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The Politics of a Script

Demand for Acceptance of Roman Script for Bodo Language

M S Prabhakar

The problem faced by the Bodo people is in essence the problem of all less developed communities when they are living with comparatively advanced groups of people under a common political system.

The lower levels of both the caste Hindu and Bodo societies have been wretchedly poor; but the elite among the caste Hindus had been larger, better equipped and better trained as an active partner of a feudal system of exploitation for centuries than the hitherto almost non-existent Bodo elite.

Of late, the Bodo elite has been growing in strength and numbers and the conflict for a slice of the pie has been essentially between these elites. The recent agitation over the choice of script for the Bodo language is a manifestation of this conflict.

The question of script has got enmeshed with many other issues — political, economic and cultural. This article is an attempt to sort out some of these issues.

I

WITH the suspension of the agitation launched by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha for the adoption of the Roman script for the Bodo Language, there has been a visible relaxation of tension in Assam.¹ But the relaxation of tension is more apparent than real, for the issues highlighted by the agitation are yet far from being resolved. Strong passions have been roused on all sides, and even if the 'script issue' might be decided, one way or the other, to everybody's satisfaction, one can never be sure that such a settlement would mean an end to the continuing assertion of sub-regional nationalisms in Assam.

On the face of it, no agitation could seem more pointless and unnecessary than an agitation launched by a group of people 'demanding' the use of a particular script for their language. The adoption of a script for a language which otherwise possesses no script of its own should ordinarily be entirely a matter for the people concerned. But unfortunately, things are not so simple; and the question of the script has got enmeshed with so many other questions, mostly of a political and cultural nature, that the issue has really ceased to be a 'purely academic matter' of concern only to the people concerned. The present article is an attempt to sort out these political and cultural questions.

The Bodos are a mongoloid people living in the whole of Northeast India and speaking one of the Tibeto-Burman languages. Ethnologists speak of many groups of people as Bodos; but our

concern here is with the group of people known as Bodo Kacharis who live mainly, but not exclusively, in the northern parts of the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang. Our concern is not with the Bodo as a speech area, which would include Tripura and the Garo Hills in Meghalaya, as well as small pockets in other parts of the Northeastern region. At the outset, it should be noted that the Bodos are only one of the many 'plains tribals' who still form territorially part of Assam. Some of these 'plains tribals' no doubt live in the hill areas now constituted into Meghalaya and other political units; but the majority of them live in Assam and have always lived here. Apart from the Bodo Kachari, the other segments of this 'plains tribal' population consist of the Rabha, the Hojai, the Hajjong, the Deuri, the Plains Miri, the Sonwal Kachari and the Lalung. Each group has a language or dialect of its own, though in some cases, the native tongue has almost completely been forgotten and the Assamese language has been adopted as the mother tongue. But the Bodo Kacharis, along with the Plains Miris, continue to speak their language, though substantial number of these peoples are fully bilingual, speaking both the mother tongue and Assamese.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is now necessary to venture upon a bit of historical and cultural background, a highly risky undertaking, but which has to be undertaken nonetheless. Who are these Bodo people?

The origin of the Kachari race is still very largely a matter of conjecture and inference, in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history ... in feature and general appearance they approximate very closely to the Mongolian type; and this would seem to point to Tibet and China as the original home of the race ... It is possible that there were at least two great migrations from the north and north-east into the rich valley of the Brahmaputra, i.e. one entering North-east Bengal and Western Assam through the valley of the Tista, Dharla, Sankosh, etc. and founding there what was formerly the powerful kingdom of Kamarupa; and the other making its way through the Subansiri, Dibong and Dihong valleys into Eastern Assam, where a branch of widespread Kachari race, known as Chutiyas undoubtedly held sway for a lengthened period ... It is indeed not at all unlikely that the people known to us as Kacharis and to themselves as Bada (Bara) were in earlier days the dominant race in Assam.²

In whatever mysteries the origins of these people might lie, it is generally agreed that once, and not so long ago either, they occupied practically the whole of the Northeastern region.

