

ASPECT OF MONGOLOID MIGRATION IN NORTH EAST INDIA WITH REFERENCE TO THE BODO: A HISTORICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Many of the scholars have also been expressed their opinion that the earliest habitation place of the ancestors of Tibeto-Burman speakers was the North-Eastern region of China lying in between the Hoang-Ho and the Yang-tze-Kiang rivers, from where they flow southward up to the north of Burma (Myanmar) and splited in many sub groups moving different directions viz. one group moved westward along the lower hills of Himalayans, another proceeded southward to reach South-East Asia spreading to other adjoining territories and third one entered North-East India and established their settlement since their arrival. It made a clear indication that the North-East India became the native soil of Mongoloid groups who were migrated from South or South-East Asia since the remote past. The hill dwellers of this place are the indigenous tribal groups who had akin to Mongoloid features. They have been termed as Indo-Mongoloid later on. Most of the people on the foothills of the sub-Himalayan ranges and tribes in many of the plain areas are found to have Mongoloid characteristic. Thus, peopling in North-Eastern region was predominantly the immigrants with Mongoloid physical traits who came from the north and east.

Key Words: Migration, Mongoloid, Kirata, Origin, Bodo, etc.

The term migration is originated from the Latin word 'migrare' which means to change residence. Migration is the movement of people from one region to another region. Human history is one of constant migrations which may be called as human movement or migration. As the migration is a universal phenomenon, it touched every country which became the points of origin, transit and destination for the drifters or migrants (Omelaniuk, 2005:11). Migration can be expressed as a geographical phenomenon which seems to be a human necessity in every age or period since human being has a tendency to leave the areas where the life is difficult, he moves to the places in which life may be easy and better for survival. In true sense of word, we all are migrants, but those group or people who came first consider others as migrants and those who arrived second think those

who came third as migrants and so on (Fernandes,2010:19). Thus, human history is marked by the waves of the human movement from region to region and place to place.

Northern China, Central Asia and Central Africa are considered to be the three major parts where human habitations started on the earth. From these areas the human population began to move from one settlement to another since pre-historic days. Peopling in Burma, China and Tibet together with the sub Himalayan regions was exactly all Mongoloid origins. Various Mongoloid tribes got mingle with each other and produced a varied tribe which also belonged to the same Mongoloid stock. The absorption of the Mongoloid tribes persisted as late as the last century A.D. (Singh, 1986:44). In the case of North-East India the nature and character of the habitations in this region is a bit different from the rest of the country as a result of which it needs to be studied along with Southern and the South-East Tibet, Burma, China and South-East Asia. The people who were occupying the sub-Himalayan region were all migrated from one place to another since it (sub-Himalayan region) was a full of virgin lands. The Mongoloid races from the eastern and the southern Tibet particularly the sub-Himalayan regions entered into India including North-Eastern part of India in the consecutive waves of the migration and began to settle at the foothills and the plain areas.

From pre-historic to the modern period, different branches of human races migrated into the various places of North-East India and established their settlement in those areas. So, the North-East India is known as the land of melting pot of human races since time immemorial. This land also may be described as a land of anthropological museum of human races. On the basis of pre-historic and other remains, Christoph von Fuer-Haimendrof (Fuer-Haimendrof, 1939:3) clearly indicated that Assam, a part of North East India, was inhabited by diverse racial elements and described it (Assam) as a great anthropological museum with some primitive people. Assam is portrayed as the melting pot of all the branches of the human races and culture of both hills and plains. Since Assam was located in one of the great human migration routes, it became a museum of large numbers of population of the various ethnic groups of disparate socio-cultural heritage and of different languages (Mills, 1928:24; Das, 2009:85-86). Among them, the Mongoloid origin peoples were also one of them who came down in consecutive waves of migrations crossing different regions, making their homeland in most of the parts of North-East India including Brahmaputra valley. Therefore, North-East India regions witnessed the influence of Mongoloid origin culture to a great extent as these areas had been becoming abode of Mongoloid stocks from the ancient days.

