and the Aryans later on must have spelt *Korosaris* as 'Kosaris'. As noted earlier, Grierson asserted that *Kachari* is mispronounced as 'Kosari'. It raises a grave doubt. The pronunciation of *Kosari* approximates *Korosari* rather than *Kachari*. It is therefore quite possible that the term 'Korosari' was mispronounced as 'Kosari' or the term 'Korosari' was corrupted into 'Kosari'. They claim themselves to be the 'first born people' of the 'earliest settlers' of the region. This proposition is not absurd in view of the opinions expressed by Rev. Endle, J. D. Anderson, Edward Gait, K. L. Barua etc. Rev. Endle holds that the Boros are the autochthones of Assam.³⁰ J. D. Anderson in his introduction to the above writer's monograph, 'The Kacharis' asserted, that the 'Kacharis' were the aborigines of the Brahmaputra Valley.³¹ Edward Gait is of opinion that the 'Kacharis' may perhaps be regarded as the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley.³² Rai Bahadur K. L. Barua writes that the Bodo tribes occupied the plains of Assam for a very long time and constituted the bulk of the population in the Assam valley during the time of the Mahabharata war, or even earlier.³³ This evidently shows that the Boros, a major constituent tribe of the Bodo race inhabited the Brahmaputra valley from time immemorial, which

has qualified them to be called the 'first born people' of the region.

There is also a reference to the term *Pra-Aris* in the saying, meaning 'a sea race'. On close examination of what the local scholars have stated, we find enough justification in such a claim of the people. History of Kamrupa often refers to the Eastern sea, Purva samudra or Sagara, Lauhitya sagara, etc.³⁴ However, opinions differ as regards the identification of these seas. K. L. Barua identifies the Eastern sea with the low-lying country to the south of the Assam range of the Himalayas covering parts of Sylhet, Mymensing of the then Eastern Bengal, which is said to have been practically under the sea at that time. The estuaries of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra formed this sea, which is according to him, given the name Lahita Sagara. This, no doubt, can be identified with the Eastern Sea referred to above and known to the ancients.³⁵ Even if it were not a sea in true sense of the terms, it is quite possible that the vast area submerged in water presented an appearance of a sea. N. N. Vasu is of opinion that there was a time in the dim past when the sea waves swept the lands comprising the present Mymensing and Sylhet districts lying to the south of the present Meghalaya and Cachar district, and the vast water-logged areas were the appearance of the sea. Eastern India surrounded by this sea was a great centre of sea going vessels and attracted many enterprising sailors for trade and commerce. The Phoenician or the Summerian traders sailing into this part of the world called the vast Water-logged areas the Eastern Sea, referred to as the Purva Samudra in the Manu Samhita. In those olden days, the Korotoya and the Lauhitya rivers fell into this sea. This sea was called Lahita Sagara in the epics, and as the Red Sea or the Lota Sagara of the Eastern Bengal. This sea in course of time receded and the Lauhitya river, identified with the modern Brahmaputra, which at at one time formed a part of this sea while flowing through Assam still reminds the people of this region of the familiar name of the Lauhitya sagara.³⁶ Hence, the Lauhitya river (Brahmaputra) is often identified with the Lohita Sagara and in fact in parts of Assam, the Brahmaputra river is more popularly known as Lohit or Luit. Thus, it is evidently proved that the Red Sea of the Eastern Bengal, Eastern Sea, Lauhitya Sagara are identical with the modern Brahmaputra river.

The Boros consider themselves to be a sea race, meaning 'dwellers on the sea coast'. This is not improbable. N. N. Vasu states that the Kiratas inhabited the Eastern Sea coast. The Boros are the descendants of the Kiratas. Even in comparatively later period

of history, the Boros were predominantly found on the bank of the Brahmaputra river, which because of its vastness can be considered to be equivalent to a sea. Hence, the Boros rightly called themselves *Pra Aris*, meaning a sea race.

Migration to Assam

The question of the routes of migration of the people to Assam is equally puzzling and controversial. Different scholars have suggested different routes, but there appears to be no definite answer to the question. Here an attempt has been made to prove a hypothesis. It is now an established fact that the north eastern tribes including the Boros, were the immigrants from the north. If this is the case they must have filtered into Assam through the various mountain passes and river courses from the north, and any attempt to prove their migration to Assam from other imaginary directions like Bihar, Gangetic plain, Bay of Bengal etc. would, therefore, be an attempt to falsify the historical fact. Prof. Ram Rahul in his work 'Himalayan Borderlands' refers to three prominent trade routes connecting Tibet with Assam and Bengal through Bhutan. These routes are : the Manas river valley, the Karia-para Duars and the Paro valley. Formerly, there was flourishing trade between India and Tibet with the Bhutanese as carrying agents. From Bengal and Assam, the Bhutanese used to collect dyes, endi or eri cloth and cocoons, areca nuts, tea, tobacco etc. and exchange them with the Tibetans for wool, salt, musk etc. He also refers to the legend and tradition relating that the first Tibetan king Nythai Tsangpo went up from India along the Mana valley route which is the historical high way between Eastern India and Central Tibet. Pilgrims from Tibet to Hajo shrine near Gauhati in Assam have always trudged along it.³⁷ S.K. Chatterji writes that a meagre stream of trade from China used to filter into Assam through Kirata country comprising Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan, Manipur and adjacent areas. He quotes Changkien, the Chinese General and explorer of Central Asia in the Second Century B. C. as having referred to such trade routes connecting North East India and Western China.³⁸ Again another prominent route connecting Tibet and Assam runs through Bhairab Khund on the north of Udalguri of Assam and Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh.³⁹ There are open routes from Assam into Burma and thence into China by which considerable trades were being carried on between Eastern India and China through Burma. The Burmese in their invasion of Assam during the first part of the nineteenth century entered Assam by this route. Tibet is open to travellers on foot from

