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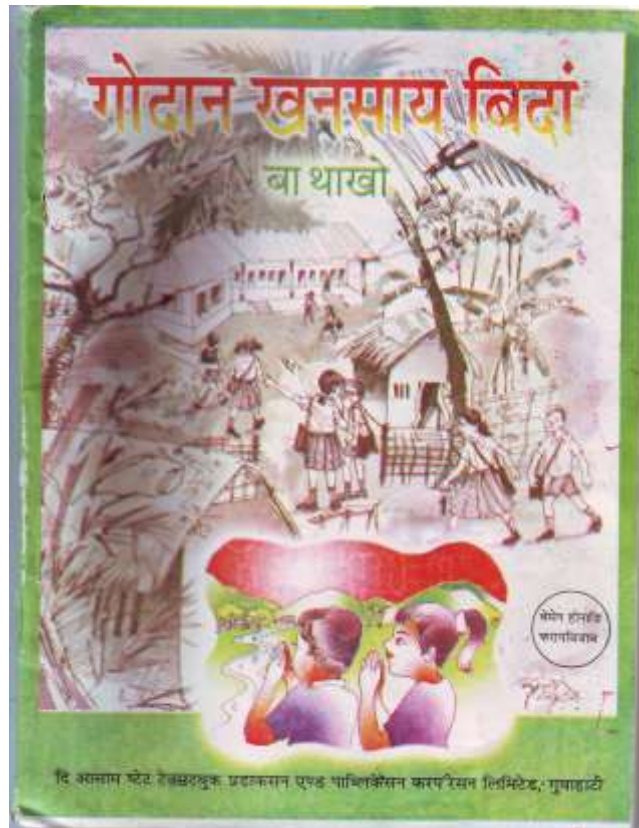
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## History of the Recognition of Bodo Language as Medium of Instruction in Assam

Kusum Brahma, M. A.



### Abstract

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History of the Recognition of Bodo Language as Medium of Instruction in Assam

The Bodo are known as earliest indigenous inhabitants of Brahmaputra valley. They were the dominant people group of Assam till the Ahom came to Assam. Racially they are of Mongoloid origin and linguistically they belong to Tibeto-Burman family of Bodo-Naga sub-group. But this important people group has no written record about their past educational system as well as the development of their language. Because of the lack of written mode their language remained confined to spoken form till the twentieth century. In this paper an attempt is made to analyse the historical development of Bodo language as medium of instruction in Assam.

## **Introduction**

Bodos are known as the earliest indigenous inhabitants of Brahmaputra valley. They were a dominant people group of Assam. They had their own kingdoms, religion, culture and language. In earlier times, they were not known by the name of the Bodos, they were known by different names in different times and different ages. In epic period they were known as Kirata, Danava or Asura, in ancient and medieval periods as Mech, Kacharis and Bodo. But with whatever names they are known to others, they like to call themselves as Bodo or Boro (Sydney Endle). It is interesting to note that racially the Bodo groups belong to Mongoloid origin whose homeland might have been somewhere in Mongolia, Siberia, China, Tibet or Central Asia but linguistically they are included under the Tibeto-Burman speech family of Bodo-Naga sub-group. It is seen from the writings of different historians that they came to Assam at about 2000 B.C. along the bank of the Brahmaputra River.

In the present paper, Bodo will mean only those Bodo speaking people whose language has been included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

## **Emergence of Bodo Language as a Medium of Instruction at the Primary Level – Formation of a Literary Club**

The emergence of Bodo language movement began with the formation of Bodo literary society, known as Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1952. The students of the Dhubri Government Higher Secondary School and the local businessmen first established a literary club of the Bodos in 1952 for the development of the Bodo language and literature. Birendra Narayan Patgiri was the president, and Rajendra Nath Brahma was the nominated Secretary of the club. Bandharam Kachari, Modaram Brahma Kamini Brahma, Sikendra

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Brahma, Barada Kanta Basumatary and some other well-known educated Boros were the active members of this club.

