

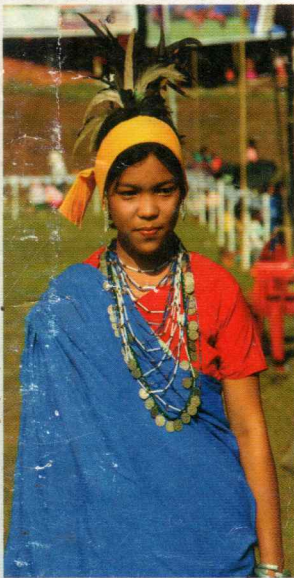
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CUM

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SOUVENIR



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HOW CORRECT AND JUSTIFIED THE GENERIC NAME BODO OF THE NON-NAGA ASSAM-BURMESE LINGUISTIC GROUP.

By Sibendra Narayan Koch

The word Bodo is the name of the Meches and the Kacharis (L.S.I. Vol. III part II:1). Dr. Grierson, however applied the same word Bodo or Bara, as generic name of the non-Naga Assam-Burmese linguistic group. This group of people comprises the Kachari, the Koch, the Rabha, the Garo, the Dimasa, the Tippera, the Lalung, the Moran and the Chutiyas. (Barua, B.K., A Cultural History of Assam, 1969:7) On and after the application and adaptation of the word Bodo as a generic name of the linguistic group there arose a supposed or real body of people or language called Bodo like the Aryan or Sanskrit.

But the learned scholar, for that matter any of the scholars living or dead has not said when and where that group or body of people or language called Bodo did exist. Nor for that matter they spell out who those people and how their languages were, such as its form, morphology, syntax, etc.

Rev. Sydney Endle called the non-Kachari Assam-Burmese linguistic people are of Bodo origin because according to him their languages are same and similar to the language of the Kacharis. Did Grierson too hold the same opinion, as Rev. Endle did hold? It is however not clear from Grierson's learned dissertation Linguistic Survey of India. According to him, he called the non-Naga Assam-Burmese people as Bodo because Hodgson called them Bodo prior to him (Grierson: *ibid*). Beyond this he did not say anything as to whether the branched body from Assam-Burmese linguistic group called Bodo was the Mech-Kachari Bodo or different body like Magdhi Prakrit of the eastern Aryan tongue.

This question arose because a tendency has grown up among some scholars that the non-Naga Assam-Burmese speakers are the people of Bodo origin. As for instance one of the eminent historian Dr. Milton Sangma holds that ethnically and linguistically the Garos belong to the great Bodo family. (History and Culture of the Garos, 1981:3). An eminent Assamese litterateur Padmanath Gohainbaruah while speaking about the origin of the Koches says that they are the descendants of the Bodos, i.e., Meches and Kacharis (Asom Buranji, 1976:124). But can these propositions be historically correct? To the best of our knowledge and information it cannot be. In support of our contention we may say that the Koches are believed to have been called by various names and designations by the Aryans in their Sanskrit Texts. To quote some of them are as follows – Kuvacha (Chatterji, S.K. KJK, 1974:113; Martin, M. The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India, 1976 (v):538), Kavacha (Basu, N.N., SHK, 1980 (1):35), Kamboja (Chatterji, S.K., *ibid*; Majumder, R.C., Bangladesh Itihas, 1988 (1):75), Pani (Basu, N.N., *ibid*: 35, 42). In the Rig Veda there are references of Kuvacha (R.V. 1-174-7), Kavasa (R.V. 7-18-12), Pani (R.V. 1-62-2/3 and in several suktas), Kamboja in the Vansa Brahmana of the Sam Veda and plethora of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit texts, Kochcha (jain literature Bhagvati), Koch (Brahmavaivarta Purana), Utkacha (Brahmananda Purana). The antiquity of the texts referred to above are of harry past. As for instance the Rig Veda, it is believed that the Rig Veda was compiled

between 7500 BC to 1500 BC. But the antiquity of the Mech Kachari Bodo people does not go beyond the thirteenth century of the Christian era. Hence to say that the Koches are the offspring of the Mech Kachari Bodo people not only appears unhistorical but sounds absurd.

The Garos call themselves as Mande. In Ramayana (Kiskinda Kanda, 40/40-41) and Visnu Purana (Ch. IV/39), there are references of Mandeha people. The Mandehas of Ramayana and Visnu Purana are likely to be a sanskritised form of the Garo Mande. The Ramayana is older than the epic Mahabharata, the compilation of which goes back to 1200 B.C. to 800 B.C. according to the learned scholars. The Visnu Purana is supposed to be one of the 18 original Puranas compiled by Vyasa. Hence the age of this Purana too goes back to first millennia B.C. But we do not find any trace of the Mech Kachari Bodo people by that age. We are therefore of the opinion that the term Bodo as a generic name of the non-Naga Assam-Burmese linguistic group is a misplaced one from historical point of view.

