

SURNAMES OF THE BODOS: ORIGIN AND PRACTICES

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Abstract:

A surname denotes a family name, a clan, and a social group. The origin of a surname differs from place to place, country to country, and so forth. The *varnashramadharm*a led to the origination of the surname in ancient Indian tradition. The state generally assigned individuals to profess. Gradually, this turns into a caste in India. Some of the surnames in India centered on totemism, especially among the tribes. The Bodos are one of the largest tribes in Northeast India. Studies reveal that the state usually assigns duties to the people. Duties and responsibilities assigned to them turned into the designation. They practiced the designation as surnames. On the other hand, another study reveals that totemism among the Bodos also led to the practice of surnames. This paper explores the origin of the surnames of the Bodos and their practices in society.

Keywords: *Bodos, Social Group, Surname, State, Totemism.*

Introduction:

The term surname derives from the French word 'surnom' meaning above or over the name. Onomastics is study of the origin of any name. Therefore onomastics meaning carries the name studies. People attach the surname as a label at any moment. It is the designation and; label of people (anthroponomy) and places (toponomy). Toponomy helps to understand the history of a society with no written sources. On the other hand, a label of people gives occupation or position in society. For instance, state formation was the outcome of social stratification. However, this also led the attachment of the surname to the individuals. The social stratification towards the state formation and the processes of mode of production in early days tended toward the evolutions of the surname in the Brahmaputra valley. It is fact that the *varnasramadharm*a¹ had well played towards the socio-political structures in the ancient Brahmaputra valley. So, accordingly it was no *varnasramadharm*a no state. Therefore, sometimes, *varnasramadharm*a became a primary duty to the

¹ *Varnasramadharm*a was a social stratification in ancient India that prevailed in the Brahmaputra valley too.

individual rulers. On the other hand, it indicated duties to the higher authority. These are supported by literary as well as archaeological evidences. The linguistic evidences also complement in analyzing the truth behind the origin of names and occupied by ethnic groups.

There are various surnames passed on from the ancestors to its descendants, whether on the father's or mother's sides in the early days. The surname of each family within the group was constructed from a specific source word (or expression) that was undoubtedly known either to its first bearer or to the person who created the surname (for example, a local authority). This factor does not directly apply to those families whose surnames resulted from the gradual transformation of nicknames into surnames. Even for these families, however, definitive knowledge is still possible: the origin of the nickname was known to the person who used it for the first time. (Beider, 2005)

Surnames were borne by representatives of an ethno cultural group during a specific time period or it can also be a geographical factor and their occupations. For example, French surnames Martin and Thomas, Dupont (from the bridge) and Dubois (from the forest), Boulanger (baker) etc. (Beider, 2005) Likewise, the Bodo groups have also their surnames which represent identity, occupation and social status in society.

ORIGIN OF THE BODO SURNAMES

In early times surnames played a major role among the Bodos. It was not only a mere title that one holds but, there are beliefs that it is associated with the creation of the social groups. The surnames of Bodos did not only represent their identity but it was more of the division of mode of production. This is ascertained that the mode of production processes and duties to the state-led surname to the Bodos. The extensive practices and similarities of surnames in a wide range and duties assigned to them were of a strong authority from the center. Such assignments of duties are usually seen in a state or the process of state formation. This is evident during the medieval and colonial periods of Assam that various offices were set up by the Ahoms and Koches; and to look after the offices, officers were appointed by the authorities. The *paiks* with different designations i.e. surname at present were found in both kingdoms. During the colonial period even sometimes, honorary titles were given to the people for their duties to the state. The officials' attachment with the land during Mughal and Colonial period in Bengal province along with Assam, according accepted the office designations like Choudhury, Patgiri, Mandal, etc. as surnames at present. Preaching of Brahmanical religion by Kalicharan Brahma among the Bodos themselves accepted Brahma as a surname. Community conversions to other beliefs and practices are also another practice of surname in Assam. Sarania Kachari is one of them. Community engagement in specific occupations also became a surname during the Ahom period. The Sonowal Kachari is one of the examples in Assam, where all the community engaged in collecting gold from the river and later on turned Sonowal as a surname to the community.