However they soon realised that confining the activities of the literary club within Dhubri alone would not serve the purpose of the community. Hence, they decided to expand their activities including all the Bodos of Assam and other states in its meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> September 1952.

Accordingly, a general meeting was held at Kokrajhar High School on September 1952, which was presided over by Satish Chandra Basumatary. In this meeting a decision was taken to call for a two day educational convention at Basugaon on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of November, 1952 with a view to forming a larger literary organisation for the Bodo community as a whole at Basugaon. A preparatory committee was formed to go ahead with the resolution of the convention under the chairmanship of Jogendra Basumatary. A reception committee was also formed on 7<sup>th</sup> of October, 1952.

### **The Convention**

The convention was thus held as per the scheduled with two days programme on 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> November at Basugaon. The convention was chaired by Dharanidhar Basumatary M.L.A., and also was attended by Rupnath Brahma, the Ex- M.P., writer and social reformer of Assam.

### **Founding of Bodo Sahitya Sabha**

On the second day of convention, i.e., on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1952 ‘the Bodo Sahitya Sabha’ the apex literary body of the Bodo was formed. Jaybhadra Hagjer was elected as the first president of the society and Sonaram Thaosen as the secretary and Jogendranath Basumatary as the joint secretary of the society. One of the main purposes of the formation of B.S.S. was to develop and expand Bodo language by introducing it as the medium of instruction for Bodo children in the primary schools of the Bodo majority areas of Assam.

Hence Bodo Sahitya Sabha passed a resolution and on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1953, the Sabha submitted a memorandum comprising of the demands for introducing Bodo language at the primary school level in the Bodo dominated areas to Bishnuram Medhi, the then Chief

Minister of Assam. A copy of memorandum was also submitted to Mr. Bimala Prasad Chaliha, the then Congress President of Assam State Committee.

### **The Use of Assamese Words in Bodo Textbooks**

In 1956, the Assam Government composed some books in Bodo language. But Bodo Sahitya Sabha rejected the books as they contained a number of Assamese words. At the same time, the Assamese speaking peoples' movement regarding the introduction of Assamese as an official language of the then entire Assam became a dominant force. In spite of the strong opposition raised by the other ethnic groups of plains and hill areas, Assamese was declared as the official language of Assam in 1960. As a reaction, the hill people demanded English as their official language; the people of Barak valley demanded Bengali as the official language in their Barak valley and the Bodo Sahitya Sabha demanded implementation of Hindi language as the official language which is acceptable to all. But ultimately the government of Assam accepted the three language formula, i.e. Assamese in Assam, English in Hill areas and Bengali in Barak valley as viable alternatives.

This posture of the Assam government and the fear of Assamese domination among the communities awakened the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and some Bodo intellectuals to start its language movement afresh.

### **The Issue of Census Enumeration**

In the Executive meeting of the B.S.S. the issue of 1961 census enumeration was raised. The Executive Committee strongly demanded that the Bodo people would show their language not as Assamese but as Bodo, religion as Bathou, Brahma or Christian in the next census enumeration.

### **Plea for the Introduction of the Bodo Language in the Schools**

Again, for the second time, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha submitted a memorandum to the then Chief Minister entitled 'Scheme for the Introduction of the Bodo Language in the schools situated in the Bodo Speaking Areas.' This memorandum attached a detailed scheme relating to the appointment of teachers, formation off the Text Book Committees, etc.

On its birth day, i.e. 16<sup>th</sup> November 1962, the Sabha organised a rally. More than twenty thousand people gathered in Kokrajhar town and participated in rally. The rally gave the