extreme east of Assam. One prominent route runs across the Himalayas parallel with the course of the Brahmaputra river and another connecting India and China runs from the Brahmaputra to the Irrawaddy via Noa Dihing and the trade intercourse between India and China was maintained through this route. Most of the big rivers flowing towards the south and through India and Burma, such as, the Brahmaputra, the Chindwin, Irrawaddy, Mekhong, Menam, Subansiri, Dharla, Teesta, Sonkosh etc. rise in the Tibetan highlands and adjacent mountainous region, and the courses of these rivers very obviously facilitated flourishing trades between India and other countries on the north. During the Chinese aggression of India in 1962, the Chinese forces penetrated into erstwhile N. E. F. A. (now Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh) through the mountain passes across the Himalayas. Thus it is seen that North East India is open to Burma, Tibet and China and therefore must have been subjected to ceaseless flow of immigration from the north and north east from time immemorial.

Now the question arises as to which particular route was followed by the Boro immigrants while entering Assam. In this regard, the north and north eastern directions seem to be a consensus of opinion among the scholars. A Boro tradition refers to the Choraikaling Pass north of Lakhimpur district of Assam through which the Boro immigrants took place.⁴⁰ Edward Gait and P. C. Choudhuri suggest that the Bodo tribes entered Assam from the north eastern direction.⁴¹ Imperial Gazetteer of India states that the north eastern route was followed by the Mikirs, Lalungs and the Boros (Kachari).⁴² Grierson holds that the Tibeto-Burman races entered Assam through the courses of the Brahmaputra, Chindwin, Irrawaddy etc. and the mountain passes of India and Burma through the north-east and south-east.⁴³ Rev. Endle refers to two great immigrations at different times, one entering from the north east Bengal and western Assam through the valley of Teesta, Dharla and Sonkosh etc. and other making its way through the Subansiri, Dibong and Dihong valley into Eastern Assam.⁴⁴ However it is to be noted that the flow of immigrations to North East India was a continuous process spreading over a long period of time from pre-historic times. To suggest a particular route for all immigrations, therefore, would certainly be far from the truth. If the flow of immigrations were a continuous process spreading over the period of thousands years, it is very likely that the successive waves of the immigrants must have entered Assam through various routes at different times. Nevertheless, emphasis can be

certainly laid on the conjecture that the bigger waves of immigrants must have followed the courses of big rivers, such as, the Chindwin, Irrawaddy, Menam etc. thus landing in Burma whence they filtered into Assam through the Patkai range of India and Burma while others found their way to Assam and Bengal through the courses of the rivers, such as the Brahmaputra, Teesta, Dharla, Sonkosh etc. Other smaller groups of immigrants must have sneaked into Assam through various mountain passes at various points along the Indo-Bhutan borders stretching from eastern Assam to North Eastern Bengal, such as Punsling, Karikola bazar, Zomduar, Gelemphu, Sandrup Jhongka, Bhairabkhund etc.

Whether the Boros are of pure Mongoloid Origin

Now the question arises as to whether the Boros are of pure Mongoloid origin. Evidences show that they are not. Nilkanta Sastri and Srinivasachari contend that no where in the world does the purity of race exist and India is not exception. India from the very beginning of the history of human immigration contained a large variety of human types than any other land. The physical features of the Indians have the traces of admixture of different ethnic groups that came to India and inter-marriages had been common till the caste system was evolved among the racial groups.⁴⁵ S. K. Chatterji writes that in Burma and Indo-China, the Mongoloids have largely absorbed the earlier arrivals, i.e. the Austriacs. The Himalayan group of the Indo-Mongoloids appear to have mixed with the Aryan speakers in the East Punjab hills.⁴⁶ The same thing must have taken place in Assam and Eastern India. Dr. P. C. Chaudhuri speaks of liberal admixture of various strains the Mongoloids, Austroloids, Negroids etc. found in Assam and Eastern India. The Khasi-Syntengs show admixture of Austric, Negroid and Tibeto-Burman elements in varying proportions. The Mikirs have admixture of Khasi blood. The Garos, one of the Bodo tribes and closely allied to the Boros, have intermixed with the Mon-Khmer Khasis. The Koches, another Bodo tribe and allied to the Boros have intermixed with the Dravidians and therefore, have assumed the Dravidian complexion.⁴⁷ It is definitely under these circumstances that Dalton asserted that the Koches are of Dravidian origin, and have Mongoloid blood.⁴⁸ Thus we see that there is general fusion of blood among the peoples found in Assam and Eastern India. Under these circumstances, one can very definitely ascertain that the Boros are no exception and must have intermixed with other peoples belonging to different ethnic and linguistic stocks, such as, the Mundas, Mon-Khmer

