

Vol III Issue XI Aug 2014

ISSN No : 2249-894X

*Monthly Multidisciplinary
Research Journal*

*Review Of
Research Journal*

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2249-894X

Review Of Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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SURVIVAL OF BORO LANGUAGE, ETHNICITY IN THE FACE OF VARIOUS CHALLENGES IN EARLY PERIOD OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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Abstract:

In this paper a microscopic discussion has been done to focus various reasons and inspirations behind formation of social institutions and organizations that came into existence for transition of the Boro society in the early 20th Century. The era was very much crucial and on the one hand painful in the so-called traditional and uneducated Boro society. The society was to survive in the dearth of illiteracy, political unconsciousness, and in the midst of magical and superstitious way of living. In that circumstances the society was unfortunately subdued by high-caste communities and socio-political policies executed by political parties and particularly recognized high caste society in the state of Assam. Consequently the Boros, articulated as a petite ethnic linguistic community in Indian context at that period, were to become confused in a threat of extinction in the coming days. The reasons and social context which encouraged the Boro people to form socio-cultural, literary and political organizations has discussed in the paper.

KEY WORDS:

Challenges, Ethnic Identity, Survival, Threat of Extinction, Various Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

To discuss the topic this is necessary to look in to the social situations from the early period of nineteenth century to the first half of twentieth century. This was the early period of unrest of social organizations for sustaining of Boro identity, ethnicity etc. At that time this was the primary mission in front of the Boros.

It is fact that the Boro is a developing language in the present day perspective. This language is not only the means of communication for day to-day life, but also a language of education and literature. For achievement of such an enthusiastic position there is a long pain-taking history behind it. Even till to-day the Boros are facing various challenges in academic, social and political situations. Facing challenges and on the one hand doing great effort is becoming a part of living of the Boro linguistic community.

This is a most sensitive matter that though the Boros had no written political or social history but they belief in historical development of their community. Depending upon legendary and folkloristic sources, they would like to closely relate them with the Dimasas and other cognate linguistic communities like Rabha, Garo, Kokborok, Sonowal, Hajong, Deury-Chutia etc. All of them are kith and kin and they demonstrate a large number of common cultural and linguistic features. Assam history highlights that the glory of the Boro kingdom had been ruined by the Ahom and Myanmar invaders and later captured the whole of the kingdom by the British Rulers in the early decades of 19th century. That was the painful event in the history of the Boros. They had lost all of the heritages of their own. Slowly the Boros scattered from the

Title: "SURVIVAL OF BORO LANGUAGE, ETHNICITY IN THE FACE OF VARIOUS CHALLENGES IN EARLY PERIOD OF THE 20TH CENTURY", Source: Review of Research [2249-894X] Phukan Ch. Basumatary yr:2014 | vol:3 | iss:11

places of Dimaphur, the ancient kingdom, throughout the areas in breadth and length of North East India, inhabited in the heterogeneous natural and geographical phenomenon.

IN THE FACE OF 19TH CENTURY

Once upon a time, the Boros were food gatherer and habituated with the homogeneous cultural traditions, and believed in magical-religious phenomenon. That is why in the early period of 19th century, the British commissioner of un-divided Darrang district Reverend Sidney Endle focused the cultural and religious traits of the Boros in animistic view point [Endle1911: The Kacharis]. After a long period various social organizations and intellectuals of the Boros have raised a strong opinion against this outlook. Of course it was an opinion that deliberated based on the social behavior of that early period of 19th century's Boro society. It is now like a recollection.

It was the period of 19th century, most properly at the decade of 80s that marked the Boro language as the language of literature. Prior to this no written evidences were available in the history of the Boro literature. Rev. Sidney Endle wrote Grammar of Boro language particularly based on spoken variety of Boro language of Darrang district which can provide an outline of Boro language. The name of the book is 'An Outline Grammar of Bodo (Bārā) Language (1884). Also Endle wrote a monograph on the language and culture of the Boros i.e The Kacharis (Published after his death by JD Anderson in 1911). This is worth to mention that some of the British commissioners were taken up sincere step for collecting linguistic and folkloristic resources from the villagers. J.D Anderson had also made a good job by collecting folktales and songs. The name of the collection is 'A Collection of Kachari FolkTales and Rhymes' (1889). To speak frankly all these literary activities of British commissioners were fundamental and initial foundation of writing of Boro language and literature. Also it encouraged the Boro people for bringing up the oral language to a formal and institutional practice. During that period no social organization was came into existence for development of the Boros. For that reason, as per available of records that reflected in written documents of early twentieth century's Boro literature, the Boros were dominated and subjugated at different spheres of society. They were restrained from institutional education, health and hygiene and something like that.