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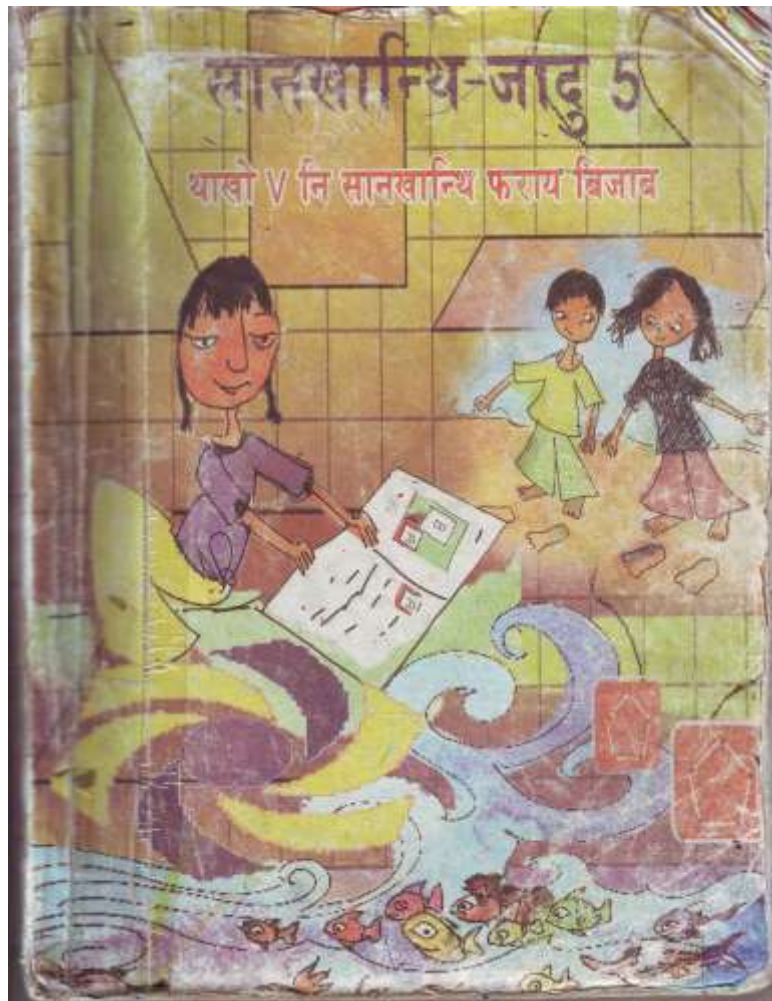
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slogans in unison demanding introduction of Bodo language in schools of majority Bodo populated areas.

At that time Bimala Prasad Chaliha became the Chief Minister of Assam. Soon after this event he assured the leaders of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha to fulfil their demand He constituted a committee named 'Study Committee' under the leadership of the then Forest Minister Rupnath Brahma to look into the feasibility of the Bodo demands. The committee submitted its report in February, 1963. On the recommendation of the Study Committee, Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha officially announced government decision to introduce Bodo language as the medium of instruction in primary schools in a ceremonial function held in Kokrajhar Higher Secondary School field on May 18, 1963.

### **Implementation**



Thus the Bodo language was first introduced as medium of instruction in the Lower Primary schools of Kokrajhar Sub-division from the academic year of 1993. The Bodo students got an opportunity to study in their own language.

As per the conditions of the order of implementation, the state government was bound to take the responsibility to supply a special kind of textbooks to enable the students to cope up with the new syllabus. But the government failed in performing this responsibility. The first batch of 415 Bodo medium students after completion of their primary education (class III) in 1967 faced lots of problems in pursuing their higher study. The Assam Government had not taken any immediate steps to solve this problem. Hence, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha demanded the extension of Bodo language up to Middle Elementary school level in its Central Committee meeting held at Gossaigaon on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1967. This demand was discussed on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1968 at Shillong between the Government and the representatives of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha. But the meeting failed to bring any positive result.

### **Mass Movement**

The annual session of the Kokrajhar District Bodo Sahitya Sabha was held at Ramphalbil on 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1968. In the meeting the Bodo Sahitya Sabha gave an ultimatum to the Government of Assam that if the government would not accept their demands within 14-15 days, they would start a mass movement. They extended their ultimatum up to 27<sup>th</sup> February 1968. But no response came from the government till 27<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1968. Hence, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha started mass movement from 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1968. As a part of the movement a Mass rally was held throughout the Kokrajhar town. Many schools and colleges were boycotted. The agitation turned into a serious situation.

