

**STATUS AND ROLE OF BODO WOMEN**  
**IN**  
**NORTHERN PART OF BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY**  
**IN ASSAM [1919-2003].**

A thesis submitted to University of North Bengal for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.) in History.

*Under the Supervision of*

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## Declaration

I hereby declared that the dissertation entitled "**Status and Role of Bodo Women in the Northern part of the Brahmaputra valley in Assam (1919-2003)**". Due the vast area of Northern part of the Brahmaputra valley in Assam special reference has been chosen to Bodoland Territorial Council. It is an original work and it has been completed under the supervision of Prof. Ratna Roy Sanyal, Department of History, University of North Bengal. To the best of my knowledge it has not been submitted in any other university or institution for a Ph.D. degree or any other award.

*Bimal Kanti Basumatary*  
(Bimal Kanti Basumatary)

## Preface

Development of a community is judged by the position of women in the society. In a society where there is negligence of women that society or community can not develop. But, women are by and large neglected a lot and also suffer low status in the society. She has contributed to low female literacy rates, early marriage, high fertility, high infant mortality, high maternal mortality and declining sex-ratio. My research works on the "*Status and Role of Bodo Women in the Northern part of the Brahmaputra valley in Assam (1919-2003)*". But due to the vast area of the Brahmaputra Valley special reference has been chosen to Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). Bodo community is socially, economically, educationally and politically one of the most backward tribe in lower Assam. Being a member of the same community, from my childhood I have seen how much the Bodo women has struggled for maintaining their day today family life as well as in taking care of their children. Despite their hard works and significant role in the family as well as in the society their contribution is perceived to be secondary by the Bodo society. Therefore, in order to give equal status and honour the contributions of women's towards the development of the Bodo community as a whole I have chosen as my research topic on the - *Status and Role of Bodo Women in Northern part of Brahmaputra Valley in Assam*, particularly in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Assam. This work is an outcome of my extensive field work and research. Since I

belong to the same community, I could easily access deeply into the Bodo socio-economic and cultural set up and able to collect necessary knowledge without much difficulty about the topic.

I work hard to present all the findings facts, chronology and information as authentic as possible and tried to analyse them critically and systematically. Besides, I have tried to use all the available sources both used and unused information very carefully in order to make more meaningful of the study.

At the very beginning, I shall remain grateful to my honourable supervisor Professor Ratna Roy Sanyal for her scholarly guidance and active cooperation who was my Constant source of inspiration. This work might not have been complete without her healthy helping hand. Again I would like to thanks to S.C. Roy, Dy. Secretary, UGC, North-Eastern Regional Office Guwahati for providing Fellowship under Faculty Improvement Programme (FIP) under XI plan period. I am grateful to all the Librarians and staff of North Bengal University Library; Librarians and Staff of North Eastern Hill University, Shillong; Department of History and Women's Study Centre, University of North Bengal for their cooperation; Jamia Millia Islamia University Archives and Centre of Women Study, New Delhi; Administrative Staff College Library, Guwahati University; Office of the All Bodo Student's Union(ABSU), Bodofa House, Kokrajhar; Office of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS)and BTC Secretariat Kokrajhar for being encouraging and cooperation.

Further, I am extremely grateful to acknowledge the cooperation, inspiration and moral supports extended by Dr. Binay Kumar Brahma, Principal Kokrajhar Govt. College, Dr. Dipak Roy, Assistant Professor North Bengal University Dr. Sikhna Shone Wary, Associate Prof. Kokrajhar Govt. College and also express

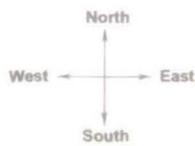
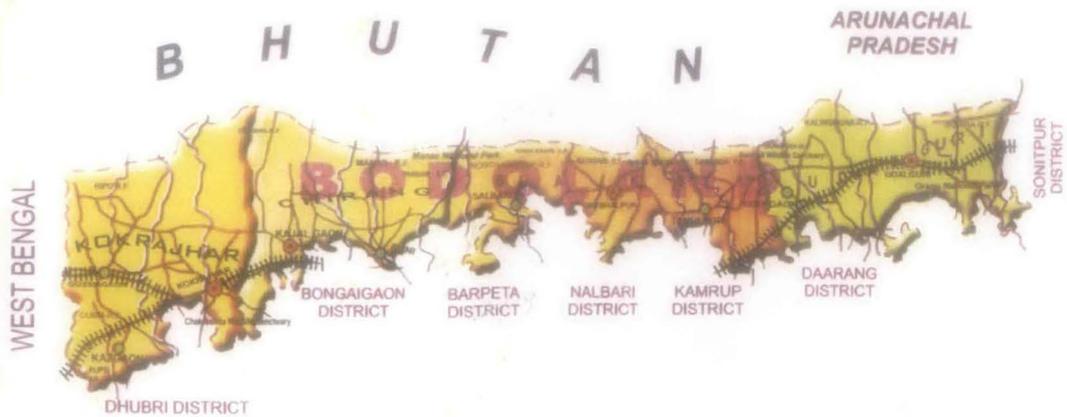
my sincere gratitude to all my well wishers those who have cooperated and encouraged me in completion of my research.

I am also grateful to my family members, who always standing my side, encouraging and providing me with intellectual and moral support in completing my research.

Bimal Kanti Basumatary



## BODOLAND TERRITORIAL COUNCIL



REFERENCES	
1. Boundary International	
2. Boundary State	
3. Boundary B.T.C.	
4. Boundary District	
5. Boundary Roads	
6. District Headquarters	
7. Sub-Division H.Q.	
8. Railway Line	
9. River & Streams	

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AASU	All Assam Students' Union
ABSU	All Bodo Students' Union
AATWWF	All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation
ABWWF	All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation
APTF	Assam Police Task Force
ABEF	All Bodo Employee Federation
AAPTLL	All Assam Plain Tribal League
AGP	Assam Gana Parisad
ATS	Assam Tribal Sangha
BSS	Bodo Sahitya Sabha
BPAC	Bodo People's Action Committee
BAC	Bodoland Autonomous Council
BCS	Boro Chatra Sanmillan
BLT	Bodo Liberation Tiger
BTAD	Bodoland Territorial Administrative Districts.
BMS	Boro Maha Sanmillan

BVF	Bodo Volunteer Force
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IMY	Indira Mahila Yojana
IWEP	Integrated Women's Empowerment Programme
IRDP	Integrated Rural Child Development Programme
DWCRA	Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas
PDF	People's Democratic Front
PTCA	Plain Tribal Council of Assam
PTCA (P)	Plain Tribal Council of Assam (Progressive)
SHGs	Self-Help Groups
RCP	Revolutionary Communist Party
RSM	Roman Script Movement
UTNLF	United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front.

## CHAPTER-1

### INTRODUCTION

The study of humanity involves the study of culture. Human society and culture are not static rather they are dynamic. The nature of changing of a society and culture is determined by a number of factors. This factor may be social, religious, political, economic, cultural contact etc. Therefore, change of society is a continuous process. Proper understanding of a society needs systematic study on the historical process of change conditioned by a variety of factors. Since the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century and till now, lot of studies in different fields have been made on Bodo society, culture, religion, language, history, civilization and politics. According to the findings of the studies – Bodos are shown distinct and separate from others groups of Indian people socially, culturally, linguistically as well as racially. Though there are similarities and affinities between the Bodos and other communities, these similarities are paid little attention by scholars and thinkers.

The Bodos belong to Mongolian race and are one of the largest tribes of Assam. They have their own culture, language and religion. Although there are several books on Bodo community covering society, religion, culture, language and politics, till now no works has been done on the role and status of Bodo women. Therefore, by realising the important role played by Bodo women towards their community, I have chosen to carry out my research work on the title "*STATUS AND ROLE OF BODO WOMEN IN NORTHERN PART OF BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY IN ASSAM [1919-2003]*". Special referance has been chosen to the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

The period 1919-2003 is taken as a base period of my research works due to some important events in the history of the Bodos. For the first time in the

history of Bodo society as a social organization "Boro Chatra Sanmillan" was formed in the year 1919 under the guidance of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. The main objective of the Boro Chatra Sanmillan was to remove the very backwardness in education, socio-political and economic condition of the Bodos and thereby safeguarding their language, culture, religion and racial identity in the world. So from this year onwards various social and political organizations of the Bodos were formed in the society in order to solve the various problems faced by the Bodo community. One of the leading organizations, which had great impact on the development of backward Bodo community, is the *Social Reform and Religious Movement* by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, the founder of Brahma Dharma (Religion) among the Bodos. Other important social, political and literary organizations, which had great impact on the society were – the *Boro Maha Sanmillan* (BMS) in 1921, the *All Assam Plain Tribal League* (AAPTLL) in 1933, the *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* (BSS) in 1952, the *All Bodo Student's Union* (ABSU) in 1967, the *Plain Tribal Council of Assam* (PTCA) in 1967, the *Roman Script Movement* (RSM) in 1974-75, the *United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front* (UTNLF) in 1984. The *All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation* (AATWWF) in 1986, the *People Democratic Front* (PDF) in 1996 etc. Finally the Bodoland Movement under the leadership of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) was launched from 1987 and that movement came to an end after the agreement between the BLT, State Government and the Central Government, *Bodoland Territorial Council* (BTC) on 20th February 2003 as a political set up under the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule of Indian Constitution.

From primitive age to till now, Bodo women have played a very important role in moulding the socio-cultural as well as the economic life of the Bodo people. The social institutions of the Bodos are interwoven and interrelated with their religion and

every sphere of life of Bodo men and women is guided by rites and rituals of their religion. Social customs and traditions play a very important role in the cultural life of the Bodos or any ethnic group. There are customs and traditions with core values which a tradition-bound society can hardly afford to do away with even under the most adverse situation. But the customs and traditions with superficial or peripheral values are always subject to change since they can hardly brush aside the rapid changes specially brought about by modern scientific advancement. Religion has also played a dominant role in changing the social and economic status of the Bodos and also the mode of living and way of thinking, giving shape to the present modernisation of Bodo society. As a result, in the society women are getting equal status. But in true sense, Bodo women are also directly or indirectly discriminated in various ways similar to other communities in different parts of India. No doubt, in the Bodo socio-economic set up, it is the women who occupy dominant role rather than the man folk; thus their social status is higher when compared to other community women in other parts of the country. But their contribution towards the family and society is hardly recognised by the society. Bodo women need not be just objects or beneficiaries of family development but the development process of a society needs the equal participation of women as well. Despite their massive contribution there is no comprehensive study, looking into the social, political and economic condition of the Bodo women. This study may be the first of its kind in this very backward area of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in Assam.

As we know, it is not possible always to visualise all the true happenings in the world, and as a result the true evaluation of those happenings or facts of the world is probably never done. By considering the responsibilities shouldered by the Bodo women towards the development of Bodo society I am inspired to choose this

area for my research. In the present global world and the society, women have to have awareness about them. This will help them in understanding about their rights and responsibilities. At present society has also started evaluating their economic and non-economic contributions in terms of money. As a result, society and the government have also started realising the hidden potential of the women force and their importance in nation building and for this reason they have initiated number of development schemes for women.

In recent years, the issues relating to empowerment and development of women have gained much attention throughout the world. The basic objective of women's empowerment is nothing but understanding one's potential, not only for self-development but also for the benefit of the society and the nation as a whole. It is a process of social transformation, where women gain control over resources and benefit and thereby influencing decisions. So, empowerment of women should not be considered only a women's issues rather it should be a social, political, economic and religious issue. Once women are empowered they can play three important roles in life: as a good daughter, good wife and good mother. As the saying goes, "Behind every successful man there is a woman." The role of non governmental organisations (NGOs) is mentioned worthy in empowering women socially, economically, politically and culturally. In recent year social workers, policy makers, thinkers and the government are leaving no stone unturned for preventing and eliminating all forms of women exploitation and atrocities committed on them by their male counterpart.

In the developing countries, women's lives are becoming revolutionaries, changing so rapidly that daughters no longer replicate the life patterns of mothers. Traditional family form and the segregated labour market are disintegrating under

modernization. The apparent invisibility of women's worth as well as their work is wide spread and persistent. It is believe that unless women's participation in production beyond home making is encouraged, women will be restricted to the role of economic dependants. As long as the household remains the domain of production, women's work in household will be undervalued and their time allocation will not be in favour of labour market.

In the Bodo society, the relation between husband and wife is divine. There are lot of activities in the family and the society, which the male alone can not perform. Then why are women's work and their contribution not given due recognition and why such discrimination in the family and society? The very purpose of my research work in this particular area is to make the family, society and the women themselves aware of women's contribution in the family society and the nation, so that they are given their due recognition and respect in the days to come.

#### **The area of Study:**

The study of my research work is conducted in Northern part of Brahmaputra Valley in Assam (1919-2003) with special reference to Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), which comprises of four districts, namely Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirrang and Udalguri. The total area of BTC is approximately 8,970 square kms. There are over 3082 villages in Bodoland Territorial Council. According to the BTC secretariat source, the total population of BTC is 26, 31,289. As per BTC sources is concerned, Kokrajhar district has total population of 8, 98,991, Chirrang district has 3, 43,626, Baga district has 7, 17,642 and Udalguri district has 6, 71,030 population (Amar Krishna Paul & Bidyasagar Narzary: *Let the world Know about Bodoland*, 2009.)) Bodoland Territorial Council has sub-tropical climate with semi-dry hot summer and cold winter. Dust and storm are common in BTC during February to April of the year

due to its proximity to the mighty Brahmaputra. Generally, December and January are the coldest months of the year in BTC. The maximum rainfall generally occurs during the months of May to August. The annual rainfall varies from 1500 mm. to 2600 mm. With respect to temperature, BTC is divided into belts in East–West direction. The middle belts are the hottest where temperature goes up to 36<sup>o</sup> and the northern belts is the coolest, the temperature going below 10<sup>o</sup>. The relative humidity is around 82%. Agriculture is the main source of income of the people of BTC and more than 80% of the total population of BTC depend on agriculture.

#### **Objective the study:**

The over all objectives of the study are to know the social, economic and political positions of the Bodo women in Bodoland Territorial Council [BTC] in Assam; To review or highlight the contribution of Bodo women in socio-economic and political development in Bodoland; To make the Bodo women visible in various sector in the society; To review various government programmes for the development of women in Bodoland; To suggest measures for improvement of the status of Bodo women in the family as well as in the society.

#### **Chaptarization:**

The whole research work is presented in seven chapters. Chapter 1 is mainly devoted to the introduction to the Bodos and their response to the changing trends of society towards the development of modern world. Besides, the importance of study about the role and status of Bodo women in the society, objectives, review of literature and methodology of the research are also included in first chapter. Chapter 2 deals with historical review of the Bodos from earliest to modern. In this chapter it is also tried to narrate about their origin, migration and early settlement. Chapter 3 provides cultural symbiosis and its impact on the Bodo Women. This chapter mainly

deals with the role and participation of the Bodo women in their social, economic, religious and political movement. Chapter 4 deals with *the* role of Bodo women in work force in Bodoland. It concentrates mainly on martial and economic status of Bodo, women work loads and also participation in decision making process in the society. Chapter 5 devoted to the study of the role and participation of the Bodo women in the Bodoland movement. Chapter 6 mainly deals with the various developmental schemes initiated by the Central, State and BTC government for the development and empowerment of Bodo women particularly in the four districts- Kokrajhar, Chirrang, Baga and Udalguri. Chapter 7 is conclusion summarizing the findings of all the six chapter of the research.

#### **Review of existing literature:**

A large number of research studies have been conducted on the status of women of various tribes of north-east India. Since last one decade, the research studies have mainly focused on the area of gender issues. The following are the studies of the researchers touching on the status and position of the Bodo women in Northeast India.

1. The Bodos as a first settler tribe of Assam are mentioned in various books by scholars. An extensive amount of study appears to have been done on the Bodos, their origin, migration, socio-political, economic and religious life. *The Kacharis* (1911) by Sydney Endle is the first of its kind about the aboriginal Mongoloid tribes. In this book the author narrated in detail about the social, economic, religious and domestic life of the Bodos as well as about the Bodo women.
2. "*The Bodos: Emergence and Assertion of an Ethnic Minority.*" Thomas Pullopilli & Jacob Aluckal, Spectrum Publication Gauhati, 1992. This book deals with only the

socio, religion and culture of the Bodos and fails to mention the positions and role of the Bodo women in the society.

3. "*The Boro Imbroglio*", Ajay Roy, Spectrum Pub; New Delhi, 1995. In this book he has narrated the historical and changing socio-economic circumstances leading to the violent movement by the Bodos. This book is particularly mentioned about the various problems of the Bodo and their political movement.

4. "The Bodo Movement and Women's participation" Suchitrasen Chaudhury 2004. This book has portrayed the Bodos as leaders and effective organizers at the grass roots level. She has tried to reflect on the concern of Bodo women recognizing the existing socio-economic situation of their own community and their sincere efforts to maintain peace.

5. "*Tribal Women of Arunachal Pradesh*", V.M. Rao, 2003. This book deals with the various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and their participation in various social activities. But he did not mention the Bodo tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and their various activities in the society in his book.

6. "*Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition: A Historical perspective*", Sekhar Brahma, 2006. This book has mentioned the religion of the Bodos and the role played by Bodo women in the society but failed to mention the position and status of the Bodo women in social, economic and religious activities in the Bodo society.

7. *The Bodo- Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti* (in Assamese) by Bhaben Narzi is one of the most valuable works about the Bodos. In this book the author narrated about the social and cultural life of the Bodos. Besides, *A Study of the Socio-Religious Beliefs and Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodo* by Dr. Kameswar Brahma is also an in-

depth study on the social customs and traditions of the Bodos of the North–East region, especially in Assam.

8. *“Indian Women: the Ushering of a New Dawn”*, Krishna Bhowmick New Delhi, 2006. This book mentions about the status of Dalit and Tribal women, their oppression and problems but fails to mention measures to solve the problems faced by them.

9. *“Gender Mainstreaming and Women”*, Usha Sharma, Delhi, 2004. In this book she has tried to expose the deteriorating conditions of Indian women due to the negligence of patriarchal system of society.

10. Aparna Mahanta: *‘Women’s Movement in Assam and North East India: An Assessment, Social Movement in North East India*, New Delhi Indus Publishing – Over view of literature, House, 1998. In this book she has mentioned women’s role and their participation in the said movement. But she has failed to mention the role and participation of Bodo women in the movement. Therefore, she has not mentioned the role played by Bodo women in Assam movement.

11. *Kacharis Burunji* (in Assamese) written by S.K. Bhuyan is a chronicle dealing with the Kacharis (Bodo). It contains legends about the origin of the Bodo-Kochari Kings and their kingdom. This book also contains a thorough history of the Ahom-Kachari (Bodo) relations from the end of 14<sup>th</sup> century up to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This book is regarded as one of the main source books to understand the history of the Kacharis.

It is evident from the above review that researchers did not give due attention on the area of socio, economic and political status of the Bodo women. Nevertheless, in the recent times, due to the gravity of the problem, the area has attracted not only individuals and institutions but also social workers and feminists to

do some serious work in this area. Although some research work has been done on social and cultural history of the Bodo, no sufficient studies have been attempted to examine the attitude of men towards the marginalized group in the society. As the above studies are not extensive, the present work is an attempt to fill the vacuum. Therefore, it is presumed that the proposed study would make a significant contribution to identify the status and role of Bodo women in the Bodo society.

### ***Methodology:***

In order to carry out the said research the following methods are adopted.

1. The basic methodological approach for this research is paradigmatic research.
2. It has based on empirical-deductive principles.
3. In the compositions of the paradigm, though the basic element is historical, it has multidisciplinary approach incorporating the dependent variables from sociology, anthropology, historical records, economics and religion.
4. This research has been supported by interviews with a cross section of people of different social organizations and of different sections of the community in the BTC region.

## CHAPTER - 2

### BODO FROM EARLIEST TO MODERN—A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

India is a land of diverse races, cultures, civilizations, religions, ethnic groups and societies. Streams of human races and groups of Austro-Asiatic, Nitrites, Dravidians, Alpines, Indo-Mongoloids, Tibeto-Burman and Aryans penetrated into India through different routes and migrated and settled in different parts of India making their history, culture and civilization and contributed to the structuring of the great Indian culture, history and civilization. The Tibeto-Burman people are predominant in the whole North-Eastern Region. The Bodos are one of the sections of the Tibeto-Burman family. The term '*Bodo*' was for the first time used by B.H. Hodgson as an ethnological term, it refer to the Meches, the Bodo speaking people of Darjeeling district in 1846 while writing about them<sup>1</sup>. Since then the word '*Bodo*' has been used as a generic term to denote the different branches of the Bodo language group. G.A. Grierson says, "The generic term '*Bodo*' was first applied to these languages."<sup>2</sup> But the Bodo speaking people called themselves as the Boro.

The Boro, Bodo, Boro-Kacharis and Meches by whatever names one may choose to call them are the same people and form a sub-section of the Bodo-Naga section under the Assam Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan speech family<sup>3</sup>. Today, the Bodos constitute one of the important indigenous tribes of the North East India. In the Brahmaputra valley the people call themselves as *Bodo or Boro*, in Goalpara district of Assam and Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal they are called '*Mech*' by their neighbours, and to the Upper Assam and Barak valley they are called as '*Kachari*'<sup>4</sup>. By whatever name they may be called by their neighbours and wherever they may live, they are the same group of people and

speaking the same dialects with few local peculiarities. Whatever may be the case the fact is that the Great Bodo once wielded great power and influence in the entire North East India. Suniti Kumar Chatterji writes, "The whole Assam and North and East of Bengal were the country of the Great Bodo people"<sup>5</sup>. But at the present they are scattered all over Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Nepal, Bangladesh etc. However the majority of them are found at present in the *Bodoland Territorial Council* which was created in the year 1993.

There are some scholars who have connected the origin of the name of Bodo with that of Lord Buddha. Buddhist religion spread into different parts of the world, namely China, Tibet, Nepal, Korea, Japan, Bhutan, Srilanka, Mongolia etc.<sup>6</sup> According to Austin Waddell, the spread of Buddhism in Tibet was taking place about 640 A.D.<sup>7</sup> It suggested that many inhabitants accepted Buddhism and the Bodos are no exception and having accepted the Buddhism assumed the name Buidofisa or Bodosa, which was in course of time corrupted into Bodosa or Bodos<sup>8</sup>. But the traditional religion of the Bodo in Assam is Bathouism and not Buddhism. The supreme God of the Bodo worship is Bathou-Bwrai identified with Hindu God Shiva, represented by *Sijou* (*Euphorbia splendours*) installed at the courtyard of the homestead of each worshipper<sup>9</sup>. This suggests that the Bodo came to Assam with their traditional religion. Whatever may be the truth, it was Bryan Hodgson who first gave this generic name to a group of Tibetan-Burman branch of the Tibeto-Chinese speech group in which Grierson includes the Kacharis (Boros and Dimasas), Koches, Garos, Rabhas, Chutiyas, Lalung and other allied tribes of North East India<sup>10</sup>.

As regards the origin of the term Bodo, there are number of opinion. According to R.M. Nath the group of immigrants who followed the Austrics to North

East India were from the north of the Himalayas and North West China. This country was known as *Bod*, meaning land of snow and a section of its inhabitants were known as the *Bodosa*, meaning Children of *Bod* country. These *Bodosa* were subsequently known simply as *Bodos*<sup>11</sup>. According to Grierson the Tibetans in early days called their country *Bodyut*, their language *Bodskat* and a Tibetan person a *Bodpa*<sup>12</sup>. John Bowl refers to a Tibetan plateau with its inhabitants called *Bod*<sup>13</sup>.

As we have referred to the *Bodos* as having derived their name from *Bod* which was their original homeland. Now the question arises as to how the name *Boro* or *Bodo* originated. According to R.M. Nath, some section of the *Bodo* tribes derived their tribal name from that of particular parts of the *Bod* country when they migrated at a later date. For instance, he refers to the *Koches* and the *Meches* having derived their tribal names from those of *Kucha* and *Mecha* areas within the *Bod* country and retained these names as their tribal names after they had migrated to Assam<sup>14</sup>. If this theory is to be true, then it appears that this particular section of the population of *Bod* country preferred to retain their national name *Bodo* as their tribal name after they had migrated to Assam, and the name *Bodo* was perhaps spelt as *Boro*. According to Grierson, the sound of *Bodo* can better be represented by spelling it as *Bada* or *Bara* pronounced as *Boro*<sup>15</sup>. Again we have references to the term *Bara fisa* must have been subsequently termed pronounced as *Boro*.

As noted earlier, the reference to the Himalayas in the above indicates that the Pre-Assam habitat of these people was somewhere in or near the Himalaya region. This is not impossible. We have also noted earlier that the *Bodos* are of Tibetans origin. Besides, the opinions of a good number of authorities on the subject further strengthen the historical value of the saying. Rev. Endle writes that the Mongoloid features and the appearance of the people seem to suggest Tibet and

China, the two Trans-Himalayan countries to be the original home land of the race<sup>16</sup>. The fact that the Bodos are ethnically Mongoloid and linguistically belong to the Sino-Tibetan speech family needs no further reference. S.K. Chatterjee locates the original home of the Sino-Tibetan speakers to the North West China, the head waters of Ho-Angho and Yang-Tsekiang rivers and observed that the Mongoloid tribes of the Sino-Chinese speech family appeared to have been pushing south and west from their original homeland from pre-historic times<sup>17</sup>. The Imperial Gazetteers of India states that the upper courses of the Yang Tsekiang and the Ho-Angho rivers in the North West China were the original home of the Tibeto-Burman races<sup>18</sup>. Depending on the above views corroborated by the folk traditions as stated the original home of the Bodo was in the Bod country, now known as Tibet where they acquired their national name '*Bodo*'.