The Bodo tribes are linguistically connected with the Nagas, but whereas the Nagas have always remained isolated and primitive, one may say that the Bodos, who spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal, forming a solid bloc in Northeastern India, were the most important Indo-Mongoloid people in Eastern India, and they form one of the main bases of the present-day population of these tracts.

Judging from the wide range of extension of their language, the Bodos appear first to have settled over the entire Brahmaputra valley, and extended west into North Bengal (in Koch Behar, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts); they may have pushed into North Bihar also, and the Indo-Mongoloids who penetrated into North Bihar might equally have been either Bodos or 'Himalayan' tribes allied to the Newars. They skirted the southern bend of the Brahmaputra and occupied the Garo Hills, where, as Garos, they form a bloc of Bodo speech. South of the Garo Hills they spread in northern Maimansing, where the semi-Bengalised Haijong tribe is of Bodo origin. From Nowgong district in Assam their area of occupation extended to Cachar district (particularly in the North Cachar Hills) and into Sylhet, and from Cachar and Sylhet they extend further to the south, to Tripura State, where there is still a Bodo-speaking bloc in the shape of the Tipra tribe which founded the State; and from Tripura they spread into Comilla and possibly also Noakhali districts; and thus they occupied the mouths of the Ganges by the eastern sea. With the exception of the isolated Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the whole of Assam (barring the eastern parts inhabited by the Nagas and the south-eastern parts inhabited by the Kuki-Chin) and North and East Bengal was the country of the great Bodo people. But at the present moment, except where some islands of Bodo speech remain, the Kirata Bodos have merged into the Bengali and Assamese speaking masses, Hindu as well as Mussalman, in the area.³

That the Bodo people in fact form the base of the present-day Assamese society is a fact hardly disputed by anybody, least of all by the Assamese people themselves. In fact, it is rather misleading to make the distinction between the 'Assamese people' and the 'Bodo people', for they are, if one could put it that way, the woof and warp of a composite Assamese society and culture. This concept of a composite Assamese society and culture is not entirely an instance of fantasy, of the Idea preceeding the Fact. Perhaps at some remote period, the Northeastern region did receive settlers belonging to the so-called upper castes from the Heartland; but the present population, even of the so-called upper-caste Hindus, is undoubtedly a product of widespread intermingling of people, both the 'Aryan' and the 'Mongoloid'. But it is not necessary to depend upon any speculative assessment of possible widespread miscegenation that should have taken place in earlier times, to see that the caste-Hindu Assamese so-

ciety has been fortified and enriched by 'non-Aryan' elements. Whatever rigidity might have existed in other areas of the country regarding the Hindu caste system, making it impossible for one born outside the caste to even enter into it, in Assam at any rate the Hindu caste system, as it operated in earlier times, was a remarkably open one. Upward caste mobility was very much a reality in Assam, and not merely was the non-Hindu permitted to enter the Hindu fold, but the convert (or his family) could, by stages, move higher and higher in the Hindu caste hierarchy, though of course the highest caste distinctions were barred to him (unless he managed to set out to an entirely new place and set himself up as a Brahman or a Kayastha). Conversion of the 'aborigines' to Hinduism was undertaken extensively by the Goseins in Assam, and the whole practice has been described in the Census Report of 1891, thus:

