Introduction of Scripts and the Art of Writing in Assam:
(With Special Reference to Bodo)

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ABSTRACTS: Bodo is an indigenous people of the North-East India. In Brahmaputra valley the Kacharis call themselves Bodo or Bodo fisa (sons of the Bodo). Racially they belongs Sino-Tibetan language family or Mongoloid stock of the Indo-Tibetans. However, S.K. Chatterji identified them as the Kirat or Indo-Mongoloids. In case of scripts, Bodo had no scripts of its own. Even then question arises- how could the Bodo kings inside the greater Assam in those days of yore be able to rule their great kingdom in discipline and order without having written constitution and written transaction with their neighboring states of countries? No historical recorded or document is available so far as evidence to answer this question. Even then it is said that the Bodo had a kind of scripts known as ‘Deodhai Hangkho’ (means Deodhai script) to be used to fulfill their purposes. The specimens of those scripts were available till now in the inscriptions of stone pillar wreackages and main gate of the Royal palace of the Boro (Kachari) king in Dimapur, now in Nagaland, a state of India.²

KEYWORDS: brahmi, deodhai, indigenous, scripts, wreackages

1.0 INTRODUCTION:
In the beginning of the medieval period the scripts had assumed a definite shape in Assam. The nomenclature of the Assamese scripts was given by the Ahom king of the Shan dynasty. In the copper plate grant of the Ahom kings it is distinctly written ‘Asamaksarena likhita’ i.e. recorded in Assamese script (in one side of the plate).¹ But as there was no printing press, it is certain that there was not a definite standard of the uniform shape of the different alphabets; in the hands of the different writers, the shape of alphabets underwent certain changes.

1.1 METHODOLOGY:
Accomplish this study, the investigator used survey method. For the related materials investigator collected through the door to door field investigation work. So, in such context work, I have heavily depended on interview, questionnaire and observation method which are consider as my primary source. As secondary data, investigator has taken from all kinds of existing published materials available in the forms of books on language, literature, culture, history, journals and periodicals, newspapers, and documentation in the archives in any form etc.

1.2 DISCUSSION:
According to late Bishnu Prasad Rabha, a prominent Boro literature and artist of Assam an old stone plate written with Deodhai scripts on Boro language is still found in a certain family of Naga Tribe in Nagaland as he reported to Dangkhha Brahmachari of Phulmati Ashrama in Bijní.³ Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya, the famous linguist is said that they have no inherited scripts of their own.⁵ He further said that, Bishnu Prasad Rabha, the famous Artist of Assam, told me that in ancient times there was a kind of Deodhai scripts among the Kocharis (Boros and Dimasas). Rabha represented in writing the Deodhai alphabet as gathered from an informant of Dimapur area which was noted for the Kachari reign and remains representing the art and architecture. As this form of Deodhai scripts is no longer vogue.⁵ It is said that the Deodhai scripts are comparable to original Brahmis used by the Hindu Brahmis in India. The Deodhai scripts may be the later developed forms of the same old Brahmi scripts. But, according to Ram Charan Brahma, a prominent Boro scholar, the Brahmi scripts themselves might have developed from some original scripts like Deodhai or like something that was used by the Bodos who were known as the Kiratas, the descendents of a lineage from the Mongoloid origin.⁶