The reference to '*Korosa Aris*' in the saying suggest that in a very dim past, the Boro called themselves as *Koros*. *Aris* means 'the first born people of the earliest settlers' of the region. In the Boro languages, '*Koro*' means 'head' '*Sa*' means 'child' and *Aris* is the clan or suffix. The compound word of *Korosari* therefore means 'the first born or the people'. The term *Koros* is usually used to the first born child. They claim themselves to be the 'first born people' or the 'earliest settlers' of the region. This demand is not absurd in view of the opinions expressed by Rev. Endle, J.D Anderson, Edward Gait, and K.L. Boruah etc. Rev. Endle holds that the Boros are the autochthones of Assam<sup>19</sup>. J.D. Anderson in his introduction to the above writer's monograph, 'The Kacharis' asserted that the 'Kacharis' were the aborigines of the Aryans of the Brahmaputra valley<sup>20</sup>. Edward Gait is of the opinion that the 'Kacharis' 'may perhaps be regarded as the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley<sup>21</sup>. Rai Bahadur, K.L. Boruah writes that the Bodo tribes occupied the plains of

Assam for a very long time and constituted the bulk of the population in the Assam valley during the time of the Mahabharata war or even earlier<sup>22</sup>. This proved that the Boros, a constituent tribe of the Bodo race inhabited the Brahmaputra valley from time immemorial, which has qualified them to be called the 'first born people' of the region.

In the earlier pages we have mentioned that the Boros are called by their neighbours such as '*Mech*' and '*Kachairis*' in different places and in different times. As regards the origin of the name '*Mech*' Charu Chandra Sanyal writes that a section of the Boros in course of their movement in Assam, moved towards the west along the foot hills of the Himalayas up to the river *Mech* between India and Nepal, settled down along the bank of the river and were called '*Mech*' after the name of the river<sup>23</sup>.

As regards the origin of the name Kachari, there appears to be a consensus of opinions that the name Kacharis is derived from Kachar. However the identification of this Kachar differs. Edward Gait traces a Limbu legend from Risley's 'tribes and castes of Bengal' which relates the origin of the name 'Kachari'. According to the legend, the 'Kacharis were originally known as the 'Meches' and in course of their migration, they inhabited the 'Kachar country', the name given by Nepalese to the tract between the Brahmaputra and the Koshi rivers and these people were later on called 'Kacharis'<sup>24</sup>. This theory get full support of C.C. Sanyal who states that a section of the Boros under the name 'Meches' as we would see later in the succeeding pages, moved towards Nepal and settled down in the 'Kachar country' at the foot hills of Nepal and subsequently came to be known as the 'Kacharis' very definitely after the name of the country. S.K. Chatterji holds that the Boros were given the name 'Kachari' after the name of the present *Cachar* district of Assam after they moved to that place<sup>25</sup>. This is quite improbable in view of the fact

that they were known by this name long before they came to settle there. Gait asserts that the district of *Cachar* might have got its name after the name of its principal tribes i.e. the 'Kacharis' and it is very certain that the 'Kacharis' did not get their name from *Cachar*. They are known by this name in many parts of the region far removed from *Cachar* and were so called long before a section of the tribes took possession of that district. R.M. Nath writes that the 'Kacharis' king placed the administration of the newly acquired territory under a Deputy and the area was named 'Kachar Zilla' meaning district of Cachar. Thus it is cleared that the district of Cachar derived its name from the name of the ruling tribe the Kachari' and not that the 'Kachari' derived their name from that of the district of *Cachar*.

When the Mongoloid Bodos reached the Brahmaputra valley and settled there perhaps the only one other people they found as their neighbour were the Mon Khmer Austric tribes, now known as the Khasi and Jaintia, occupying the low hills and dales of the present Meghalaya. It does not appear that there was much contact or interaction between the two groups as no mutual exchange of words and speeches, customs and habit, tradition and folk-lore can readily be identified. Whatever may be the case the Bodos were certainly the earliest settlers in the Brahmaputra valley and they must have predated the Alpine, Aryan and Dravidian settlers as well as other Mongolian tribes that followed them into Assam. The rich alluvial soil fed by regular and abundant rainfall and irrigated and fertilised by the seasonal floods were tilled by the Bodos producing adequate food crops for an easy livelihood.<sup>26</sup> To this day mono-cropping is the standard practice with the Boro farmers all over Assam.

But such rich abundant fertile land could not have had remained unexplored by other nomadic tribes for long. So new Mongoloid immigrants of some other ethnic

origin followed the Boros from the north and the east and they occupied the lower ranges and the adjacent foot-hills surrounding the Brahmaputra valley plains. The Aryan adventurers coming from the western side of India were gradually advancing towards this valley through the plains of northern Bihar and northern Bengal. The Boros people were originally war like and ferocious in nature as the Kham Tibetans. But long and easy life in the humid climate of the Brahmaputra valley must have had some softening effect on them. So pressure from other new immigrants and their growing numbers forced some of them to move further south. Gradually they moved on and settled in the Garo Hills, North Cachar Hills and plain, Tripura Hills and plain and finally spreading over the adjoining foot hills regions of present Bangladesh. In course of time these various scattered groups acquired variations in their language, custom, culture and even some physical features through inter marriage and close association with other local inhabitants. Therefore, they acquired separate tribe names for these separated groups often associated with their new locals or other such significant aspects of life. That is how now we find Lalung, Rabha, Mishing, Koches, and Sonowal etc. in the Brahmaputra valley. Dimasa in North Cachar Hills, *Burman* in Tripura, *Garos* in Meghalaya, *Hajongs* in adjoining foot-hills of Bangladesh as well as *Meches* in lower Assam, North Bengal and South Eastern Nepal.<sup>27</sup> Besides, the most prominent and original group now known as Boro or Boro-Kacharis, presently inhabiting almost all along the northern part of Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

As per the migration of the Bodo are concerned there are number of opinions among the scholars. As the Bodos racially belonged to the Mongoloid, they surely and certainly migrated from the Central Asia, the mainland of the Mongoloid people. Most of them agreed that the people of Bodo origin migrated into India about 5000



B.C. and the Bodo or the Kiratas are the latest migrants before the Aryans. According to Dr. N.N. Acharyya, "Kachairs are the earliest known indigenous habitants of Assam. They are known under different names in different places and ages throughout the North Eastern part of Indian sub-continent. In Goalpara and North Bengal they are called Mech, in the North Cachar Hills as 'Dimasa' and in Brahmaputra valley the Kacharis are known as 'Bodo' or 'Bodo-fisa'.<sup>28</sup> The idea of Dr. Acharyya is based on the contemporary ethno-demographic structure and distributions of the Bodo people lying in north Bengal and Assam, which is very partial. His information about the present distribution of the Bodo population is incomplete and did not cover the areas like-Nepal, Tripura, Meghalaya, Bangladesh. He is far distant from the pre and archaeological part of the Bodo History. It may be because of his preoccupation in approach and attitude towards the construction of Indian History in general due to which history of Bodo and other aborigines failed to gain actual place in the history of India. Many of the historians failed to show balance in attitude, interest and approach in the study of Bodo History.

Realistic approach in the study of the Bodo History, culture and society was started only with the English writers. The Bodo living in different parts of India have been identified by different names. In addition to the Kacharis proper, S. Endle has classified the following tribes of Boro, Rabha, Mech, Dhimal, Saranias, Dimasas, Garos, Lalung, Mahaliyas, Hajongs, Hojais, Phulgurias etc. within the fold of great Bodo race.<sup>29</sup> To Endle may be one or more communities e.g. the Moran, the Chutias of upper Assam, whose language not altogether extinct as yet though apparently dying out rapidly, would seem to prove them to be closely akin to Kacharis (Bodo) race. The Bodo or Meches of Bengal called themselves' as '*Bwrthwnary*' or '*Bardhanari*'. The term Bardhanari is suggestive to that section of the Bodo people

who might have been the subjects of Harsha Vardhana, the great King of Northern India who was contemporary to Kumar Bhaskar Varman, the king of Asura dynasty of ancient Kamrupa. The term *Bardhan* or *Bwrdown* may have close connection with the 'Bardhan Confederation', Bardwan, Bardhaman, Boudha, Bodo etc.

The question of the routes of migration of the people to Assam is also a confusion and controversial among the scholars. Different scholars have suggested different routes but there is no consensus among them. Here an attempt has been made to prove a hypothesis. It is now an established fact that the north eastern tribes including the Boros were the immigrants from the north. If this is the case they must have filtered into Assam through the various mountain passes and river courses from the north and any attempt to prove their migration to Assam from other imaginary directions like Bihar, Gangetic plain, Bay of Bengal etc. would therefore, be an attempt to falsify the historical fact. Prof. Ram Rahul in his book 'Himalayan Borderland' refers to three prominent trade routes connecting Tibet with Assam and Bengal through Bhutan. These routes are: the Manas river valley, the Kariapara Duars and the Paro Valley. Formerly, there was flourishing trade between India and Tibet with the Bhutanese as carrying agents. From Bengal and Assam, the Bhutanese used to collect dyes endi or eri cloth and cocoons, nuts, tea, tobacco etc. and exchange them with the Tibetan for wool, salt, musk etc.<sup>30</sup> S.K. Chatterji writes that a meagre stream of trade from China used to filter into Assam through Kirata country comprising Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan, Manipur and adjacent areas. He quotes Changkien, the Chinese general and explorer of Central Asia in the second century B.C. as having referred to such trade routes connecting North East India and Western China.<sup>31</sup> Again another route connecting Tibet and Assam runs through Bhairab Kundha on the north of Udalguri district of Assam and Tawang in Arunachal

Pradesh.<sup>32</sup> Most of the big rivers flowing towards the south and through India and Burma such as Brahmaputra, the Chindwin, Mekong, Menam, Subansiri, Dharla, Teesta, Sonkosh etc, rise in the Tibetan highlands and adjacent mountains region and the courses of these rivers very obviously facilitated flourishing trades between India and other countries on the north. During the Chinese aggression of India in 1962, the Chinese forces penetrated into East while NEPA (Arunachal Pradesh) through the mountain passes across the Himalaya. Thus, it is seen that North east India is open to Burma, Tibet and China and therefore must have been subjected to ceaseless flow of immigrations from the north and north east from time immemorial.

So, the question arises as to which particular route was followed by the Boro immigrants while entering Assam. In this regard, the north and north eastern directions seems to be a consensus of opinion among the scholars. A Boro tradition refers to the Choraikaling pass north of Lakimpur district of Assam through which the Boro immigrations took place.<sup>33</sup> Edward Gait and P.C. Chaudhury suggest that the Bodo tribes entered Assam from the north eastern direction.<sup>34</sup> Imperial Gazetteers of India states that the north eastern route was followed by the Mikir, Lalungs and the Boro(Kachari).<sup>35</sup> Grierson holds that the Tibeto-Burman races entered Assam through the courses of the Brahmaputra, Chindwin, Mekong etc. and the mountain passes of India and Burma through the north-east and south east.<sup>36</sup> Rev. Endle refers to two great immigrations at different times one entering from the North-East Bengal and Western Assam through the valley of Teesta, Dharla, Sonkosh etc. and other making its way through the Subansiri, Dibang, and Dihang Valley into Eastern Assam.<sup>37</sup> However it is to be noted that the flow of immigrations to North East India was a continuous process spreading over a long period of time from pro- historic

times. Therefore to suggest a particular route for all immigrations would certainly be far from the truth.

To locate early settlement of the people under our review in Assam, no concrete evidences are available but there are suggestive evidences that provide us with ample scope to establish the fact that the Boros occupied the plains of Assam predominantly till they were overwhelmed by the later arrivals. It appears that the Boro immigrants before penetrating into the heart of Assam and adjoining areas in gradual process must have settled down along the foot hills of the Himalaya. This contention holds well in view of the opinions expressed by a good numbers of scholars who refer to a group of Mongoloid people under the name Kirata. The name Kirata was given to the people dwelling along the foot hills of the Himalayas after they had come from their original habitats in the Himalayan region.<sup>38</sup> S.K. Chatterji introduces Kirata as the frontier dwellers of the Himalayas and the north eastern Himalayan tracts which included Sikkim, Bhutan, Manipur and other adjacent tracts which were exactly the lands of Mongoloid settlement in India.<sup>39</sup> The Boros and other tribes are the descendents of the Kiratas country referred to above as the land of their early settlement. Grierson holds that a section of the Tibeto-Burman occupied the hills on the southern side of the Himalayan range right along from Assam in the east to the Punjab in the west<sup>40</sup>. Linguistically also it is proved that these Tibeto-Burman predominantly include the Boro. Padmeswar Gogoi contents that the 'Kocharis' dominated Eastern Assam at the time when the Ahom entered the land.<sup>41</sup> N.N. Vasu is of opinion that the 'Kacharis' spread and settled down over the whole eastern frontiers of India and called them Lohitic.<sup>42</sup> The Lohit region comprises the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh and the contiguous areas of Tibet and Burma. S.K. Chatterji holds that originally the areas covered by the Lohit River

in the present Arunachal Pradesh appeared to have been inhabited by the Bodo speaking people.<sup>43</sup> R.M. Nath refers to the inhabitation and control of the foot hills of the Himalayas by the 'Kacharis' and it was in these foot hills that innumerable chieftains grew up and gradually pushed towards the south where they established petty kingdoms.<sup>44</sup> Depending on the above view, one hardly finds any room for doubts that the Bodo at the initial stage of their travels and adventures in quest of lands settled along the foot hills to the south of Himalayas which provided them a good base for further penetrations into and settlements in the interior parts of Assam and beyond in different batches at different times in different directions.

Regarding the movements of the Bodos in Assam and adjoining areas of North Bengal, Charu Chandra Sanyal writes that a section of the Boro immigrants moved towards the west along the foot hills of the Himalayas up to the river Mechi between India and Nepal. The Mechi River has its origin in Nepal and flows into India through North Bengal. These section of the Bodo immigrants settled down along the bank of the river Mechi and hence were called 'Meches' by the neighbours clearly after the name of the river. They cultivated paddy in the interspaces of the dense terrain forests. This part of the land was very fertile and the yield of the crop was high. The Nepalese on the hills were probably attracted by the high yield of the crops and descended there to grab the land of the 'Meches'. The displaced Bodo settlers then crossed the Mechi River and many of them descended and moved southwards and settled in the forest to the north of Noxalbari in the district of Darjeeling. Some of them crossed Balasan and Mahananda areas, whence they shifted to Baikunta forest in the district of Jalpaiguri. As tea garden grew up to the river Sonkosh, a natural boundary between Assam and west Bengal, while some of them inhabited Rangpur, Dinaspur and their adjoining areas. A great number of them again crossed

the Sonkosh River and penetrated into Assam. <sup>45</sup> This is proved by old census reports and Gazetteer of the provinces of Assam and west Bengal as well as the presence of a large number of Boro villages on both sides of the Sonkosh River.

According to Grierson the Bodos after entering into plains of Assam proceeded along the course of the Brahmaputra River up to the great bend near Dhubri town. From there some of them went south and occupied modern Garo Hills. South of Garo Hills, they spread in northern Mymensing at present in Bangladesh. <sup>46</sup> R.M. Nath mentions that the Boro settlement in Assam extended as far as Nowgaon district where they built a city *Brahmapur* on the bank of the Kullong River and then gradually pushed towards the slopes of Mikir Hills where they again established cities at *Sonapur* and *Urdhaganga*. This is evidenced by the fact that Urdhaganga is called '*Paro-Khowa*' meaning the lands inhabitants of the Boros. <sup>47</sup> From there, their area of occupation and settlement extended to Cachar district, particularly in the North Cachar Hills and then spread into Sylhet. From Cachar and Sylhet, they moved further to the south Tripura state where there are still a large number of Boro speaking people live and they are, <sup>48</sup> today known to be a distinct tribes by the name 'Barok' or 'Borok', a name clearly a corruption of 'Brog' or 'Boro'. At present these 'Borok' form a solid bloc in the state of Tripura. Grierson again points out that the 'Kacharis' could not occupy the mountainous tract between North Kachar and Garo Hills which constitute Khasi and Jaintia Hills forming a part of the present state of Meghalaya. <sup>49</sup> Then a large number of them pushed towards the foot of the Naga Hills where they established their first powerful kingdom with Dimapur as capital on the bank of the Dhansiri River. The establishment of the flourishing kingdom there furnishes positive evidence that at one time the Boro settlements spread in the Naga Hills with heavy concentration in the capital city Dimapur. Moreover 'Dimapur' is

unmistakably a Boro name derived from Boro word *Doima* meaning a 'big river' and *pur* meaning 'city or kingdom'. The compound word 'Dimapur' or '*Doimapur*', therefore, means a kingdom on the bank of a big river. The big river referred to is identified to be the river Dhansiri on the bank of which is situated the kingdom. N.N. Vasu and Edward Gait suggest that the ancient name of the 'Kachari kingdom' were Haidimba or Hidimba and the name of their capital city 'Dimapur' was the corruption of 'Haidimbapur' or Hidimbapur<sup>50</sup>. This is very unlikely. S.K. Chatterji is perhaps right in asserting that Dimapur was arbitrarily sanskritised into '*Haidimbapur*', and in this way a connection was established between the 'Kachari' and Haidimba, a Rakshasi or non-Aryan wife of Bhima, the Pandva hero of Mahabharata.<sup>51</sup>

Late Bhisnu Prasad Rabha, an eminent artist of Assam is very often quoted as having suggested that the name Brahmaputra River is a corruption of the Boro name *Burllungbutor*, meaning a big river of gargling noise.<sup>52</sup> The term Bull is the abbreviation of two words - *Bullung* and *Butur*. *Bullung* means 'to pull out' and *butur* means 'to remove or let go'. The compound words, *Burllungbutor*, therefore means, 'to pull out together and then remove or let go'. The Brahmaputra River is understood to have pulled out waters from others rivers together and then let the collected waters go in a single channel with gargling noise. Hence its name *Burllungbutor* and the modern name Brahmaputra is the sanskritised form of this Boro name. In this connection, it is worthwhile to refer that the three prominent rivers such as Dibong, Dihong and Lohit flowing through Arunachal Pradesh combined together at different stages in Assam and came to be known as the Brahmaputra. S.K. Chatterji holds that the name Brahmaputra is of recent origin, and still later that Lauhitya is certainly a sanskritised form of some other Indo-Mongoloid name. However, he suggested that *Burllungbutor* might not be the name, as contented by

Late Bishnu Prasad Rabha, but *Burrambutar*, whose pronunciation approximates that of Sanskritised Brahmaputra.<sup>53</sup>

The name '*Lauhitya*' is suggested to be a corruption of the Boro formation Lauthou, an abbreviated form of Golao and Gothou meaning, long and deep.<sup>54</sup> The river Lauhitya, identified with the Brahmaputra is the longest and the deepest of all the rivers in the region. Therefore it appears that the name '*Lauhitya*' is the corruption of the Boro formation Lauthou. Similarly, the names Tilao, Dibong, Dihong etc. have the Boro elements '*Ti*' and '*Di*' meaning river or water. Among these names that of Tilao deserves special mention. It is clearly of Boro origin corrupted from *Ti* and *Lao* or *lau* meaning 'river and long' respectively. *Tilao*, meaning a long river, therefore, refers to the river Brahmaputra.

The present day Bodos of North-East Indian were of course not known by the name of the Bodo by others. During the time of epics and Puranas the present day Bodos were known as Danavas, Asuras, Rakhshasa, Daityas, Mleches, Kiratas, etc. The people whose life and culture were structured around the Vedic system gave these names. It appears that the presence of the various Mongoloid groups of Sino-Tibetan speaking people were noted by 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C., when the Vedas were compiled, and the composite Hindu culture and civilization reached the Mongolian peoples of North and North-Eastern mountains and plains from about that date.<sup>55</sup> Dr. S. K. Chatterjee proposed the name 'Indo-Mangoloid' as an equivalent to what the ancient Hindus understood by the term Kirata. In the history of Assam the Mlechas or the Mechas were the most important people as these people had moulded and shaped the history of ancient Assam then known as Pragjyotispur and Kamrupa.<sup>56</sup> Suniti Kumar Chatterjee writes, "One may say that, the Bodos who spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal, forming

a solid block of North Eastern India, were the most important Indo-Mongoloid people in eastern India and form one of the main basis of present day population of these tracts. Judging from the wide range of extinction of their language, the Bodos appear first to have settled over the entire Brahmaputra valley and extended west into north Bengal (in Koch Bihar, Rongpur, Dinaspur district). They may push towards north Bihar also and the Indo-Mongoloids who penetrated in the north Bihar might equally have been Bodos or Himalayan tribes allied to the Newars.<sup>57</sup> Dr. T.C. Sarma stating the distribution of the Bodo people says 'from the records in the Epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata it is known that the north eastern frontiers kingdom of India, a Mlecha territory ruled by the Bodo kings referred to as Danava and Asura by Aryans of the Ganga Valley was known as Pragjyotishpur(the land of Astrology) and later known as Kamrupa with its central Shrine of mother Goddess Kamakhya on Nilachal Hill overlooking the mighty Brahmaputra within the metropolitan complex of Gauhati. He also is of the opinion that North Bengal and parts of east Bengal were ethnically and politically an extension of Bodoland of Assam.<sup>58</sup>

The first historical name of Assam is *Pragjyotisha* and its capital was called *Pragjyotispur*, now identified with *Dispur*, Gauhati capital of modern Assam. According to the popular Boro folks, Pragjyotispur is the sanskritised form of the Boro name *Prajutoipur*. *Pra* means sea, *jutoi* means 'full of blood' or most powerful' and *pur* or *puri* is the suffix of place, city or kingdom. *Prajutoipur* therefore means a most powerful kingdom or city on the sea side.<sup>59</sup> Bihuram Boro refers to a popular Boro legend according to which a powerful Boro King named *Barka* Basumatary ruled over the kingdom of *Prajutoiur*. In course of time, king *Barka* was succeeded by his son *Narko* Basumatary born of his second queen and brought up in non-Boro surroundings. He also refers to king *Narko* being identified with Puranic *Naraka*

*Asura* by Bishnu Prasad Rabha.<sup>60</sup> Early History of Kamrupa refers to Puranic legend that Supreme God Vishnu in his incarnation of the Great Boar while lifting the earth from the deluge with his tusk took her as his consort and had by her a son named *Naraka*. It is for this reason that Naraka is called *Bhauma*, meaning 'born of earth'.<sup>61</sup> A Boro clan known as Basumatary to which King Barka and king Narko belonged to, seems to be Aryanised one meaning 'Earth folk' and probably Aryanised form of the original Boro name *Vasari* meaning 'Earth folk' or 'the descendants of Earth'. Dhuparam Basumatary explains the Boro background of the sanskritised name of *Pragjyotisa* in a different context. He states that the name *Pragjyotisa* is the corruption of Boro formation *Purga-Jongti*, meaning star shining white or shining bright.<sup>62</sup> This can be explained in the light of a legendary origin of the name *Pragjyotisa*. Edward Gait and other local scholars define *Prag* as eastern and *jyotisa* as a star, astrology or shining. The compound word *Pragjyotisa*, therefore, may be taken to mean 'city of Eastern astrology'. They also refer to the Kalika Purana stating that Brahma made the first calculation of stars in this land and the temple on the Chitrachal hill near Gauhati is said to have been dedicated to the Navagraha or nine planets. *Pragjyotisa* owes its name to this temple.<sup>63</sup> From the above it appears that the Boro word *Purga-Jongti* and Sanskrit *Jyotisa* are identical in meaning. The Boro *Purga-Jongti* therefore must have referred to those stars. P.C. Chaudhury holds that the same *Pragjyotisa* appears to be sanskritisation of some non-Aryan formation.<sup>64</sup> It can therefore, be suggested that the name *Pragjyotisa* is a sanskritised form of the Boro formation *Prajutoipuri* or *Purga-Jongti*.

History says that Kamrupa or *Pragjyotisa* was the land of the Kirata-Bodos ruled by Hirimba-Bhagadatta dynasty. Therefore, the languages of the locality should gain priority in this type of study. The term 'Kamrupa' and 'Kamakhya' may be

examined from the Bodo philosophical perspective. Worship of mother goddess was the tradition among the Bodo. Even today mother goddesses are worshipped by some of the allied Bodo group. The Chutiyas in upper Assam worship in the form of 'Kesaikati', eater of raw flesh, Koch-Rajbongshi worship in the form of Marai, Makali and Manasa; and at Bageswari in Bongaigaon blood sacrifice is still in practice. Deodhani worship and dance performance during Kherai puja of the Boro society is the symbol of mother worship. Similar types of shrines are still in existence in the Koch-Rajbongshi inhabited areas in which female goddesses are worshipped in the form of Mother Goddesses. At the shrine of 'Mahamaya' at Bogribari in Gauripur that was built by the Jaminder of Gauripur, the tradition of blood sacrifice is still being regularly in practiced. Prem Charan<sup>64</sup> stated that the worship of mother goddess in different parts of India slowly gained momentum as all Indian Tantric features; it evolves systematic rituals full of symbolism and utilizing yogic techniques for their achievement of traditional Indian religious goals, namely the mystical experience. Tantrism involves five principles of 'M', i.e., *modya* (alcohol), *mangsha* (meat), *matchya* (fish), perch grains and sex,<sup>65</sup> and observation of ritual goes through certain steps. According to, Bolle,<sup>66</sup> Antiracism in India gained complete pan Indian character and achieved its peak around 1000 A.D. Worship of mother Goddess in the form of Saki worship is not the sole property of Austric but also developed among the Kirats of East, North, and North-east India. D.D. Kosombi<sup>67</sup> stated a number of non-Aryan goddesses of fifth and sixth century A.D. living under the foot hills of Himalayas during the time and areas of lord Buddha, which were originally worshiped by local Non-Aryan tribes belonging to the Vratsa's egg, Rumminai, Manmodai, Mengai Mandhraai, Songjaai, Udalai, Kumbajai, Bolhai etc. The termination of 'ai' means mother. Many a times the goddess is identified when

worship becomes widespread and popular with Parvati or Lakshmi and some other Hindu deities. Such names often represent some tribe or clan group. The 'Kamakhya' might be the Kirata or Bodo goddess and the term may be derived from the Bodo language.