Khasis, and the Aryan families. The fusion of Boro-Naga blood is categorically pointed out by Dr. P. C. Chaudhuri, and as a result, they assumed both Aryan and non-Aryan features.⁴⁹ However, it is not definitely known how and when such admixture took place. It is probable that such admixture took place through the inter-marriages in course of their migration and settlement within Assam. S. K. Chatterji holds that the Ahoms were forced to take wives from among their Bodo tribes. Another possibility of such inter-marriage or admixture of these peoples in some proportion even before their migration into this land can not be ruled out. From above evidences and the statements, a conclusion, therefore, can be drawn that the Boros are not the descendants of the people of pure Mongoloid origin.

Migration and movement within Assam

To locate early settlement of the people under our review in Assam, no concrete evidences are available, but there are suggestive evidences that provide us with ample scope to establish the fact that the Boros occupied the plains of Assam predominantly till they were overwhelmed by the later arrivals. It appears that the Boro immigrants before penetrating into the heart of Assam and adjoining areas in gradual process must have settled down along the foot hills of the Himalayas. This contention holds good in view of the opinions expressed by a good number of scholars who refer to a group of Mongoloid people under the name Kirata. The name Kirata was given to the people dwelling along the foot hills of the Himalayas after they had come from their original habitats in the Himalayan region.⁵⁰ S. K. Chatterji introduces the Kiratas as the frontier dwellers of the Himalayas and the north eastern areas of India. He refers to a Kirata country comprising the eastern Himalayan tracts which included Sikkim, Bhutan, Manipur and other adjacent tracts which were exactly the lands of Mongoloid settlement in India.⁵¹ The Boros and other Bodo tribes are the descendants of the Kiratas of Mongoloid origin. It, therefore, follows that the Kirata country referred to above, was the land of early settlement of the Boros. Grierson holds that a section of the Tibeto-Burmans occupied the hills on the southern side of the Himalayan range right along from Assam in the east to the Punjab in the west.⁵² Linguistically and ethnically it is also proved that these Tibeto-Burmans predominantly include the Boros. Padmeswar Gogoi contends that the 'Kacharis' dominated Eastern Assam at the time when the Ahom entered the land.⁵³ N. N. Vasu is of opinion that the 'Kacharis' spread and settled down

over the whole of eastern frontiers of India and called them Lohitic.⁵⁴ The Lohit region comprises the Lohit district of the present Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh and the contiguous areas of Tibet and Burma. The 'Kacharis' were called Lohitic quite possibly because they inhabited this region in early period of history of their migration and settlement in Assam. S. K. Chatterji holds that originally the areas covered by the Lohit river in the present Arunachal Pradesh appeared to have been inhabited by the Bodo speaking people.⁵⁵ The Lohit region, in all probabilities, can also be referred to the northern and north-eastern shores of the Lohita Sagara, already referred to earlier, and stated to be inhabited by the Kiratas. R. M. Nath refers to the inhabitation at, and control of, the foot hills of the Himalayas by the 'Kacharis' and it was in these foot hills that innumerable chieftains grew up and gradually pushed towards the south where they established petty kingdoms.⁵⁶ Depending on above view points, one hardly finds any room for doubt that the Boros at the initial stage of their travels and adventures in quest of lands for settlement settled along the foot hills to the south of the Himalayas which provided them a good base for further penetrations into, and settlements in, the interior parts of Assam and beyond, in different batches at different times in different directions.

As regards the movements of the Boros in Assam and adjoining areas of North Bengal, Charu Chandra Sanyal writes that a section of the Boro immigrants moved towards the west along the foot hills of the Himalayas up to the river Mechi between India and Nepal. The Mechi river has its origin in Nepal and flows into India through North Bengal. This section of the Boro immigrants settled down along the bank of the river Mechi and hence, were called 'Meches' by the neighbours, clearly after the name of the river. Many of them moved further north into Nepal and established large colonies within the so called 'Khachar' country already referred to earlier. They cultivated paddy in the interspaces of the dense terrai forests. This part of the land was very fertile and the yield of the crop was high. The Nepalese on the hills were probably attracted by the high yield of the crops and descended there to grab the land of the 'Meches'. The displaced Boro settlers then crossed the Mechi river and many of them descended and moved southwards and settled in the forest to the north of Naxalbari in the district of Darjeeling. Some of them crossed Teesta river and migrated to Duars where fallow lands were plenty, while a large number of them crossed Balasan and Mahananda areas, whence

they shifted to Baikunta forest in the district of Jalpaiguri. As tea garden grew up gradually in duars, they had to move further east up to the river Sonkosh, a natural boundary between Assam and West Bengal, while some of them inhabited Rongpur, Dinajpur and their adjoining areas. A great number of them again crossed the Sonkosh river and penetrated into Assam. This is proved by old census Reports and Gazetteer of the provinces of Assam and West Bengal, and that there are a large number of Boro villages on both side of the Sonkosh river.⁵⁷