The Bodos constitute a large group among all other tribes of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Many scholars suggest that they are the earliest inhabitants of Indo-Mongoloid stock in the valley. Suniti Kumar Chatterji drew a vivid outline regarding the movement of the Bodos from one place to another. The Bodos were in all likelihood the dominant people of the Assam valley and the adjacent hills and had spread also all over North Bengal and East Bengal, and possibly also North Bihar. (Chatterji, 1991) They were the largest tribe in Assam. (Hodgson, 1847) The physical features of Indo-Mongoloids of the great Mongoloid race are yellow or yellowish-brown skin, square-set face with a broad nose, strong cheekbones, flat nose, almond-shaped black

or dark brown eyes, black stretches and coarse head hair, scanty bread and mustache. These physical traits are found among the Bodos of Brahmaputra Valley. With distinct Tibeto-Burmese marks in their language, the Bodos started to settle in the plains of Assam in the second millennium B.C. (Devi, 2004)

The term 'Bodo' was for the first time used by B.H. Hodgson in 1846, is an ethnological term to refer to the Meches, the Bodo-speaking people of Darjeeling district in writing about them. (Brahma, 2016) The Bodos are also called Bodo-Kacharis or just Kacharis. But there is no agreement on the origin of this word. Some believe the Kachari term derived from the Sanskrit Kaksata, meaning Kirata or the 'Kachcha' referred to as the Mahabharata. (Halfdan Siiger, 2015) But it must be admitted that the Bodos call themselves neither Kiratas nor Kacharis. These terms were used by the high castes, especially outsiders, who regarded them as inferior. They rather call themselves Boro or Bodo or Borofisa. The term 'Bodo' denotes an ethnic group speaking the Sino-Tibetan Bodo language.

The surname practices by the Bodos are discussed below:

The words behind of the equal symbols were mentioned by Rev. Sydney Endle in The Kachari.. (Endle, 2007)

Table:

1. Bargary	14. Lahary
2. Basumatary= <i>Basumati-ari</i>	15. Maomarary
3. Bibaiary= <i>Bibijiya-ari</i>	16. Mohilary= <i>Mohila-ari</i>
4. Bingiary= <i>Bing-bing-ari</i>	17. Mushahary= <i>Mosa-ari</i>
5. Champrary	18. Narzary= <i>Narze-ari</i>
6. Daimary= <i>Doima-ari</i>	19. Phadangary= <i>Fadam-ari</i>
7. Dingary= <i>Ding-ari</i>	20. Ramchiary= <i>Ramsha-ari</i>
8. Ganjeldary= <i>Gandret-ari</i>	21. Sabary
9. Gayary= <i>Goi-bariari</i>	22. Sibingary= <i>Sibing-ari</i>
10. Hazowary	23. Swargiary= <i>Swarga-ari</i>
11. Islary	24. Thalibary.
12. Khakhlary= <i>Khangkloi-ari</i>	25. Woary
13. Kherkatary= <i>Kherkhata-ari</i>	

About the creation of the different social groups, the Bodos have a popular story among them. During a certain period, the Bodos lived in indiscipline and an unsystematic state of things. Society was full of undesirable activities and the atmosphere was unhealthy. To preserve the traditional social customs the people of the society realized the necessity of the creation of different groups of certain specific works or duties. A great convention of all the Bodo people was held to solve the burning problems of society. To that convention, the first human being 'Monsing-Sing-Borai' came down from heaven with the help of a golden ladder to the earth and presided over the convention. The convention was attended by all the Bodos irrespective of age and sex. The first human being Monsing-Sing-Borai conducted the proceedings and helped to solve the problems facing the Bodos. It is said that the convention lasted for twelve years. Along with other things, the groups called "Ari or Hari" were created by Monsing-sing-Borai for the Bodos. The following are the main groups or aris of the Bodos which are based on specific works or duties. The ari seems to signify some kind of kingship. (Brahma K. , 1999) On the other hand, R.N. Moshahari put emphasis on clan system based on totemism. (Mosahary,

1986)

A group of persons went out searching for a new site for settlement. In a deep forest, they selected a place and started felling the trees and clearing the jungle. Some of them were busy in cooking food under the shade of an Indian fig tree. While the fig tree was cut down, the persons busy in cooking food were compelled to leave the place with the food half cooked. Hence, it is believed that the people who fled away leaving their food half cooked were called by the name Sangphramari.

1. Basumatary=*Basumati-aroï*: In Boro Baisamata means the 'Mother Earth'. Baisamata+ari=Baisamatari or Basumatary, the folk of the earth or the 'Earthly Folk'. They are related to the cultivation and any matter related to the land. So, they are also known as the landlord class of people. The word Basumatary is a Sanskritised form of Baisamatary. They were engaged in solving the land problems. Distribution of land and settlement were carried out by them.

2. Bargary: In Bodo 'Bar' means blessing, 'Gab' means cry or prayer. In the Kherai or in the Garja Puja the persons who are engaged as the Dauri or Oja pray to God Bathou Borai for blessing. It has been suggested that the group might have got its name from the words Bar and Gab (Bar+Gab+ari=Bargabari or Bargaoari or Bargaryari). However, their duties do not appear to be much different from those of Swargaiari group.