The changes of the existing local names of places, rivers and even institutions as indicated above must have certainly taken place as it is understood from the fact that the progressive sanskritisation of the various pre-Aryan and non-Aryan peoples in their culture, their outlook and their way of life forms the key-note of India throughout the ages. Judging from the wide range of extension of their language and its influences on the culture of present Assam and beyond, there can hardly be any doubt that the Bodo established not only political supremacy throughout the length and breadth of Assam but also wide spread settlement till they were overwhelmed by the later arrivals. Even today, they form one of the main bases of population of the plains of Assam and in parts of North East India.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century had been a period of darkness for the Bodo people. They had already lost their ruling identity with the kings disintegrating successively over the centuries of Ahom rule and culminating with the British annexation of Assam. It was also a period when their age old agriculture and barter economy took hard and fatal blows from advanced non-Mongoloid businessmen. The demographic and economic consequences of the British rule hurt the Bodos and other ethnic Mongoloids the most. By the time a few of them had acquired education and began to understand the new equations of life, a century had passed by.

Assam was overwhelmed by recent migrants and settlers', majority of them coming under the direct intervention of the British Government. The Bengali speaking people were imported to fill up the clerical jobs in Assam. Adhivashi

labourers were imported into the fast growing tea gardens by the administrators. There were migrations of Nepalese from Nepal. The Marwari's came to capture the business in the capital city and emerging towns and semi towns. The Biharis came here to work as construction workers, as barbers, as shoemakers and for engagement in other manual works. The migration became so widespread that the census report of 1921 observed that people from east Bengal virtually came in '*very trains and steamer*'. Some years later, Syed Sadullah who became the Chief Minister of Assam, in November 1939 was to outdo everything that had gone before. The "*grow more food*" motive of the British was cleverly subverted into "*grow more Muslims*" and welcomed the Muslim migrants from East Bengal into Assam. Fortunately he was in office for only a brief tenure. But the damage had been done as never before.<sup>70</sup> It was so much so that during the partition the Muslim League made a strong move to include Assam in East Pakistan.

It was only from the first half of the twentieth century that the Bodo found themselves in a position to make concerted efforts to focus on their identity and unity by recalling the grandeur of their past. By this time the community had already been divided into many tribes and sub-tribes. The demographic scene of the state as already noted was being transformed drastically. The Assamese speaking people, Bengali, Nepalese, Marwari and migrants from East Bengal had begun to crowd the semi towns and rural inhabited by the Bodos. Many of the aboriginal Bodo retreated into the forests both reserved and unreserved to escape the social and economic onslaught of the new comers. The Assamese speaking non-Mongoloids were not known to be particularly concerned about the plight of the Bodo. Many of them were only interested in converting the Bodos into Hindus and Assamese speaking non-entities.<sup>71</sup>

Under the guidance and leadership of the Great Bodo leader Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma the Bodo people found a new direction of self consciousness and the Brahma dharma movement culminated the thought of self-identity and national integrity. Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was a leading social reformer, who founded the Brahma Dharma religion of the Bodos. He was an educated member of the community and he became deeply worried about the destiny of the Bodo. He saw a community that was disintegrating due to lack of a common religion. To him, the traditional *Bathou* religion is not appropriate for the development of the community because it encourages the brewing and consumption of 'Jou' or rice beer and animal sacrifices. Besides he saw many Bodos going through the ceremony of the 'Sorania' by which they accepted Hinduism and adopted titles like - Koch, Chaudhury, Das, Deka, Rajbongshi, Mondal etc. This was done by the Bodos to achieve a perceived sense of a higher social status. It is a fact that the Hindus looked down upon the Bodos who clung to their traditional system of life and religion. Another fact that worried Kalicharan was the conversion of the Bodos into Christianity. Thus he felt that the Bodos were breaking up as a community and that it would not be long before their distinct and unique identity became a thing of the past. In such a situation he decided to bring a change in the society and of the religion of the Bodos and thus started reading '*Sarnaitya Kriya*', the work of Param Hansa Sibnarayan Swami. He was deeply impressed and he believed that he had at last found all the answers to the problems.

In such a critical period Kalicharan appeared as a messiah of the Boro society; he realised that the Boro need to be educated and the entire socio-economic and political condition needed to be transformed and the traditional Bathou religion did not suit for the time. On the other hand, Islam or "*Ek Sharan Nam Dharma*" would

not protect their identity, language and culture. Therefore he saw a ray of hope in Brahma Dharma religion, which would save the Boro society from that critical stage.

Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was born in the year 1862 at Kazigaon village of Parbotjhora area, under the present Kokrajhar district. His father Kaula Mech was a wealthy person. His mother was Randini Mech. There was no school in Kazigaon during that time. He started his preliminary education under Bir Narayan Sarkar. He could read only up to class IV at Tipkai primary school due to death of his father and undertook the profession of his father as a timber merchant.<sup>72</sup> He was very much impressed by '*Saranitya Kriya*,' a book about the Brahma religion written by Mohini Mohan Chattapadhaya from the house of one Charan Mandal (Mech). Kalicharan felt that the teachings of the Brahma dharma would be beneficial to the Bodo society and determined to preach the Brahma Dharma among the Bodos. He had an opportunity to meet Sivanarayan Param Hansa at Bagribari Mahamaya Dham on the way to Calcutta. Kalicharan Brahma decided to meet Sivanarayan Param Hansa, the founder of Braham Dharma, for enriching further knowledge on Brahma Dharma. In 1905, Kalicharan Brahma along with his friends Karan Mandal Mech, Charan Mandal Mech and Jamadar Mech went to Calcutta and met Swami Sivanarayan Param Hansa at Bhavanipur Road. Thus, he got an opportunity to learn about the ideal, norms and principles of Brahma Dharma. On the advice of Siva Narayan he devoted himself in the study of Amrit Sagar, Gita, Vedas, Upanishad, Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc.<sup>73</sup> Thus in 1905 Param Hansa Sibnarayan Swami himself 'initiated' Kalicharan into the Brahma Dharma in Calcutta. After the initiation he returned to Dhubri and began to preach and propagate the new religion among his followers.

In 1906 Kalicharan Brahma organised a religious rite, '*Maha Yajna*' at Bainyaguri village, it was initiated by Phanindra Chatterjee who was invited for the

purpose from Calcutta. Under his Purohita the first *Hum Yajna* was performed with the *Gayatri Mantra*. The *Maha Yajna* lasted for seven days. Thousands of Bodo people from different villages participated in the *Maha Yajna*. It was for the first time that Vedic religion began to embrace thousands of Bodo people within its realm,<sup>74</sup> without sacrificing their ancestral socio-cultural identity. It was a new development in the History of Sanskritization and Hindunization when the converts were allowed to retain their ancestral language, culture, customs and traditions even after conversion. In the same year the second *Maha Yajna* was performed on a large scale at Kazigaon, the birth place of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. And similar type of Yajna was performed at Gombirakata in 1907 and Bangshijhora in 1908. Gurudev Kalicharan organised another *Maha Yajna* at Rajbhomra Borkella Hill near Borshijhora village on the occasion of Mahalaya and that was the first *Yajna* performed by Gurudev himself. It was attended by thousands of Boro who accepted the new religion warmly.<sup>75</sup> For teaching Brahma Dharma he organised *yajna* in different Boro villages and his co-workers and disciples assisted him in preaching the Brahma dharma in different parts of Assam and Bengal. Thus slowly and steadily many Bodo villages came under the congregation of Brahma Dharma by replacing traditional Bathou religion.

By that time Christian missionaries had established schools or Hospitals at Gaurang, Bengtal, Tukrajhar, Grahampur, Haraputa, Joima and converted many Bodos into Christianity along with other tribes like, Rabha, Garo, Adhivashi, etc. but the spread of Brahma religion completely checked further conversion of Bodo into Christianity. Even some newly converted Boro Christians came to Brahma Dharma.

The most remarkable development after embracing Brahma religion was the change of their Surnames. Before that most of the Boro used to write Mech after

their name. Siv Narayan Param Hansa advised to Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma to use the surname, 'Brahma' after their name. Accordingly, in 1911, Kalicharan Brahma appealed the Deputy Commissioner and Census Commissioner of Goalpara district for using their surname. Therefore with due permission from the Deputy Commissioner, Goalpara district, the followers of Brahma Dharma were entitled to write Brahma after their name. However, they were given the right to take either Brahma or their ancestral title like Basumatary, Narzary, Mushahary, Daimary, Swargiary, Goyari etc. after their name.

Along with the preaching of Brahma Dharma, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma went ahead with reformation mission to uplift the backward Bodo society. With a view to accomplishing his missionary work he organised the first meeting of the *Boro Maha Sanmilan in 1921* at Bhaoraguri of Gossaigaon under Goalpara district. It was a landmark event in the history of the renaissance and reconstruction of socio-cultural identity of the Bodos. It is often identified as the beginning of the movement for self-determination, because the objective and characteristic feature of this event was less religious and was more concerned with social reform, identity and status of the community and socio-economic and educational development of the Bodo community. Kalicharan Brahma clearly understood that mere adoption of Vedic ideals would not improve their community status in the context of wider Assamese society. Since long Bodo people were quite unaware of their degraded socio-economic condition. They lived an isolated self contended community life in the physical and socio cultural environment. They were quite unaware of their backward socio cultural and economic condition as well as about their community identity and glorious history of the past. He identified the factors responsible for their degraded status and socio-cultural backwardness in broader national and inter societal

context.<sup>76</sup> Development of education and eradication of evil practices from the society was the only way to improve the Bodo Community. He understood that in the normative structure of existing society needed massive changes which could bring modern education and reform movement.

The Maha Sanmilan resolved to work for the upliftment of the Bodo Community and adopted some important resolutions: 1. Prohibition of the preparation and use of liquor. 2. Restriction in rearing of pig and poultry. Hindu religion considered both pig and liquor as polluted and impure. Eating of pork pollutes man and so also drinking of liquor creates sin. Using pork and liquor is a sin of low-grade caste or tribe. So, giving up of the use of liquor and pork also constituted as an agenda of reform movement everywhere in India especially among backward caste and tribe including the Bodos. It was thought that development of education on a mass level was the only way to emancipate the community from the shackle of degraded socio-cultural condition. 3. Discouragement of customary practice of bride price and elopement of young girls. The practice of this tradition is also sign of a degraded society. 4. The high caste people considered the moving of women freely in market and public places as an immoral act. The Boro Maha Sanmilani also resolved to follow similar ideals with their fellow Bodo women. Even restriction was made on attending Durga Puja, Kali Puja, etc. by women. 5. Formation of women organisation and publication of periodical mouthpiece for the growth of socio-cultural consciousness among man and women constituted an agenda of the reformation movement. 6. Prohibition of worshiping of deities and spirits. Religious reform movements carried by different leaders in different parts of India emphasised monotheism, worshiping of only one Supreme almighty God. Other gods and goddess were regarded as the part of the Supreme Almighty and

hence people should be encouraged in believing in Supreme one. Brahma was considered as the symbol of Supreme god and people should be prohibited from worshipping deities and spirit. Some of the customs and traditions practiced by the Bodo community appeared quite unsuitable and odd to cope with the new trends of civilization.<sup>77</sup> So resurgence in culture and religion, which became an urgent need of the time, was brought in the community through reformation.

The important feature associated with Brahma Dharma and social reform movement led by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was that the entire movement was assisted, guided and co-operated by the high caste Hindu intellectuals from the very beginning. High caste liberal Hindu intellectuals understood that the orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism as a system of religion and way of life no longer remained as the viable option for untouchables, depressed class and tribe due to its inherent features of social inequality and exploitation. Islam with the principle of equality and brotherhood and Christianity with the principle, '*all men are equal before the sight of God*' stood as viable alternatives before them. To detract the mass people from conversion to Islam and Christianity, the structural and ideal norms of Hindu religion were reformed for which the converts neither lose their community identity nor constitute a low caste stratum in the Hindu social hierarchy after conversion nor the converts become subject to exploitation and suppression of high caste people any more. Kalicharan Brahma himself witnessed a large number of Boro in Panbari area of Dhubri having converted into Islam and similarly into New-Vaishnavism throughout Assam losing their socio-cultural identity.<sup>78</sup>

There is no doubt that the Brahma Dharma movement led by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was a part of national level socio-religious reformation movement that had taken place in different parts of India under different leaders. It was a part of

national movement carried by Hindu Mission, Calcutta and Hindu Maha Sabha, the primary target of which was to stop the untouchable castes and tribes from conversion into Islam and Christianity and to integrate and unite them for broader Hindu society. The leaders of this movement were quite successful in their mission in bringing unity, integrity and resurgence amongst different sections of the people of India retaining their distinct socio-cultural identity. Only after this movement, Bodo people came on the tract of enlightenment and development and marched towards the movement for the reconstruction and establishment of community identity, development of language, literature etc., ultimately leading to the movement for self determination.

Gurudev Kali Charan Brahma devoted his life for restructuring Bodo society through Brahma Dharma Reform Movement. Brahma Dharma reform movement was more than a religious movement. His movement encompasses social, political, economic, education and cultural interest of the Bodo people. His urge for formation of Tribal League, retention of Goalpara district within Assam, retention of Assam with the Indian Union, his initiation for the development of education, social, cultural and economic reform etc. projects him more than a religious guru; he was great visionary, master, friend, philosopher and leader of the Bodo society. His contribution to Indian society in general and to the Bodos in particular will only come into total focus when we examine his works, activities and roles during his life time with reference to contemporary national and regional history from political, economic, educational, religious, social and national movement perspectives.<sup>78</sup> Gurudev as a social reformer tried to stop brewing and consumption of rice beer and other forms of liquor. Besides, he encouraged the Bodo to initiate new trade and commerce, weaving, carpentry, etc. for their economic development. He also made enormous

contribution on the educational field. He was the first Bodo leader who prayed to the British Government for the establishment of more school in the Boro areas and also demanded that Bodo children should be taught in English medium.

Under the impact and impulse of the great Boro leader Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma the Boro people found a new direction of self consciousness and the Brahma Dharma movement culminated in the thought of self-identity and national integrity. Towards the early decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century introduction of Brahma religion of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma and the hectic effort to revive Boro culture and literature followed by socio-political reforms led the growth of education and literature. Gurudev realised the need of education for all round development of the Boro, when there was not any educational institution in the Boro areas. As a result, when the Chief Commissioner of Assam visited Dhubri, Kalicharan Brahma with the help of the Deputy Commissioner of Dhubri met him and submitted a memorandum requesting him to establish educational institution in the Boro areas as the poor Boro could not afford to go for study to Dhubri or other towns. As a result of his effort an amount of rupees thirty thousand was sanctioned for the establishment of three institutions, one Middle school, one Weaving centre and one Carpentry centre at Tipkai, near the Railway station and by 1912 a number of primary schools came into existence in Boro dominated areas. Till 1916 Bengali language was the medium of instruction in the schools, whereas the Boro were much closer to the Assamese culture and society.<sup>79</sup> In 1917, Kalicharan Brahma submitted a memorandum to the chief Commissioner, Assam pleading to introduce the Assamese language as the medium of instruction in the schools of Boro dominated areas.

With a view to assisting the Boro students in pursuing education Kalicharan Brahma founded '*Brahma Boarding*' at Dhubri. Most of the residents of the Brahma

Boarder were the follower of Gurudev and it became the nerve centre for the Boro to developed Boro nationality. They were inspired by Kalicharan to find out the Boro inhabiting in different parts of the country and bring them under one umbrella socially, politically, which had a far reaching effect in the Boro society. As a first step the students of the Brahma Boarding decided to form a student organisation in 1915 and to mobilise mass opinion. Under the active initiative and leadership of Rupnat Brahma, Madaram Brahma and the disciples of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, the *Boro Chatra Sanmilan* (Bodo Students' Association) formed in 1919 at Dhubri, brought solidarity among the Bodo students and was a driving force for later socio-political, economic, religious, education and literary developments.<sup>80</sup> The two other organisations-Kacharis Youth Association and Goalpara District Bodo Association also took up the issues of the development of the language, culture and educational facilities of the Bodos including political and economic issues like empowerment and employment of the Bodos.

There was a strong urge for literary work because it was by that time that, a considerable number of Bodo youths became educated achieving higher education in different fields and this generation is mainly responsible in giving shape to the new socio-political and educational standard of the Boros in the subsequent decade.<sup>81</sup> Although the Boro Chatra Sanmilan was formed by the educated Boro youths of Goalpara district, who set about to work within the jurisdiction of their district, it exerted tremendous influence on the conscious Boro people through out the state and outside Assam. The Boro students and eminent personalities from other districts like, Nagaon, Kamrup, Lakimpur, Goalpara etc. of Assam and North Bengal came to participate in the Annual Sessions of the Boro Chatra Sanmilan every year. Such a huge gathering every year under the banner of Boro Chatra Sanmilan helped to

understand each other and unify the scattered Boro population of different parts of the country, who had been isolated from each other till then. The Sanmilan also undertook a project for building a 'Greater Bodo' race by uniting all Bodo groups of people like, Boros, Kacharies, Sanowals, Lalungs, Dimasas and Garos into one stream.<sup>82</sup> But the Sanmilan could not succeed in bringing the entire groups to a single platform due to the lack of co-operation among themselves.

The formation of *All Assam Plain Tribal League* (AAPTTL) in 1933 under the initiative of Rupiah Brahma, Bhimbar Deury, Satish Chandra Brahma and other young educated Bodo leaders was one of the important step in the modern socio-political history of the Bodo and perhaps the first socio-political organisation of the Bodos in Assam. This organisation initially took up most of the political issues concerning the Bodos in addition to the social and educational issues relevant to the overall progress of the Bodo people. The *All Assam Plain Tribal League* (AAPTTL) was successful in its movement for separate electorate status for the Bodos and other plain tribes. Thus the Bodo cast their votes on the basis of a separate electorate in the first general election held under the Government of India Act, 1935. Afterwards the founder of the League, particularly Rupiah Brahma, joined active politics and in 1939 joined the Congress Ministry headed by Gopinath Bordoloi Government.<sup>83</sup> Thereafter the Tribal League was converted into a purely social organisation named *Assam Tribal Sangha* (ATS) which remained in the confidence of the Assam Government in matters like issuing of S.T. certificates to Bodos etc.

The formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1952 at Basugaon in Kokrajhar district was another milestone in the socio-cultural life of the Bodos. With the creation of Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1952 clash of interest started between mainstream Assamese nationalism and Bodo nationality both on

ideological, socio-cultural, linguistic and lastly on political level. So long Bodo Sahitya Sabha was not in existence, the trends of the construction and development of Assamese nationality moved up unaffected and flourished to high level. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha which was founded in 1952 in the Convention of Boro Maha Sanmilan in keeping with three importance objectives like : **A.** Creation of Common Bodo Language and literature by synthesizing Diamasa, Kok-Brok and Boro languages. **B.** Upgradation of Bodo as the medium of instruction. **C.** Development of Bodo Culture and construction Bodo nationality through literary works. Keeping this in view for achieving unity, integrity and force, Jaybhadra Hagjer was elected as the first president and Sonaram Thousen as the first Secretary of Bodo Sahitya Sabha. Yogendra Nath Basumatary was elected as the joint Secretary; Syam Charan Tripura was made executive member from Tripuri Kok-Brok. In this convention representatives from different undivided Assam even from North Bengal participated. The then MLA, Rupnath Brahma, Dharanidhar Basumatary and others attended the Convention. The convention discussed the matter of introduction of Bodo as the medium of instruction. Initially all the MLAs including Rupnath Brahma opposed to this move but ultimately they were persuaded.<sup>84</sup> In 1953 Bodo Sahitya Sabha submitted a memorandum to the then Minister of education, Jay Bhadra Hagjer demanding introduction of Bodo medium in primary schools. The same copy of the memorandum was also submitted to Bimala Prasad Chaliha the then Congress President of Assam State Committee. But both the Chief Minister and President of Congress made no response to the demand of the Sabha. The members of Assam State Congress Committee sharply reacted and apprehended that Bodo people might subsequently put demand for separate state. Thus, the achievement of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha from 1952-1960 was nothing spectacular and was only

confined to organisational development. In 1960, the demand for Assamese as official language of entire Assam caused negative reactions from the non-Assamese people. The non-Assamese people of Assam considered it as the policy of assimilation through the imposition of Assamese language on non-Assamese people. As a reaction to this move taken by Assamese speaking people, the hill people demanded for retention of English as the official language in hill areas and the people of Barak valley demanded Bengali as the official language in Barak Valley.<sup>85</sup> The Executive meeting of the Sahitya Sabha held at Kokrajhar considered that the implementation of language policy would divide Assam on language basis and hence resolved to urge the government introduced Hindi language as the official language of Assam as an alternative option, acceptable to all.<sup>86</sup> Ultimately the three language formula i.e., Assamese in Assam, Bengali in Barak and English in Hill area was accepted as viable alternatives.

On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1962, on the day of '*Bodo Literary Day*' (BLD) more than twenty thousand people gathered in Kokrajhar town and took out a mass rally on demand of introduction of the Bodo language as the medium of instruction at Primary level. Soon after this event, Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha along with Rupnath Brahma arrived in Kokrajhar and assured the leaders of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha to fulfil their demand. Immediately Chief Minister Chaliha, appointed an enquiry committee under the leadership of Rupnath Brahma, the then Minister of Assam, to find out the feasibility of implementing Boro medium in Primary schools. Very fortunately the report of inquiry committee was in favour of Boro Sahitya Sabha. Thus on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1963, Chief Minister of Assam Bimala Prasad Chaliha along with education Minister and MLAs came to Kokrajhar and formally inaugurated the introduction ceremony of Bodo language as a medium of instruction at Primary level.

As time went by the first batch students of Bodo medium completed their Primary schools in 1967 and became eligible for admission into ME school. But they were refused to get admission in the secondary schools as they did not know Assamese language. Thus the Bodo Sahitya Sabha had an opportunity for demanding implementation of Bodo language in ME school level. This demand was discussed on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1968 at Shillong between the government of Assam and the representative of Bodo Sahitya Sabha but nothing came out through the discussion. As a result Bodo Sahitya Sabha gave an ultimatum till 27<sup>th</sup> February to Assam govt. failing to bring about an amicable solution to the issue of Bodo medium and in the even govt.'s failure Bodo Sahitya Sabha would lunch a mass movement with effect from 28<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1968. As a result, on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1968, in the Assembly Session, Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha recognised their demand by his speech in the Assembly House.<sup>67</sup> Thus Boro medium was formally introduced in Kokrajhar Higher Secondary School, ME section on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1968.

In the year 1971, the first batch of the Boro medium students in ME standard completed their education and came for admission to class VII at Secondary level. The Government of Assam was quite indifferent of the implementation of the Bodo medium at Secondary level. On pressure by the All Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the then Chief Minister, Sarat Chandra Sinha arranged a joint meeting of Govt. of Assam and the representatives of All Bodo Sahitya Sabha on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1971. As per the agreement of dialogue between the Govt. and the representatives of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, ultimately the Govt. agreed to implement Bodo medium in secondary stage as part of the Government standing policy decision on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1968. Accordingly on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1972 Bodo medium was implemented at Secondary level.

Since the introduction of the Bodo language as the medium of instruction in primary school the use of suitable script for Bodo language had appeared as a major organisational issue before the All Bodo Sahitya Sabha. The 8<sup>th</sup> session of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha held at Kokrajhar in the year 1966 formed an expert committee for the settlement of script issue. This committee failed to suggest any concrete measure and hence another expert committee was formed in the Rangapara Session of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1969. The Expert Committee recommended the Roman Script as the suitable script for the Bodo language. With much debate and discussion the recommendation of the Expert Committee was approved by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha.<sup>88</sup> A team of representation of Bodo Sahitya Sabha met the Chief Minister of Assam, Mahendra Mahan Chaudhury on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1971 but the Chief Minister did not respond to the script issue of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and politicized the script issue.<sup>89</sup> Sarat Chandra Sinha, the Chief Minister of Assam later referred the matter to the Govt. of India for settlement saying that the question of Roman script was a national issue to be settled by the Central Government. Meanwhile, the restive situation in Boro areas was rapidly worsening because of the repressive measures adopted by the State Government to crush the script movement. For the Bodo Sahitya Sabha it became a prestige issue to retreat and embrace the Assamese script again after the lose of innocent lives in the non-violent democratic movement.<sup>90</sup> Thus forced by circumstances, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha finally had to accept the Devonagari Script gracefully at the instance of the erstwhile Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.”