While supplying the clue of the Mongolian migration to the land of India, it is illustrated that because of the natural changes the sea gave way to the Himalayan mountains from which many rivers like Ganga, Indus,

Brahmaputra, etc. were rose and the fertile valleys swabbed these rivers had fostered and sustained Indian civilization. Some groups of the Mongolians came across through the Bod region of Tibet and Khyber Pass. They arrived in the Sind Basin of India in about 5000 B.C. Another group of Mongolian appeared in the eastern and north-eastern parts of Assam and Nathuk pass of Sikkim. Later on many branches of these races reached north-western and north-eastern parts of India where they set up their home but the history of which is became shrouded in obscurity today (Mondal,2011:2). The people of Sino-Tibetan speaking are believed to have had been in North-Western China between the head waters of Hoang-Ho and Yang-tze-Kiang river. They had began to moved from their original place of settlement to the south and west direction from pre-historic times. It is generally accepted that the Mongoloid tribes from Eastern and Southern Tibet particularly the sub-Himalayan regions penetrated to India including North-Eastern part of India in the repeated waves of the migration (Bargayary,2015:150).

The Sino-Tibetan speaking tribes likely to formed the area of dispersion in some zone to the west and north of the Tibet from where they launched their movement to different tracks and directions especially to east and south- Yunan of Chinese province, east of Assam and Myanmar, Siam and Indo-China (Viet-nam). Quite possibly some of the Tibeto-Burman made a way into India taking the route to the southern slopes of the Himalayas through Assam or by way of Tibet (Chatterji, 2011:21). The Mongoloid groups and Tibeto-Burman who were widely concentrated in the upper course of Yang-tze-Kiang and Hoang-Ho rivers in China from the pre-historic times made expansion to the directions to the upper water of Yrrawaddy and the Chindwin rivers of the Upper-Burma and then entered North-East India (Kabui,1991:17). Some of them occupied the Brahmaputra valley and some proceeded to Garo Hills and Hills of Tippera, the present Tripura where they established their own settlement. E. H. Pakyntein (Pakyntein, 1964:56) while answering on the question which route was followed by the Bodo immigrants while extending Assam wrote as the north and north-eastern direction supposed to be consensus view of the majority of scholars. The Bodo tradition says that the Choraikaling Pass of the north of Lakhimpur district of Assam was one of the routes of Bodo migration to Assam in ancient days. According to the folklore tradition of the Gurungs, particularly of those who were followers of Bonism (pre-Buddhist religion or the advanced form of animism), Cho-Nasa in western Mongolia was the original homeland of their antecedents (ancestors), which located to the south of Sinkiang in western China and north of China in the Tur-fan Depression and spread out to different regions. One section moved to Tibet falling within the northern Himalayan range. The nine clan of the Gurung, Mhina Kugi people moved towards Chamdo in eastern Tibet, the gateway to Tibet for the immigrants. They further proceeded to western part of Yarlung valley of Lhoka region where they were designated as Tamu-Gurung in 1000 B.C. From the ancient history of Central Asia it came to light that the Gurungs were originally called Gyarungs who were one of the nomadic tribes of western China. One group of this

tribe went to central Asia and those who came to Tibet stayed behind for a considerable period of time. On the basis of findings, it is also well known fact that the Gurungs who were moving southward from Tibet reached Nepal and Sikkim after the dawn of the Christian era and in the early century of Christian era. The Mongoloid tribes made their settlement on the southern slopes of the Himalayas (Singh, 2008:91). Based on scientific studies and researches on the origin of Tibeto-Burman group, we may agree that the North-western China was the homeland of the Tibeto-Burman speaking people from where they moved southward in the North Burma and westward along the sub-Himalayan ranges and another section moved into Brahmaputra Valley, passing through the North-Eastern and South-East Asia. In all probability some groups of the Tibeto-Burman scattered in different parts of Manipur (Devi,2011:17).

On the basis of the data available in the folklore regarding the migration of Bodo in the ancient time, the oral source provides the following information:

“Jouma futuma bifa hajwma”

The free translation:

The highest and whitest mountain is the father.

The aforesaid sentence indicates that the Himalayas or Trans-Himalayan region was the land of Bodo's father or ancestor. The folk song referring to the whitest and highest mountain, the Himalaya which covers with the white snow seems to be speaking to their father (Mushahary, 1986:17). The ancient survival tradition of disposal of death body of the Bodo which placed the head of corpse towards the direction of south do support that the Himalayas was the original homeland of the Bodo. According to legends, the deceased person put in the grave facing towards the south in order to enable the departed soul to see the Himalayas, the native place of their predecessors and the position of the dead body, facing towards the south also enable the soul to proceed back to the primeval mountains (Mondal, 2011:183). From the legends of the Bodo a conclusion may be drawn that the Bodo were originated from the mountains of the Himalayas and the Himalayas was the domicile of the Bodo's forefather. However, it needs to be examined critically by making comparison and cross checking with other sources on migration.