Based on another belief it is said that this clan or group originated from the Phadang tree. In the early period, before the creation of cloth, the people used the bark of the Phadang tree as garments. So, the people who collected and supplied the barks of the Phadang tree were called Phadangari.

3. Bibaiary=*Bibijiya-aroï*: Feasts are common during the festivals of the Bodos. Some people were engaged in collecting some essential commodities like rice, fruits, etc. begging from the same community. In Bodo bibai means beggings.

4. Bingiary=*Bing-bing-aroï*: Bingi is a small one-stringed instrument that is played during festivals, especially during the Baisagu festival. In course of time, the persons who made this instrument and played came to be known as Bingiari(Bingi+ari=Bingiari or Bingbingari). People of this group are very rare in the present Bodo society.

5. Daimary=*Doima-aroï*: The word 'Daima' in Bodo means big river and the people related to the big river were called Daimari (Daima+ari=Daimari). Probably, some people who used to live by the bank of the big river got their livelihood by fishing. It is also probable that some groups of people were engaged in the work of floating logs down the big rivers to the towns or market centers where the timbers were sold. Anyway, persons who lived on the Banks of big rivers either by fishing or by any other means were grouped as Daimari.

6. Ganjeldary=*Gandret-aroï*: This name of the group is believed to have originated from the slug which the Bodos call 'Ganjler'. It is hated by everybody. There was a custom among the Boros that if a person outraged the modesty of a lady, then the guilty person had to perform penance by eating a slug. A man who had to eat the ganjler for his hateful behavior was addressed by the name ganjler and the group that originated from him is believed to have been designated as (Ganjler+ari=Ganjlerari).

7. Gayary=*Goi-bariaroï*: In Bodo 'Gay' mean areca nuts. The Bodos are very fond of areca nut. The Gayari clan or group is believed to have been named after Gay or areca nut. Hence, Gay+ari = Gayari, the group of people who were traditionally associated with areca nuts. The Gayari clan originated from the people who were engaged to collect and distribute areca nuts in the convention held under the presidentship of

Monsing-sing-Borai to settle the case relating to the illicit love affair between Chikri Singra and Chikri Sikhla.

8. Hazowary: In Bodo 'Hajo' means a hill and the people who lived in the hills or Foothills might have been called Hajoari (Hajo+ari=Hajoari).

Hence, the group came to be designated Bibaiari or Bibariari(Bibari+ari=Bibariari or Bebariari). But there is no proper evidence that any group of the Bodo people had taken begging as a profession. It is rather probable that the people who were engaged in collecting commodities for the festivals were regarded as the Bibaiari or Bibariari group or clan.

In the early period, a custom was followed by the Bodos in connection with the cremation of the dead body. Before cremating the dead body, some coins were to be offered to an elderly person of the Basumatari group as revenue for the plot of the land where the cremation took place. The elderly person of the Basumatari group who received the coins was not allowed to bring the coins home. But he was to leave them at the cremation ground. In the present Bodos society, this custom is followed no more.

9. Islary: In Bodo God is called Isar. It is probably that the people who were engaged in preparation for the worship of God Bathou Borai and goddess Bathou Buri were called Isarari(Isar+ari) which became Islary in course of time. The Bodo people of this group are fairly numerous in West Bengal. In the State of Assam, the people belonging to this group are found in the districts of Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Kamrup and Darrang, although not in large numbers.

10. Khakhlary=*Khangkloi-aro*i: Khangkhla is a kind of plant. It is used in the Kherai. It is belief that persons who were engaged to collect the plant Khangkhla for Kherai came to be known as Khangkhleri (Khangkhla+ari=Khangkhleri). In the present Bodo society, the members of this clan use the surname Khakhlari in place of Khangkhleri.

11. Kherkatary=*Kherkhata-aro*i: They are not found in the Northern Parts of Goalpara and Kokrajhar districts. It is said that the name come from Kherkata, (cutting of thatch) (Kherkata+ari=Kherkatari) However, Kherka is not a Bodo expression. It means cutting off the Straw or thatch in Assamese, in Bodo thatch is called jigab. It is probably that the persons who were engaged to collect thatch during festivals were called Kherkatari. On the other hand, Endle describes them as the squirrel Folk. But it is not so clear why this clan or group should be associated with the squirrel. The origin of the term might have been influenced by some non-Bodo language of a particular area. The people of this clan or group are generally found in the district of Kamrup of Assam.