The office of the Prime Minister, Govt, of India, suggested Devonagari Script for Bodo language as an alternative to Roman script. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha session held at Dhing Nogaon accepted the Devonagari script as the script for Bodo

language after long debate and discussion. It was a compromise forced by the circumstances. On the other hand the issue of script continued to remain as a matter of discourse for a section of ambitious people in Bodo society, who dream of becoming Messiah by championing the cause of Roman script for the Bodo language.<sup>91</sup> In subsequent times, the govt. of Assam changed its attitudes towards other indigenous tribes and adopted a policy of dialogue and mutual understanding in resolving issues relating to language, literature, education, curriculum, creation of post etc. In the introduction of Bodo language as MIL subject at the PU/HS and under Graduate level Bodo Sahitya Sabha did not face any trouble. Bodo as a subject of Major Indian Language (MIL) in PU, Gauhati University was introduced in the academic year 1976 and in Degree level on 29<sup>th</sup> February 1978. In 1985, the Govt. of Assam also granted the status of Associate Official Language to Bodo in the administration of the Bodo areas. Lastly, Gauhati University opened the Department of Boro from the session 1996 -1997 with teaching provision.

One of the greatest organisations having the greatest impact on the destiny of the modern Bodo people was the formation of the *All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU)* on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1967. Soon after the formation of the All Bodo Students Union the Boro political movement started showing signs of aggressive militancy and a political organisation in the name and styled 'Plain Tribal Council of Assam' was born on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1967 at Kokrajhar under the leadership of Samar Brahma Chaudhury and Charan Narzary with the support of the All Bodo Students' Union. Thus, the *Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA)* with the strong support of the ABSU raised a demand for *Union Territory* to be named 'Udayachal', comprising the Bodo and Mishing dominated areas along the northern bank of Brahmaputra extending from the western boarder of Kokrajhar district right up to the eastern border of North

Lakhimpur district. On the 20th May 1967, the PTCA for the first time placed their demand for the creation of an autonomous region to the President of India, Dr. Zakir Husain by submitting memorandum in New Delhi.<sup>92</sup> The Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) jointly boycotted the Parliamentary election on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1968 in support of the demand for creation of a separate administrative unit. The demand for creation of a homeland for the Plains Tribals of Assam in the shape of Udayachal became a major plank of political movement by the Bodos during the entire decade of the seventies and the movement from time to time became rather violent in nature and therefore invited police action. The govt. could not readily concede this demand in view of the fact that the proposed territory was not well defined compact area with contiguous Bodos or plain tribal habitation, and had many pockets of heavy concentration of non-tribals and the govt. vehemently opposed to the creation of any separate tribal state where they have to face discrimination by the tribal administrators. The govt. clearly utilised the apprehension of the non tribals to justify their refusal to concede the Udayachal demand by the PTCA and the ABSU.

The extreme Assamese Chauvinism based on Assamese language and culture that developed after sixties caused other ethnic groups of Assam to fight for their social, cultural, political and other constitutional rights in an organised way. In free independent period the people of Assam were not divided on community and ethnic lines. People worked together for freedom against the British imperialism. When advanced Assamese Caste Hindus people were fighting for the construction of greater Assamese nationality based on Aryan language, culture and civilization, encompassing all other ethnic groups of Assam taken together along with freedom movement at national level, the socio-cultural consciousness among the Bodo and

other tribes was just like a new born baby. They were quite unaware of their backwardness and historical alienation by assimilating their socio-cultural identities into caste Hindu and Islamic society. It may be noted that till 1967, there was no common forum for the Bodo students at state level. Of course there were many Bodo Students Associations in various localities, almost in all districts of Assam. The function of these organisations was confined to hold their Annual Conferences through which efforts were made to instil a sense of socio-cultural awareness among the Bodo students and the public at large. During their conferences they organised sports, cultural programme, exhibitions and also campaigning a little bit of social work such as construction of village roads, irrigation, canals etc. They also undertook programmes of social reformations such as prohibition of liquor, and all other evil practices and superstitions prevalent in the backward Bodo society.<sup>93</sup> Under such background and with the objectives of social work Bodo Students Association was emerged. Even before the emergence of the All Bodo Students' Union at state level, different Bodo students' organizations came into existence at local level with different names. They worked for the welfare of the students' community as well as for the society in their localities. The most important example is the "*Boro Chatra Sanmilan*" (BCS), which was formed under the guidance of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, in the year of 1919. Being the first generation enlightened Bodos and having been inspired by Gurudev, they gave a unique contribution to the development of education and literature of the Bodos.<sup>94</sup> The mission of Boro Chatra Sanmilan was purely non political and their activities were confined to the welfare of the Bodo students community.

Since inception, the ABSU has been playing tremendous roles in the social, cultural, political and literary spheres of the Bodo society. The ABSU, which started

its humble beginning as follower and allied organisation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the PTCA, , emerged itself as the parent or master organisation of the whole Bodo Society after Bodoland Movement. In all important and serious matters, the ABSU has been a friend, ally, assistant, guide and co-worker of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha. Till today both the ABSU and the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) maintain this tradition. The ABSU stood as a force and energy and guiding spirit behind all important organisational affairs of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha. By manoeuvring in every important policy decisions on language, literature, education, medium of instruction, etc. the ABSU held the position of guiding spirit to the Bodo community.

Since 1967, the ABSU and the PTCA maintained a relationship .The ABSU extended strong support to the PTCA at the extension of organisational base of PTCA in grass root level in the entire northern bank of Brahmaputra Valley especially among the Bodos. The ABSU also extended its full support to the PTCA on the demand of Separate Autonomous Region of Udayachal for the Plain Tribals of Assam for the realisation of its cause. On 20<sup>th</sup> May 1967, the PTCA, for the first time submitted a memorandum to the President of India, Dr. Jakir Husain in New Delhi, on demand of Separate Autonomous Region for the Plain Tribal People of Assam. The PTCA and the ABSU jointly boycotted the Parliamentary election on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1968 to draw the attention of the central Govt. on demand of a separate autonomous region. In the State Assembly election 1972, Charan Narzary, the general Secretary of the PTCA, was elected defeating his nearest rival of the Congress Party and the then Cabinet Minister Ranendra Narayan Basumatary. In 1973, the demand for an Autonomous Region was upgraded to the creation of Union Territory with the support of the ABSU and even eminent workers of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the PTCA consolidated its organisational ground amongst the mass Bodo people.

In the General Assembly Election of 1977, the PTCA won four seats joined in the coalition government headed by Janata Party. Mr. Samar Brahma Chaudhury returned in the State Legislative Assembly and got the berth of Cabinet Minister in the coalition government, While Mr. Charan Narzary was elected as the M.P. Lok Sabha. After joining the coalition government, the PTCA suspended its demand of the Union Territory or Udayachal and retreated to the demand of an autonomous region without consultation with and consent of the allied partner and party workers.<sup>95</sup> The Bodo Students' Union and the Young party workers vehemently opposed the decision of the PTCA and withdrew their support to the PTCA to show its resentment.

Under the above mentioned repeated circumstances the breakaway faction of the PTCA formed a separate political party, the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA: Progressive) on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1979 and submitted a memorandum to Smt. Indira Gandhi the then Prime Minister of India, demanding a separate state of 'Mishing Bodoland' on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1980. The PTCA leadership underestimated the sentiments of the youth forces, who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the noble cause of the Bodo nationality. The PTCA (P) succeeded in its attempt to draw the attention of the central Govt. of India towards their demand for political autonomy. In order to discuss the question of political autonomy for the tribal people of Assam, a joint discussion was arranged at Raj Bhavan, Shillong on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1980 which was presided over by Jogendra Makwana, the then Minister of State for Home Affairs Govt. of India, who was deputed by the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as her emissary. Mr. L.P. Singh, the then Governor of Assam, and Mr. H.C. Sarin, the Principal Adviser to the Governor and the Chief Secretary to the Govt, of Assam, attended the discussion. Altogether 17<sup>th</sup> representatives from leading tribal organisations like – the PTCA (P),

the PTCA, the ABSU, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the All Assam Tribal Sangha, and the All Assam Tribal Students Union were present in the discussion. While discussing the question of creation of a separate state for tribal people of Assam, L.P. Singha, the Governor of Assam made a remark that Udayachal is misnomer, and Bodoland is the most appropriate linguistically.<sup>96</sup> This remark attracted the minds of the Young Bodos and it made a noticeable effect in the subsequent movement.

The split between the PTCA and the PTCA (P) brought a political chaos among the Bodos and it had along repercussion in the Bodo society. The All Bodo Students' Union tried to bring the PTCA and the PTCA (P) in a single platform as both the parties had been fighting for the same cause. But due to the indifferent attitude of the PTCA leadership the humble attempt of the ABSU failed. However a joint action committee was formed to fight together for achieving self-rule or autonomy in the Bodo dominated areas in the ABSU convention. The dissident PTCA leaders formed the United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) in 1984. During the time of ideological conflict between the PTCA and the ABSU, the later never remained idle. As students' organisation, ABSU worked restlessly on all issues including economic, political, literature and language for the interest of the Bodo people of Assam. The ABSU initiated a movement for the fulfilment of 92 point charter of demands encompassing the economic, political educational, social and cultural problems on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1987, on its own initiative and confidence without depending on the PTCA, the BSS or any other organisations. The 92 point charter of demands was placed before the Assam and the Central Government of India. The ABSU realised that without movement, the Govt. of Assam as well as the Central Govt. would not concede any demand of the Bodo people. The Bodo people had to

fight their own battle alone for their cause without depending on others. Besides the ABSU realised that Bodo problems would remain unsolved until and unless a Separate State is created for them in northern part of the Brahmaputra valley and an Autonomous Districts in Karbi-Anglong on the South bank of Brahmaputra.<sup>97</sup> Thus the ABSU, instead of organising repeated movements for several issues, launched a movement for the creation of Separate State in which they could be able to exercise their will, concept and self determinations for all round development of Bodo people.

It was under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma, the ABSU made the final crossover on social, cultural and literary development of the Bodo. To determine the next phase of movement for separate state, the ABSU conference was held at Bashbari (in Kokrajhar district) from 19<sup>th</sup> December to 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1988, under the Presidentship of Upendra Nath Brahma and in the conference the ABSU unanimously resolved to launch a rigorous mass movement for the creation of Separate State of Bodoland. In the same Conference 'Bodo Peoples' Action Committee' (BPAC) was formed for the purpose of steering mass movement for separate state. Thus soon after the Bashbari conference, the ABSU and the BPAC initiated a vigorous movement for Separate State. During the time of ABSU and BPAC movement more than 11000 people were killed. Hundreds of Bodo girls and women were raped and molested by the Assam police, hundreds of Bodo villages in Gohpur area were completely burnt into ashes by the joint attack of Assam police and the Chauvinist Assamese people in 1989. Hundreds of Bodo youths were murdered brutally by the police. The ABSU movement turned violence as a counter attack against the hostile role of the Assam Govt. towards the Bodos. At some times, it went beyond the control of the ABSU leadership. Besides police atrocities, some

militant supporters of the ABSU resorted to killing some innocent civilians whom they considered anti-Bodoland movement.

To consolidate the mass support the ABSU on its own initiative gave birth to a number of allied organisations, and these organisations worked for the ABSU movement as strong organs. The allied organisations created by the ABSU are: the Bodo Peoples' Action Committee (BPAC), the All Bodo Employees Federation (ABEF), the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF), the Peace and Co-ordination Committee, All Lawyers' Association, the All Bodo Somaj etc. Besides, many non-Bodo organisations also extended their full support to Bodoland movement along with the leading Bodo organisations.

The first phase of the Bodoland Movement came to an end with signing the Bodo Accord on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 1993 between the Centre-State and Bodo movement leaders. On behalf of the Centre Mr. Rajesh Pilot, the Chief Minister Mr. Hiteswar Saikia, on behalf of State Govt. and Mr. Sansuma Khungur Baiwsumutiary, the then President of the ABSU were the first signatories of this accord. By this accord, '*Bodoland Autonomous Council*' was arranged and Mr. S.K. Bwisumutiary was appointed the first Chief of the interim Bodoland Executive Council by the Governor notification dated 30<sup>th</sup> June 1993. This political arrangement was put on trial for some years and the ABSU, the main signatory of the accord considered the BAC arrangement nothing but a mockery. No power of autonomy in economic, political and legislative spheres was granted to BAC by this arrangement. There was no sincere effort made by the state govt. to implement the 'Bodo Accord'. Neither election nor boundary was demarcated, rather divide and rule policy was followed by the state govt. to destabilise the BAC. Thus in the Langhing conference (Karbi-Anglong) 1996, the ABSU formally denounced the BAC arrangement as worthless

and was resolutely decided to fight again till the creation of a Separate state named Bodoland.

The Bodo Accord of 1993 between the All Bodo Students' Union, State Govt. and the Centre Govt. which led to the creation of Bodoland Autonomous Council failed miserably. The cause for the failure of the Bodo Accord was mainly due to the lackadaisical attitude on the part of the state govt. and the central Govt. in regards to implementation of the clauses of the Accord. There was no delimitation of boundary of the Council areas, no withdrawal of cases levelled against the movement activists, no relief and rehabilitation of the martyrs' families, no delimitation of constituencies for holding council elections and so on so forth. In protest against all these the Chief of the Interim Council Sansuma Khungur Bwisumutiary tendered his resignation. Then Mr. Premsing Brahma, the then Deputy Chief of the Council (Chairman of the Bodo Militant Force who surrendered giving due honour to the Bodo accord along with his colleagues) was elevated to the post of the Chief of B.A.C. But he, too, failed to get the Bodo Accord implemented.

The ABSU, the struggling Bodo organisation and the signatory of the Bodoland Accord, denounced the Bodo Accord totally in its Langhing conference (Karbi-Anlong) in 1996 and resolved to launch movement for Separate State afresh along with its two other demands - Creation of Nilachal District Council in the South bank of the river Brahmaputra and inclusion of the Bodos living in Karbi-Anlong in the ST (H) list. Thus the ABSU started a series of agitational programmes with new policy and strategies in order to attain their goal. But the members of Bodo Militant Force who surrendered with its Chief Premsing Brahma were suffering from untold miseries due to the non-implementation of Bodo Accord as they became unarmed; they fell easy prey to the rival group, National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB).

The assertion of the NDFB with arms activities became a tread to the ABSU leadership over the Bodoland and other issues. The emergence of Peoples' Democratic Front (PDF), a political party, on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1996, patronised by the NDFB and subsequently winning in the six seats in the Assembly election of 1996, compelled the ABSU to think. At last the volunteers force decided to choose arm struggle as the alternative option left for them to fight for the cause of Bodoland as well as for their security.

In such a critical situation, Chilagang Basumatary took advantage of the situation by regrouping the members of erstwhile Bodo Militant Force forming the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) on 29<sup>th</sup> February 2006, with himself as the Chairmen. The main objective of the Bodo liberation Tigers was to bring all round development and security for the Bodos through armed struggle. The demands of the BLT were in line with that of the ABSU, i.e., a. Creation of Separate State of Bodoland within Indian Union, b. Creation of Autonomous Council on the South bank of Brahmaputra and c. Inclusion of the Bodo living in Karbi-Anglong in the ST (H) list.

In order to achieve their demand the BLT cadres resorted to certain violent activities such as bomb blasting in railways bridges and public places. It may be mentioned here that the founder Chairmen, Chilagang Basumatary died of cancer in 1997, and the then Deputy C-n-C, Hagrama Basumatary (now Mahilary) became the Chairman of the BLT. After some times came proxy war between India and Pakistan in the Kargil, Drass and Batalic sectors of Jammu and Kashmir. Expressing solidarity with the Govt. of India and on a good gesture the BLT declared a unilateral ceasefire in the critical situation of national distress. The National Democratic Alliance Govt. of India (NDA) realised the gravity of the situation and reciprocated the ceasefire. Ground rules for the ceasefire prepared, Monitoring Cell was formed and a series of

official and unofficial talks were held between the BLT, Govt. of Assam and the Govt. of India since March, 2000. Finally Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the BLT, Central Govt. and the State Govt. on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2003. Accordingly, the Bodoland Territorial Council Act was passed to create Bodoland Territorial Council under the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution. Besides, a Constitutional amendment was also made to incorporate Bodo language under the Eight Schedule of Indian Constitution. Thus the new arrangement has provided constitutional protection under the sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India to fulfil the economic, educational and linguistic aspirations and the ethnic identity of the Bodos. The Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) was signed by Hagrama Mahilary, Chairman of BLT, P.K. Dutta, Chief Secretary Govt. of Assam and R.C.A. Jain, Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2003. The ABSU whole heartedly welcomed the Bodoland accord and withdrew officially the demand for Separate State giving due honour to the accord signed by the BLT, Govt. of Assam and Indian Govt.

The basic objective of the BTC was to create Self Governing Body for the Bodo people to fulfil their aspirations relating to their economic, political, language, social and cultural identity and the development of education under the sixth Schedule of the constitution. As per the area of BTC is concerned, it comprises 3082 villages being divided into four districts - Kokrajhar, Chirrang, Baksa and Udalguri. These districts are known as *Bodoland Territorial Administrative Districts*. The total number of constituency of the BTC is 46. Out of them, 30 seats are for the Schedule Tribes, 5 seats for non-tribal communities, 5 seats open for all communities and 6 members to be nominated by the Governor of Assam from the unrepresented communities of BTC area of which at least 2 should be women. Thus, through the

creation of Bodoland Territorial Council in the name of Bodoland Territorial Administrative Districts, most of the problems of the Bodos were met, but the desire for a Separate State is still one of the most cherished ideas of the Bodo people.

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## Cultural Symbiosis and its impact on the Bodo Women

### Social Life of the Bodos:

From time immemorial the socio-culture of the Bodo was blessed by such virtues like honesty, truthfulness, and straight-forwardness and general trustworthiness as witnessed by Endle in his monumental work. But with the passage of time, things have somewhat changed bringing new complexities unknown or unheard before. The improvement of communication, general mobility and intercourse with the people all round have brought some psychological and attitudinal change of all section of people. To meet this changing situation of life, necessity has arisen to frame some local laws on the basis of customs and traditions that prevail in the society. Thus locally codified customary usages and practices of the Bodo society came to be followed after approval from zone council composed of adjacent villages. These local laws are known as '*Pandulipis*' as they are in manuscript forms and are hardly printed. Since these are not co-ordinated homogenous sets of laws, they differ in content and application from area to area. However, the basic issues pertaining to inheritance of property, succession to office of socio-religious and socio-political nature and liability of atonement on committing unnatural and unsocial offences are more or less identical.

The traditional Bodo society which came into contact with different culture and societies underwent great changes in the middle part of 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The change at different institutional levels have been taking place from time to time and these changes are visible in the traditional institutions like religion, marriage, economy, social customs and also in their position and status of men and women, food habit,

dress and other spheres of life. The changes are found in the form of Sanskritization, modernisation and also westernisation to some extent. The prime factors of these changes are certainly the influence of Hinduism, the spread of higher education among the Bodos and the development of science and technology. The upward movement in the traditional Bodo society has occurred without the loss of their basic values, norms and identity. The Bodo culture is a part and parcel of the Indo-Mongoloid culture. The Mongoloid Bodo Culture of Assam has, to some extent, influenced the Indic (Indo-Aryan) Assamese culture or vice-versa. The different Bodo culture which has influenced and contributed in the development of Assamese culture has been discussed and analysed by many scholars.<sup>1</sup>

How the Bodos contributed in the evolution of the great Indian culture and the course of Indian history is a hidden part of the history of this land. In short it was a revolution of culture. Did the Brahmin priest play the main role in bringing this culture among the Bodos of Assam and Bengal? "But it was not a case of one sided influence or absorption. It was a case of Mongoloid speeches and ideologies, cult and customs being engrafted on the stock of Hindu (i.e. Indo-Aryan cum Austric and Dravidian) speech ideologies, cult and custom".<sup>2</sup>

The Bodo are referred to as a 'tribe' by the British administrators and missionaries and designated as a scheduled tribe after independence. The written documents on their social organisation are available from the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the European missionaries and administrators began to write on them. In this context it is worth referring to '*Bibar*', the first magazine of the Bodo. The first generation of Bodo writers wrote regularly on various aspects of the community in the magazine. The articles were written in Bodo, Assamese and Bengali languages.

This helps us to understand their historical relationship with the neighbouring castes and communities.

The Bodos of entire Assam and Bengal have been in constant touch with Assamese people and Bengalis who are more advanced than the Bodos. The rituals, customs, living standard, food habit, dresses and other life habits of the Bodos are influenced by their neighbouring Aryans in many respects. A comparative study between pre-sanskritized Bodo society and present Bodo society shows two distinct features of the same society. So effort has been made to narrate and analyse both traditional and sanskritised form of the Bodo society.

#### Family Life:

The Bodo society is primarily patriarchal with few elements of matriarchal characteristics<sup>3</sup>. The family members live together at home called *Nokor* or family. A *Nokor* consists of father, mother, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters etc. Father is the head of the family, who is honoured and obeyed by other members of the family. All the male members of the family enjoy the coparcenaries rights, unless one goes out of family during the life time of his father with the intention of living separately from the bonds of the joint family. The eldest son of the family assumes the charge of the household on the death of the father or in absence of father and discharges his responsibilities in consultation of with his mother. There are both joint and nuclear families among the Bodos. The unmarried brothers get double of the family property than the married brothers. The eldest male member also gets a preferential share in view of his assumption of family liability and other social responsibilities<sup>4</sup>.

The mode of living of the Bodo society is in compact villages and putting barriers all around the homestead is a common sight to see. Rev. S. Endle on this account gives a vivid description, "One prominent feature in the typical Bodo village

can not fail to strike the attention of any casual visitor at first sight. Each house, with its granary and other buildings is surrounded by a ditch and fence; the latter usually made of ekra reeds, jungle grass or split bamboo etc. The ditch, some three and four feet in depth surrounds the whole homestead, the earth taken from its being thrown up on the inner side, i.e., that nearest to the dwelling house; and on the earth works some two or three feet in height, so thrown up are firmly inserted the reeds or split bamboo work forming the fence itself, this later often inclining outwards at a very obtuse angle; so that the ditch and fence are not easily surmounted from the outside by the intruders.”<sup>5</sup>

But due to the changing trends of the Bodo society such typical Bodo *Nokhor* (Family) is very rare at present, except in some interior village. With the conversion into Brahma religion by the Bodos, the use of *Noma No* and its importance has been changed as the follower of this cult neither set alter nor cook foods in the main house. They also do not build main house like traditional *Noma No*, which posses' only one door and a side corridor and a side corridor running into the interior rooms without any window. Rather they build houses for their conveniences like other Indians as there is no rigid rule for constructing houses among the Bodos of Brahma religion. Even at present, the followers of traditional Bathou dharma have extra kitchen house, as they do not prepare food in the main house. Thus with the changing trends of the Bodo society and with the advent of new architecture the construction of typical *Noma No* is gradually disappearing among the Bodo.

### **Inheritance of Property:**

In Bodo traditional custom only sons are entitled to inherit the parental property, as daughters have to leave parents house after getting married. Every son gets equal share of land from their paternal property and one who looks after the

parents till death may get an additional share of land. The daughters, especially if married, can claim nothing. Parents can decide with whom they are going to live in their old age. In absence of son, daughters inherit the property of parents. If the person is childless the property goes to the nearest relatives after the death of both husband and wife. But if they adopt child then he or she can inherit the property. But sometimes, a rich father can give a portion of land to his daughter even in the presence of sons.<sup>6</sup> According to Endle (1911) the law of inheritance of property were patrilineal. He mentions that the eldest son inherited half of father's property and the rest was distributed among other sons. In any case the daughters are not entitled to the share of property. In absence of a son the eldest brother of the deceased would inherit the property. In such case the inheritor allots a portion of the land to the widow of his brother.

### **Social Organization:**

In the Bodo society, unlike other parts of India the caste system is unknown. Even the high caste Aryans living with Bodo have to become more liberal in their outlook and practice, in their religion. One of the important factors is the presence of vast majority of non-Aryan population who are ignorant of caste system. The Aryan had to give up some of their rigid customs to adjust themselves with the local inhabitants. They have become more liberal in their foods, drink, dress, customs and manners.

The social division among the Bodos in ancient times could be traced according to their occupation. The Bodos are divided into a number of 'sub-tribes' (Endle 1911:24-32) or 'social group' (Brahma 1992:34-35). These groups are exogamous and referred to as 'Ari' or 'Hari'.<sup>7</sup> There are as many as 23 'Aris' or 'Haris' namely ---*Swargaiari, Basumatary, Mahilari, Mosari, Khaklari, Daimari,*

*Narzari, Sibiziari, Ishari, Kachari, Oari, Hojoari, Bibaiari, Borgayari, Ramsiari, Kherketari, Supramhari, Gayari, Supramhari, Fadangari.* The clan structures of the Bodos though essentially remind us about their traditional division of class, such divisions are no longer recognised in the present day society. Endle mentions of hierarchy within these groups and one of them called *Swargiari* is referred to as 'heavenly folk' (*swargo*-heaven, *ari*-folk) who are entrusted with the duty of worship; they were said to be top of all groups. As mentioned above there are more than two dozen sub-tribes or social groups in the society. Some of these groups are totemistic in nature such as *Basumatary* (*Basumata*-earth, *ari*-folk) the proprietor of the lands, *Narzary* (jute folk), *Mosahary* (the tiger folk), *Khakiary or Khangkhlo ari* (a certain jungle grass which is used during religious ceremonies and festivals), *Sibing ari* (sesame folk), *Gandled ari* (leach folk), *Daimari* (the river folk or fishermen folk), *Owary* (bamboo folk), *Gayari* (areca nut folk) etc. *Basumatary* the largest sub-tribes in the Bodo community, are also referred to as 'the son of the soil'.<sup>8</sup> Endle (1911: 24-32) mentions that the members of *Basumatary* clan enjoy privilege at the time of burying their dead bodies. There is a custom in the Bodo society according to which a Bodo has to purchase the land for burial with a token money from the *Basumatary* clan. But the members of *Basumatary* clan do not have to do this. In earlier days the elderly members of this clan received a small amount of money as the revenue of that plot of land where a diseased person was buried or cremated.