Grierson observed that the swarm entering into the plains of Assam proceeded along the courses of the Brahmaputra river up to the great bend near Dhubri town. From there some of them went south and occupied modern Garo Hills. South of Garo Hills, they spread in northern Mymensing at present in Bangla Desh.⁵⁸ R. M. Nath mentions that the Boro settlement in Assam extended as far as Nowgong district where they built a city *Brahampur* on the bank of the Kullong river, and then gradually pushed towards the slopes of Mikir Hills where they again established cities at *Sonapur* and *Urdhaganga*. This is evidenced by the fact that Urdhaganga is called 'Paro-khowa' meaning the lands inhabited by the Boros.⁵⁹ From there, their area of occupation and settlement extended to Cachar district, particularly in the north Cachar Hills, and then spread into Sylhet. From Cachar, and Sylhet, they moved further to the south to Tripura state where there are still a large number of Boro speaking people,⁶⁰ who are today known to be a distinct tribe by the name 'Barok' or 'Borok', a name clearly a corruption of 'Brog' or 'Boro'. At present, these 'Boroks' form a solid bloc in the state of Tripura. Grierson again points out that the 'Kacharis' could not occupy the mountainous tract between North Cachar and Garo Hills which constitute Khasi and Jaintia Hills forming a part of present state of Meghalaya.⁶¹ Then a large number of them pushed towards the foot of the Naga Hills where they established their first powerful kingdom with Dimapur as capital on the bank of the Dhansiri river. The establishment of the flourishing kingdom there furnishes a positive evidence that at one time the Boro settlements spread in the Naga hills with heavy concentration in the capital city of Dimapur. Moreover 'Dimapur' is unmistakably a Boro name, derived from Boro word *Doima* meaning a 'big river' and *pur* meaning 'city or kingdom'. The compound word 'Dimapur' or 'Doimapur', therefore, means a kingdom on the bank of a big river. The big river referred to is identified with the river Dhansiri

on the bank of which is situated the kingdom. N. N. Vasu and Edward Gait suggest that the ancient name of the 'Kachari kingdom' was Haidimba or Hidimba, and the name of their capital city 'Dimapur' was the corruption of 'Haidimbapur' or 'Hidimbapur'.⁶² This is very unlikely. S. K. Chatterji is perhaps right in asserting that Dimapur was arbitrarily sanskritised into 'Haidimbapur', and in this way a connection was established between the 'Kachari' and Haidimba, a Rakshasi or non-Aryan wife of Bhima, the Pandava hero of Mahabharata fame.⁶³

The capital was shifted from one place to another, once from Dimapur to Maibong in North Cachar Hills, and then to Khaspur in the plains of Cachar due to political exigencies. The shifting of capital from one place to another led to partial shifting of the population, which also means the extension of the settlement of the people in those areas brought under their occupation. The movement of the population to new head quarters was however, limited and restricted to the Raja and his court only and great majority of them continued to live where they were as the subjects of the Ahom rulers owing nominal allegiance to their Raja.

It is noticed that the Boros after entering Assam were not quite settled permanently at a particular place and remained as migratory people, and it appears that it took a long time for them to settle down at a particular place as permanent citizens. Sanyal⁶⁴ and Hodgson⁶⁵ write that the Boros at early times practised jhum cultivation. As the people, were not good agriculturists at that time and were not well-versed in artificial or scientific renovating processes, they found in the exhaustion of the soil a necessity, or in the high productiveness of the new, a temptation, to perpetual movement.

Age old traditional tales and folk rhymes describe the migratory character of the people in their early life in North Eastern India. One such popular rhyme goes thus :

*Nopti gudung
Abad jaya
Hojong karlangni*

.....⁶⁵

Rendering : (Our) homestead is hot
No crops prosper
Let's flee away to that place.

Again, another such rhyme goes thus

*Raijo khoulai jadong mon Jalpaiguri Zillao,
Gojon nai monni lai karlangdong mon Goaipara yao
Gojon nai monni lai be jaigayaobo,*

Ushao-badao, karao-marao hangma shuhabo.

*Gojonnai khou nuhorasoi sanja thingoi Dorrong-Kamrubao,
Hor-Shan thapsaiasoi bihi-fisa karlangno beao.*

*Thangtarnosoi honnanoi kalamasoi mosou-mosa panglung
panglang,*

*Ukum-injur bodlap-bodlip kalamasoi noh-bang langdang-
padang.*

*Hi topla bannanoi karlangasoi horling hoting tilling gia,
Jeraokia thanga mano nongha gojonnaia goia.*

Gojonnaia goioikai Dorrong-Kamrubao,

Jabaoasoi unao biha, thu thangni Gogamuk jaigao.⁶⁷

Rendering :

*(He) had his home in Jalpaiguri district,
There being no peace, he migrated to Goalpara.*

(He) found no peace there too;

(His heart) became full of anxieties and heavy sigh.

