



Post-Independence Bodo Literature: Literary Diversity and Challenges

Dr. Pranab Jyoti Narzary¹, Prof. Anil Kumar Boro²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Bodo, Pandu College, Guwahati-781012, Assam, India

²Head, Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, Assam, India

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Abstract— *The post-independence era has been a transformative period for Bodo literature, witnessing remarkable growth in both form and content. Beginning with its humble literary roots in the early 20th century and propelled by the formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1952, Bodo literature has diversified across genres—poetry, fiction, drama, essays, criticism, and children's literature. The recognition of Bodo as a scheduled language in the Indian Constitution and its inclusion in higher education curricula further accelerated this growth. The role of private and institutional publishers, women writers, digital platforms, and translation initiatives has been instrumental in enriching literary production and expanding readership. Despite significant accomplishments, challenges remain in national visibility, global outreach, and digital representation. This paper explores the journey of Bodo literature over the last seventy-five years, its achievements, current trends, and the critical gaps that need to be addressed to ensure its relevance and survival in the 21st century and beyond.*



Keywords— *Bodo literature, post-independence, literary development, tribal language, literary challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

The last seventy-five years have been the most productive and eventful period in the history of Bodo literature. Like other Indian languages, Bodo has witnessed remarkable literary developments across various genres over the past seven decades. Although Bodo began its literary journey in the early decades of the 20th century, it was still in its infancy in 1947 when India gained independence from British rule. Literary development in Bodo received significant momentum after the formation of the **Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS)** on 16 November 1952 and the inclusion of Bodo as a medium of instruction in schools in 1963. With the growing demand for textbooks and reference materials, publication in multiple literary genres increased steadily. Besides textbooks, literary journals, poetry collections, short stories, novels, essays, critical works, and plays were published during the decades from the 1960s to the end of the 20th century.

The recognition of Bodo as a scheduled language under the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in 2003 and its inclusion as a medium of instruction and research in Gauhati University and Bodoland University marked a new era. Today, books in all genres—Kavya literature (based on oral poetry), modern poetry, drama, fiction, travelogue, children's literature, and non-fiction prose—are regularly published. Newspapers, journals, and e-media platforms have also emerged.

There is a conscious effort to preserve traditional Bodo identity and culture through literature while simultaneously exploring new themes and literary techniques. The quality of publications has improved significantly with the involvement of private publishers and government-sponsored institutions. The Sahitya Akademi has supported the publication of Bodo translations and awarded distinguished works. Institutions like the NBT and CIIL have published children's books in Bodo. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha has played a central role in publishing

dictionaries, glossaries, textbooks, and reference materials. This paper explores the literary accomplishments since independence and examines the current challenges and prospects for the future.

Bodo Language and Literature in the Formative Years

Bodo, a language of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family, is spoken across the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), adjoining districts of Assam, and parts of Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Despite being an ancient and rich language, there is little evidence of a written literary tradition in the distant past.

Historically, Bodo rulers supported the languages of priestly classes—Sanskrit in ancient Kamarupa and Bengali in Tripura—while Bodo remained primarily an oral language. Its expressive forms included songs, ballads, prose narratives, chants, sayings, proverbs, and riddles transmitted orally through generations.

The late 19th century witnessed the first attempts to document Bodo oral traditions in print, thanks to missionaries and British administrators. The first Bodo literary magazine, *बिबर* (*The Flower*), appeared in 1920. The first printed Bodo book, *बर'नि फिसा ओ आयेन*, a work on customary law, was published in 1915. Poetry collections such as *Khonthai Methai* (1923) by Modaram Brahma and Rupnath Brahma, and religious texts like *बर'नि गुदि सिबसा*, marked the early literary landscape. Short stories, essays, and commentaries began appearing in literary magazines, albeit in mixed Assamese and Bengali scripts.

During this time, a growing number of Bodos adopted Assamese as their primary language, leading to concerns about the survival of the Bodo language. In response, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha was formed shortly after Indian independence, aiming to preserve and promote the Bodo language and culture.

The Bodo Sahitya Sabha and Literary Development

Founded in 1952, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) emerged as the principal literary and cultural organization for the Bodos. It played a pivotal role in asserting the rights of the Bodo language as a medium of instruction and cultural expression. Under its leadership, Bodo literature flourished, with the publication of textbooks, reference works, poetry, short stories, novels, dramas, essays, and scholarly writings.

The official journal *The Bodo* and other literary magazines have been in regular circulation since the Sabha's inception. Bodo was recognized as a Modern Indian Language (MIL) subject at Gauhati University and NEHU, which further expanded literary output. Diverse genres such as biography, academic essays, and media

writing found a place in the growing literary landscape. Dictionaries, grammar books, newspapers, and journals also emerged during this time.

