



## **Role of Christian Missionaries in the Growth of Bodo Language and Literature.**

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**Abstract:** The Bodos are indigenous tribal people of Assam. Since the early periods, they have inhabited in the northern bank of the Brahmaputra Valley. Among the different tribal community, they are one of the largest aboriginal tribal groups of Assam. They have their own language and literature. But during the colonial period, their language and literature were in unwritten forms which are the antique positioned. The Christian missionaries have played a great role as pioneer for the growth of Bodo literature. They have brought immensely social change and transformation through their remarkable contribution in the field of education among the Bodos. The Christian missionaries made a unique contribution towards the growth of Bodo language and literature and have a great impact.

**Keywords:** Contribution, Christian Missionaries, Growth, Bodo Language and Literature.

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**1. INTRODUCTION:** The Bodos are one of the major ethnic and linguistic aboriginal communities belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid family of Tibeto-Burman stock of the Assam-Burmese group of the Brahmaputra valley in the northeastern part of India. Racially, they belong to the Mongoloid stock of the Indo-Mongoloids or Indo-Tibetans. They are recognized as a schedule tribe in the 6<sup>th</sup> schedule of the Indian constitution. They are residing in many districts, both plains and hills areas of Assam. Generally, they are widely concentrated in districts of Baska, Bogaigaon, Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Chirang, Goalpara, Kamrup, Dhubri, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Dhemaji, Karbi Anglong and Lakhimpur. Besides Assam, Bodos are also found in Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal and even Nepal. In 1846, the term 'Bodo' was firstly used by B. H. Hughson for referring to a group of language family. At present, the term 'Bodo' or 'Boro' is referred to as both the language and the community.

In the first part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christian Missionary came to Bodo areas with the intent of preaching Christianity among the Bodos. They have undertaken some significant works that have attracted the common people towards Christianity. During that period, the Christian Missionaries considered the Bodos as animistic and took up the chance to influence them towards christianity. They have started their first activities among the Bodos of the Darrang district. Eventually, they used to translate the Christian tracts into Bodo. They also started schools in the Bodo areas. The Christian Missionaries played a significant role among the backward tribal societies by bringing about changes in their socioeconomic and cultural lives. The Bodo language had no written tradition till first part of 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was once spoken throughout the entire Brahmaputra valley of Assam. The Bodo language might have come down orally in the form of spoken language. Historically, Christian Missionaries

initiated writing in Bodo which has been recognized as the 'Missionary Period' in the Bodo literature.

**2. OBJECTIVES:** The major objectives of the present study are: -

1. To study about the contributions of Christian Missionaries towards the growth of Bodo Language and Literature.
2. To focus on the role played by different Christian Missionaries for the growth of Bodo Language and Literature.

**3. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES:** The historical method employed for this paper is based on primary and secondary sources for collecting data. Generally, the primary and secondary data have been analyzed. The primary data have been collected from intellectual and literate people of Bodo community. On the other hand, the secondary data have been collected from text books, journals, articles and from web browser.

**4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:** The contributions of Christian Missionaries towards the Bodo language and literature are remarkable. Before the Christian Missionaries works in the field of Bodo language and literature, the status of Bodo language was in spoken form. The Bodo literature history started when the Christian Missionaries initiated to work on Bodo language and literature by writing books in 1884. Generally, they have come for preaching and spreading Christianity. They did not only want to spread the religious activities but also contribute in the field of Bodo language and literature to a great extent. Thus, they have collected oral information and knowledge regarding the grammar, religion, life styles, language, culture, history, folk literature etc. from the Bodo people and all the information and data were published in book form. They published all the collected data in English especially in roman script. Some Christian Missionaries who have worked and contributed in the field of Bodo language and literature can be mention as follows-

**4.1 Reverend Sidney Endle:** Reverend Sidney Endle is recognized as a pioneer of language and literature of Bodos. He was born on 1840 at Totnes in Devon. He had entered St. Augustine's College at Canterbury. He was sent in February, 1864 by the Christian Missionary society for the Propagation of the Gospel to Tezpur, Assam as an assistant of Mr. Hesselmyer at Kachari Mission of Tezpur. He has learnt Bodo language to be familiar with Bodo people with an aim to preach Christianity among Bodos. He was always greeted with a joyous and often noisy welcome by the Bodo people.