*(He) saw peace in Darrang-Kamrup in the east,
Day and night (he) gave no peace to (his) wife and children
to persuade them to follow him there.*

*Deciding that his going is a must, he sold cows and everything
he had,*

Reduced his house to one with out walls and roofs.

*He set out for his new abode with bag and baggage like ever-
migrating gipsy,*

Alas ! no peace awaits him there too.

There being no peace in Darrang-Kamrup too

*The next thing he said, 'Lets move to Gogamuk'. **

The above Boro rhymes portray a pen picture of the migratory habit of the Boros in their early days in Assam and how they moved from one place to another on one pretext or the other, and these movements were caused not only by political and economic reasons as shown above, but also that their migratory propensity must have been a part of their very nature. It is, therefore, quite possible in this way that the Boros spread throughout the Brahmaputra valley and adjoining frontier tracts of Balipara and Sadiya.

The fact that the Boros were once predominant settlers throughout the length and breadth of Assam is also noticeable in indelible

* Gogamuk is a place on the North Lakhimpur-Arunachal Pradesh borders within the administrative jurisdiction of Dhemaji sub-Division in North Lakhimpur district, and once known to the Boros for its plenty of fallow lands and bumper crops.

Boro names of various places and rivers preceded by *doi*, *di* or *ti* which means water or river in the Boro language. Dihong, Dibong, Dibru, Dihing, Dimu, Dikhou, Dibru, Digaru, Dikhrang etc. are some of the surviving examples.⁶⁸ According to Padmeswar Gogoi, Dhansiri river is the Boro name.⁶⁹ The possibility can not be ruled out on the ground that on the bank of this river situated the capital city of the 'Kachari' kingdom and the name of the river, therefore, must have been given by the Boros (Kacharis). S. K. Chatterji mentions Alexander Cunningham having suggested that the presence of Boro elements in the names of rivers and physical features are also noticeable in other parts of India, particularly North-western India. The rivers with names ended by *di* or *ti*, such as Rawati (Ravi river), Niyungti (Beas), Zangti (Sutlej), Parati (Para river), Iravati, Parvati, Mahanadi etc.⁷⁰ are the surviving examples. Again, S. E. Peals refers to the names like Rapti, Tapti, Gomati, Kamti, Bhagirati etc. all ending in Boro word *ti*. These names appear to be Boro names in sanskritised form.⁷¹

Late Bishnu Prasad Rabha, an eminent artist of Assam is very often quoted as having suggested that the name Brahmaputra river is a corruption of the Boro name *Bullungbutar*, meaning a big river making a gargling noise.⁷² The term *Bullungbutar* is the abbreviation of two words-*Bollang* and *Botor* or *Botrot*. *Bollang* means 'to pull out' and *botor* or *botrot* means 'to remove or let go'. The compound word, therefore, means 'to pull out together and then remove or let go'. The Brahmaputra river is understood to have pulled out waters from other rivers together and then let the collected waters go in a single channel with gargling noise. Hence its name *Bullungbutar* and the modern name Brahmaputra is the Sanskritised form of this Boro name. The proposition is not untenable altogether. In this connection, it is worthwhile to refer that the three prominent rivers such as Dibong, Dihong and Lohit flowing through Arunachal Pradesh combined together at different stages in Assam and came to be known as the Brahmaputra. Such origin of the river very much coincides with the meaning of *Bullungbutar* mentioned above and as such, it can appropriately be suggested that the name Brahmaputra is the sanskritised form of the Boro name *Bullungbutar*. S. K. Chatterji holds that the name Brahmaputra is of recent origin and even later that Lauhitya and is certainly a sanskritised form of some other Indo-Mongoloid name. However, he suggests that *Bullungbutar* might not be the name, as contented by Late Bishnu Prasad Rabha, but *Burrambutar* whose pronunciation approximates that of sanskri-

tised Brahmaputra.⁷³

The name 'Lauhitya' is suggested to be a corruption of the Boro formation *Lauthou*,⁷⁴ an abbreviated form of Golao (Golau) and Gothou, meaning long and deep. The river Lauhitya, identified with the Brahmaputra is the longest and the deepest of all the rivers in the region. It, therefore, appears that the name 'Lauhitya' is the corruption of the Boro formation *Lauthou*. Similarly, the names Tilao, Dibong, Dihong etc have the Boro elements *Ti* and *Di* meaning river or water. Among these names, that of *Tilao* deserves special mention. It is clearly of Boro origin, corrupted from *Ti* and *lao* or *lau* meaning 'river and long' respectively. Tilao, meaning a long river, therefore, refers to the river Brahmaputra.