Accomplishments in Recent Decades

The establishment of the Department of Bodo at Gauhati University (1995–96) and the Kokrajhar campus (1998), later upgraded to Bodoland University in 2015, marked a new academic milestone. Postgraduate courses and research opportunities enhanced the demand for high-quality publications.

Bodo is now the only tribal language in Northeast India to be included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, putting it on par with other scheduled languages. Yet, much remains to be done for national and international recognition. Translation of major works into other Indian and world languages remains a pressing need.

Poetry and fiction have been particularly vibrant genres. A new generation of poets and authors—many of them women—has emerged, spearheading a movement of women's writing in Bodo under the aegis of the **Bodo Women Writers Association**. The association publishes the journal *Gambari*, organizes seminars and poetry readings, and actively participates in literary festivals and book fairs, promoting women writers and their work. Literary bodies and the Bodo Sahitya Sabha continue to support and encourage diverse literary production.

Creativity and 21st Century Writing

Creativity plays a vital role in literature, particularly in genres like poetry and fiction. Among contemporary writers, poetry remains the most favored genre, likely because of its power to articulate complex human experiences and emotions. Poetry has always been a revered literary form—from classical and romantic traditions to the modern day—capable of conveying truth, beauty, and social critique.

In the digital age, poetry is evolving. Social media platforms such as Instagram and blogs have popularized “Instapoetry,” with poets like Lang Leav, Atticus, and Rupi Kaur gaining global audiences. Young Bodo writers, too, are engaging with digital platforms, uploading poetry and fiction that later find a place in print. Performance poetry is also gaining traction, merging literature with music, theater, and visual arts. Senior poets continue to prefer traditional print, though some also engage online occasionally.

Digital poetry tends to embrace free verse, unconventional syntax, and experimental forms. While some critics lament a decline in traditional poetic conventions, others recognize these developments as new forms of creative expression that are dynamic and symbolic.

Short forms like haiku and limerick are especially popular online.

Fiction—both short stories and novels—also continues to thrive. Authors like Bidyasagar Narzary, Rita Boro, and Tulon Mushahary have written historical novels, while others like Manoranjan Lahary and Surath Narzary have explored psychological, social, and biographical fiction. The COVID-19 pandemic inspired many writers to produce short fiction and novels that were initially shared online. Writers are also venturing into non-fiction, travel writing, life writing, and children's literature.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

As India celebrates 75 years of independence, several questions arise: How well-known is Bodo literature outside Assam and Bodoland? How many Bodo literary works have been translated and made available to national or global readers? Which Bodo literary figures have achieved national prominence?

Themes such as tribal life, folklore, identity, social issues, environmental concerns, and indigenous knowledge are central to Bodo literature, yet remain largely unknown outside the region. Translation is essential to bridge this gap. Currently, research on Bodo language and literature is mostly confined to institutions in Assam and Northeast India. There is limited visibility in national and international universities. Collaborative programs, academic exchanges, and literary seminars beyond the region are rare.

Moreover, how many Bodo poems, stories, or performances are accessible on digital platforms? The presence of Bodo literature in national and government media like AIR and Doordarshan is minimal. To address these issues, more e-journals, digital archives, and translation initiatives are needed. Institutions such as NIB, Bodo Study Centres, and regional universities can play a vital role.

CONCLUSION

Over the past seventy-five years, Bodo literature has undergone a significant and inspiring transformation. From its modest beginnings rooted in oral traditions and missionary documentation, it has evolved into a dynamic and multifaceted literary tradition. The formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, constitutional recognition, academic institutionalization, and the emergence of women and young writers have collectively enriched the literary corpus across a wide range of genres—poetry, fiction, drama, essays, literary criticism, and children's literature.

The post-independence era has not only witnessed a surge in creative output but also marked a deliberate effort to preserve indigenous identity, values, and knowledge systems through literary expression. Contemporary writers continue to experiment with form and content, blending traditional themes with modern sensibilities. The advent of digital media has opened new avenues for literary expression and readership, making Bodo literature more accessible to younger generations and diasporic communities.

Nevertheless, significant challenges persist. The visibility of Bodo literature at national and international levels remains limited, with a critical need for translation, digital presence, and academic engagement beyond the region. Without broader dissemination and institutional support, Bodo literature risks remaining marginalized despite its literary richness and cultural significance.

To ensure the sustained growth and recognition of Bodo literature in the 21st century, a multi-pronged strategy is essential—one that promotes systematic translation projects, fosters digital archiving and dissemination, supports young and marginalized voices, and encourages collaborations across linguistic and disciplinary boundaries. Only then can Bodo literature take its rightful place in the mosaic of Indian and world literatures, contributing meaningfully to discourses on diversity, identity, and cultural resilience.

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