The Gosein or some of his subordinates usually select certain families of the aboriginal tribes, who reside in the vicinity of Hindu villages and at a distance from the main villages of the aboriginal tribes. These families are frequently lectured upon the purity of the Hindu religion and the easy way in which they can get salvation, and how they can acquire a position in the Hindu society if they give up their habits of eating pork and other forbidden food and drinking strong liquor, and conform to the Hindu methods of eating and drinking and worship. As these people frequently feel the inconvenience of their isolated position, they are easily tempted to become Hindus, and thereby be enabled to associate and move with their Hindu neighbours, by whom they are hated and looked down upon as a degraded class so long as they remain in an unconverted state. When these people after frequent lectures show some inclination towards giving up their religion and becoming Hindus, a certain propitious day is selected, and they are questioned as to whether they would like to give up their former habits and customs, and become perfect Hindus, or they would simply take *saran* (religious instruction) from the Hindu Gosein, and remain free as to their habits of eating and drinking. When they express a desire of entire conversion to the Hindu religion, they are made to fast for a day or two, and then to undergo a *prayachit* (atonement), for which they have to spend some 5 to 20 rupees according to their circumstances. They then receive their *saran bhajan* (religious instruction and mode of worship) from the Gosein, whom from that day they look upon as their spiritual guide. These people then change all former

utensils of cooking and eating and also their dwelling house and become quite Hinduised. The Gosein then makes them over to a certain *khel* (a body of Hindus who eat and drink and associate with each other) with whom the converted are to associate. The converted men are closely watched by their new comrades as to whether they take any of the forbidden food and strong liquor or not; and if they are found to have entirely given up these things, they are freely admitted into the Hindu society, and are called Saru Koch. For the first three generations from their conversion they are looked down upon a little by their Hindu comrades, and they are not allowed to take any leading part of their society. From the third generation they become quite as good as any Hindu of the Koch caste.⁴

It should be noted that the *khel* referred to in the passage cited was a peculiar feature of rural Assam under Ahom administration.

The adult population of Assam was divided into *khels* having to render specific service to the state, such as arrow-making, boat-building, boat-plying, house-building, provision-supplying, fighting, writing, revenue collecting, road-building, catching and training of elephants, superintendence of horse, training of hawks, and supervision of forests. Sometimes *khels* were composed on a territorial basis... Each *khel* was like a guild to which lands were allotted for cultivation by the constituent members, free of rent in return for the service they rendered to the state. The strength of a *khel* varied from 3,000 to 100.⁵

This constitution of the subjects into *khels* in Upper Assam made it possible for even the non-Hindu elements to live in a comparatively integrated state with the caste Hindus. Such a 'reorganisation' of rural Assam did not take place in areas which were outside the Ahom administration;⁶ and it is in these areas, like Goalpara and Kamrup, that the majority of the present-day Bodos live.

Every people need a myth. One of the myths that strongly persists in Assam, especially in the minds of the upper-caste Hindus, is that they — which by a process of ethnocentrism includes their caste and class and finally the whole of Assamese society — are peculiarly free from the bane of caste prejudices and caste feelings, which are so rampant in other parts of the country. Like all myths, this myth too has an element of truth; the very fact that a non-Hindu tribal could, of course, by doing the proper penances and paying the required fees, etc, become a Hindu of sorts and even

aspire for higher things, does indicate that the Hindu caste system was not after all such a closed and rigid system as it was in other parts of the country. But despite the comparative openness of the society, the caste Hindu Assamese society could never completely absorb all the 'aboriginal' elements into it. Many factors went into this partial Hinduisation of Assam, but at least part of the reason for the failure of total proselytisation should have been the 'demands' made on the convert. And not all the openness of the caste system in Assam made the convert forget that he was, even though a Hindu, still a very low-class Hindu.

II

Let us for a moment consider the class vaguely referred to in the above section as the Upper-caste Hindu elite. There is only one word that can adequately describe the psychological state of this class at present — panic. The sequence of events that has been unfolding for the past couple of years should seem as *deja vu*; they have been there before. What is being enacted before their eyes cannot but seem as yet another act in an unending drama of the dismemberment of Assam. Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram — each name speaks to the Assamese mind of yet another slice taken off the body politic of Assam. Inevitably, the present movement of the Bodo people for a rejection of the Assamese script for their language is seen as yet another rejection, by a minority group, of its Assamese identity. But the Bodo's 'rejection' is undoubtedly a far more serious matter, more hurting even, than the 'rejection' of the Khasis, the Nagas, the Garos, the Mizos, etc. They were all, culturally as well as geographically, peripheral to the Brahmaputra valley. Enjoying many privileges under special provisions of the Constitutions, they were, even while in Assam, never of Assam. But the Bodos are very much in Assam; they are, in fact, as both the Assamese and the Bodos insist on maintaining, the original inhabitants of the land. In a way, it is silly to make a distinction between the Assamese and the Bodos, for the Bodos are Assamese (though the eager apologist will never reverse the equation and claim that the Assamese are Bodos). And as pointed out earlier, it is from the Bodo stock that the present day Assamese society has been derived, a derivation which is nowadays being increasingly insisted upon. So, how can the Bodo people reject