Endle said about the traditional religion, "There is no authorised priestly caste among the Kocharis nor are Brahmans ever employed in their religious ceremonies". A village elder, having good knowledge about the religious rites and well versed in religious hymn or mantras, performs the religious ceremonies. The office of the

priesthood is not hereditary either in *Bathou* or *Brahma* religion. Any men living a pious life can become a priest in both the religion.<sup>9</sup>

But at present the Bodo society has become a multi-religious society. There are followers of traditional Bathou cult, the followers of Brahma cult, the followers of Saiva cult of Rupamani and the followers of Satsangha of Sri Sri Anukul Thakur and also believers of Christianity etc. All these religious cults, except that of Anukul Thakur and the Saivism of Rupamani, did not contribute to create hierarchy in the Bodo society. The Bodo priest s of Satsang cult is forming a purified class by giving up meat, fish, onion etc.<sup>10</sup> Priest of high rank like Ritik, Prati-Ritwik observe strict formalities in their dietary habit and behaviours. In the Saivism cult of Rupamani the priestly class like Maha-Richis, Richis and Purahits become purely vegetarian and lead their lives like strict Brahmins and generally they do not take meal prepared by so called impure people. It seems that the Bodo society is leaning towards the formation of new caste system in the days to come.

### **System of Marriage:**

Marriage is the social means to widen and strengthen the network of social relation in the society. It is one of the most important social institutions of all the societies of the world. Marriage is considered as sacred. Like other societies the marriage ceremony is very important ceremony in the life-cycle of the Bodos. In Bodo, 'Marriage' is called '*Haba*'.<sup>11</sup> The word '*ha*' means soil or earth and '*ba*' means to bear the soil or the responsibility of the earth on the back.

So far marriage is concerned monogamy is the prevalent system of marriage in the Bodo society. Only with some exceptional cases like when the first wife proves childless, the Bodo custom sanctions taking a second wife mainly with a view to begetting children and thereby handing down the father's name to posterity.

Marriage takes place after both sexes gain full maturity as a result of inclination of the families. The Bodos have very high regard for chastity and they live by it. In the words of Sydney Endle, "The standard of chastity among the Kocharis, both man and women, is by no means a low one. As a rule young people in the villages at least lead pure lives before marriage and faithful to their marriage vows (....)".<sup>12</sup> Adultery is considered as sin and serious offence and people committing adultery are inflicted with severe punishment according to social rules.

Traditionally the Bodos have as many as six types of marriage. These are –

1. *Swngnanwi Lainai Haba* (Arranged marriage):-This type of marriage is the most common socially accepted marriage of the Bodos. This type of marriage is held with mutual consent and agreement of both the parties and it is arranged by the social norms and customs. Therefore normally this type of marriage is celebrated with great solemnity and honour. Till the recent past, decision of parents or guardians was given priority than the choice of the boys and girls who were dependent on their parents.

2. *Gwrja Lakhinai Haba* (Obtaining groom by service):- This type of marriage is rather rare; however it does take place. This type of marriage is celebrated when in a family there are only daughters and there are no sons or male members to inherit the family property. In this type of marriage the bridegroom has to work at the house of bride before marriage. But this type of marriage is rarely seen in the present society.

3. *Kharsonnai Haba* (Girls flee away to boy's house):- This marriage takes place when there is a delay in the arrangement of the marriage or the parents are not happy with the bride. In this uncertain situation after a mutual agreement between the young boy and girl enters into the house of the boy. The consent of the

parents is not taken into consideration. The formal marriage takes place after the bride price is settled. This is an irregular form of marriage.

4. *Bwnanwi Lainai Haba* (Marriage by capture):- In this type of marriage the bride is forcefully taken away from the house of bride to the house of bridegroom and then the marriage takes place. This marriage is called marriage by capture or *Bwnanwi Lainai Haba*. This type of marriage was prevalent in the earlier days. But at present this type of marriage has been completely discarded from the Bodo society.

5. *Dwnkharlangnai Haba* (Elopement marriage):-This type of marriage is not socially recognised and yet it takes place in the Bodo society. The mutual understanding between the bride and bridegroom is enough for this type of marriage. It is also regarded as an irregular marriage by the Bodo society.

6. *Dongkha Habnai Haba* (Co-habitation marriage):- This system of marriage is approved by the Bodo society. If a man comes and live with a widow, and if the society recognises this co-habitation, then the man and woman should regularise the marriage according to the social custom called *Dongkha Habnai*.<sup>13</sup> This system of marriage is very rare.

#### **Widow Re-marriage:**

In the Bodo society re-marriage is socially recognised as regular marriage. A widow can re-marry any person who is not related to her. However, she loses the authority on the property of her deceased husband. The male child is always entitled to get the property of his father. Sometimes, it is seen that the widow is allowed to take the female child of her deceased husband along to her new husband. A widower may remarry his deceased wife's younger sister, but not the elder, whom he is obliged conventionally to guard as mother. Similarly, a widow may re-marry her

deceased husband's younger brother, but she is not allowed to marry the elder brother of her deceased husband.

### **The Traditional System of Marriage or Hathasuni Khurnai:**

The traditional system of marriage of the Bodo is called *Hathasuni Khurnai*. This form of marriage is very simple. In this system both the bride and the groom are seated in front of Bathou, the alter of Siva in the courtyard, and a Douri (priest) recites mantra invoking Siva and other deities and declares that the bride and bridegroom have been wedded to each other and from that day they are entitled to co-habit as husband and wife. As a ritual, the bride cooks rice and curry prepared with rice powder and chicken without applying spice or turmeric, which is called *Ondlakhari*. The bride offer a little portion of the meal to the household god and goddess of Ishing (the innermost room of the main house, *nomano*) on banana leaves and the Douri recites mantras introducing the bride to gods and goddesses. Then they pray to god Bathou Bwrai to grant them a peaceful conjugal life. The bride promises to lead a happy conjugal life by touching the rice kept in earthen container. Then the bride serves a little portion of rice and curry to the bridegroom and the villagers present. Then the Douri and village elders give advice to the new couple about the duties and responsibilities towards the family and society. Then the main function of the marriage or *Hathasuni Khurnai* comes to an end. The marriage function is followed by a grand feast, which was continued for seven days in earlier days. During those days rice-beer and pork are the most important items of the feast and they were supplied in abundance. During the feast, man and women, both young and old, enjoyed together by dancing, singing and playing traditional musical instruments in the marriage. The villagers irrespective of sex and age enjoyed by singing, dancing and playing traditional musical instruments in the marriage.<sup>14</sup>

## Marriage according to the Brahma Dharma:

Since the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century thousands of Bodos embraced Brahma Dharma under the guidance of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma; consequently the new system of marriage came into existence in the society. The new religion has not only brought a great change in the pre and post marriage ceremony but it has also refined the old customs to suit the new religion. The use of rice-beer and pork on the day of wedding was totally discouraged and now the use of liquor has been replaced by tea. Tea becomes one of the most important items to entertain guests in the wedding ceremony, nowadays.

Unlike the traditional marriage there is no prevalence of dancing or singing in the Brahma marriage. Modern ban party has taken the place of traditional music.<sup>15</sup> The bridegroom party is given a ceremonial welcome at the gate of the house along with the music of the ban party. The bridegroom stands on the *Gambari Khamplai* (a low sitting tool made of wooden plank of gambari wood) and the younger sister or cousin of the bride washes his feet and puts perfumed oil and cosmetics on bridegroom's hair and face and combs his hair. The bride groom, in return gives a small present to his new sister-in-law as a token of love.

The main function of the marriage is performed at night. In accordance with the Hindu calendar a *Subha logno* (sacred time) is fixed for the performance of *Yajnahuti* or *Ahuti*. The bride and bridegroom are taken from the main house to the Mandap (the place of yajna) by cheering and playing band. The main function of the wedding starts with the *Purohit* (priest) chanting *Gayatri Mantra*, facing eastward in front of the fire of the yajna; the mantra is followed by the father of the bride, the bridegroom and the bride.

Keeping the fire as witness, the father of the bride makes 'Ashirbad' (Sanskrit, asirvada i.e., blessing) on his daughter and bridegroom. And they pray for the blessing of god for the new couple.<sup>16</sup> The relatives and friends of both the bride and bride groom offer blessings in the form of presentations of articles, ornaments or cash. At the very outset, the parents of the bride offer blessings, while they are followed by others. After *ashirbad* function is over, the purohit concludes the main function of the marriage with a few slogans in the name of Brahma invoking blessings to the newly married couple.

The follower of Brahma dharma introduced a new system of marriage in the Bodo society. At present this system of marriage is not confined only to the followers of Brahma Dharma but even the followers of the traditional Bathou dharma and other Hindu cult of Bodo perform yajnahuti in the matter of wedding.

#### **Bride-Price and Dowry:**

The system of realisation of bride price has been customarily followed in the Bodo society. It is called *Phon taka* (bride price) in Bodo language. Demand of phon taka (bride price) was compulsory tradition of the society. But in the present days bride price has almost disappeared; it is now practiced as ritual. In the prevailing customs, the father of the bride offers a nominal price of a pair of areca nuts, betel leaves and a pair of one rupee coins on a banana leaf to bride's father. The father of the bride accept the areca nuts, betel leaves only and returns the coins.<sup>17</sup>

**Malsa:**

There is another system of collecting *Malsa* from the parents of the bridegroom. The rates of *Malsa* differ from place to place.<sup>18</sup> In some villages *Malsa* is realized to the tune of Rs.2.50 (Rupees two and fifty paise) and in some villages it is realized at 5.00 (Rupees five).

**Kholar Gothainai:**

In Bodo marriage custom, if the husband expires suddenly after the marriage, the bride returns to her parents and the amount of 'Malsa'(bride price) is given back to the parents of the deceased husband by the parents of bride. This act of returning of the bride and 'Malsa' is known as '*Kholar Gothainai*'.<sup>19</sup>

**Mamai mara:**

If the bride groom or the parents of the bridegroom had not paid the phon taka (bride price) at the time of marriage and if the bride had expired leaving female child behind, the phon taka or the bride price of the female would go to her uncle at the time of her marriage.<sup>20</sup> This system is known as *Mamai mara*.

**Athmongal:**

On the eight day from the day of marriage, the bride and bridegroom come to bride's house for the post marriage ceremony known as '*Athmongal*'. In the traditional society the bridegroom brings cocks, goat or pig in honour of his father-in-law's family and relatives. *Athmongal* is a very brief ceremony and limited feast is arranged on the occasion. Only a few selected friends and relatives are invited to the ceremony. After the ceremony the bride and bridegroom return home along with the articles of presentation which they received from their friends and relatives on the occasion of their marriage ceremony together with the articles presented by the

parents of the bride. The bride also takes away all her belongings from her parents' house.

#### **Divorce:**

In the Bodo society divorce is allowed. But there must be valid ground to satisfy the society for divorce. As per Bodo society is concerned divorce or separation is very rare. If both husband and wife desire to get divorce, they have to appear before the '*Bodo Samaj*' or *village headman* for their settlement. If both the couple desires to separate each other, then it is performed by tearing a betel leaf. This is called *Pathoi-lai bisinai*. The betel-leaf is kept in the presence of the village elders in the house of the 'Gaoburah' (village head man) and then betel-leaf is torn into two pieces. By this act the marriage bond of the couple comes to an end. Thus the couple can part from each other peacefully. It is a symbolic act which indicates that the torn leaf can never reunite, so their married life is severed for ever. But if the husband divorces his wife without valid ground, the husband has to bear the responsibility of her livelihood for a certain period of time and he must also pay certain amount of fine for his freedom to the divorced woman and the village committee. On the other hand, if divorce occurs due to unfaithfulness of the wife, the husband is entitled to recover the amount of money he spent for the marriage from the parents of the bride. When the amount is paid to the man, the woman is at liberty to live with a new husband.<sup>21</sup>

#### **Female Chastity in the Bodo Society:**

Pre-marital relationship is strictly prohibited in the Bodo society; female chastity is considered to be the major qualification for marriage. If one does indulge in pre-marital sex, she is subjected to physical punishment at the time of trial in the

village court. Then she is required to undergo ritual purification along with religious function. As such the young people of the society lead pure lives before marriage.

### **Food:**

Rice is the main food stock of the Bodo along with the curry prepared with variety of vegetables, meat or fish. They are very fond of meat like pork, chicken, mutton, fish, and also meat of duck, pigeon which are domesticated by the women. Besides they also go for hunting animals, like deer, hare, wild buffalo, mongoose, tortoise, etc. They like all kinds of vegetables either sour or bitter available at home and in jungles. But they do not eat beef. Eating beef is considered as sin and a crime to Bodo society. The Bodos preserve dry meat and dry fish for future use; they are very favourite diet for them. They also know the art of preserving dry fish inside bamboo pipe by plastering the mouth of Bamboo pipe with mud. This food is called *nafam* that can be preserve for long time. The Bodo also use *Khardo* or *Kharoi* (alkali) in different curries to make it more tasty.

With changing trends of the society, the Bodo have modified their food habit and menu of diet. Many of the animal meats have now been abandoned. These days they like to drink milk, eat curd, butter, ghee, sweets etc. though these items were not prepared by common Bodo folks in the past. Edward Gait mentioned, "It is not their custom to eat ghee; even any food article flavour of ghee they will not eat it."<sup>22</sup>

On special occasions they prepare some special items of food from different varieties of rice and takes as breakfast or tiffin. These are pitha (cake made of powdered rice with some ingredients like sugar, coconut, lit, till etc., *maibra sithao* (pan cake made of sticky rice powder and other ingredients), *chaurai* (flattened rice), *akai* (parched paddy free from husk), coconut *laru* etc. But this days they also

prepare *puri, luci, pokora, samosa*, etc. Bodo are fond of chewing areca nut and betel leaf with lime.<sup>23</sup>

### **Drinks:**

The Bodo have the habit of drinking liquor (*jou*), as it is a compulsory drink in the traditional social gathering or religious function. They are expert in preparing wine or beer from rice. They use two types of liquor viz., *jou bidoi* (rice beer), *jou gwran* (distilled liquor). The *jou bidoi* though intoxicating, is nutritious too.<sup>24</sup> The drink rice-beer after whole day hard work or after working in scorching sun. The rice-beer is consumed by man, woman and children, in the traditional society but they hardly get drunk. According to Hodgson (1850:150), "I see no reason to brand them with name of drunkards, though they certainly merry a cup in honour of the gods at the high festive of their religion. Among my servants, the Bodos have never been seen drunk, but the Muslim and Hindus drink excessively."

But after the conversion of Brahma Dharma, Satsang, Saivism etc. use of liquor has totally been wiped out in any social or religious functions. Instead of *jou* nowadays tea has become very popular among the Bodos. All sections of people in present Bodo society have adopted taking tea regularly and they entertain their visitors, friends and guests with a cup of tea. The tea has taken place of liquor on many occasions like community work, social gathering etc.

### **Dress and Ornament:**

The spinning and weaving is an indispensable part of every Bodo family till today. The Bodo women wear their traditional dress *dokhana*, a home loom product woven by women themselves. The size of *dokhana* is about ten feet long and four and half feet wide. They wrap *dokhana* around their breast down to ankles and tighten knots one above the bosom and other in the waistline. The *dokhana* has

borders on both sides and it is designed with geometrical or floral or sometimes stripes running along its entire length. To cover the exposed portions of body they use smaller pieces of cloth known as *sadwr*. *Sadwr* is also hand-woven fabric in a variety of colours with geometrical and floral designs. The length and breadth of the fabric is two metres by a half metre. The use of blouse and petticoat was not known in ancient times.

The Bodo man wears hand-woven fabric called *gamsa*, by which they cover themselves from the waist down to the knees. They also use shirts, known as *gosla*. But the use of turban or phalli *khaokhanai* was not common to all. Bodo people wrap *eri* or *endi* shawl during the winter season to protect themselves from cold. In the olden days the Bodos used a kind of foot-war made of wood with jute lace known as *kurwm* or *poitha*.<sup>25</sup>

But now with the development of modern industries different varieties of machines made dresses have become plenty in the market, they can be obtained without pain and at a cheap rate in no time. As such even the villagers now wear machine product shirts, pants, trousers, dhoti etc. The well-to-do or educated families wear western as well as Indian dresses like long pants, coat, suit, necktie, jeans, shoes or dhoti, Panjabi shirt etc.

The Bodo women of BTC area wear exclusively *dokhana*, though *mekhala* is also worn in other parts of Assam and outside. Nowadays they wear skirts, *shalwar kamis* and sometimes modern saris and jeans while they are on outings. The women mainly use the ornaments of gold and silver. They are very fond of ornaments like bracelets, necklace, earring, fingerings, etc. Though the nose ring was worn by Bodo women, they have almost given up the use of it. The ornaments have occupied a very important place in Bodo society. In the time of crisis they take loans from

*mahajhans* keeping the ornaments as security bond. Failure to give ornaments to a new bride in the marriage is looked as a sign of extreme poverty by the Bodos.<sup>26</sup> Thus ornaments are considered not only luxurious article for Bodo women, but also as a helper in the days of crisis or need.

### **Economic Organization:**

Pemberton has written about the trade between Bhutan and Assam. The exports items from Assam were rice, lace, madder, silk, endi, dried fish, etc. In lieu of them they imported goods like woollen cloths, gold, dust, salt, horses, cowries, Chinese silk, etc. He further writes that the trade suffered severely after the Burmese occupation of Assam in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> Nag (1987) mentions that the Ahom kings from 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries organised a state militia comprising of the male population of the state who were about 16<sup>th</sup> years old. These people were attached to the works of the kings and serve the state. This militia was employed to carry out public work other than construction of roads, tanks, embankments, bridges and canals. They were also employed to reclaim cultivation land from forests and swamps. And irrigation network was also constructed with the help of this militia. Hundreds of river embankments crossed by highly raised pathways or walls and join by embankments graduating down to the end of connecting villages and fields formed a network that helped to keep out the water due to annual floods.<sup>28</sup> Each of the militia was known as *paik* and a unit of four *paiks* was called *got*. Each *paik* and *got* was assigned the duty to cultivate lands of three *paiks* of his own got when other three were supposed to render their services to the king. These *paiks* were assigned duties in rotation. In times of emergency they had to participate in the wars as soldiers.<sup>29</sup> Assam was never an isolated place. The travelogue *Tabkat-I-Nasiri* quoted by Sen. (1987: 157-159) refers to the routes that connected Assam with the

other regions of India. Ramkumar Vidyaratna (1885), a religious preacher of Sadharan Brahma Samaj, wrote a travelogue on Assam. All the area situated on the bank of the Brahmaputra River was travelled by him. This travelogue gives an idea of the people of Assam and their culture during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A special mention is made here of the women.<sup>30</sup> They described as hard working and taking part in agricultural activities. Weaving is mentioned as women's occupation.

The Bodos are now found settled on the vast alluvial plains of the northern bank of river Brahmaputra. This community was, however, famous for its migratory habits. Since rice is the primary cultivation of the Bodos, they mostly prepared alluvial land called, *Hama ha*. For the establishment of village and homestead they select high land, where there are grazing field, river, lake for fishing, jungle and forest for hunting and fire wood.

There has been a striking change in the economy of the Bodos from the ancient time to the present. The change in the economic system has also contributed towards the development of present Bodo society and it has also helped to change the outlook of the Bodo people. Fertility of the land and monsoon rain made this region suitable for easy cultivation of various crops and vegetation. They mainly depend on the paddy cultivation. But they also cultivate cash crops such as mustard seed, tobacco, jute, varieties of pulse and vegetables like potato, cabbage, cauliflower, radish, carrot, cucumber, gourd, green leaves etc. These are cultivated partly for consumption and partly for selling in the market. They also cultivate varieties of spices, chilli, onion, garlic, coriander, ginger etc.

For paddy cultivation, they mainly depend on monsoon rain. They also construct artificial irrigation system to supply water in paddy field by erecting dam in the stream and by digging canal. Sarbeswar Rajguru quoted from W. Rabinson (A

descriptive Account of Assam: 1841), "The Kacharis along the northern frontier....about the Bhutan Dowers exhibit on exception to the general neglect of irrigation. They have the habit of extensively irrigating their rice from the small streams which intersect these districts."<sup>31</sup>

The Bodos have a clear idea about the different types of land for the production of various crops. *Jampwi daria ha* or irrigated land where paddy is cultivated is the costliest land today. There are three seasons for paddy cultivation.<sup>32</sup> These are *Maisali* (winter season), *Bawa* (rainy season) and *Ashu* (just after rainy season). The *Maisali* paddy seedlings are transplanted on low lands. *Bawa* species are broad casted on marshy land. The latter species has tall stems and grows in deep water. *Ashu* cultivation is done on highlands.

They also produce jute, mustard seeds and various kinds of pulses. Each family grow fruits trees on homestead lands. Jackfruit trees, areca nut trees and betel leaves are also common.<sup>33</sup> A cow shed near home is a symbol of prosperity. Everybody tries to keep cows and bullocks at home. Bullocks are used for ploughing. Domestic animals like goat, pig and birds like hen and duck are also found.

Spinning and Weaving: - The rearing of *eri* and *muga* is another tradition of economic activity which were solely taken care by the Bodo women. The Bodos produced *muga* and *eri* clothes for their own use as well as for business purpose. But nowadays they have almost given up rearing *muga* or silk worms, as it is more laborious than the market price. At present they only produce *eri* clothes, which can be reared indoor.<sup>34</sup> One of the presents, the Kusuma Vastra sent by Bhaskar Varman to Harsha Vardhan as mentioned in Harsha Charitra is believed to be *eri* silk of Assam, whose colour is described as white with yellow tinge.

Spinning and weaving are women's activity among the Bodos. Weaving is compulsory for young Bodo girls. Endle remarked, "...a Kochari women if not greatly or frequently interrupted in her work can weave half a yard each day."<sup>35</sup> They learn the techniques of weaving early in life. Traditionally they wove all the clothes required for a family like- *dokhana*, *aronai*, *gamocho*, *sadwr*, bed cover, etc. by themselves. Apart from that they also wove cloths for marriage. A Bodo woman who does not know the art of spinning and weaving is regarded as *aouluri* (good for nothing) and neglected by the society. The Bodo women weave on the frame loom and produce their own requirement of fabrics in their spare of time. These hand woven fabrics are used by women, men and children on religious occasion or festivals, at the funeral for covering death body and also as bed sheet, furniture cover etc. They can depict different floral and geometrical designs on the fabrics.

Nowadays the government has various schemes to provide free grants to tribal weaver in cash or kinds, to open weaving centre or industry, through the Tribal Development Corporation, District Rural Development Agency, Bank, etc. Taking such assistance from the government some Bodo women have opened weaving industry in various places of the district and supplied their products to the market. Thus quite some Bodo women have become economically independent in the present Bodo society.

Fishing is also another important activity of the Bodo women. During the rainy season they go for fishing regularly. They catch fish with the help of *Jekai* (conical shaped artefact made of split bamboo) and keep the fish in the *Kobai* (pot made of spilt bamboo). These instruments of fishing are very handy. *Jekai* is a bamboo pot which is hung on their waist during fishing. This is a very favourite sport of the Bodo women. Now a days husking mills have been established in rural areas, which are of

great relief to the Bodo Women. Husking mills saves the time and labour of young women. They have got more time in hand for study than before.

### **Medium of Exchange:**

Till the recent times barter system was prevalent among the Bodos. In the earlier times the business transaction and the value of the things were measured by the barter system.<sup>36</sup> The Bodos use paddy as a medium of exchange, as it is valuable and essential article for all families. Though money has taken its place, even today in Bodo villages, wages of agricultural labourers, *dahwna* (male worker) and *ruwati* (female worker) are paid in terms of paddy. As stated in the *pandulipi* (social laws) of the Bodo society, the wages of the agricultural labours are as follows:-

1. Dahwna (male labour):-is paid ten *monds* of paddy during the season of cultivation and seven and a half *monds* at the time of harvesting.
2. Ruwati (female labour) is paid seven and a half *monds* of paddy during the month of cultivation and six *monds* for the months from Aswin (September) to chaitra (March/April).

The urban people, whose occupation is non-agriculturist, pay the wages of servants in cash but the exact value of the paddy because contract is made in terms of paddy. Some elements of barter system still exist in some backward villages but it is very rare. In the traditional Bodo religion rice is considered as a form of *Lakhi* or *Mainao* (goddess of wealth), so the Bodos honour and accept it without hesitation.<sup>37</sup> But today, all societies are interdependent to each other in many affairs including economic activities for which barter system becomes convenient to be the medium of exchange and it is gradually disappearing from the Bodo society.

## **Religion, Fairs and Festivals:**

The Bodos constitute an important element of the population of Assam and are known for their enchanting cultural peculiarities. They have their own language and literature; their own songs and dances; their own religious beliefs; their own customs and traditions and they have their own fairs and festivals.

Fairs and festivals are the essential aspects of the cultural life of the people and as a matter of fact these are the true mirror of the peoples' cultures. Peoples' cultures manifested in traditional fairs and festivals have socio-economic-religious bases and are interwoven-one cannot be separated from the other. The traditional Bodo culture is no exception and has undergone the process of evolution and growth. In Bodo fairs and festivals the following characteristics are predominantly noted. First, they are socio-religious in nature and content. There are no festivals which are exclusively called social or religious. Some festivals are predominantly social in their content, but their celebrations are performed under the umbrella of religious rites and practices. Similarly, there are fairs and festivals which are apparently religious in their content and purpose, yet, these are not entirely free from social elements including laws and customs. Secondly, most of the Bodo fairs and festivals have economic roots. Suffice to say that since agriculture is the mainstay of the people, the festivals celebrated by them are naturally closely connected with their occupation. Such festivals are celebrated on a larger scale for thanking the gods and goddesses for their providence and for saying a prayer for a bumper crop. Throughout the year, people celebrate one festival or other. Some of the important festivals are discussed below.