The earliest historical name of Assam is *Pragjyotisa* and its capital was called *Pragjyotispur*, now identified with *Dispur*, an immediate vicinity of modern Gauhati (Guwahati) and the temporary capital of modern Assam. According to the popular belief current among the Boro folks, Pragjyotispur is the sanskritised form of the Boro name *Prajutoipur*. *Pra* means sea, *jutoi* means 'full of blood or most powerful' and *pur* or *puri* means is the suffix of place, city or kingdom. *Prajutoipur*, therefore, means a most powerful kingdom or city on the sea side.⁷⁵ This proposition is not improbable. Earlier we have noted the existence of the Eastern sea, Lauhitya Sagara or Lohit Sagara which are more or less identical. Rai Bahadur K. L. Barua locates Pragjyotisa on the bank of the Lauhitya sagara which formed the southern boundary of the kingdom about 1000 B. C.⁷⁶ B. K. Kakati places it in the north-east region.⁷⁷ P. C. Choudhury locates it in modern Assam whose boundary in pre-Buddhist period and even later time touched the Eastern Sea. The powerful kingdom referred to above, therefore, corresponds to Pragjyotisa, and the proposition that the name Pragjyotisa is the sanskritised form of the Boro name 'Prajutoipur' is not without certain amount of historical value. Bihuram Boro refers to a popular Boro legend according to which a powerful Boro king named *Barka* Bosumatari ruled over the kingdom of *Prajutoipur*. In course of time, king *Barka* was succeeded by his son *Narko* Bosumatari born of his second queen and brought up in non-Boro surroundings. He also refers to king *Narko* being identified with Puranic *Naraka Asura* by Late Bishnu Prasad Rabha.⁷⁸ It may, therefore, be contended that the name of King *Narko* was Aryanised into *Naraka*. This is not improbable on some valid grounds. Early History of Kamrupa refers to Puranic legend that

Supreme God Vishnu in his incarnation of the Great Boar while lifting the Earth from the deluge with his tusk took her as his consort and had by her a son named *Naraka*. It is for this reason that *Naraka* is called *Bhauma*, meaning 'born of Earth'⁷⁹. A Boro clan known as *Bosumatari* to which King Barka and King Narko belonged to, seems to be Aryanised one meaning 'Earth folk' and probably Aryanised form of original Boro name *Hasari*, meaning 'Earth folk' or 'the descendants of the Earth'. It is believed that the Boro folks of *Bosumatari* clan are the descendants of Barka and Narko *Bosumatari*. From above, it appears that both Narko *Bosumatari* of the Boro legend and *Naraka* of the Puranic legend have identical significance, and it is quite possible that Boro king Narko was Aryanised into *Naraka*, and that the Puranic legend of King *Naraka* is the Aryan version of the Boro legend about King Narko *Bosumatari*. Aryanisation of *Narko* into *Naraka* is a literary device and painting to represent the fact in indirect way, and to conceal the real identity of, and give a divine pedigree to, non Aryan head, was an Aryan way of Aryanising him. It takes us back to an earlier statement of S. K. Chatterji that Dimapur was arbitrarily Aryanised into Haidimbapur and thus a connection was established between the 'Kacharis' and Haidimba, a Rakshasi or non-Aryan wife of Bhima, the Pandava hero of Mahabharata fame. Again, Rev. Endle refers to the fact that the 'Kachari' kings Krishna Chandra and Govinda Chandra after having made a public profession of Brahmanism were placed for a time inside the body of a large image of a cow, and on emerging thence were declared by the Brahmins to be Hindus of the Kshatriya caste, Bhima of Mahabharata fame being assigned to them as a mythological ancestor.⁸⁰ The above two instances lead us to an inference that King Narko *Bosumatary* who ruled over the kingdom of Prajutoipur was Aryanised into *Naraka* ruling over the kingdom of Pragjyotisa.

Dhuparam *Bosumatary* explains the Boro background of the sanskritised name Pragjyotisa in a different context. He states that the name Pragjyotisa is the corruption of the Boro formation Purgajongti, meaning star, shining white or shining bright.⁸¹ This can be explained in the light of a legendary origin of the name Pragjyotisa. Edward Gait and other local scholars define *Prag* as eastern and *jyotisa* as a star, astrology or shining. The compound word *Pragjyotisa*, therefore, may be taken to mean 'City of Eastern Astrology'. They also refer to the Kalika Purana stating that Brahma made the first calculation of stars in this land and the temple on the Chitrachal hill near Gauhati is said to have been

dedicated to the Navagraha or nine planets. Pragjyotisa owes its name to this temple⁸² From the above it appears that the Boro word *Purga-Jongti* and Sanskrit *Jyotisa* are identical in meaning. The Boro term *Purga-Jongti*, therefore, must have referred to those stars. P. C. Choudhuri holds that the name Pragjyotisa appears to be Sanskritisation of some non-Aryan formation.⁸³ It can, therefore, be suggested that the name Pragjyotisa is a Sanskritised form of the Boro formation *Prajutoipuri* or *Purga-Jongti*.

The name Pragjyotisa was changed into *Kamrupa*. S. K. Chatterji holds that it is also a Boro name.⁸⁴ This proposition can be corroborated by a Boro tradition which suggests that the name *Kamrup* is the Sanskritisation of the Boro word *Kamlap* or *Kamlup* meaning 'burnt to ashes' or 'burnt up'.⁸⁵ This conception can be explained in the light of the prevalence of a traditional story relating to the origin of the name *Kamrupa*. The story goes that, *Kamdeva*, god of love (cupid) was burnt to ashes by the angry and fiery glance of *Siva* being disturbed during his remorseful meditation on the *Kailas Hill* of the *Himalayas* over the death of his consort *Parvati*, and was subsequently revived to his life in his original form (*rupa*), but in an invisible form, only to reside in the hearts of mankind. *Kamdeva* was revived to his life in this very country *Pragjyotisa*, and since then the kingdom came to be known as *Kamrupa*. We notice that the above two traditions are related with the term 'burnt to ashes or burnt up' expressed in *Kamlap* or *Kamlup* in the Boro language. An inference, therefore, can be drawn that if the name *Kamrupa* is associated with the revival of *Kamdeva* after being burnt to ashes, the Boro word *Kamlap* or *Kamlup* is the root source of the derivation of the name *Kamrupa*.