EMERGING OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

In the year 1911 a socio-cultural organization was founded by a group of young peoples in the district of undivided Goalpara; it was 'Habraghat Boro Sanmilani' founded with a view to restructuring and improvement of the exploited society and the Boro language as a whole. The organization had taken up bold initiative for improvement of language, literature and culture. As part of this mission they published a small book 'Boroni Phisa O Ayen' (The Boros and the Social law, 1915) composed by Gangacharan Kachary which focuses on the essence of racial identity, aspiration of the community towards the survival of language. As mentioned in the literary history of Boro language, it was the most ancient written evidence of literary work. Besides one more literary organization was also formed by some enthusiastic Boro peoples in the year 1917 i.e 'Dakshin Kul Boro Sahitya Sanmilan' which had a planning for upgrading language and literary activities among the Boros. Most of the enthusiastic peoples had deep concerned and reaction that the linguistic community was pathetically facing the threat of extinction. This made them very responsive and aware of the ethnic identity. Many questions aroused in the mind set of the social and literary workers that what is the way of survival of language? Can they exist in the wave of challenges of the coming days? Even till to-day this is a big question in front of the small homogeneous linguistic groups.

To overcome various obstructions facing at different time and spaces socio-literary, socio-political organization of the Boros involved since long years back. This is very much important to mention here that during the early decade of twentieth century the Brahma religion preacher Kalicharan Brahma had dedicated his life not only for preaching of Brahma religion in the Boro society but also sincerely look into the essence of linguistic identity for the Boros. In this regard he had conceived a clear cut idea that the racial identity of the Boros is really in vain without academic performance of language among them. This basic idea had also been supported by enthusiastic personalities like Mada Ram Brahma, Satish Chandra Basumatary, Rupnath Brahma and their contemporary fellows, and students who advocated for introduction of Boro language in the academic purposes. With a view to carry on the fundamental issue, the student organization like Boro Satra Sanmilani (Bodo Students' Union, 1919) had been founded by a few Boro students of Cotton College. Their vision is to bringing up the society, more extensively in the sphere of language, literature and education. The mouthpiece of the student organization was Bibar (Flower, 1924), the first Boro magazine in the history of Boro language which had taken up a dynamic role to encourage the Boros at the diverse social context. The writings included here were on the various burning social issues that reflected in most of the writings. Most important point is that a group of literary activists as well as writers were being motivated the

so-called educated peoples to keep in writing Boro literature. In course of time literary works and writing exercise was being flourished among the Boros. As a result Boro literature was growing up in a slow and steady way. Consequently various literary genres like poetry and prose were flourishing during this period. The most famous poetry book of that period was Khonthai-Methai (1923) [Poems and Songs] composed by Madaram Brahma and Rupnath Brahma. Literary critics of the Boros have opinion that this is one of the masterpieces of the Boro literature. Some other contemporary writers of that period like Ishan Chandra Muchahary and Pramod Chandra Brahma were also contributed a lot towards the growth and development of the Boro language and literature. In this way the linguistic and literary flavor was grown-up to a great extent.

To speak frankly, the socio-political organizations like Kachari Juvak Sanmilani, Boro Satra Sanmilani, All Assam Tribal League (founded in 1933) had taken up vibrant initiative to face with various challenges of the society. During the visit of Simon Commission formally deputed by the British Government in the year 1928, some enthusiastic Tribal groups met the Commission for demanding socio-political safeguard especially for the Tribal peoples. During this time the Kachari Jubak Sanmilani played significant role to ascertain and form the future fortune of the entire plains tribes of Assam. They asserted that the entire tribal of Assam have their own distinct ethnic linguistic identity, culture and do not like to identify them as untouchable community. Social organizations, the religious preacher Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma and some other followers thought deeply about social predicament of the Boros. To determine survival and protection of socio-political opportunities of the Boros and the tribal peoples, they submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission. The political organization 'All Assam Tribal League' was founded for the peoples of tribal of Assam. Social organizations, literary and social workers of this community had collectively announced a clarion call to all sections of the tribal to be involved for development of language and literature. Such a sincere statement had motivated the Boro community as well as the tribals to become aware of their ethnic identity.

CONCLUSION

From a microscopic discussion it is observed that, in the pre-independence period, the Boros were living in the dearth of education and political unconsciousness. Even they had been dominated politically and socially by other high-caste communities. In spite of all these situations the social organizations were doing energetic endeavor for growth of language and literature. Effort had been made for publishing magazines, books etc. though these were infant in style and features. Slowly an emotional tendency of writing and learning of language was being created during this period. Consequently the Boros were able to achieve a status of linguistic community in Assam. To get hold the status of language, the Boro literary and social organizations had done great effort and involved in untiring struggle since very long years back. There is a painful story in the history of the Boros. It is a matter of fact that they are getting unseen obstructions for achieving constitutional opportunities though they are doing struggle against the so-called high-caste society and political conspiracy of the government. To speak honestly, Boros are inspired by political and racial subjugation for doing agitated effort for survival of linguistic identity within a constitutional jurisdiction.

This is a brief history of unrest for sustaining Boro identity as well as ethnicity and how emotional and deep-rooted reaction for survival of language has been formalized by some social organizations since the very early period of nineteenth century to 50's of twentieth century, the inception of the great literary organization of the Boros THE BODO SAHITYA SABHA. In the present day situation, the literary organization, socio-political parties and many more well-wishers are doing effort for enrichment of language and literature.

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