Religion in the present context has emerged as one of the most important catalysts of transformation in the Bodo community. The influence of the new religion

called Brahma dharma is deep in the society. The followers of this religion are reformists and have brought significant cultural change in the society. Traditionally the Bodo worshiped the *Sijou* plant (*Euphorbia*) which is considered as the image of their supreme deity *Bathau Bwrai*. The British missionaries described the traditional Bodo religion as 'animistic' religion. Christianity was introduced to this community only in the beginning of this century.

In the traditional religion, *Bathau Bwrai* is the chief of their gods. He is also known as *Khuria Bwrai* which means the old man (Moshahary 1993:1-6).<sup>38</sup> *Ba* means five and *thou* means deep. Hence '*Bathou*' means 'the five deep spiritual entities. 'Five' is considered as the special numerical in the traditional Bodo religion. In this regard a Bodo verse is like this:

"Thaigirni bikhonga khongba,  
Sijouni siria siriba,  
Siphungni gudunga dungba,  
Bathouni bandua banduba,  
Boro bwrai raoa phongba" (Brahma 1983: 35).<sup>39</sup>

In translation, *Owi fruit* (*Dillenis indica*) has five rinds, the *Sijou* tree (*Euphorbia Splenden*) has five ridges, the *Siphung* (the long bamboo flute of the Bodos has five holes, the *Bathou* has five knots (of bamboo strips) and the *Boro Borai* (the Bodo elder) has five moral preaching. Again, the Bodos have five principles on which their social customs are based. These are 1. *Agarbad*, 2. *Phongslodbad*, 3. *Daokibad*, 4. *Khoulwbwdbad* and 5. *Khaoalibad*.

It is said that in ancient times the Bodos had five main gods, viz, 1. *Ailong* (the god of earth), 2. *Agrang* (the god of water), 3. *Khoila* (the god of air), 4. *Sanja Borli* (the goddess of light) and 5. *Rajkhungri* (the goddess of sky). (Brahma 1983: 35-

36).<sup>40</sup> Thus the *Bathou* religion and its philosophy are based on five principles, which upheld the whole fabrics, social customs, economic institution, beliefs and rites of the Bodo society.

### **Kherai Festival:**

*Kherai puja* is believed to be the greatest religious festival of the Bodo. It is a symbol of hope and desire, that has been prevailing among them since time immemorial. The main purpose of the *Kherai puja* is welfare of both private and public lives. For the welfare of the private life, they performed *Kherai puja* individually. On the other hand, for the welfare of the villagers as a whole, they perform *Kherai puja* collectively once or twice in a year. Besides welfare of both private and public lives, the *Kherai puja* is performed for the good harvest of crops. The Bodos are generally dependent on agriculture. So, before and after cultivation they performed *Kherai puja* and propitiate different gods and goddesses for the success in cultivation.

It is difficult to ascertain the source from where the word '*Kherai*' originated. Different scholars and writers are of different opinions as regards the origin of the word *Kherai*. According to Dr. S. K. Chatterjee there is similarity between the *Ker Puja* of the Tripurians and the *Kherai Puja* of the Bodo. Brahma (1989:62-74) has given a detailed description of the *Kherai* ritual according to which the goddess of wealth (Lokhi) is worshipped in this ritual. Along with the goddess other gods are also worshipped in this ritual. They perform this puja on some specific occasions.<sup>41</sup> The *Kherai puja* is of four types, 1. *Darshan Kherai*, 2. *Umrao Kherai*, 3. *Phalo Kherai* and 4. *Noaouni Kherai (domestic Kherai)*

The *Darshan Kherai* is performed during the first week of the month of '*Kati*' or '*Kartik*'. The *kherai Puja* is meant for *Mainao* who is identified with '*Laksmi*', the

goddess of wealth and welfare. It is also called as '*Lokhi Kherai*'. *Umrao Kherai* is held during the month of '*Ashara*' at the end of the '*Amti Sua*' (unclean period) for the welfare of the villagers as well as of the crops. This puja is also known as the *Ashu Kherai*, being connected with the *asu* or a summer-season crop. *Phalo Kherai* is performed specially on the day of '*Maghi Purnima*' or the full moon of the month of '*Magha*'. This Kherai also known as *danswrang Kherai* as it is performed during the full moon of the month. The *Noaouni Kherai* (domestic or family Kherai) is performed by the family when it is deemed necessary. There is no fixed time for this *Kherai*. The Bodo family that believes in the traditional practices depends on the '*Kherai puja*' or '*Garja puja*' for their welfare at all times. So whenever they face any trouble they perform the *Kherai puja* for the welfare of their own family.<sup>50</sup>

The *Kherai* ritual is also performed by the whole community. Among other things some particular species of bamboo, herb and leaves are needed. All the musical instruments which are commonly used by them are also needed. *Kherai puja* involves many persons for its arrangement but for the worship only three persons are necessary.<sup>42</sup> They are *Doudini* (the main worshiper of the *Kherai* and she must be a lady), *Oja* or the instructor of the worshippers and one helper (*githal*). At the end of the worship she tells the future of the villagers, their probable success and failure in cultivation and about their fortunes or misfortunes.

### **Garja Festival:**

The *Garja puja* or '*Garja Modai Hwnai*' as termed by the Bodos is another important traditional socio-religious festival of the people and is celebrated outdoor at the place permanently earmarked for the purpose. They perform *Garja puja* on many occasions. Usually this ritual is performed to protect the village from epidemics. If any person does any sinful act this ritual is performed to purify him or her. There are

many *Garja* gods and goddesses who are regularly propitiated by the Bodos.<sup>43</sup> Brahma (1989:76) mentions the names of fifteen such deities who are worshipped in *Garja ritual*. He also mentions the names of a few non-Bodo *Garja* gods who are worshipped along with the Bodo gods and goddesses during *Garja puja*. These are *Mahadeo, Sila Rai, Rupa Rai, Ai Kali, Maya Kali* etc. The river god and goddesses are also addressed. There are about hundreds of gods and goddess who are worshipped during *Kherai* and *Garja puja*.

### **Bwisagu:**

The most important occasion of marry-making in the social life of the Bodo community is the celebration of '*Bwisagu*' in the month of *Baisakh* (Mid April). It is also known as '*Bihu*' in Assamese. This occasion is welcomed by each and every Bodo community as it is a spring time festival of the New Year.

'*Bwisagu*', a corruption of two formations "*Bwswrni Agu*" meaning "beginning of the year" or New Year is a great social festival and celebrated in the month of *Baisakh* (mid April) for seven days beginning from the day of *sanskranti* of Chaitra (last day of Chaitra which is also the last day of the passing year). According to Sydney Endle, "Among the Darang Kacharis (Bodo of Darrang district), this festivals lasts for seven days during which little or no work is done, the whole period being given up to merry-making, dancing, feasting etc. As is practiced among their Hindu neighbours on the opening day, all cattle are taken to the nearest river or tank and there, formally bathed and afterwards sprinkled with a preparation compounded of rice beer (Jou), tomatoes and turmeric etc. The horns are smeared with oil; ashes and pounded rice flour are applied in patches to the bodies of the cattle. This duty discharged, the people abandon themselves to sheer merriment, the younger folks especially giving themselves up to dancing and singing etc."<sup>44</sup>

The day ends with the ceremonial eating of chicken /fork meat cooked with bitter and sour leaves in the evening. This is called '*Gwka-Gwkwi Janai*'. The term '*Gwka-Gwkwi Janai*' is very often used as a phrase to convey the sense of severances of all connection or relationship with someone due to bad blood or misunderstanding. Keeping this meaning of the term in view, the Bodos eat bitter and sour leaves on the last day of the passing year to symbolise ones severance of all connecting with the passing year in a jolly mood of welcoming the New Year. The first day of the New Year is the second Bihu day which is set aside for the worship of Bathou in individual houses or jointly at the *Bathou Tansali* (permanent place of worship) of the villagers. At the dawn of the New Year, members of the family take ritual baths and propitiate '*Bathou*' and the spirits of ancestors with scarifies. In earlier days the rest of the days of Bwisagu were set aside for specific purposes. For instance, the third day of Bwisagu was set apart for feeding the dogs, the fourth day the swine, the fifth day the fowls and the sixth day the ducks and other birds. The seventh day is the last day of Bwisagu and is set aside for visiting and receiving the relatives and friends, exchanging gifts with the beloved ones, seeking apologies from the elders for acts of omission and commission during the year.

The Brahma dharma followers pray to god on the first day of *Bahag* or *Bwisakh* by performing *Ahuti* jointly in their village. Before *Ahuti* none is allowed to take jou or rice-beer. After *Ahuti* the villagers sit together and discuss the affairs of the village under the presidentship of *Gaoburah* or village headman. They also discuss the matter about annual accounts and liabilities of the villagers and solve any problem mutually. In the evening the villagers, both young and old, enjoy by dancing and singing. They also consume rice-beer roaming from one house to another in the village. It has been observed that some sections of Brahma dharma

followers have given up the habit of taking rice beer on the occasion of the Bwisagu festival as well as on other occasions. They simply enjoy by singing and dancing together, and the young boys and girls collect alms from door to door and arrange feasts with the articles they receive by singing and dancing.<sup>45</sup> The begging of alms is called by the Bodos as *Mairong maginai*.

### **Domachi:**

*Domachi* is a post harvest festival corresponding to the Assamese Magh Bihu and is celebrated in the month of *Magh* (January-February). The characteristics of this festival are to enjoy with different types of foods like cakes or *pithas*, to entertain the friends and relatives with foods and drinks and to enjoy singing and dancing. The male members of the family tie cords around the fruits bearing tress of the house. The Bodos believe that the fruits bearing trees would bear more fruits if the trees are tied with cords of straw during *Domachi*.

Along with *pithas* (cake made of powder rice putting some ingredients like sugar, coconut, lit, sesame etc.) of different types the women fry different pulses like - Sobai, Sibing, pulses, *maibra sithao*, *chaura*, *akai*, coconut *laru*, etc. eat them and splash them at the cowshed. The elderly persons of the village traditionally sacrifice fowls to *Bathou Bwrai* and worship him. The followers of Brahma dharma arrange Ahuti on the day of full moon of *Magh month* or *Maghi Purnima* for the welfare of the villagers in general.

### **The Bodo Women:**

According to Mohini Mahan Brahma, there were two Bodo women queens named Wairangma and Wairanguri of Hidimbapur who fought against the Ahom soldiers and were slain in the battle. These two women are referred to as Ranchandi

in the Bodo legends. Mention is also made of some other women like Sundari and Bhanumati who accompanied their husbands to war.<sup>46</sup>

It is natural that every woman desires to have child after her marriage. In the Bodo society it is generally seen that a Bodo woman prefers to get a male child rather than a female child. It may be owing to the general psychology of the Bodo parents that to give daughter to marriage is a matter of great burden, while in the case of sons it is not so. Also, the Bodo society being patriarchal, sons are the inheritors of the parents' property. Hence sons are more desirable to the Bodo parents than daughters.

The Bodo women have various restrictions during pregnancy. Pregnancy is detected when the menstruation discontinues. An expectant mother discloses this fact before her mother-in-law or any female members of the family. It is observed that every mother-in-law of married women is anxious about the information of the first pregnancy of her daughter-in-law. The mother-in-law naturally becomes happy of her daughter-in-law. There are special rites or ceremonies connected with pregnancy in the Bodo society.<sup>47</sup> A pregnant woman has to be very careful during the whole period till the birth of the child. Restrictions are imposed on some foods as well as on physical movement. They can not go to the forest and cremation ground or to visit or touch any dead body.

At the time of child birth the Bodos of the rural areas follow certain old and traditional customs. Since time immemorial the Bodo women have co-operated one another at the time of child birth. The elderly women of the village perform the duties of midwife. *Brahma (1992: 66-67)* mentions that cutting of umbilical cord is followed by a ritual. A little while after the child is born the umbilical cord is cut with a sharp-edged slip of green bamboo skin placing the cord, a cotton or silk thread is tied

around it. If the baby is a boy the thread is tied five times and if female it is tied seven times. The cord is cut by such women whose hands are considered as 'bitter', so that the cut wound will dry soon. They believe that if the cord is cut by a widow the new born may be short lived. The new born baby and mother are given a hot bath soon after delivery. Then the baby is sprinkled with holy water and while sprinkling holy water the woman who performs this rite utters:-

“Oi gotho! Nwngba gwdw mamwn, Bangal na Jungal, Garo na Gangar, Harsa na Nephal mwn, Dinwinifrai Boro jabai.”

*English rendering:* - “Whoever you were, whether you were a Muslim, a Garo, a Bhutia or Non-Bodo or a Nepali, you have become a Bodo from today.”<sup>48</sup>

The Bodos believe that the usual food is harmful to the mother as well as to the new-born baby. Therefore dry food is given to the mother for a few days. He or she is given name just after the birth. The feeding ceremony is observed in the fifth month. Hair cutting ceremony and ceremony of ear perforation for girls are observed after one year. At the time of feeding rice to the child for the first time at the age of five and seven months the Bodos follow some customary procedures. The followers of Brahma dharma feed the child after performance of a Yagyahuti. They pray to god through *Yagyahuti* for the welfare of the child and then the mother of the child feeds her child with the guidance of the *Purahita* or the priest.<sup>63</sup>

In the beginning of this century marriage by elopement was common and known as Dwnkharlangnai Haba (Brahma 1992:77). This type of marriage was criticised by the educated Bodo in the beginning of this century. Early marriage was also received criticism because it was considered as an impediment to boy's education and progress. Marriage by negotiation is the standard practice. In negotiated marriage selection of the bride depends not only on the beauty but also

other factors. One such factor is the physique. The girl with large hip, breast and waist is considered as fickle-minded. The girl who makes noise while walking is considered as hot-tempered. The girl with pointed nose, bright eyes, small teeth, well shaped fingers, bright face and dark thick hair is considered as most desirable as bride (ibid., 1992:80-82).<sup>49</sup> The other qualities considered desirable in an ideal bride is expertise in husking weaving, cooking, etc.

In an arranged marriage the villagers take all sorts of responsibilities. They prepare rice beer, supply vegetables and take part in various activities. It is also customary that all villagers are invited to a marriage. The village women assist the bride's mother to clean the house, husk rice and pound pulses, cut vegetables, cook and serve food to the guests.

In the Bodo society separation takes place mainly for the following reasons. Extra marital affairs are one of the most important causes of divorce. To be most specific when a woman is involved in such an affair, it leads to separation, but when a male is involved it leads to the second or third marriage. This is because polygamy is socially sanctioned but it is very rare in the society. But the members of present generation, especially the women have started protesting against polygamy.

The festivals and ceremonies of the Bodo community are full of music and dance. In any performance, the traditional instruments like *Khum* (elongated drum), *Sifung* (flute with five holes), *Jotha* (cymbal), *Sherja* (violin of four strings) and *Gongona* (Jew's harp) are used. The Bodo music is classified into three sections. These are instrumental, vocal and dance. Most of their dances are group performances and performed by women in open space. Among them *Bagurumba* is one of the most popular, beautiful and attractive dances of Bodo women. *Bagurumba* dance is performed in all the festivals, meetings, Conferences, ceremonies as well

as to welcome the VIPs and guests to honour in any programme and function. It is said that their dances originated from *Kherai* festival.

Bodo Women have varieties of dances like *Bardwisikhla mwsanai*, *Haba janai mwsanai*, *Mwsaglangnai*, *Nagurnai mwsanai*, *Kherai mwsanai*, *Bwisagu mwsanai*, *Bagurumba mwsanai*, *Tungri sibnai mwsanai*, *Daothwi lwngnai mwsanait*, etc. Different types of dances and participation of women in those performances reveal that singing, dancing and making different motifs, while weaving, are part of their life. They are very fond of weaving and embroidery. If a group of young girls assemble somewhere and gossip, it is sure at least once they discuss about new motifs and designs of weaving. They use bright colours like yellow, green and red in different shades. They usually keep their houses clean and like to keep their furniture, artefacts and other things in order.<sup>50</sup>

Besides that, they participate in modern cultural activities as well. Deben Kochari<sup>68</sup> writes that earlier the Bodo songs and dances were performed only during religious festivals. But in 1950s the Bodo of north and south Goalpara started doing group performances on the stage.<sup>51</sup> The first women singer on the stage was *Narmeswari Basumatary* who presented a Bodo song at the conference of '*Boro dol*' in 1891 at Goalpara. Even during the Bodoland movement a number of ABSU and AAWWF members composed varieties of songs which are very popular. Besides, after the attainment of Bodoland Autonomous Council (BTC) beauty contest as well as Fashion show for the Bodo girls was organised in urban and rural areas in BTC.

#### **Social customs of the Bodo relating to death:**

Immediately after death, the dead body is washed with water and a new cloth *gamcha* is tied on the body. The hair is combed after applying oil. In case of female a new *dokhna* (a female dress) is tied on the body. Then the dead body is taken out

from the house and kept in the middle of the courtyard. The place where the dead body is to be kept is cleaned with cow dung mixed with water. A fowl or a pigeon/chicken is killed and from its flesh a curry is prepared with vegetables and condiments. The near and dear ones offer foods to the dead person with water before taking the dead body to the cremation ground. Then the dead body is covered with a new white cloth. Generally the dead body is carried by the sons and relatives. Then the funeral procession of the dead body takes place heading towards the cremation ground. At least one member of the family of the village is bound to go to the cremation ground with the dead body. The women and children are not allowed to participate in the procession.

The Bodos follow both the burial and cremation systems of the dead body. Earlier, the Bodos generally preferred burial to cremation. Even now some follow the practice of burying the dead. At the time of burial the dead body is covered with a white sheet of cloth and slowly lowered into the grave keeping the head to the south. A few coins and cowries shells are also buried along with the dead body. It is belief that the soul of the dead may be required to cross a river by boat by paying the fare to the boat men or the soul may be required to purchase some foods on the journey. So some coins are placed in the grave or beside the dead body. A little rice also cooked on the spot of cremation and is left for the dead. It is belief that the soul of the dead may start its journey after taking the rice.<sup>52</sup>

Before the funeral pyre is lit some traditional customs are followed relating to the dead body. All the persons present at the cremation ground offer the dead body a little water with the help of the leaves of banyan tree (*Pakribilai*) and utter like this: "No lwngdw amwkha, dinwinifrai nwnng ba nwnng, jwnngba jwnng". Its meaning is this "O, you take this water, from today you will remain as yourself and we shall remain

as ourselves.” After offering water a piece of red thread is placed on the lips. The Bodo believed that as a result of placing a piece of red thread on the lips the dead person will have red lips when the re-birth takes place.

While the dead body to be burnt in the pyre is arranged as per the dead person. There is system of placing five or seven stacks of woods while the pyre is arranged. A torch is then lighted and the relatives and friends of the deceased move round the funeral pile in procession, for men five times and for women seven times after which the torch is applied to the pyre. A pair of chickens is taken to the cremation ground and one is burnt along with the dead body and the other is left free. After the cremation is over, the members of the funeral party take bath in the river or stream before returning to their respective houses. Just after bath every member of the funeral party chews a little quantity of rice and dry leaves of jute plant (*narji gwan*). This indicates that the relationship with the deceased is totally cut off. Holy water is sprinkled upon them for purification before entering their respective house. Finally all the members of the funeral party sit together in the deceased's house and take *jou* or rice beer.<sup>53</sup>

**Daha Garnai:** - One day ahead of the *Saradu* (Shraddha) ceremony, a pre-*saradu* ceremony is performed by the Bodos. This ceremony is called *Daha Garnai*, which means to give up grief or sorrow.

This ceremony is performed simply by offering some favourite foods of the dead person. It is called *Gwtwinw baonai* or offering food or other things to the dead person. The whole ceremony is conducted by *Dauri* or *Oja* who chants the mantras in half-sitting position facing to the south. The members of the family, especially sons of the dead person, pray to him kneeling down on the ground appealing him to accept the offerings made by them.

### **Saradu (Shraddha) ceremony:**

On the eleventh or thirteenth day from the day of the death of a person the *Saradu* or *Shraddha* ceremony is held. The followers of the traditional believers perform the *Saradu* ceremony with prayer before the alter of Bathou and then the villagers and relatives of the dead person are entertained with jou or rice beer which is procured in abundance. At the end of the entertainment of all present at the ceremony a custom of giving alms in the form of coins is followed. The coins is mixed with uncooked rice and these are thrown in the air about a large gathering of the children. This ceremony is called *Dan sarnai*. Sometimes a bullock is set free in the name of the dead person and this is called in *Bodo* as *Mwsou saran hagarnai*. The responsibility of conducting the whole function rests on the eldest son of the dead person. He has to perform some specific duties under the traditional customs. He has to carry the unclean leaf-plates left after the guests have eaten food in a basket on his head and throw them away. It is called in *Bodo* *Sua Garnai*, which means removing of impurity. The way the impurity caused by death is ceremonially removed and the members of the family can perform all normal activities after this ceremonial cleaning. This function is essentially very important as per the *Saradu* ceremony is concerned and none can avoid this traditional custom.

The followers of the *Brahma dharma* perform *Yagya*(*Ahuti*) during the *Saradu* or *Shraddha* ceremony. After the *Ahuti* is over all the persons present are entertained with a common meal. The meal is generally vegetarian. The practice of serving jou or rice beer is sometimes observed among the followers of the *Brahma dharma*, just after the function of *Saradu* although it is restricted.<sup>54</sup>

Role of Bodo Women in the Family: - The Bodo social structure is strictly patriarchal though the women in the house are always accorded their due status and respect. In fact the Bodo society as is the case with most other tribal societies is extremely egalitarian. In any social function almost every adult is equally treated and age alone commands respect, not any financial or official status. In a Bodo house the master and the servant sit together at the same level and place to take meals or to share other occasions. In the Bodo society nuclear families are common but joint family are also noticed. Nuclear family consists usually of parents and 4 to 6 children. Number of children is less in educated families. Most of the educated women have more than three children in the family. Generally the Bodos have no clear sex preference in case of new born babies but gender differences can be traced in child rearing.

The *Bibar* published a number of articles on education, health and hygiene in which some of their old customs were criticised. To be more specific, some of their traditional practices like early marriage, addiction to alcohol etc. had received severe criticism. The writers like- Karendra Narayan Brahma, Namol Chandra Boro, Rupiah Brahma and others gave special attention to education and national character formation. The early marriage of young boys was criticised by them vehemently and such practices were identified as causes of their backwardness. So, 'education' as a factor for the development had received top priority from those writers. They were conscious about women's education also. The Bodo writers of early 20<sup>th</sup> century suggested that mother's education was necessary for the benefit of the children. So women education received the attention of those Bodo educationist writers. They conceived of women's education as follows: activities like home management, child care, care of the aged, cooking, entertainment of guests, weaving, embroidery etc.

received top priorities from them. They thought that women must know all this and they must teach the same to the girls before marriage.<sup>55</sup>

On the basis of my field work it is observed that a Bodo girl begins to help her mother at an early age. Her job as baby-sitter begins within 9 to 10 years. Work like washing utensils or cleaning rooms and boundary is also part of her daily duty. The girls who are above ten years of age go to forest to collect leafy vegetables, roots, fire-wood etc. They also go for fishing and take part in agricultural works. Among these activities transplanting the seedlings and harvesting is the main work which the Bodo girls start doing before they attain the teen age. Teenage girls participate in cultivation as well. These girls also do weaving and cooking. But, there is no distinct household work which is performed by the Bodo boys. The boys get priority over the girls in the field of education. Normally the boys are sent to school and exempted from the household work whereas the girls have to stop their studies and start working. This is truer of the poor than the rich families.

Status of Bodo Women in the Society: - Though the processes of Indianisations of the Bodo started long back under the patronage of the Bodo rulers like, Krishna Chandra and Gabinda Chandra of Cachar, Siva Singha and Nara Narayan of Koch kingdom, the Bodo society was free from social evils of the Hindu society. Towards the last part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hindu society was engulfed by many social evils and practices. Though the Bodo society was intermingled with the mainstream of the Hindu Society, the system like *sati*, *dowry*, *child marriage*, *purdha system*, *child infanticide* etc. were completely unknown to the Bodos. The Bodo women have played very significant role in the family, socio-economic life and also in religious function. Though the overall condition of Bodo women till the beginning of

this century was not worth mentioning, from the time of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, a gradual change has been taking place as a result of the reformation movement let by him. Thus their condition is better than that of high caste Hindu women in some parts of India.

Before talking about the status of Bodo women we need to understand the meaning of the 'statuses' as a concept of social science. Generally we use the terms like status of women, status of Brahmin, status of Sudras, etc. in order to define the position of a particular segment of society. As indicated by the term itself, 'status' implies the position of a member or group in a given society in relation to others. Society is a web of relationship. Hence, 'social status' is a position of a member or a segment of members, in the network of social relationship in a society.<sup>56</sup>

According to Ralf Linton "status are the polar positions...in patterns of reciprocal behaviour". A polar position comprises 'a collection of rights and duties'.<sup>57</sup> Thus he conceives of status as a position based on socially approved rights and duties. Members of a society confirm these rights and duties by performing certain roles. When a person, acting these rights and duties, he is said to be performing role of a status of a member of a society as defined by the society. In order to understand the status of a member or a segment of a society we must know the roles performed by that particular member or segment of society in relation to others.