He was an honest, simple living and good sense of humor person. So, when he travelled on foot, the villagers affectionately called him 'gami-ni-brai' (the old man of the village). He contributed tremendously for the growth of Bodo language as well as literature. For the first time, in 1884, he wrote "An Outline Grammar of the Kachari (Bârâ) Language". His book "An Outline Grammar of the Kachari (Bârâ) Language" (1884) is worth mentioning. In this book, he discussed about the Bodo Kachari grammar along with a few collections of Bodo folk tales, ritual and rites which are written both in English and Bodo language. Mentioned may be made here, he was the first Missionary who created written literature by using the Bodo language. He also worked on translation of Bible New Testament into Bodo language. His most significant work for Bodo is his monograph entitled "The Kacharis" which was published in 1911. The content of this book was consistent with social and domestic life, Laws and Customs, Religion, Folklore, Tradition, superstitions and Outline Grammar of the Bodo-Kacharis. He also furnished a few folk tales of Bodos which are

written in Bodo and English languages. These are: – Dwima Dwisa ni Khorang (How the river was made), Sase olsia gatha ni Khorang (The Story of the Lazy Boy), Bamun arw bini sakor ni Khorang (The Brahmin and his Servent), and Raona Raoni (The Tale of Raona Raoni). His monograph, “The Kacharis” was edited by J.D. Anderson, then Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, Government of Assam in 1911.

**4.2 J. D. Anderson:** He was born on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1852 at Calcutta, West Bengal and died in 24<sup>th</sup> November 1920 at Cambridge, England. He was a member of the Indian Civil Service as well as scholar and writer. Dr. James Anderson MD and Ellen Garstin were his father and mother. He has studied in Cheltenham College in England. In 1875, he joined as an assistant Magistrate and Collector of Bengal province. He has been working in Assam for a long time since 1880 to 1894. He joined in Bengal Civil Service as a district Magistrate and Collector in 1894. He took retirement in 1900 and after that, at the same time, joined as a lecturer of Bengali language and literature. His contribution towards the development of Bodo language and literature is noteworthy. In 1895, he wrote “A Collection of Kachari FolkTales and Rhymes”. In this book, he has brought out remarkable Kachari Folk-Tales and Rhymes, i.e.- Dùmâ dùisâ ni khorâng (How the rivers were made), Sâse olsiâ gâthâ nê khorâng (The Story of the Lazy Boy), Gâthâ mâmra nî khorâng(The seven Champions), Sâse phâlângi gâthâni khorâng (he Story of the Merchant’s Son), Bîdâ bînânaunî khorâng (Brother and Sister), Embu Bonglâ nî Khorâng (The Story of the Toad), Mùì ârù daukhâ dandâ nî khorâng (The Story of the Doe and the Raven), Brai sâse ni khorâng (The Old Man and the Tiger), Mùkhrâ ârù Sessâ nî Khorâng (The Tale of the Monkey and the Hare), Khusung ârù Mùkhrâ (The Tortoise and Monkey), Bâmun deâru bînî sâkor nî khorâng (The Brahmin and his Servant), Âbrâ nî khorâng (The Story of the Simpleton), Sâ-snî âbrâ nî khorâng (The Story of the Seven Simpletons), Khânâ khuzâ nî khorâng (The Story of the Blind Man and the Hunchback), Sâse âbrâ brai nî khorâng (The Story of a silly old man) and Brai bûrùini khorâng (The Story of the four Thieves). Generally, he has contributed in the fields of local folk culture, language and linguistics area.

**4.3 Brian Houghton Hodgson:** The Brian Houghton Hodgson was born in 1801. He was a pioneer naturalist and ethnologist working in India and Nepal. He died in 1894 in his 95 years of age. Hodgson was most brilliant young Indian Civil Service. In 1818 at the age of seventeen years he came to India as a writer on behalf of British East India Company. He was very much talented in Sanskrit as well as Persian languages. In 1819-20, he was posted as an Assistant Commissioner in the Kumaon region of India. He is a very significant person in Bodo literature because he was the first British administrator who has worked in field of Bodo vocabularies. He wrote “Essay on the Koch, Bodo and Dhimal Tribes” and it was printed and published by J. Thomas in 1847. The book is consisted of three important Parts i.e., Part-1- Vocabulary (English, Koch, Bodo, Dhimal), Part 2- Grammar of the Bodo and Dhimal languages and Part 3- Location, numbers, creed, customs, condition, and physical and moral characteristics of the people.