12. Lahary: In Boro Lai means a leaf. In a great festival like Kherai huge quantities of leaves, especially leaves of the banana tree are required. To collect the leaves some persons were engaged during the great festival. So, probable that those persons who were engaged or entrusted to collect the leaves were designated as Lahari or Laihari, (Lai+ari=Lahari or Laihari). According to another explanation, this Lahari originated from the word 'Laha' which means Lac, and the people of this clan were associated with the production of lac (Laha).

13. Mohilary=*Mohila-aro*i: It is believed that the clan or group Mahilari or Mahalari originated from the word mahal or lease. A group of Bodo people lived on fishing and they got the fishery tanks on lease from the authorities concerned. Some people were also lessee of timber mahals and were called Mahilari(Mahal+ari=Mahilari or Mahalari).

14. Maomarary: The name of this clan or group might be originated from the name of the place Maomari.

Sometimes it is found that the people of a particular place are known by the name of the place. Several places are known as Maomari still exist in this state of Assam. Hence, it is probably that the people of the place Maomari were called Maomarari.

15. **Mushahary=*Mosa-aro***: Musa+ari=Musari or Musahari. In Bodo, Musa means tiger. So, this group is related to the tiger. The people of this clan follow some traditional customs relating to the tiger. They are not supposed to kill a tiger. Further, when they get information about the killing of a tiger, they have to remain without food for a day and clean the house for purification. It is believed that their duty was to safeguard the domestic animals from the tigers. In the early period, the tigers created trouble for the villagers. The Mushari folk kept watching at night so that no tiger could kill the domestic animals.

16. **Narzary=*Narze-aro***: The meaning of Narzoi is the dry leaves of the jute plant. Dried jute leaves constitute a favourite food of the Boros. Although the taste of narzoi is bitter, the curry prepared from narzoi is a favourite dish. There is a belief among the Boros that the dry leaves of the jute plants have medicinal properties. Besides, narzoi goran, or the dry leaves of the jute plants possess another great importance. At the time of cremation, the party has to chew the narzoi goran after having a bath at the end of the cremation. Again, during the time of Saradu or Sharadh(a post-cremation ceremony) all the persons who attended the ceremony are given small quantities of narzoi goran to be taken as a compulsory item. The Bodos believe that by taking narzoi goran they cut off their relationship with the dead person. Thus, narzoi is an essential commodity for the Bodos. From narzoi comes the name of the group Narzari (Narzoi+ari=Narzoiari or Narzari). It is said that the Narzary was engaged in collecting and supplying Narzoi goran during the Saradu. In the present Bodo society, the people of this group call themselves Narzi or Narzari.

On the other hand, there is a story about the origin of the clan in the district of Darrang and Kamrup. According to the people of these districts 'Phadang' bears the meaning of a naked or shameless. The story says that once there was an old man in a village who kissed his daughter-in-law. In the Bodo society for this sort of behavior, the old man had to perform penance according to the custom of the society. The old man had to put off the dress in presence of a large crowd and he had to put on a new dress which was to be supplied by another person. At the outset, none could gather the courage to supply the garment and for this, he was also regarded as shameless or sinful by the villagers. Both the old man and the supplier of the garment were addressed as phadang. And from them originated the clan Phadangari(Phadang+ari=Phadangari or Phadamari).

17. **Owari**: The name of this group or clan Owari originated from the word owa which means bamboo. Owa+ari=Owari, it is said that since during the festivals like Kherai large quantity of bamboos are essential and persons who were engaged in the collection of bamboos for such festivals came to be known as Owari. They are believed to have planned bamboos for the first time.

18. **Phadangary=*Fadam-aro***: Phadang is a tree. It is believed that those people who took shelter under the shade of the Phadang tree came to be called, by the name Phadangari. But there is no strong ground for the belief that a group of people was known by the tree under which they took shelter. Neither it is possible to live under the shade of a tree for a long time.

19. **Ramchiary=*Ramsha-aro***: It is believed that the group Ramsari or Ramsiari originated from the name of a place called Ramsa(Ramsa+ari=Ramsari or Ramsiari). On the other hand, in the Karbi language, Rama means Kachari (the Bodo Kachari people). The place known as Ramsa is situated in the district of Kamrup on the Southern bank of the Brahmaputra.

20. **Sabayary:** Like Sibling or Sesame, sabai is also a kind of pulse that is essential during the festivals. Hence, people who were engaged to supply sabai were given the name of the group Sabaiari (Sabai+ari=Sabaiari). It is believed that they were the first producers of the pulse Sabai.