their Assamese identity? "Who else is Assamese if the Bodos are not Assamese?" Rhetorical questions abound.

But notwithstanding all the pious declarations about the Bodos being the mainspring of presentday Assamese society, it is very doubtful if the Bodo people were ever really considered as part of the Assamese society while they remained Bodos. Their acceptance into Assamese society was very much linked with their acceptance of Hinduism, which also meant, in course of a few generations, the loss of the native speech and the adoption of the Assamese language.⁷ Those who remained outside the Hindu caste system continued to remain Kacharis, a term which, at least in private conversation among caste Hindu Assamese, continues to have its traditional pejorative connotation. The acceptance of the Assamese language as the mother tongue was the *sine qua non* of entry into Assamese society, an attitude of mind not especially different from that exhibited by language groups in other parts of the country. At certain points in the past, the Bodo people found some marginal benefits accruing to them by seeking entry into the Hindu caste system, even on the terms imposed by the latter. The illusion was created that the new entrants were equal partners, while the reality was that they were admitted on sufferance. And while they undoubtedly derived all the 'spiritual' advantages offered by the entry into the lower ranks of the Hindu caste system, the more 'material' advantages being offered by the new system of government — the jobs, the educational facilities, the contracts, etc — while being theoretically available to the Bodos as well as to the non-Bodos, were in fact being almost exclusively cornered by the non-Bodo people.

ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION

The problem faced by the Bodo people has been in essence the problem faced by all less-developed communities, when they are living with comparatively advanced groups of people under a common political system. Despite all the efforts at conversion and assimilation, there still existed a substantial community of Bodos who, on the one hand, were extremely poor, backward, inward-looking; but who, on the other hand, had to live with a people who were, comparatively speaking, slightly better off than the Bodos in every way. The lower levels of both the societies were wretchedly poor; in fact, it would be misleading to speak of the 'economic

exploitation' of the Bodos by the Assamese people, a kind of battle-cry of the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), for the plain fact is that both are being exploited equally impartially by Delhi. But undoubtedly, the 'elite' among the Caste Hindus was larger, better equipped, better-trained as an active partner of a feudal system of exploitation for centuries, than the almost non-existent Bodo elite. Of late, the Bodo elite has been growing in strength and numbers, and the conflict for a slice of the pie has essentially been between these elites; and a 'cultural' manifestation of this conflict has been the recent one over the choice of the script for the Bodo language.

But to say that the present conflict is between the Caste Hindu elite and the Bodo elite is in a sense to beg the question by saying the obvious. It still does not answer the question — why? The Bodos, to adopt a sentence from Eldridge Cleaver, feel that they have been rather late in waking up on the caste Hindus' doings, and now that they have been tricked all these years, are very bitter. Other tribal groups in the composite state of Assam have not merely retained their cultural identities, but have even won their rights to a distinct political identity, vindicated most triumphantly in the sprawling bureaucracies of Shillong, Kohima and other places. The Plains Tribals (among whom are the Bodos), on the other hand, were denied the elaborate constitutional protections contained in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution; instead, they were fobbed off with the 'protection' contained in the provisions of the Tribal Belts and Blocks,⁸ and everyone agrees that even these nominal rules governing the possession and transfer of land in the tribal areas have not been observed. The result has been large-scale alienation of land in the tribal areas, whose scale and extensiveness is yet to be properly assessed. The results of a survey conducted in a couple of plains tribal villages suggest that land-pauperisation and debt are rampant in these villages.⁹