According to Anthropologists there are three important criteria for understanding the 'social statuses' in simple society, i.e. sex, age and kinship. The Bodo women are a segment of the total population of the Bodo society and the status and role of the Bodo women can be explained in terms of age and kinship. The kinship system refers to a set of persons recognised as relatives either by virtue of blood or by virtue of marriage relationships that is through what is called affinity.

Kins are bound by virtue of blood relationship and marriage. As a member of a kins group, a person occupies a specific position in the society and his or her roles accordingly. Thus we may explain the status and role of women within the network of kinship relations frame works of '*Role Domain*' for explaining the status of a member or a segment of a society, i.e., Kinship domain, economic domain, political domain, and religious domain.<sup>58</sup> Thus his frame work '*roles domain*' provide a wider scope for understanding the status of a member or a segment of a society in general and the women in particular.

The roles of the Bodo women under '*kinship domain*' can be explained in two levels, i.e., pre-marital level and post marital level. Before the marriage, a woman is a member of a particular family of orientation. She acquires her membership either by birth or adaptation. The family is the basic unit of social structure of every society. Statuses in the society are determined by the internal organisation of family, its degree of autonomy, sanctions of taboo by which it is protected and perpetuated. The specific pattern of family life in any given social structure is the product of mores, and varies with time. Children either male or female are taught largely by their families to conform to socially approved pattern of behaviour. Family prepares the children for participation in the larger level and acquaint with larger culture. Individual personal identity is initially fixed by family membership by being born to give status and characteristic. The children take on the socio-economic class standing on the parents socio-economic positions in which they are born including its behavioural pattern and definition of reality. In addition to internalizing family attitudes and beliefs children are treated and defined by other extension of social identity of their parents.

Before the marriage, a Bodo woman is a daughter of a family. Father and mother, brother and sisters are her immediate kinsmen. Daughter is regarded as the transient or non-permanent member of the family. Her relations to parents and other elders are of love, mutual affection, respect and of obedience. Every member of a family has to play 'some ideally set roles' or normally expected roles, which are defined by social norms and value. She has to play different types of ideally set roles with different members of the family in different ways such as a daughter, sister, grand daughter, as niece, aunt, etc. Her role in the family is defined by her kinship relation. Her relationship to younger members of the family is of love and affectionate. Her role differentiations are extended to lineage and clan level. Whatever roles (services, duty and works) she plays with her kins in the parents' family are set all a sacrifice to the family.<sup>59</sup>

The role of daughter in the Bodo society as kins member in the family is determined by the structure and economic condition of the family. In a poor family the role of a daughter is cooperative, contributory and substantive in terms of economy. In her early time of childhood she is to perform the role of baby sitter at home. A female child also performs as baby sitter in other family. She leads responsible and difficult life. Even now, in spite of government's policy of compulsory education for all children, the children from poor family in the rural areas hardly can avail her chance for education. They are too dropping out from schools due to poor economic condition of her family.

The culture of the Bodo society emphasizes the marriage of daughters. Earlier, the life was simple and the necessity of life was limited. The basic conditions of economic life have totally changed, the necessities of life have increased and society becomes complex. For economic uncertainty both boys and girls are not

interested in getting marriage. Marriage of a daughter constitutes a difficult problem for every parent these days and constitutes a major women issue in the Bodo society. Unmarried girls beyond age limit are neither desirable by parents nor individual girls concerned. For a father it is a burden and a state of dishonour and anxiety; they move to towns and cities and engage themselves as household workers and workers in small scale industries and start independent lives.<sup>60</sup> The attitudes of the parents towards girls are not fair when it is compared to boys. Boys are more preferred than the girls and options for higher and costlier education are more open for boys than the girls. Daughters do not enjoy the rights of property inheritance. This is the most important factor that attributes to economic uncertainty for unmarried girls.

After marriage a woman is incorporated into her husbands' family with different family structure and economic conditions and psychological background. The family structure and economic condition of the husbands' family determine the roles of the newly married bride. Her living in the new home is in a way conditional, depending on proper behaviour, efficiency in the household work, amicable relationship, service to the elder, pleasure to husband and gifts she brings at marriage. At the marriage rites, the couple promise to associate one another in all circumstances in pain and pleasure, prosperity and adversity till death. Her relation to husband is of love, friendly, mutual respect and affection and cooperation.<sup>61</sup> Endle has stated that the position of Bodo women was sub-ordinate to her husband, but the direct observation of fact convinced that, the Bodo husband treated his wife with distinct respect, and regards her as an equal and a companion.

Stating the freedom enjoyed by the women in Assam, W. Robinson stated that, the women of Assam were beautiful to look and they go out in public without

any artificiality. Definitely Robinson indicated to the women folk beyond the caste-structured society of Assam.<sup>62</sup> Her role to the father and mother in laws is of love, respect, obedience and servitude. She is subordinated to mother in-law in the management of household affairs. In the absence of mother in-law she manages the household affairs. She maintains avoidance relationship with the elder brother of her husband. Her relation to younger brother member of the family is love, affection, master and guide. Women in the family are regarded as '*Noni Mainao*' or *Lakshmi*. These are the 'ideally set roles', normally expected to be performed by a woman after marriage in husband's family.

There are lots of differences between the actual roles performed by a woman and ideally set roles of the women. According to Thakkar and Desai, women themselves sometimes become oppressed and oppressor.<sup>63</sup> There are instances of Bodo women of becoming oppressed particularly by husband in drunken stage. Barren women without child become subject to dishonour in the society. A woman may be ill treated or oppressed due to her miss-conduct and character. Sometimes, it is seen that, women herself usually become oppressor instead of being oppressed. Daughter in-laws with better economic background and modern outlook from wealth families married to a son working in government service created tensions in the family. She for one reason or the other used to come into conflict with other members of the family. In these conflicts ultimately the son takes side of his wife. When the husband is the only earner, she gradually begins to control the family affairs and tension in the family grows. And slowly the bride herself turns to an oppressor and she becomes the factor of anxiety for the members of the family.

Employed women, on the other hand put rational domination on the family. Due to her education and economic position she enjoys comfortable position in the

family as well as in the society. A few women with irresponsible, mischievous, quarrelsome, jealous, and envious, cruel in nature create tensions not only in the family but also outside the family. Such type of Bodo woman is referred to as 'Rangkhini, Khangkhini, Mwnsari, Fansari, etc. Such type of women is generally avoided by the people in the society. The society gives due value to the quality of women but not on beauty which is reflected by the Bodo proverb, "*Mohora mwjang akhola angjang*, the meaning is *beautiful in form but ugly in characters*."<sup>64</sup>

In the words of Desai and Thakkar, "women's works is of tremendous value to family, society and state but it always remains invisible". According to them, "Women's contributions to economy remain hidden because their work especially in agriculture and in the unorganised sector remains unanimated."<sup>65</sup> The roles of Bodo women performed in the economic domain are in no way less than male counterparts. The Bodo society is a patriarchal society and so the contributions of the women are not duly recognised. "Men are bread winners, so, they, not the women, are head of the house hold."<sup>66</sup> But this statement is not appropriate in case of Bodo society. Because Bodo woman, leaving aside ploughing work in the agricultural land along with men. A woman produces her dresses and necessary cloths in the family by weaving. She helps the family economy by poultry farming, animal husbandry etc. Thus it is stated that from her minor age Bodo women play vital, effective and contributory roles to the family economy. Upala Baruah in her work on the economic life of the Karbi women remarks, "Daughters begin as soon as their strength permits to help their mother in all her works."<sup>67</sup> The poorer the household, the greater dependency on womens work for survival." Same is the case of Bodo women in poor families in rural areas. In newly settled poor families in reserved forest areas particularly in BTAD, the women play similar roles in survival

and continuity of the families. In traditional Bodo society agriculture is the primary and common occupation of all the families. There are instances of specialized occupations i.e. carpentry, bamboo crafts, pottery, weaving etc. In all the poor Bodo families of the society women play equal roles with male counterpart to the family economy. When a girl attains five or six year of age, she begins to play her roles as a baby sitter in the family. It is exception to only the families with wealth and property. She helps the families by moving light households articles from here and there as desired by the elder members of the families. With the increase of her ability and strength she begins to help her mother in all kinds of household works. Washing of pots and utensils, fetching of water from stream and well, brooming of floor and courtyard of the house, are her regular works. Her intention is towards becoming a 'good household worker'.

Traditional Bodo society is characterised by isolation, self sufficiency, self content economic life; distinctiveness and homogeneity, are the essential features of the little community as conceptualised by Robert Redfield. The introduction of new social structures or systems since the time of British rule in India has brought radical changes in structural and functional system of all traditional Indian societies. Changes have crept into the world views, mode of life, avenues of life, attitude of life, necessity of life, organisation and structure of society, material culture, value system, etc. of the society. Society is directed to new dimensions of social change i.e. development, welfare, progress, unity, peace etc. Indian societies have achieved a lot in general but the national policies for development has failed to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, advance communities and backward communities; they have created a new situation attributing to socio-economic backwardness of the scheduled communities of India. On the other hand new modes of life enhance the

level of consumption at the individual and family life. Under the above circumstances, the life of the tribal people turns miserable. Growth of population put tremendous pressure on land. Alienation of land by non-tribal community, encroachment, illiteracy and many other social, economic and political factors make these people displaced from their homeland and compelled to settle in a new reserved forest areas. Thus their socio-economic conditions become bad to worse.<sup>68</sup>

The deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the families degenerate the roles and statuses of the Bodo people in general and the Bodo women in particular, all these areas. Poor families in rural and forest reserve areas lead a very difficult life. Adult women support their family economy in different ways such as- animal husbandry, especially by poultry farming, piggery, silk rearing, weaving. Many women now adopt weaving as a profession. They take important roles in agriculture. Paddy plantations are completely done by women folk. They take care of vegetables garden in the family and also sell the domestic products in the market and they do shopping and marketing for daily consumption. The women of poor families, in order to meet the growing needs of the families of the time undertake the customary production of rice-beer for trade. The women from well to do families comparatively lead an easier life. They get their household works done by the maidservant. They take important role in the management of household works in the family and in taking care of their children.

At present Government of India provides to the people new domains of economic roles in the form of jobs in the public sector under different departments, in the private sector in different industries, entrepreneurs, and trade and business establishment etc. Educated Bodo women have also accepted these chances and got employed as government servants under different departments in the public or

private sectors. But the percentage of serving under government departments is less in comparison to the Bodo male counterparts. The status of employed Bodo women is better economically and socially than those who are engaged in agriculture. Employment is the symbol of economic status in itself and the sign of being educated.

In the Kachari history, the participation of queen Induprobha of Raja Gabinda Chandra indicated the participation of women in public affairs. Women played a very critical role as spies in the Kings' court. *Birgwshri* was an efficient woman who was appointed as a tax collector by *Jaolia Dewam* and she collected revenues from the people and paid it to the British government on behalf of the *Dewan*. *Gambari Shikla*, *Theng Pakri* and *Birgwshri* participated in the war against the British where they sacrificed their lives for the interest of the country, i.e., *Shikhnajhar*. *Bhaben Narzee* mentions two types of Councils: first one is '*Haden*' regional council consisting of twelve villages and '*Hasong*' the council of single village. The head of '*Haden*' is known as '*Hadung Gwra*' and the head of the village council '*Hasong*' is known as '*Hasung Gwra*'. No mention has been made about the participation of women in the affaire of the council. In the present village committee system also Bodo women have equal scope to play roles along with their male counterparts. In the real sense, women's participation in the public affairs was facilitated by the introduction of modern education. Educated Bodo women started to play their roles as well as a government employees i.e., teachers, clerks, officers, etc. Employment is indicative of ones education, economic position as well as of status and roles.<sup>69</sup> Higher the education, better the job, icome and status.

The formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and All Bodo Students' Union created a wide avenue enabling the mass people to interact with on important public

issues. A few educated women were incorporated as the members of executive committee of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the All Bodo Students' Union at different levels, and hundreds of others as supporters and general members. The educated women started taking part as writers, poets etc. During the time of Bodoland movement led by the ABSU, the allied organisations, the Bodo women's organisations ATWWF (All Assam Women Welfare Federation) and ABWWF (All Bodo women welfare Federation) came into existence. Through these organisations many Bodo women established their positions as leaders, social workers and politicians. So far two MLAs to Assam Legislative Assembly and one general council member to BTAD represent the ABWWF. The ABWWF, so far produced a number of prominent Bodo women leaders and social workers. This women organisation deals with important women issues in particular and also issues of common interest of the society. In apparent observation it seems that, ABWWF and other Bodo women organisations enjoy rights exercising their freedom given by the constitution of the country. But minute analysis of the activities of these women organisations shows that they are more or less dependent on men's organisation or parent organisations, and most of the time they are used by the parent organisations to execute their will. Recently only a few non-governments Bodo women's organisations and associations have emerged basically to exploit the benefits given by the state and central governments under various welfare schemes. But due to the illiteracy of the majority of the women of the society most of the beneficial schemes and policies are remain unused in the Bodo dominated areas. Therefore awareness campaign is very essential in the Bodoland areas in order to motivate the illiterate Bodo women about the policies and programme initiated by the central, state and the BTC government in Bodoland.

Majority of the Bodo people still practice their traditional religion, 'Bathou'. In this religion a number of deities are worshipped. Deities are divided into two categories i.e., household deities or '*Noni mwdai*' and village deities or '*Gamini mwdai*'. Village People often, very commonly, refer to another type of deities, which are known as '*Hagrani mwdai*'. In the propitiation of gods and goddesses, both man and women play very important roles. The priesthood is confined to male only. A priest does perform and initiates religious rites in community and family levels. In the propitiation of household deities' women take primary role. For the propitiation of household deities there are two types of altars '*bedi*' in every family, altar or '*bedi*' inside the '*Ishing* or '*Nomano*' or main house, the house of the northern side. On altar of the '*Ishing*' '*Mainao*' is propitiated by the women only. On the other hand another altar '*bedi*' is existed in the frontal side of courtyard of the house at the foot of the '*Sijou*' tree. Bamboo fencing is erected encircling the '*Sijou*' tree. The women everyday and regularly mop the altars with clean water and offer '*Gwthar dwi*' or '*Santidwi*', light '*bati*' or '*Alari*' and pay prayers to the deities. '*Mainao*' or '*Lakshmi*' is propitiated at the altar side the '*Ishing*' and '*Bura Bathou*' is propitiated at the altar of the frontal side of the house.<sup>70</sup>

Community rites are performed once or twice in a year. A priest performs and initiates rites. In these rites a selected woman performs the role of '*deodani*', which is considered as the symbol of spirit or deity. The '*douri*' or priest by chanting mantras, sprinkle '*Santidwi*' on the '*deodini*' and transformed her into a spiritual entity. She moves rounds and rounds around the altar by dancing and singing for a long time about three to four hours and she worshipped all the eighteen Gods and goddess installed in front of the altar of '*Bahtou*'.

Similar type of community rites is observed at the time of famine, epidemic and other crises of the society. In community rites both men and woman participate. A smaller segment of the Bodo population follows a peculiar type of '*Bathou*' religion, which is known as '*Moni Bathou*'. The founder of this religion is a woman. This is a religion blending of indigenous traditions from ancestral religion, '*Bathou*' and *Vedic* traditions from Hinduism. This religion follows smaller type of rites and ritual activities that are practiced in Hinduism, viz, Yajnas, Ahuti, Karma, Dharma sanskara etc. Basic principles of this religion are derived from Hinduism. Some traditions of ancestral religion constitute an integral part of this religion. The position of priesthood in any levels of hierarchical arrangement is opened for both man and woman. Women can preach, perform religious rites as Purahitas. A woman may attain the highest position of the priesthood by dint of her perfection and purity of higher religiosity. Women of the family perform every domestic Puja and propitiation of God Shiva and other household deities.<sup>71</sup>

The Bodo society has been relatively free from many inhibitions' as found in many parts of India. Bodo women are known for the skill of weaving cloths not only for the members of the family but also for the community as a whole, and even these cloths have high demand in the market. The evil of dowry system has not plagued the society. However, recently the practice is now slowly trying to creep in the society. In Bodo society divorce is allowed and there is no restriction on widows as far as their food, dress, etc. as it is found in Hindu families in other parts of India. Women in Bodoland enjoy a higher status as compared to the greater Indian society; the caste-society of this region is devoid of practices like dowry, child-marriage and bride burning, that are rampant in most parts of India. The economic dependence of women on men is an acknowledged reason for the low status of women. Even

though the illiterate women have to work hard for a longer period, their work remains invisible and marginal. Women's physical labour which remains invisible is not counted as work. A majority of women work force in rural and urban is unorganised sector. Education is considered as a potent instrument through which the process of modernisation of the society could be affected. As most of women are illiterate and unskilled, they have options only to join informal sectors like handloom, handicrafts, bidi factory, construction work, garments and domestic work. Consequently they have to remain stagnant in their jobs and they are always uncertain of their services. New education policy gives importance to women literacy. Powerful effect of education can be observed very distinctly among the educated families. The rapid growth of English medium schools and also the increased number of students indicates clearly the concern of educator parents for better education of their children in Bodoland. The impact of education is seen in the life style and the size of the family. Generally, working parents prefer single family, willing to enjoy greater freedom of association and movement. Educated girls exposed to wider worlds are changing their view with regard to marriage and life style. The effect of modernisation has been evidenced in Bodo families also. Girls are generally married at a mature age and a sizeable number of educated girls are against arranged marriage and prefer to select their spouses.

It is a fact that the working women suffer from role conflict in a conservative society and in the traditional families. Some working women have to withstand unbearable burdens in the form of physical and mental strains in discharging their responsibilities in their families as well as in their jobs. Generally illiterate women are engaged in low skill, low wage, low productive and unsecured and unorganised sector which keeps them in the marginalisation of occupation. The National

Perspective Plan for Women has recognised eight employment areas for rural women in the state namely - agriculture, dairy, farming, cattle rearing, fishery, handlooms and also in handicrafts and sericulture. Supportive services and other programmes need to be provided to adult learners, working mothers and young girls.

The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) recommends 30% reservation for women in legislature, other administrative bodies and positions of power as a temporary measure. Such a step will definitely encourage women to participate in diverse fields of activities and this will go a long way in accelerating the development process of women in Assam, particularly the Bodo women. As education and development of women are associated with joint endeavours of different agencies, maintenance of women's cell in every ministry and department with definite resources and targets for development of women would help in arranging training and education programmes and support services for women.

The supply of work effort by women in partnership with men has characterised the development of every society. Though the number of female workers has increased in Bodoland, the status of Bodo women has not changed to the desired extent. Technological advancement has not been able to diversify the work participation of women particularly among the uneducated and rural areas. In rural sector, though agriculture and allied activities account for the heaviest concentration of labour for both male and female workers, the proportion of the work force is much more for women than for men in this occupation. Women, particularly in rural workforce, have to be engaged in innumerable jobs like growing vegetables for home consumption, preparing fodder and rearing cattle, cooking and working in cottage industry together with extreme painstaking operations relating to crop production and processing like pre-harvest plantation and post-harvest operation of parboiling,

drying, de-husking, storage of paddy, preparation of seeds and the like. All the sweating jobs are done by the female workers, but the position of women would not change because men have the primary control of cash and income generating assets.

Though the Bodo women continue to be engaged in their traditional occupations in a changed market, still these women workers are ill-paid in almost all occupations. The poorest categories of working poor and low-paid wage earners are largely females. It is worthwhile to mention that women in poor peasant and labour families suffer a larger calorie deficiency than men not only because of lower food intake but also because of larger energy expenditure, mostly in domestic and gathering tasks like fetching water, fuel etc.

In Bodoland a large number of women are employed in the private sector. The number of women engaged in organised sector is reasonably high as compared to total number of women employed as compared to other states. Tea plantation is the single largest employer in the state providing employment to more than 40% women. Tea plantation is largely agro-based and labour intensive. The pattern of female employment in tea plantation obviously enhances the social and job security of the tea labourers working in Assam. After tea, factories constitute large segment of organised working population in Bodoland. Besides tea and factory, shops and establishment also constitute a good number of women workers.

Poverty and unemployment are two important economic problems in rural areas of Bodoland, as most of the people live in rural areas and the pressure of population on land is acute, the problem of finding jobs for surplus population has become difficult. Therefore the role of handloom and weaving to generate employment and their contribution to the rural family income is immensely important.

It is no denying the fact that from time immemorial the Handloom industry has been playing a vital role in the economy of the Bodo. The most important household industry run by the Bodo women is handloom and weaving. The traditional skill of handloom and weaving was not only a status symbol of women folk of the Bodos but also an indispensable aspect of the socio-economic life of the Bodo community.

Handloom and sericulture industries provide opportunities for employment to a large number of people, next to agriculture only. Thus a good number of Bodo women particularly in rural areas give the output of handloom products. In Bodo society weaving activities are mainly done by women, who offer helping hand to their male counterparts during the agricultural work. This state of affairs leads us to believe that weaving has not been adopted as commercial proposition and from that point, persons engaged in weaving operations may be designated as 'Kisans cum Weavers'. Only a few weavers particularly in the district head quarters have taken up weaving as a commercial proposition.

Endi is one of the important household industries for women in rural areas, while Muga and Silk industries are found in selected areas. As the demand for various products made from Endi, Muga and Silk are increasing, such industries should be revived or expanded by providing credit and marketing facilities and also technical guidance so that more and more Bodo women can join in weaving industries and be benefited from these factories. There is huge demand for muga sarees, muga shawls, endi shawls, silk sarees, pat sarees, etc. in the domestic as well as foreign markets. Besides, Bodo women in rural and urban areas have already taken up tailoring, embroidery and knitting professionally in many parts of the Bodoland. Therefore, it is the government of Assam and the government of BTC to provide financial as well as technical trainings to the Bodo women to be

professionally competent to face any kind of challenges or competitions. So that a large numbers of Bodo women's will be commercially well established in these activities.

With the gradual spread of education, the women of BTC and Assam in some urban areas have learned effectively to overcome the inhibitions they had so long and are now participating in all kinds of activities and competitions with their counterparts of other states and even countries. This is not only boosting up their self-confidence and morale but also inspiring a number of unemployed women of the state. Until and unless economic status of the rural women who constitute half of the population can be raised by providing more additional employment and income, it would be difficult to eliminate rural poverty in Bodoland (BTC). The rural women of Bodoland should be brought to participate in the main streams of development activities by initiating extension of education and training facilities in rural areas. Dr. Radhakrishnan says, "the most important role a woman plays and will continue to play, is that of home-maker, but this be done best only when she is educated". If these women are educated, they will be able to manage the economy of the family, educate and inculcate good morals in her children and maintain a healthy balance in all her relations in the society. Therefore the all round development in BTC (Bodoland) will be possible only if the income and standard of living of women, particularly in rural areas is developed.

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## CHAPTER - 4

### Bodo Women in Work Force in Bodoland

It is well known fact that women occupy low status in society through the historical process of discrimination. There are several ways in which women are denied equal opportunities and one of them is denying girls their rightful access to education<sup>1</sup>. In this chapter, an attempt is made to understand the nature of work that the Bodo women do and how it is valued. It is hoped that this understanding will help to give a high priority to the education of girls so that women's work does not continue to be devalued.

The contribution of Bodo women to household and community work as well as to the economy of the family and the society is very crucial and significant. However, policy makers and the male dominated society have consistently ignored this contribution over the years. "One important indicator of the economic growth of any country is the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The GDP is the total output of goods and services for final use produced by an economy by both residents and non-residents. This output Goods (agricultural, manufacturing and cottage) and services (financial and insurance) are expressed in monetary terms. This figure is a good indicator about the state of any economy. However, since women's work is devalued, their contribution to the national economy and to the GDP has been consistently ignored and still does not find a place in the computing of national accounts in many countries.<sup>2</sup> Women, a weaker and oppressed section, are important segment of the Indian society. Although the neglect and discrimination of

women hardly exist in the Bodo society, it is very common to other Indian society in different parts of the states<sup>3</sup>.

As per the society of India is concerned, male superiority and female inferiority is more or less accepted norms. It is believed that women are physically weak, intellectually poor, mentally inconsistent, timid and irrational and psychologically unstable<sup>4</sup>. In the traditional Bodo society it is considered that a woman cannot exist without the protection and supervision of a man who is supposed to be physically strong, assertive, intelligent and calculative. Hence, it is often felt that marriage is the only option open to women. Within the marriage framework, the husband and his family control all outside relationships. Women are dependent on the goodwill of their husbands and most often they have no independent financial standing. But the fact is that, 'Women are the main providers for one-third of all families in the world and two thirds of the poorest. Three-fourths of the world's micro-entrepreneurs are women and in low income countries, women produce between sixty and eighty percent of the food for local consumption'.<sup>5</sup>

According to anthropologists and some historians, women are the major producers of food, textile and handicrafts throughout human history and continue to provide a major labour input where production is still in small scale subsistence sector. Most of the women's work is either not visible or is only partially accounted for in the data on workforce participation. The component of women's work includes housework, paid and unpaid work related to home based craft activities, family enterprise or business and paid work outside home. The kind of work women attend is determined by women's position in the society and family's location in the social hierarchy. Women's work also differ according to age, gender, income, occupational group, location (rural/urban), size and structure of the family.<sup>6</sup> As women's work is

mostly for self consumption, much of the work that they do is not recognised as 'work' in the national income statistics. In the Bodo society Bodo women are engaged in cooking, housekeeping, child care, fetching fuel wood and water, collection of forest products, care of livestock, house repair and maintenance, storing grains, preparation and preservation of foods etc. Much of the work which is important for the maintenance of families is largely done by women in the Bodo society.<sup>7</sup>

To understand the nature and extent of Bodo women's work, it is important to make the distinction between the *productive work* (wage works) and *reproductive work* (the child-bearing and household works) that women do and the value that is assigned to each of these. It is observed that in ancient pre-historic societies the barter system was the norms, transactions took place on the basis of exchange value. But modernisation has led to a market economy in which cash transactions have assumed paramount importance and non-cash transactions have been devalued."<sup>8</sup> Therefore in present world, greater value is given to *productive work* and if any product or service does not have cash value then it is valueless. Much of the work that women do is unpaid i.e. the *reproductive works* like that of childbearing and rearing, cleaning, washing, cooking, fetching water, collection of fire wood, collection of vegetables and fruits from forest, caring children, agriculture, feeding animals, handicrafts, preparation of rice beer etc. The fact that the work of Bodo women are sustaining and maintaining the human race is completely ignored and rendered valueless by the society.<sup>9</sup>

"Mr. Mayo goes to the doctor" a story goes like:

"What is your job?" Doctor asked.