21. **Sangphramari:** It is not clear how this group originated. According to a story available in the district of Jalpaiguri of West Bengal, this group originated from an incident where the rice was left half cooked. In Bodo 'sang' means to cook or to search for something and 'phram' means to leave any work half done (song+phram+ari=Sangphramari). Thus, Sangphramari is a clan or group of people who had left the rice half cooked. There is a story about the creation of this clan or group. The story runs as follows.

22. **Sibingary=*Sibing-aro*:** Sesame is called Sibling in Bodo. This commodity is essential in the performance of the great religious festivals. So, the engaged in this works were called Sibingari (Sibling+ari=Sibingari). They were probably the first cultivators of sesame. Of course, there is no such specific function attached to any groups in the present Boro Society.

23. **Swargiary=*Swarga-aro*:** The Bodo people of this group claim their position to be at the top of all the groups. They also claim to be the direct descendant of the god 'Bathou Borai'. The Bodo society entrusted the duty of worshipping the god to this group. In Bodo Swarga means heaven. Swarga+ari=Swargiari. They are also known as the Heavenly Folk. The Bodos selected worshippers called Dauries or Ojas from among the Swargiaris.

24. **Thalibary:** Thaler or Thalet means banana. It is believed that this group originated from the word Thaler (Thaler+ari=Thalerari or Thalet+ari). The person who was engaged to supply thaler during the festivals like Kherai or Garja was probably designated as Thalerari or Thaler+ari. They planted banana trees for the first time, according to their belief. The people of this group are very rare in the present Bodo society.

There is a belief among the Bodos that some persons have the power of transforming themselves into tigers and while in the tiger form, they kill and devour domestic animals. Such persons are known Musa Jarou. Shri Bhaven Narzi describes the duty of this clan or group to be hunting of animals for food. Some Boro people belonging to the Musahari group of Assam are found using the surname Baglari, instead of Musahari. Bagh is an Assamese word that means the tiger and it is quite probable that the Bodo people who lived close to Assamese speaking people and the use of the term baghlari in place of Musahari is the result of the influence of the Assamese language in the Bodos.

Thus, it was believed to be originated as Laha+ari=Lahari. But this explanation does not seem to be very convincing as there is little evidence of the Bodo people have been engaged in the collection of lac or trade-in lac.

Besides the groups discussed above the Bodos of the state of West Bengal have some more groups. Like Sangphatang, Katajari, Bamuda, Laoari, Aeophramari, Khakhloari, etc. are found among them. The Bodos of the state of Assam are not familiar with this group. (Brahma K. , 1999)

CONCLUSION

The given numbers of surnames or social groups in this paper are limited. Many more surnames emerged as time passed by, very little could last till the present day. It cannot be completely rely the history behind each social group as it lacks proper written records, whatever the sources, are most likely folklores those have been passing from one generation to other.

All the groups of the Bodos are of equal status. In respect of inter-group marriage, there is no bar. After the marriage, the girl assumes the surname of her husband. The children also assume the surname of their father. (Brahma K. , 1999) But at one point, it is said that there was a rise in social status among the Bodos. However, having several surnames among Bodos, there is no chaos in the society. There is rigidly practicing of the caste system in other parts of India. The Brahmins are at the top position in society. But, among Bodos practicing surname and positioning it in society is not there. Of course, the surnames have a role in the rituals and festivals, but not in other social domains. The Bodos do not practice the social positioning among them. There is not a single ostracise among the Bodos regarding surnames. Generally, while anyone tries to understand, then aware of the positioning of surname comes to Swargiari first, but only at the time of rituals and traditional festivals if their presence would be available, then gives preference. Some scholars argue that the Basumatari group is at the top of society. They were considered landlords among the Bodos in the early days. However, other groups also have a certain status in Bodo society. But, the reforms carried out by Kalicharan Mech brought changes in the socio-political life of the Bodos. Some Bodos accepted the Brahma as a surname instead of having tradition. This indicates that the Bodos have traditional surnames. They had been practicing the surnames functionally in the early days. But, at present, there is no rigid practice of surname assigned to them among the Bodos.

Thus, the surname remains as a title of the people. There is no restriction on changing the surname. It is one of the reasons that there are some surnames but not practiced at present by the Bodos. Some people are doing multiple occupations in different positions for livelihood. It can not be called the same person with multiple titles. These become a mere title without representing what they are, and there is no sense over it. People who belonged to groups like Ganjlerari and Phadangari would still like to bear those titles. They would probably convert their surnames to another as they wish. However, this day surnames like Ganjlerari and Phadangari are no more. Some of the common Bodo Surnames of today's are Basumatary, Brahma, Narzary, Musahary, Islay, Swargiary, Wary, Daimary, Goyary, and Bargayary.

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