But why should feelings of economic exploitation result in opposition to the Assamese script? If anything, the objective conditions for sustained struggle against landlordism are ripe in the rural areas of Assam. And yet, we find the Bodos, one of the largest homogeneous peasant communities of Assam, acutely suffering from the evils of landlordism, burdened by debts repaid many times over in interest alone, and having a tradition of agrarian revolt and

armed struggle under Communist leadership, now being massively mobilised* for an agitation against the Assamese script.

The explanation, of course, is that the leadership of the Bodos finds it more profitable, at the present juncture, to mobilise the Bodo masses on the issue of script. Often, the landlord and the village mahajan are caste Hindu Assamese, and the feelings of economic exploitation are easily turned into 'cultural' channels. The agitation against the Assamese script is also sure to pay rich dividends, quickly, which can be reaped by the leadership. Not that the grounds for the demand of Roman Script for the Bodo Language are entirely non-existent. The present writer is totally ignorant of the Bodo language; his ignorance of the Assamese language too is near-total; but if representative literary/cultural organisations of the Bodo people like the Bodo Sahitya Sabha agree that the Roman script is more suited to their language, then that should have been the end of the matter. In fact, many Assamese intellectuals feel that even the Assamese script, as it is constituted at the present, is unnecessarily cumbersome even for the Assamese language, and a lively debate is going on about the need to modify the present Assamese script, which is practically indistinguishable from the Devnagari in its composition, to suit the sound requirements of the Assamese language. The activists of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha muster an impressive set of arguments to support their demand;¹⁰ but the agitation has been not so much on the demand itself, as on the measures the government has taken concerning the demand.¹¹ Undoubtedly, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha precipitated the issue (they had waited long enough) early this year, by introducing, in the Bodo Medium Schools, the Bodo English Primer *Bithorai*, printed in the Roman Script. The result was that the government stopped grants to the schools which had introduced the new, 'unrecognised' textbook, and stopped the payment of salaries of teachers in the recalcitrant schools. Followed protests, token strike for a day (September 12), mass satyagraha in the 'Bodo Medium Implemented Areas Of Assam' (September 18-21), mass picketing of schools in the same areas September 24 to October 4) and mass indefinite picketing in government offices in the same areas (October 5). There was a let-up in the movement following discussions between the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the government in the middle of

October. The movement was resumed on November 16, the anniversary of the founding of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, (incidentally, one of the demands of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha is that November 16 should be declared as a government Holiday) and before it was suspended on November 28, by the government's own admission, ten people had been killed, including two CRP men. During the early phase, four people had been killed: two in Barpeta Road on September 28, and two more in Mangaldoi sub-division on October 3.¹²

It is clear that the government has been quite ruthless in its reaction to the agitation of the Bodo people. But while one can understand the ruthlessness of the government, it is difficult to understand the extreme anxiety and near-panic displayed by the non-Bodo people, on the Bodo demand for the Roman script. Some months ago, when the police invaded the Gauhati University campus and severely beat up many students and employees, there was widespread protest all over the state against the brutalities perpetrated by the police. But a far more severe repression let loose upon the Bodo people has elicited but little public indignation, a fact whose significance has not been lost upon the Bodo people. Undoubtedly, the demand for the Roman script is seen as only seemingly academic and cultural; in the minds of the Assamese, the demand is the thin end of the wedge, the thick end being Udayachal. Since Udayachal, an autonomous region for the 'plains tribals' of Assam, is after all not a practicable idea — the Bodo people are spread all along the Brahmaputra valley, mainly but not exclusively on the northern side, and there are no significantly large contiguous areas where they are in a majority — the concept of Udayachal has to be seen as a pure and simple pressure device, employed by a minority group, to wrest concessions for the ruling elite. But with the bitter memories of earlier acts of dismemberment, one cannot be absolutely certain that future 'reorganisations' are not going to be carried out in the north-eastern region, and we might be in for yet another redrawing of boundaries. It is this prospect that is most disturbing to the average Assamese. A group of people who were all these centuries part of the Assamese society (on terms dictated by the latter) has suddenly started asserting that they are in fact different; and though the Bodos are stating what is merely a fact, the ges-