Dhuparam Bosumatari narrates the origin of the name *Kamrupa* from the Boro word *Kamlap* or *Kamlup* in a different connotation. He holds that *Shri-Borai's* first creation of this Universe was burnt to ashes at the first glance of *Luba-Lubini*, the goddess of evil and associate of *Shri-Buri*, the consort of *Shri-Borai*. But the Universe was rebuilt by the genuine desire of *Shri-Buri* to see the beauty of the Universe. For the purpose of rebuilding the Universe, *Shri-Buri* cohabitated with *Shri Borai* then manifested himself in the form of *linga* (phallus) during the period of her fertility, and as a result of this cohabitation, the universe which was reduced to ashes, was restored to its original form,⁸⁶ and the newly rebuilt universe came to be known as *Kamrupa*, and the kingdom of *Pragjyotisa* was subsequently given the name *Kamrupa*.

Thus we have two Boro traditions relating to the origin of the

name Kamrupa, but the central theme of both the traditions is 'burnt to ashes or burnt up,' the corresponding Boro words being *Kamlap* or *Kamlup*. Whatever might have been the truth, whether it is the restoration of Kamdeva to his original form or that of the universe, it appears certain that the root source of the origin of the name Kamrupa is the Boro word *Kamlap* or *Kamlup*.

The Boro origin of the modern name 'Assam' can be suggested in more than one context. Padmeswar Gogoi contends that the real source of the name seems to be the word Sam or Shan, and the earliest form of the name was *Asam* or *Ashan* which was later conveniently sanskritised into *Asom*.⁸⁷ Baden Powell states that the name Assam is most probably traceable to the Boro word *Ha Com*.⁸⁸ *Ha* means earth, land or country, *Com* is an abbreviated form of *Coman*, meaning plain or level. *Ha, Coman* or *Ha, Com* therefore, means plain or level country. The name is thus based on the topographical feature of the land. The name *Ha Com* must have been later abbreviated into *Acom*, which became the ultimate source of the formation of the name *Asom*, the Anglicised form being Assam. This hypothesis of the formation of the name *Asom* on the basis of the topographical feature is not totally untenable and can be corroborated by the fact that the major portion of the province of Assam comprises the plain areas. Further, the transformation of the original Boro word *Ha, Com* into *Acom* and then into *Asom* is not absurd in view of gradual phonetic development. In this context, B. K. Kakati writes that *Ahom* is a modern phonetic development of earlier *Asam* or *Asama*. In other words, *Ha, Com* can also be suggested to be an abbreviated form of another Boro word *Ha, Gosom* or *Ha Gocom*, meaning black soil or black earth.⁸⁹ John M'Cosh in his 'Topography of Assam' classifies the soil of Assam into two categories on colour basis. He writes, "The soil of Assam is for the most part composed of rich black mould except in hilly areas which are universally composed of rich red loam."⁹⁰ In fact, the Brahmaputra valley which covers the most parts of the plains of Assam is composed of fertile silty-alluvial soil carried down by the river and deposited on the bank. This soil is apparently black. On the basis of this observation, it can be suggested that *Ha Gosom* was abbreviated into *Ha, Som* which must have undergone further transformation into *Asom*.

The origin of the name 'Assam' from the Boro word can also be suggested in yet another context. The Tais were originally known as the *Sam*. In course of their movement and migration through Burma, the Burmese called them *Shan*.⁹¹ The name *Shan*,

therefore, is the Burmese corruption of *Sam*. The Boros, who were predominating in Eastern Assam at the time the Tais entered the land, called them *Sam*.⁹² It is suggested that the Sams conquered and established their kingdom in the northern part of the Brahmaputra valley, the Boros applied the name *Sam* to the land of the conquerors,⁹³ probably with the prefix *Ha* meaning land or country. The name of the land, therefore, came to be known as *Ha Sam*, meaning 'land of the Sams'. Edward Gait refers to an Ahom tradition in which the Ahom people themselves admitted that it was the local people of the region who gave them the name.⁹⁴ It, therefore, appears certain that it was the Boro name *Ha-Sam* which might have been the root source of the origin of the name Asom or Assam. The Boro name *Ha Sam* must have been later abbreviated into Asam, Asama, and it appears that the forms Asom, Ahom or Assam gradually arose from Asam or Asama.⁹⁵

The phonetic variations of the Boro words *Ha Goman* or *Ha Gosom* indicated above as the possible sources of the origin of the name Assam can be presented as follows :