**4.4 George Abraham Grierson:** George Abraham Grierson was born on 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1851 in Glenageary Dublin, Ireland. He was an Irish linguist and Indian Civil Servant in India which has interested him in the field of languages and folklore of India. During his administrative career he has studied about the different societies and wrote books on India. In 1898, he was appointed as superintendent of Linguistics Survey of India as per idea of British

Government. He has done lots of works of the Indian people i.e. - surveying people across the British Indian territory, documenting spoken languages, recording voices, written forms, documenting information on 179 languages, and 544 dialects where the five language families take plays.

Total 19 volumes series of the Linguistic Survey was published by him. Specially, George Abraham Grierson has discussed the Bodo language in his Survey of India-Volume 3 (Part-II) where the Bodo language got textual form for the first time. We have found that in this language survey book, he discussed different parts of Bodo Grammar i.e., Noun, Pronoun, Tense, Verb, Adverb etc. Mentioned may be made, in the specimens of this Books, J.D. Anderson incorporated. The first specimen "The Statement of an accused person" was translated from Assamese to Bodo language. The second was a fable which bears evident signs of translation from the Bodo language to English. Finally, there are some folk tale and folk songs genuine agglutinative of Bodo which was translated from Bodo language to English.

**4.5 Edward Albert Gait:** E.A. Gait was born on 1863 and died on 1950. He was an administrator of the Indian Civil Service and served as Lieutenant Governor of Bihar and Orissa Province in the Bengal presidency of British India. He served as assistant commissioner in Assam and in 1890 he took the charge as provincial superintendent for the 1891 census in that region. In 1891, under his supervision census of Assam was done where all the data was compiled in the book entitled "Census of India". In the Part II census book (chapter VIII), some grammatical structure of Bodo language has been sketched by him. Generally, he highlighted about gender, number, adjective, degree, noun, pronouns, and adverbs etc. of Bodo language. Besides this he wrote "A History of Assam" in 1906. He has sketched an outline of Kachari or Bodo history in Chapter – X. Apart from above discussion, we have found that some Christian Missionaries have also contributed towards the growth of Bodo language and literature which are remarkable creation for Bodo society. In 1872, Edward T. Dalton wrote "Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal" which greatly extended contribution towards the study of Bodo history, language, and culture. L. O. Skrefsrud was a Norwegian Lutheran missionary as well as language researcher. We have found that after Reverend Sidney Endle, he wrote "A Short Grammar of the Mech or Bodo language" in 1889. Rev. A. Christiansen also wrote a book entitled "Grammar and Dictionary of the Kachari language" in 1904 for better scope to know about Bodo language. In 1959, Rev. H. Holvorsrud brought out Boro Grammar, on behalf of Gaurang Mission of Haltugaon. Eventually, in this book, the grammatical rules of the Bodo language are discussed.

**5. CONCLUSION:** From the above discussion, although the Christian missionaries gained very little success in spreading Christianity among the Bodos, their creative activities made an impact immensely towards the growth of Bodo language and literature. Without their contribution the Bodo language and literature would not gain today's status. We have found that the Bodo language and literature is abundantly blessed with pioneer works done by the Christian Missionaries. They eagerly contributed in different ways in the fields of downstream language and literature. Besides the language and literature, they also immensely contributed in the field of socio-culture of Bodos. In 1875, they built first Bodo Christian church at Bengbari in Harisinga in Udalguri district. It cannot be denied that the Christian Missionaries were largely responsible for awakening the Bodo community and for the

pioneering studies on the amalgamated Bodo people and their languages. These colonial works greatly contributed towards the development of Bodo languages and brought the ethnic and racial consciousness among the Bodos. They have revived the culture as a whole and changed the socio-cultural life of Bodos and guided how to create language and literary activities. Their pioneering creations are motivated to literate Bodo people for new creation on written literature in its own language which began from the first decade of 19th Century. At Present, Bodo language and literature are in developing stage. So, in the history of Bodo literature periods from 1884 to 1919 are known as the Missionary Age of Bodo literature.

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