ture of rejecting the Assamese script which accompanies this assertion has been especially difficult for the Assamese people to stomach. Viewed rationally, a script should hardly rouse such passions. A common script anyway has never automatically meant any greater understanding between the people who share the common script, a point hardly necessary to make when writing about Assam. That the Bodos wrote their language in the Assamese script all these years did not make communication between the Bodos and the non-Bodos any easier, except when the Bodos spoke Assamese. The number of Assamese speakers able to speak and write Bodo must be insignificant, compared to the number of Bodos fully fluent in Assamese. And yet, a major agitation had to be launched by the Bodos to secure something which anyway nobody could deny them; and on this issue, over a dozen people have died in the last few weeks. But the issue itself is yet to be settled, and a further round of talks between the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the government is scheduled for the latter part of January 1975.

III

The alienation of the Bodos from a composite Assamese society is one of the most disturbing developments for Assam in recent times; one can only hope that this alienation is not total. For long, the Bodos (and other Plains Tribals) considered the entry into the lower ranks of the Hindu caste system as an essentially forward step. But what was once a phenomenon of mass conversion has now altogether stopped. Not merely that; there is even a movement back into the Bodo fold of those converts who, (or whose forefathers) had taken *saran* or had become *kochs*. While this self-respecting acceptance of an original non-Hindu tribal identity should be heartily welcomed, the prospects are that the Bodos too are on the way to preaching their own form of exclusivism and a closed-society-system. The Constitution of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha lays down that only Bodos can become members of that body; there is no provision for a non-Bodo to become a member, a bar which does not exist in the Assam Sahitya Sabha or other similar organisations.

But can the Bodos really exist quite outside Assam? Unlike the Hill Tribals, the Plains Tribals have lived too long, in close proximity, to the rural poor of Assam. Perhaps it was the very exclusiveness of the caste Hindu society that bred the new exclusivism of the Bodos.

But even more important than tribal exclusiveness have been the factors of economic rivalry, the anxiety to have a bigger share of the loot, jobs and contracts and the like. This conflict cannot of course be solved under the present system, and it would be comfortable to end the article with a combination of radical denunciation of the landlord-comprador axis that rules the country, and expressions of pious exhortations to the Bodo people and the non-Bodo people of Assam to stand united and fight. But there are the intentions of the Government of India to be taken into consideration in any account of events in Northeast India.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT'S INTENTIONS

Outside its political opponents whose doings are of course most closely watched by the Government of India, no other group, and certainly no people of a whole region are kept under such close and constant scrutiny as the people of the northeastern region. It is unlikely that the events of the past few weeks have taken place without New Delhi having a fair idea of what is going on here. There have been attempts here to explain away the agitation of the Bodos as being CIA-inspired, Missionary-inspired, Bengali-inspired (the last, because frustrated as the Bengalis were in their attempts to get Assam officially classed a bilingual state, they are now seen as egging on the 'innocent tribal people' into anti-Assamese activities); but what is likely is that the movement might be receiving tacit approval and support, not so much from any external intelligence agencies, but from the Government of India itself. While no one can say that the problem has been created by the GOI, it would not be too far-fetched to suggest that the GOI would not be particularly averse to further dismemberment of this region. After all, the weakening and the fragmentation of the northeastern region has been the consistent policy of GOI, for such weakening has resulted in individual units, depending heavily on New Delhi subsidies, and these units can always be expected to be loyal. It was in pursuance of this strategy that the initial 'reorganisation' of Assam was undertaken. No doubt the task of New Delhi was made easier by the Assamese elite who were unwilling to share power with the less developed nationalities of the region. A generous concession to tribal sentiments, and a frank acceptance of an 'un-Aryan' cultural identity would by themselves not have probably removed all the suspicions and antagon-

isms, but the effort was well worth making, if it would have at least had the merit of retaining the territorial integrity of Assam. A strong, united Assam could well have 'challenged the Centre', not merely in the sense of a Centre-State confrontation, but even in more radical ways.