On 7<sup>th</sup> March, a team of Ministers and M.L.A.s came to Kokrajhar. On that day a meeting was held between the government representatives and the representative of the Kokrajhar District Bodo Sahitya Sabha at the premises of the Kokrajhar Tribal Rest House. But the meeting failed to bring any solution. Bodo Sahitya Sabha informed the government team that the coming H.S.L.C. (final) examination which is scheduled to hold from 12<sup>th</sup> March would be obstructed on failure of the fulfilment of demand. In the meantime the Assembly Session started. In the Assembly Session the demand of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha was recognised by passing a Law and this message was sent to Bodo Sahitya Sabha.

The government of Assam called a joint meeting of the representative of the state government and the representatives of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha on 31<sup>st</sup> March in Shillong to discuss the issue of medium of instruction. The government of Assam accepted the demand to introduce Bodo medium up to Lower Secondary stage, vide their letter no.EMI/167/66 pt.2 dated Shillong the 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1968, from the Secretary, Govt. of Assam, Education Department). Therefore, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1968, in a ceremonial gathering at Kokrajhar Government Higher Secondary School's premises Sayed Ali Ahmed, the then State Education Minister inaugurated the introduction of Bodo language as the medium of instruction in M.E. Level.

On the demands of Bodo people in general and Bodo Sahitya Sabha in particular, Bodo language has been introduced as a medium of instruction in High school also when the Bodo medium student passed M.E. level education in due time , vide Government Notification No. EMI/16/71/267-A, dated Dispur the 25<sup>th</sup> June, 1973, Government of Assam, Education (G) Department.



Thus slowly but steadily Bodo people were able to achieve a suitable status for their Bodo language in school education. The first batch of the High School students of Bodo medium appeared in H.S.L.C examination in the year 1977. In 1976 Bodo language was introduced as the Modern Indian Languages at the Pre-University level under Gauhati University. In 1978 it was introduced at the graduate level, in the same year in North Eastern University and in 1995 in Dibrugarh University. In 1996, Gauhati University started Bodo major in M.A. level. In 1985, it was recognised as an Associate Official Language in the Bodo inhabited areas of Assam, as a subject of Orientation course in 2002, Bodo M.I.L. as a subject of SLET in 2003. Bodo language was included in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Indian constitution in 2003 by an act of the Parliament of India. From 2006, it was introduced as Major subject in Kokrajhar College.

These are the significant achievements of the Bodo people in relating to their language identity and use of their language in various levels of education. Now the Bodo people can study through their own language. They can appear in the state level and national level competitive examinations in their own language independently without bearing the heavy burden of other languages.

### **Conclusion**

It has been observed that although Bodos were once a dominant people group in Assam, in course of time, they become a minority. For the revival and uplift of their language and identity they have successfully organized several institutions and movements. Today they have their own recognised language and identity. Since 1963 they have made great progress in terms of language identity and use of their language as medium of instruction and of competitive examinations for jobs with the government. Further progress of the Bodo language is now largely in the hands of its own leaders and intellectuals. The numbers Bodo speaking people are also increasing (from 1221881 in 1991 Census to 131571 in 2001 Census). Similarly, the Bodo medium schools are also found everywhere in Bodo language region. But it is unfortunate that there are already signs of declining enthusiasm for their own language, culture and education among the Bodos. Except a few, most of them still opt for study through other languages like English and Assamese. In some places, there are Bodo schools with teachers but no students, while in others there are students with good premises but no teachers and no textbooks, teaching aids; there are schools with enough students but



no proper infrastructural facilities, no regular inspection, etc. There is still no Bodo newspaper or journal with good quality that can be compared with those published in other languages. It is now time for Bodo people to come together and develop their language with the help of the government and non-governmental organisations to make their language a fit vehicle for all domains including culture, literature, education and business. Otherwise whatever is achieved till now will be lost soon.

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