1.2.1: Brahmi is also believed that it is the parent of the Indian scripts.⁷ We cannot, however, conclude whither the Brahmi or any other script had its origin in the prehistoric pictographs,⁸ till these are completely deciphered.⁹ But it is certain that from the period of the Vedas onwards both the script and the art of writhing were developed.¹⁰ It is likely that the Assamese script was derived from the Brahmi and Devanagari through successive stages until it reached its final form. It is stated to be a descendant of the Kutila variation of the Gupta script of Eastern India.¹¹ An examination of the script of the epigraphs, written mostly in Brahmi and in Devanagari shows the trend of its evolution.
on independent lines. In any case, the earliest known script of Assam was Devanagari, rather North India Brahmi, and the art of writing in Assam was known as early as the 6th century A.D., if not earlier as proved by the Umachal rock inscription of surendraravarman. Beginning with a gradual change in the Kamrupi dialect, which according to Yan Chwang differed only a little from that of Mid India, the process of evolution of both the script and the language continued until it had an individualized and independent script of its own. It may be noted that in most inscriptions of the period under review composed in Devanagari, rather than North Indian Brahmi and in Sanskrit language, not only do we notice Assamese almost in their present forms. In the kanaivarasi Rock inscription at North Guwahati, dated saka 1127, we find specimens of a few Assamese characters. Along with Brahmi, characters approximating the old Assamese alphabets are found even in old inscriptions as those of Khanikargaon and on the join icons of Hari-Hara as well as on the Vishnu Icon from Deopani. It is evident therefore, that Assamese alphabets had taken more or less their present forms beginning around the 12th century A.D. In the Buddhist do has, composed by the Tantrik-Buddhist saddhas, most of whom were from Assam may be found the earliest specimens of both the kamrupi script and the language which at one time constituted the parent speech of eastern India, including no doubt North Bengal, Mithila, Videha, Orissa, Nepal and Tibet. It is of interest to note that the modern Tibetan characters bear close similarities to the Assamese, which is possible because of their common origin. It is pertinent to observe that while the epigraphs of the period are found composed in North Indian Brahm and Devanagari scripts and Sanskrit language, not a single old manuscript is found written in Devanagari, though the language used, is Sanskrit. The early evolution of the Assamese script perhaps explains for its universal use in producing both the Sanskrit and Assamese manuscript.

1.2.2: In Bodo the oral literature, which includes folk-songs, folk-tales, ballads, idioms, etc., is very rich, but the written literature is not available Bodo. The growing Bodo writers especially the younger sections are trying hard to contribute in various fields of literature. According to linguist Dr. S.N. Goswami, the Roman script and modified Assamese script or Purbilipi were first used to write Bodo textbook and literature by the Christian and non-Christian Boro writers respectively. The non-Christian group was the majority, and so, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha has followed their views in using the modified purbilipi. But later on, the Sabha has changed its view and has finally accepted the Devanagari script for the Bodo language in place of the purbilipi on various socio-political reasons. At present the Bodo text books at the lower level are published in Devanagari script. This Devanagari scripts were accepted for the Bodo language by the interference of Central Government of India from 1976 under the prime Minister ship of Indira Gandhi on temporary basis at first just for test whether it will be feasible for writing or coding Bodo language or not. The demand for Roman script for Bodo writing started in 1968. Its demand had firm footing from 1974 and like old disease the demand for it repeated off and on All Bodo Student Union (ABSU), the Bodo Sahitya Sabha(Central) decided again to continue only Devanagari scripts for Bodo writing in its 39th Annual Conference of 2000 held at Simbargaon in Kokrajhar District. Anyway finally the Bodo Sahitya Sabha decided to continue the Devanagari scripts only on the ground that it is still current in use for Bodo and maximum books have been published so far in this scripts only. Many other organizations also supported this final decision on the ground that Bodo people as a whole should forget their pettiest problems like the question of scripts etc. and try to improve their language, literature, culture for the greater interest of the Bodo community.

About Devanagari scripts, Ramacharan Brahma, a famous writer among the Bodos, said in his Assamese article ‘whose contribution is the Devanagari’ scripts (Devanagari Lipi kar Abadan), published in Khamrup Bisombi; the souvenir of the Annual conference of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, 1976, (Barama) that, looking forward the future of the Boro tribe, Boro Language and Boro medium, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha has accepted the Devanagari scripts which is used for Hindi, the national language as common scripts. Then he explained about the origin and development of the Devanagari scripts in the same article Dr. Harish Chandra Bhattacharyya in his Sanskrit Grammar entitling Sanskrit Vyakaran Prabah has written formerly the non-Aryan tribes were more handsome than the Aryans. They looked like the Gods. Therefore the language that they used is called the Gods language (Devanagari) and the scripts that they used for their language are called the Gods scripts (Devanagari Lipi) or Nageri scripts (Nageri Lipi), for instance o, a, k, kh…. Then he asked himself - who are these Non-Aryan tribes that are handsome to look at and what are those scripts that they used? As an answer to this, he wrote -Dr. George Bulhar is called the father of Indian scripts (science of scripts). According to him the scripts that could be seen being inscribed on the surface of the earthen pots that were available in the place called ‘Pi-Prao’. The specimens of the most ancient scripts (350 B.C -600 A.D.) and these scripts are known as Brahmi or Northern Indian scripts. Many of the scholars has an opinion that from these Brahmi scripts -(1) The Maurjiya scripts, (2) New Brahmi scripts, (3) Kushana scripts, (4) Gupta scripts, (5) Cursive
Introduction of Scripts and the Art of Writing in Assam: (With Special Reference to Bodo)