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|
| (i) <i>Ha Coman</i> | <i>Ha Com</i> | <i>A Com</i> | <i>Acom</i> | <i>Asom = Assam</i> |
| (ii) <i>Ha Gocom</i> | <i>Ha Com</i> | <i>A Com</i> | <i>Acom</i> | <i>Asom = Assam</i> |
| (iii) <i>Ha Gosom</i> | <i>Ha Som</i> | <i>A Som</i> | <i>Asom</i> | <i>= Assam</i> |
| (iv) <i>Ha Sam</i> | <i>A Sam</i> | <i>Asam</i> | <i>Asama</i> | <i>Asom = Assam</i> |

On the basis of above statements and observations, a conclusion can be drawn that the root source of the origin of the name Assam is of the Boro formations *Ha Com*, *Ha Som* or *Ha Sam*.

The name of the shrine of Mother Kamakhya near Gauhati which has attained India-wide celebrity today is contended to be of Boro origin. Local scholars are of opinion that the name is in all probability of pre-Aryan origin and suggests it to be Austric name. S. K. Chatterji, however, holds that the name being Bodo in origin seems to be more probable, atleast to start with, the name contains Bodo element *Kam* which occurs in Bodo names of places, such as *kamrupa*, *Kamata* etc.⁹⁶ A Boro tradition refers to the Boro formation *Kangnai-Bima-Kha*, meaning 'Mother Goddess who really created or brought up' (*Kangnai*-created or brought up; *Bima*-Mother Goddess; *Ka*-really) to be the basis of the Sanskritised 'Kamakhya'. The Boro legend referred to earlier, stated that the universe of Shri-Borai's (Siva's) first creation was destroyed, but was recreated as a result of the cohabitation of Shri-Borai (Siva) and Shri-Buri (Shri-Borai's consort) manifested themselves in the forms of *Linga* (phallus) and *Yoni* respectively. Shri

Buri thus became the real Mother who caused the recreation of the dead universe and therefore came to be worshipped as *Kangnai-Bima-Ka*, meaning 'Mother Goddess who really recreated or brought up'. This Boro name 'Kangnai-Bima-Ka' later must have been Aryanised into *Kamakhya*.⁹⁷ Shri-Borai (Siva), the consort of Shri-Buri also came to be worshipped in the form of 'Linga'. This legend of the Boros is corroborated by the prevailing practice of Yoni worship in the Kamakhya temple on the Nilachal Hill near Gauhati and that of the worshipping Siva-Lingam at *Umananda* temple on the peacock island in the middle of the Brahmaputra near Gauhati. Yoni of Mother Kamakhya in the temple and the Siva-Lingam at Umananda, placed side by side, very much coincide with the cohabitation of Shri-Borai and Shri-Buri, who were at that particular moment, in the forms 'Linga' and 'yoni' respectively. B. P. Rabha who belonged to Bodo tribe and studied them very closely and extensively suggests that the great goddess Kamakhya originally was 'Kamakhie' or 'Kamalakhi, of a Mongoloid race.

The name *Umananda* is of Boro origin, and is related with the Boro origin of the name Kamakhya as narrated in the above Boro legend. It goes that at the time of cohabitation, as we have seen above, the yoni (Shri-Buri) screamed saying 'U-Ma-Ludoi' meaning Oh ! what an organ it is ! (U is the sound of expression of fear, shock or surprise ; Ma-what ; Ludoi-Male genital organ). The Boros believe that *U-Ma-Ludoi* must have been Sanskritised into *Umananda* at later time.⁹⁸ This proposition received further impetus from the statement of R.M. Nath who holds that it was the Boros who first installed the phallic emblem of their worship at Umananda temple near Kamakhya.⁹⁹ Besides, there are a number of place-names throughout Assam and contiguous areas of North Bengal which are of Boro origin. It is suggested that the name *Maibong* is the corruption of Boro word *Mai Gobang*, meaning paddy in abundance. *Mairang* is corruption of *Mairong*, meaning rice, and *Haja* or *Hajo*, meaning hills. The name *Dispur* seems to come from Boro name *Disapur*, meaning a town or city on the river side. B. K. Kakati however contends that it comes from a different Boro word *Disai*¹⁰⁰ or *Dislai* or *Doslai*, meaning to remove from one place to another. R. M. Nath is of opinion that the name *Bangla* (Bengal) is the corruption of Boro formation *Ha-Bang-La*, meaning plenty of plain lands, and the name *Dinajpur* is the corrupted form of *Dimapur*.¹⁰¹

The liberal changes of the existing local names of places, rivers and even institutions as indicated above must have certainly taken

place as it is understood from the fact that the progressive Sanskritisation of the various pre-Aryan or non-Aryan peoples in their culture, their outlook and their way of life forms the key-note of India throughout the ages.

Judging from wide range of extension of their language and its influences on the culture of present Assam and beyond, there can hardly be any doubt that the Boros established not only political supremacy throughout the length and breadth of Assam, but also wide spread settlement till they were overwhelmed by the later arrivals. Even today, they form one of the main bases of population of the plains of Assam and in parts of North Bengal, Tripura and Nagaland forming a solid block in North East India.

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