Scholars are not consensus about the date of the migration of the Kiratas who were considered to be of Mongoloid race. While dealing with the dispersal of Mongoloid groups to the North-East India, it is avowed that from the pre-historic times the Mongoloid tribes had been set in motion from their original homeland to south and west but it was most probably in the early part of the first Century BC the large scale of their movement have

been occurred (Chatterji, 2011:22). The Mongoloid group from the eastern and southern Tibet mainly the sub-Himalayan regions entered India by successive waves of migration in about second millennium BC. The route of their migration to India is not well established but deduced to be through the valley of the branches of Kosi river in the eastern Nepal along the course of the Indus River (Kabui, 1991:45).

Denying tribal migration into the land of the India before Christian era it is remarked that being closed the door of India due to the presence of the seas and the Himalayan Mountains; it was not possible for the migration of the tribe populations to the land of India from outside in pre-Christian era. This statement is based on ancient history and the geography. G. P. Singh (Singh, 2008:68) maintained as “both ancient history and geography bear witness to the fact”. G. P. Singh (Singh, 2008:86) also claimed that most of the ancient Kiratas who were dwelling in northern and eastern Himalayas were of indigenous origin. Those Kiratas who had been settling in these areas from a very remote period in the valley and mountain regions until the migration of the tribes of Mongolian origin were, no doubt, the original inhabitants of the country. A good numbers of Kirata tribes of Mongolian origin had, of course, inhabited in Nepal and Sikkim (called Indrakil in the epic age and later Sukhima) in the second half of the first millennium AD. Those who were migrated from Tibet (called Bhotadesh for the first time in the 7th Century AD) towards eastern frontiers, sub-Himalayan tract of Nepal or eastern Himalayan States of Sikkim before the seventh century were of purely Tibetan origin. The tribes of so-called Mongolian race migrated from the seventh century onwards have been identified with Mongoloids generally on the basis of their physical features.

On the subject of the Bodo who are absolutely identical with the Kacharis, Rev. Sidney Endle (Endle, 2011:7-8) is of the view that the Kacharis (Bodo) were the original autochthonous of Assam. Like the other tribes of the ancient India, the Kiratas have been depicted as aborigines, who had been inhabited originally in the Gangatic plains in Madhya-desa, in the wild tracts on the banks of different rivers and their tributaries, of the Kailasa mounting near the lake Manasorovara and its adjoining areas, in the mountainous regions and the forest in the Northern and Eastern Himalayan border land, Vindhya region and many parts of the North-Western, Central and Western India as well as Deccan from the olden days, in many ancient literary texts. However, they have been look upon as immigrants. The impression of immigrants on them may lead to wrong notion as the fact remains that they were by and large autochthonous (Singh, 2008:67). These statements testified that the Bodo evolved on the very soil of Assam. However, till date the modern researches into the origin of the human being always silent Assam as the first place of human evolution which clearly proved that Assam was not the land of the human origin. Those who had been settling in Assam might have been migrated from different directions and places in various stages of human dispersal. Kasten Ronnow (Ronnow,1936:100-123) had classified the Kiratas

into two sections- i) those who had affinities with the Mongoloid and ii) those who are of mixed origin and also informed us that most of the Kiratas tribes of Northern and North-Eastern India are of Indian origin. Nevertheless, Robert Shafer (Shafer, 1954:124-125) does not support it by stating that the Kiratas were Mongoloid race and speaker of Tibeto-Burmic language.

Heterogeneous group of the tribes of North-East India arrived to this place migrating from different parts like South-East Asia, Tibet and Burma. In ancient times the concept of immigrant (outsider) and son of soil were not much strictly applied and fully developed. And it appears that such notions were not prevalent and zilch in the remotest past as human movement is admittedly the law of nature touching each and every corner and inch of the world right from the food gathering stage. The term Indian origin or original and autochthonous applying to some of the tribes or tribe of North-East India by some scholars seems to finger point to their settlement in this part from the earliest time. Original and autochthonous, these words used by some scholars referring to the Bodo probably pointing to their myth signifying that the Bodo did evolve in the soil of Assam but it could be taken as an indication of the habitation of the Bodo, in Assam, since time immemorial or on or before historical period and hence appositely credited with such epithet.

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