It was imperative for the ruling elite that the composite state of Assam be destroyed; and in co-operation with the Congress leaders of Assam and an emerging tribal elite, the job was accomplished a few years ago. It is not at all certain that the present agitation (if it ever goes beyond the demand for a script of one's choice), the incipient demand for Udayachal and an Ujani Assam State and other equally frivolous demands are not all part of an elaborate strategy of the Centre, to make a real patchwork quilt of the whole northeastern region, weakening the constituent units into heavily subsidised little bureaucratic empires, with an army of officers and policemen and contractors bloated on the good things of life, keeping things in shape, maintaining Law and Order.

But, to divide is also to multiply.

Notes

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- 1 Following the talks between the Minister of Education, Assam, and representatives of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the agitation was suspended from November 28, 1974. While some sort of a settlement was worked out regarding the payment of salaries to the teachers in Bodo Medium Schools and the release of the arrested volunteers of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, "regarding the recognition of the Roman Script and the approval of Bithorai ... it was agreed upon that the matter will be discussed after suspension of the movement sometime in the 3rd week of January 1975". (Minutes of the Meeting of Bodo Sahitya Sabha with Government, Government of Assam, Dispur, December 1974.)
- 2 "The Kacharis", by Sidney Endle, London, 1911, pp 3-4.
- 3 "Kirata-Jana-Krti", by Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1951, pp 27-8.
- 4 *Census of India 1891: Assam*, by E A Gait, Assam Secretariat Press, Shillong, 1892 p 225, footnote. The passage cited, which is a note by

C G M Kennedy, Officiating Deputy Commissioner, Nowgong, describes the method of conversion in Nowgong. For other methods of conversion, see pp 83-5 of the 1891 Census Report.

- 5 "Anglo-Assamese Relations", by S K Bhuyan, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, Gauhati, 1949, p 10.
- 6 "It [the *khel* system] was still in vogue at the time of the British occupation, except in Kamrup where a system of collecting revenue according to local divisions, called parganas, had been introduced by the Muhammadans." ("A History of Assam", by E A Gait, Third Edition, Calcutta, 1963, p 250.)
- 7 This reading is not applicable to the position of a non-Hindu, non-tribal Assamese community as that of the Assamese Muslims. Linguistically at any rate, the Assamese Muslims seem at present to be an indistinguishable part of the larger Assamese identity.
- 8 "Assam Land Revenue Manual", Eight Edition, 1970, pp 75-9; 169-72.
- 9 *Natun Prithivi* (Quarterly magazine in Assamese), May 1973, pp 586-9.
- 10 "How Roman Script Helps the Bolos?" Prepared by the Bodo Text-Book Committee, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Kokrajhar, Assam November 27, 1974 (typed copy).
- 11 For a brief summary of the Bodo grievances, see "On Bodo Medium Education, Bodo Script, University Medium and Hindi Language", (Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister on August 12, 1974), Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Kokrajhar, Assam.
- 12 "Documents Regarding the Movement Launched by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, etc", Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Kokrajhar, Assam (typed copy).

Raipur Wires

RAIPUR wires and steel, which is establishing a mini-steel plant near Raipur in MP with a capacity of 18,000 tonnes of MS ingots, carbon steel, etc, expects to commence trial production by April next. In their first annual report the directors refer to the decline in market prices of ingots and billets but add that this will not affect the company's profit margin as envisaged when the project was conceived, since there has been a corresponding fall in the cost of steel scrap, the major raw material. They reiterate that the company will be able to give an "adequate return" on the capital as envisaged earlier.

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