letters (scripts), (6) Kashmiri scripts, (7) Gurumukhi scripts, (8) Sindhi scripts, (9) Devanagari scripts and (10) Different Nageri scripts have developed.  

Further Brahma had said the scholars say that the most ancient Indian Brahmi scripts themselves are the scripts that were developed from Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa Age. The civilization of this age is the civilization current even prior to 3500 B.C. itself. The Aryans learnt to write these scripts later to this age from the non-Aryans. Dr. Sunity Kumar Chatterjee, Acharjya Kshitimohan Sen, Dr. A.D. Pushalkar also in the opinion that the Aryans did not know the art of writing. The had disliking to this art. This type of ancient most specimens of scripts is known as the contribution of the Sino-Tibetan Mongolian people. For instance, the branch of Brahm is one of the five main branches of the Tibeto-Bhutanese group of people. The scripts that are used by the Brahmins are not so different from Devanagari scripts that were used by the Aryans then and also from Nageri scripts (Nageri Lipi) of the present age. In this sense, P.C. Choudhury opines that, the aksaras of the early inscriptions, of particularly the Kanaivarasi inscription, and the Ambari stone inscription, as has been pointed out, present a clue to the gradual transition from Brahmi and Devanagari to the early Assamese script, or more appropriately the Kamrupi, which was marked subsequently by four schools, and which in process of time merged, producing more or less a common script. The language used by Tibeto-Bhutanese Mongolians has relation with Boro in case of sound and vocabulary because of their origin from the same source. The Boro special /u/ sound is available in their language also. Therefore the word Brahmi might have originated from Brahmi itself. It can be said that, this word never originated from the tribe Brahman. The uses of Brahmi scripts were available in their language also. Therefore the word Brahmi might have originated from Brahmi itself. It can be said that, this word never originated from the tribe Brahman. The uses of Brahmi scripts were current ever before the Aryan came to India (1500 B.C.)

1.2.3: Another type of scripts used by the Zangkhrao Parties, a class of followers of the original Boro Shakti cult still seen to be prevalent among the Boros related with Shakti Ashramas or the hermitages meant for the believers in force of the Gods or God Himself. Mahendra Narzary, related with Rajkali Ashrama of Gossaigaon (Ranchaidham) and some others related with other Shakti Ashramas like Roumari Ashrama, Phulmati Ashrama, Lakshmi Ashrama of Gossaigaon and Bijni areas of Kokrajhar and Chirang respectively took much initiatives to use these scripts a kin to Deodhai scripts to write their religious books and to inscribe the concrete walls with religious versions. The scripts used by the Zangkhrao parties are almost similar to Devanagari scripts. Even then some differences also can be seen in between the two, particularly in their shapes and forms. The scripts used by the Zangkhrao parties have more clusters, possessing even more diacritics. But after minute observations one can come to the conclusion that these scripts might have developed from Brahm and these are almost similar to Devanagari in shapes and forms.

1.3: RESULT AND CONCLUSIONS:

Anyway now Devanagari script is the script for the Bodos. But the Assamese script is still in vogue among the older intellectual, outside the school premises. Though most of the books, papers and journals are printed in Devanagari script, a few writers bring out their work in Assamese script also. One of the basic reasons of using Assamese script is that most of the established intellectual, writers have no command of Devanagari script as they got their education in Assamese and Bengali script. It is quite obvious that in the last a few years thousands of educated Bodo youths have acculturated the Devanagari script and they feel quite at home in using that script. In fact the Devanagari script has become an inseparable part in the development of the Bodo language and literature even though the Assamese script still occupies a considerable room in the Bodo language. It is does not a matter, to developed Bodo language and literature, we have to do harder work, for which we will remain everlasting in today’s global world.

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