Why then an eminent scholar like Grierson used the term Bodo as generic name of this linguistic group? The simple answer we got from him is that prior to him, Mr. Hodgson called this linguistic group as Bodo. (Supra). But did Mr. Hodgson really call the non-Naga Assam-Burmese linguistic group Bodo? From the work of Mr. Hodgson it appears that he did not call the non-Naga Assam-Burmese linguistic group as Bodo. Here we quote what he said – "I look upon the Rabhas as merely the earliest and most complete convert to Hinduism And upon the Hajongs or hojai kacharis.... as the next grade in time and degree of conversion ... The Garos are at least a more affiliated race. But I do not however include the Garos, or the Rabhas or the Hajongs among the Bodos embracing only the Meches of the west and the Kacharis of the east and south". (Hodgson, B.H. Essay relating to Indian Subject, 1992(1): 115).

The passage quoted above clearly says that while he called Bodo to the Meches of the west and the Kacharis of the east and south (Dimasas) he did not include the Garos, the Rabhas and the Hajongs or the Hojai Kacharis among the Bodos who also belong to the Assam-Burmese speaking group. Thus the claim made by Grierson is found to be totally false, baseless and untrue.

It is however a matter of great concern and surprise that the learned scholars world over believed the false statement of Grierson as GOSPEL truth and calling the non-Naga Assam-Burmese speakers as Bodo. The use of the term Bodo has gone to such an extent that some scholars not only called them Bodo but also called them Meches and Kacharis, the other two names of the Bodos. Here, we cite two such instances:

Dr. B.K. Kakoti, while speaking about the Bodos said, "Among the Tibeto Burman people the Bodos were most powerful. They built strong kingdom under different names, the Chutiyas, the Kacharis, the Koches, etc. The Bodo folks who live to the west of Kamrup district are called Mech. Those who live in and to the east of Kamrup district are called Kacharis". (Assamese Its Formation and Development, 1940:42). Dr. B.K. Baruah in his A Cultural History of Assam, 1969 at page 7 said that the Garos, Rabhas, Koches, Lalungs, Dimasas, etc. are known as Mech to the west of Kamrup and as Kachari in and to the east of Kamrup district as held by Dr. B.K. Kakati. But to the best of our knowledge and information we can vouch with greater degree of certainty that other than the Meches and the Kacharis no Garo, Koch, Rabha, Lalung, etc. are known either as Mech to the west of Kamrup or as Kachari to the east of Kamrup.

These two statements coming from two learned giants of Assam, nay the entire North-East India is really an unexpected one. But whether we expected or not they said it which appears to be totally false and baseless. But what made them to commit this mistake? So far we could decipher the cause of this mistake was that the word Bodo is an equivocal term meaning to the Meches and the Kacharis on one hand while on the other the non-Naga Assam-Burmese linguistic group. It is a fact that the same word is used as name of more than a person or thing. It is because the number of persons and things are more in the world than perhaps there are human vocabulary has to name them respectively. Hence same word is used as name to more than a person or things. To avoid confusion and easy identification in such cases people devised certain mechanisms, such as Chandragupta I, Elizabeth II or George V, etc. But Grierson while calling the non-Naga Assam-Burmese speaking people as Bodo, he did not provide any means to differentiate the Mech Kachari Bodo from the non-Naga Assam-Burmese Bodo. The relationship between these two groups are genus and species which represents two distinct groups of people. Hence their identity cannot be same.

But, because of the same name of the two groups without any sign or mark of their differences; Dr. Kakati and Dr. Baruah failed to differentiate the two groups and called all the non-Naga Assam-Burmese linguistic people as Mech and Kachari to the west and east of Kamrup respectively, because both groups are known as Bodo.

In this connection, mention may also be made that man invented the system of nomenclature to enable one to identify persons or things. But in the instant case it has become just the opposite because of their common

name. This common name without any sign or mark of difference of which Bodo means which groups, i.e., the Mech Kachari or Assam-Burmese group created a great deal of confusion to differentiate one Bodo from the other Bodo. It therefore appears that the word Bodo is not suitable to be a generic name for the non-Naga Assam-Burmese linguistic group.

It may further be stated with pain that Grierson while calling the non-Naga Assam-Burmese linguistic group as Bodo he resorted to forgery. We are compelled to say this with heavy heart because he claimed that he called the non-Naga Assam-Burmese speakers Bodo because this generic name Bodo was first applied by Hodgson. But the passage we have quoted earlier shows that Hodgson did not call this linguistic group as Bodo (supra). According to dictionary meaning, a book is a document because it is intended to be used. Grierson called the non-Naga Assam-Burmese speakers as Bodo in his Linguistic Survey of India, which is a book intended to be used. Hence it is a document and a document which is made with the help of falsehood is called a forgery. It therefore appears that the generic name Bodo of the non-Naga Assam-Burmese speakers is a child of forgery committed by Grierson. In view of this the generic name Bodo of the non-Naga Assam-Burmese speakers does not deserve the place Grierson has so generously given to the word Bodo, as it was done resorting to forgery, perhaps with an oblique motive to give name and fame to a section of people popularly known as Mech or Kachari or Bodo at the cost of a large number of ethnic groups popularly known as Assam-Burmese or Lothic.

We are, therefore, of the opinion that the generic name Bodo of the non-Naga Assam-Burmese speakers should be stricken down to protect and preserve the dignity, self-respect and untainted history of the respective groups of the non-Naga Assam-Burmese speaking people.