"I am a farmer," replied Mr. Mayo.

"Have you any children?" The doctor asked.

"God has not been good to me. Out of 15 born, only 9 *alive*," Mayo answered.

"Does your wife work?"

"No she stays at home."

"I see. How does she spend her days?"

"Well, she gets up at four in the morning, fetches water and wood, makes the fire, cooks breakfast and cleans the homestead. Then she goes to the river and washes cloths. Once a week she walks to the grinding mill. After that she goes to the township with the two small children where she sells tomatoes by the road side while she knits. She buys what' she wants from the shops. Then she cooks the midday meal."

"Do you come home at midday?"

"No, she brings the meal to me about three kilometres away."

"And after that?"

"I go home for supper which my wife has prepared."

"Does she go to bed after supper?"

"No, she has thing to do around the house until 9 or 10."

"But I thought you said your wife doesn't work."

"Of course she doesn't work. I told you she stays at home."<sup>10</sup>

The devaluing of women's reproductive work has a bearing on the productive work that women do as the story of Dr. Mayo above shows. Let us try to understand how much women's productive labour is also devalued. A patriarchal society has not only identified the mode of behaviour that men and woman must conform by but has defined women's work roles as well. Similarly, in the handloom and weaving industry, women do all the work related to preparing yarn, while men are in charge of the actual weaving. This phenomenon, which has been defined by scholars as the gender division of labour, restricts and confines men and women within specific work roles and more importantly, ascribes greater value to the work that men do. It completely negates the fact that women work for longer hours since they bear the burden of both productive and reproductive work. Division of gender labour results in great wage differentials between men and women which regrettably the law and policy makers have done little to change.

The constitutional provision today makes it clear that women have equal rights with them in all spheres of life. The age old suppression of women by men has been put to an end at least constitutionally. Women are free like men to choose any form of education and training to equip them for a career. The constitution not only gives equality in education to women but it also assures equal opportunity to women in matters of public appointments. It says, "there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment and appointment to any office under the state and no citizen shall, on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, residence or any of these be ineligible for or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the state". Plans and programmes should be formulated not merely to educate women for new responsibilities and provide them with

opportunities for employment in public life but also to promote an entirely new set of attitudes and values concerning the role and status of women.<sup>11</sup>

Present Indian society is a society dominated by values and agenda where women's labour has been viewed only as subsidiary labour a derivative of male labour. What is even of greater concern is that women's contributory role in society economy and polity have seldom been acknowledged by policy makers and social thinkers. In fact, since their inception, the social sciences have been dominated by men and as a logical extension have been equally dominated by the assumption of male supremacy as a social constant, a universal fact of psychological and biological life. It was almost forgotten that human being consisted of women too. History was written from the perspective of *mankind*. 'She' was sometimes glimpsed in some history text books, that too perhaps because her achievements were considered significant by male standards. Thus, women in history, have by and large remained invisible or have been added in but never be a part of theory construction or the historiography research agenda which has remained 'rational', 'scientific' and 'universal'.<sup>12</sup>

In Bodoland, sericulture sector has long been dominated by women and it has remained largely house hold based. In fact, the art of sericulture was known to Bodo women from the age of two epics and if not earlier. *Endi or Muga*, the golden yellow silk is mostly associated with Assam and it is in the weaving of this silk that the Bodo or Assamese women are renowned. "However it was Suaulkuchi, a village located on the northern bank of Brahmaputra that developed into an important silk weaving centre and came to be known as the '*Manchester of Assam*'. This industry is completely dominated by women folks for centuries.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the appreciative references to the Bodo women's weaving silk, however, there has been little attempt till date to undertake studies in this sector that make women's role in this sector as their main concern. While the historians of this region mentioned that the Bodo (Assamese) women were skilled weavers, no attempt has been made to understand the women as socially productive workers. This is because an inherent gender bias exists regarding the concept of labour itself. Feminists feel that in order to understand women in their specific historical conditions, we must examine the kind of work they perform, the way in which labour is organised and the social relations that women form with others and with men as a result of their labour and its mode of organisation.<sup>14</sup>

Women are taking up jobs due to various reasons. A few women work as sole supporters of the family while others work as additional bread of the family. Generally women face lots of problems in seeking employment. The Report of National Committee on the Status of Women (1975)<sup>15</sup>, pointed out that the statutory provisions of maternity benefits and welfare facilities like crèches and separate sanitary conveniences constituted a negligible expenditure to the establishments. Similarly the private establishments by and large have stopped recruiting women as they argue that when there is a choice between an equally competent men and women, why not they should prefer a man who does not need maternity leave and would not present his employees with the above said problem.<sup>16</sup>

Studies have shown that many cities and a number of industrial organisations do advertise for the post or posts exclusively meant for male applicants. Studies have also shown that when women apply for traditionally male jobs, they tend to get rejected at the initial stage of selection by screening and short listing the job

applications. In case they are called for an interview either by mistake or otherwise, they in general tend to get lower evaluation in the selection process.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of these factors women are compelled to seek employment due to many reasons. The Ministry of Labour, Government of India has pointed out that whatsoever is the stage of economic or social development of a country, four factors which led women to join the work force prevail. They are: Inadequate income of the principal earner which forces women to work and supplement the income; mishaps such as incapacity of the bread – winner, death of the bread winner and a woman desires for economic independence or for securing a higher standard of living.<sup>18</sup> There is also a desire on the part of the women to give expression to her talents and skills. Some other studies have brought to light the fact that loneliness is a powerful motive for women to seek employment outside their homes.

In BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council) also their importance as a work force has been either neglected or misrepresented. Many activities of Bodo women in economically gainful work are either given no recognition or not properly represented in the statistical data of traditional perception of male-female relationship. Even if they get employment after undergoing all the hurdles, they are made to abide by the traditional perception of male-female relationship. They find it difficult to interact as they have been trained to listen, obey and leave decision making to men in the family or in the business situation. It is also felt that they pose special problems to their employers because of their high absenteeism and turn over by rejecting promotions and resisting transfers etc.

In order to evaluate the value of Home Work, two methods of approach can be applied. The first method is the '*Opportunity Cost Approach*', which sets the value

of work done at home equal to the income the person could earn in the labour market. The second one is the '*Market Cost Approach*', which uses the cost of hiring some one to do the house work to determine its value. Women, who has been raised to consider a career unacceptable for a good wife and mother, she may chose to forgo high salary to be full time home maker. This doesn't necessarily mean that her work at home is worth as much as her work in the market would be.<sup>19</sup> The value of house work done by the Bodo women cannot be exactly determined and cannot be accurately measured. As there is no time limit in the case of house work, so almost one-third of the day, women remain engaged in the family for the development and welfare of the family members. Bodo women help in running the family in a planed and systematic way. In the Bodo family, be it rich or poor, without women, a family can not be a complete family. So the importance of women in the family cannot be underestimated whether she is literate or illiterate.

We often observe in the labour market the value of per hour is calculated in their salary or wages but the society does not try to identify the value of work per hour at home. Because in case of home, no money is paid per hour. So in our eyes they are doing only their duties. It is exception in the case of self employed women who are doing different types of work sitting at home and they are getting their remuneration. The labour of Bodo women in their houses certainly enables men to produce more wealth than they could otherwise and in this way women are economic factors in the society. Women could become emancipated through participation in the labour market and we can put forward some arguments against the relation of the traditional family institution because of the way in which it exploited women. Women's work should be supported or respected as it is always an important standard of measurement of women's status, especially when their labour

is remunerated with wage and also, the presence of women in the paid labour force reflect the level of society's development.<sup>20</sup>

In Bodo society, the participation of women in the labour force is not only desirable but also essential because it increase the level of food availability, nutrition, productivity and creates essential demands. Women's participation in the labour market also determines the structure of the household and the relationship within the family. It also results in the reduction in female fertility and improvement in the quality of lives. Thus, we can undoubtedly say that women's participation in labour force seems to lead to multidimensional utilities relating to personal, economic, social health and welfare sectors. The historical tracing of women's status has revealed that they had higher status in horticultural societies than in agricultural and industrial societies. With industrialization much productive activities were shifted from home to the factories and to the office.<sup>21</sup>

In rural and backward areas of Bodoland (BTC) majority of Bodo women are illiterate and women work forces were involved in agricultural and other unskilled activities. This is also true that in case of urban and developed areas, where the majority of women are engaged in unskilled labour, mostly involved in menial labour services and hence remain unskilled throughout their work lives. Increased work-participation of women is considered as one of the remedies to elevate their position in the society. The work participation rate decreases as the educational level at secondary level of education registers a sudden upward trend to graduation level and above. Inequality exists today because one gender has only one kind of responsibility and the other, another kind. Education still is considered as a major mechanism which can be used to transform social and economic status specially

that of women, who because of social sanctions are denied access to many spheres of work dominated by men.<sup>22</sup>

Low literacy level among females even after more than six decades of independence and technological advancement in the world is another important phenomenon showing the poor status of women in the society. Education broadens one's outlook and a woman can better understand about her rights and positions in surrounding environment. According to former Secretary General, UNO, Boutros Boutros Ghali, "Without progress in the situation of women there can be no true social development. Human rights are not worthy of the name, if they exclude the female, half of humanity. The struggle for women's equality is part of the struggle for a better world for all human beings and all societies." Equality means equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities to men and women in all spheres of life. This can not be achieved until there are equal accessibilities for boys and girls of the education and development of their personal ambitions, interests and talents.<sup>23</sup>

Due to the influence of education in Bodoland, Bodo women have started to break the shackles and those women who are economically hard pressed, get engaged in remunerative jobs and also those who wish to live a socially useful life and subsist on the family income, seek employment. They have now realised that work gives them better personal status and an independent social standing. Time has come now to recognise the untiring efforts put in by women folk in keeping the home front in better way, keeping in mind not only the present requirement of the home and society but also nurturing the children to grow as worthy citizens of the future world. Although in the Bodo society, families' money generally comes from the male members of the family, the contribution of the women of the family in enabling the men-folk to go outside for earning is significant and treated equal.<sup>24</sup>

In recent time women, who were till then not in the employment market are exercising the second option of career, thus exchanging an absolute reliance on their spouses' earnings for a more diversified, personally and mutually enriched sharing of earning responsibilities. As for sharing of household responsibilities it cannot be categorically stated that it is always women's responsibility. In most cases of working women, they are the first generation earning members and there is adjustment by family members, though the extent of help and degree of adjustability are not uniform in all cases. The future generation of working women will gain much more supportive influence from the family once the working women concept becomes a *fait accompli*. Society is slow to accept women in the professional arena and it is 'lamented that norms have not changed' because of any changing attitudes of women to work. Much of the general viewpoint is that working outside home disturbs family life and gives rise to neglect of children and family responsibilities. But in most cases the cohesiveness of families and family values has been strengthened according to them. Career women add to domestic income and are more self confident than entirely domesticated women. Women with only domestic responsibilities, cannot add to income or bring the 'know how' of modern socio-economic institutional conditions outside the home.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the spread of literacy and modernisation, all the women do not want to work. Mostly they depend on their individuality and family considerations get priority over a career. Personal aspirations, social conventions and economic circumstances appear to be and often conditioned to be mutually inter-dependent. A balancing of options of women is shape by family background and circumstances, age of children, employment opportunities and the overall cultural milieu.

The primary wave of social change of Bodoland is reflected in terms of the rising age of marriage, smaller families, urbanisation, migration, rising costs and standard of living. These act as very effective socio-economic factors, pushing women into the economic mainstream and changing and also extending their roles and responsibilities. The secondary wave of social change activities emerges from the increase in the proportion of women in the labour force, and because of such a wave, new social welfare services are called forth to deal with the management of home and children.<sup>26</sup>

In India, women constitute 48.2% (33 cores out of 68.4 cores) of the total population, according to 1981 census. But the percentage of women in the total labour is only 20.8%, whereas in developed countries it ranges from 30 % to 45%. The work participation rate for females increased from 15.9% in 1971 to 23.09% in 1981 in the rural areas of the country thereby showing increasing participation of women in economic activities during the decade of 1971-1981. Roughly every fifth women is a worker as against every second man. The primary sector (farming, livestock, forestry, plantation, orchards etc.) provides work for about 83% of women and 46% of them work as agricultural labourers; 33% are cultivators.<sup>27</sup>

Agriculture remains the major economic activities of the Bodo women in BTC as well as of the women of other parts of the country. According to census of 1971, 80.1% of women workers are found in agriculture. In rural areas they constitute 87% of the female work force. Next to agriculture, because of their labour intensive character, handlooms, handicrafts and rural industries play a vital role in providing work opportunities for women. The low literacy percentage (1981) of women at 22.88% as compared to 47% among men also contributes to the limited employment opportunities of the former. Lack of technical knowledge and skill limit

their participation to 16% in the tertiary sector (such as construction, trade and commerce, transportation and storage communication and other services). The participation rate of women in Khadi and village industries is around 45%. Their participation is significant especially in spinning of cotton, wool and silk, manufacturing of fancy and utility articles in fibre industry, cottage industries, processing of cereals and pulses, etc.<sup>28</sup>

In Bodoland, rural sector is dominant with 90% of its population living in 3,000 villages. Out of total workers 77% are engaged in agriculture and its allied activities. Female population is a significant force in Bodoland. The long term trend in the economic activities of females in rural areas of Bodoland indicates that females continue to concentrate the primary sectors. The number of women workers is higher in agriculture than in other sectors of industry. In plantation and allied activities females work in the same capacity as that of males. The increase in the number of workers in agriculture as compared to non-agriculture is more marked in the case of females than that of male workers.

It is evident that Bodo women are losing their occupational participation in cottage industry and agriculture. One reason is that in the post independence period, there has been rapid growth in the modern and organised sector of the industry. The role of household industry declined rapidly. The household industry provided the biggest source of self employment to women and they are the greatest victims of the process of economic transformation. They had to face competition from the factory production. In such circumstances, it is necessary to train women for handling new technologies; demonstration cum training centres should be established in urban as well as rural areas to enable women entrepreneurs to learn simple technologies of their interest. This would not only promote self employment

among women, but would also generate employment opportunities for the entire female workforce who have been displaced in traditional agricultural employment due to mechanisation and improved economy.

In Bodoland, for rural Bodo women, therefore, new initiatives are particularly urgent in matters of agricultural production, cottage and small scale industry, credit, marketing, energy, technology, potable water supply, sanitation; non-agricultural occupations have assumed greater importance in acting as the main source of income. Moreover, rural women face problems in engaging in income generating activities because of their illiteracy or lack of modern education and training. In addition to this, their time consuming responsibilities within the household like the preparation of food, fetching of fuel and water, caring for animals, rearing of child, house keeping, etc. marginalised them even further from access to education and training.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, rural development still continues to be largely discussed in terms of agricultural development only. But it is obvious that rural industrial development equally deserves increased attention as being an important source of employment and income. Rural industries if promoted, could supply goods suitable to local market conditions, utilising locally available raw materials and skills. These industries would also provide opportunities to investing surplus rural labour together with satisfying and refining local entrepreneurial initiatives. When such varied activities are established closer to rural areas, rural-urban flow of migration would also increase substantially<sup>30</sup> Thus, economic independence of this nature would accelerate an improvement in the status of Bodo women in Bodoland.

The long term objective of the development programmes for women during the Seventh Five Year Plan was to raise their economic and social status in order to bring them into the mainstream of national development. The basic approach was to inculcate confidence among women and bring about awareness of their own potential. During the Eight Five Year Plan, programme designed to bring about improvement in the status of women comprised a condensed course of education for adult women and vocational training, support of training and employment programmes for women, setting up women's development corporations in states and the like.

The National Policy of Education adopted in 1986 devised various strategies for women's emancipation and bringing equality between sexes through education. It was proposed to encourage educational institutions to take up such programmes which directly benefit and give empowerment to women. For women, children are the greatest emotional liability, for the sake of whom they have to sacrifice their own advancement. Employment opportunities for women will be said to be negative if they cannot find a job of their own choices, merits and educational backgrounds at their own places, keeping the pace between the family and career advancement. As it has been said earlier, mere legislations and enacted laws cannot achieve the desired goal unless there is required environment and no gender bias.<sup>31</sup> Family as well as society has to change their attitude towards girls and women and take care of their emotional, economic, social and other needs in addition to governmental efforts.<sup>33</sup>

Ninth Plans intends to take special measures to improve human development. For this purpose, extension of education and health care to the weaker and underprivileged sections received special priority in the Ninth Plan. The under

privileged sections include women, schedule castes, schedule tribes and the like. 33% reservation for women in employment, which was announced by the Government of India recently, is considered a boon for their upliftment.<sup>34</sup> However, achievement expressed in terms of demographic and employment characteristics show the position of women to be unequal. This reflects the limitations of the law to bring about substantial change. The law assumes and reinforces the conventional notions of women as having a primary responsibility to the family and motherhood and the need to preserve these roles. Majority of men are even now not quite reconciled to women's working outside home and this is considered one of the reasons for women's slow progress. This may be because male vanity fed by centuries of tradition is not ready to accept a measure of financial independence and self assurance among women. But the old resistance to not letting women to work is being eroded by the economic imperatives of high standard of living. It has come to be realised that the working women are an asset to a middle class family without being a serious embarrassment, as long as she abides by the general decorum of the family.<sup>35</sup>

In spite of initiatives taken by the Government of India, the position of Bodo women in labour market is not attractive in Bodoland. Bodo women feel that they are capable of discharging duties assigned to other kinds of jobs that are available. Further, majority of them feel that they are not only capable of doing things properly but also can perform the assigned work as good as men. They are not only confident about the performance and discharge of the assigned duties but they do want to have equal opportunities with men to prove their competence in all possible walks of life, in every profession and in all occupations.

Thus, it has to be recognised that Bodo women today can no longer be regarded as the weaker sex and discriminated as second grade citizens. To improve their status more, proper attention is needed to eradicate illiteracy among Bodo women. It is also equally important to motivate women to work as equal partners of economic development. For assuring equality, dignity, justice, prosperity and stability, the contribution of Bodo women has to be viewed in a wider perspective in Bodoland and particularly in the Bodo society.

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## CHAPTER-5

### Response of Bodo Women in Bodoland Movement

There are number of movements in which Bodo women participated along with their male counterparts in Assam. During the Ahom period they protested against the monarchical oppression of Ahom Kings<sup>1</sup>. According to A. Guha, in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, tea garden labours called a strike which compelled the British tea Garden owners to enhance the daily wages of the tea garden labours. He mentions that the Bodo (Kochari) labourers constituted a substantial portion of tea garden labourers and they actively participated in labours movement<sup>2</sup>. Other movement of 20th century includes labour strikes at Dhubri Match Box Company in 1928-36 and Digboi Oil Company in 1939, Sharecroppers Movement in 1950-55, Brahma Movement, Script Movement, Bodoland movement, etc<sup>3</sup>.

According to T.S. Deka, the Tribal League and Tribal Sangha were popular organisations of the Bodos and some of its members joined the sharecropper's movement Assam in 1950s<sup>4</sup>. According to Bhupen Boro, all communities of Assam joined the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) of Assam, founded by Sumendra Nath Thakur and Pannalal Dasgupta 1950. Some of the young and dedicated RCP leaders of Assam were Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Aniram Basumatary, Bipin Daimary, Prakash Basumatary, Samar Brahma Chaudhury, Rati Swargoyari, Balo Basumatary, Rajni Rabha, Sarat Rabha, Mohini Brahma and Sital Chandra Basumatary<sup>5</sup>.

During the Sharecroppers Movement of Assam a number of Bodo women had participated. Among them Basanti Basumatary, Khope Basumatary, Rasmi

Swargiary and Ashwini Basumatary were prominent Bodo women members of the RCP. Under their leadership they founded Nari Mukti Sangathan in some districts particularly in Nalbari, Goalpara and Kamrup<sup>6</sup>. The movement for equal distribution of cultivable lands for landless peasants created a sensation among the peasants of Assam. Beside, the implementation of the land ceiling law and settlement of seven hundred sharecroppers' families in the grazing reserves at Baksa Mouza etc. are important demand of the RCP in Assam.<sup>7</sup> The Bodo peasants of Mushalpur, the present district of Baksa launched a movement to open grazing reserves in Baksa (Jopadong area) for the landless peasants. Along with the leaders of RCP, Nari Mukti Sangahtan mobilised one village to another village and conducted number of meetings and discuss their problems and made people aware of their rights. During the movement the RCP leaders also protested against preparation and consumption of country liquor (rice beer).<sup>8</sup>

In 1969, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) was founded and it started their movement from 1979-84; it is known as People Agitation or AASU movement. It gained momentum with the participation of women folks of Assam. Women were the moving force behind this remarkable movement in Assam. In any process of movement like- mass rally, dharna, strike and procession women participation would not be less than 80% of the total participants. Barthakur and Goswami describe a dharna at midnight in front of Oil India in Guwahati where about 1500 men and women picketed to prevent crude oil from being pumped out of the Bongaigaon and Barauni refineries.<sup>9</sup>

The issues have been apparently different in each such struggle but there was an underlying structure in all of them which was a desire to carve out a safe niche for them. They wanted to recognise what they wanted for whether it was a

matter of land, language, script, autonomy or religion. In their long agitation with the state, women have been silently supporting their men. But in recent past, in the Bodo Movement women's participation has been more visible than earlier participation.

Prior to the establishment of British rule in India, the existence of the Bodo and other allied societies were on the verge of extinction. A social change was oriented to structural assimilation either to Hinduism or Islam. For centuries, tradition of structural assimilation as a process of social change remained as a popular tradition among the Bodo. The new condition initiated by British Government in India totally changed the traditional mindset of the people not only of the Bodo but also all sections of the people of India. Due to new liberal intellectual conditions set by the British rule, the Bodo people developed the sense of self-respect, identity consciousness of their society, pride and honour of their community and soon they reassert their community identities. They started to reassert their community identity by reviewing and restructuring their lost history, culture, tradition, custom and language etc.

#### **ABSU Bodoland Movement:**

The burden of leading the Bodo people towards a decisive stage in their quest for social, political, economic and cultural autonomy finally fell on the shoulder of young, dynamic and dedicated ABSU leader, late Upendra Nath Brahma who is better known as '*Bodofa*' or '*Father of the Bodo*'. Upendra Nath Brahma was elected president of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) on May 31<sup>st</sup> 1986 in its 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference held at Rawta in Darrang district (present Udalguri district). Under his presidentship, the ABSU demanded Union Territory for the Bodo and other plains tribal on the northern part of Brahmaputra Valley. Thus in order to meet their legal

demands the ABSU formally launched a vigorous movement on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1987 for a separate state by holding mass rallies in all the district headquarters of the State<sup>10</sup>.

On 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1988 an umbrella organisation of the ABSU called Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) was formed to secure the support and participation of all sections of the Bodo society irrespective of their political affiliations. Other organisations that played significant roles during the Bodoland movement of the ABSU were the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AAWWF) which was later renamed as All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF) and the All Bodo Employees Federation (ABEF). Thus, ABSU-BPAC combined Bodo organisation received massive support from every member of the Bodo community in the entire state. This movement continued for six years and came to an end formally with the signing of the Bodoland Accord on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1993<sup>11</sup>.

Bodoland movement of the ABSU has been analysed from different angles. According to Bhattacharjee, the movement for autonomy of the Bodo started in 1939 under the aegis of the Tribal League. The formation of 'Tribal League' is described by her as a bold attempt of the tribal population of the plains of Assam<sup>12</sup>. Chaudhury identifies 1967 as the year of emergence of this movement, following the formation of the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA). According to him, the first memorandum submitted by PTCA to the Prime Minister of India in 1967 marks the beginning of the demand for autonomy, though the degree was left unspecified<sup>13</sup>.

The decision of the ABSU to demand statehood in 1987 marked a new phase of the movement. The failures of the PTCA, PTCA (P) and UTNLF were recounted to justify its demand for Bodoland<sup>14</sup>. It was in this movement that a large number of

Bodo women participated and acted in different capacities to meet the demand of the ABSU. According to them there were large number of protest rallies, meetings, dharna and strike by the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) and the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU). But the movement of Roman script led by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha had left the most enduring impression on the Bodo women. It was the first Bodo movement, in which the Bodo women, coming out from their homes, joined the script movement. The All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) leaders like Malati Rani Narzary, Hirabai Narzary, Supriya Basumatary, Mira Rani Basumatary and some others actively participated in the 'Roman script' movement led by the BSS and some them were arrested and punished by the Assam Police<sup>15</sup>.

#### **Response of Bodo Women:**

The participation of Bodo women in the earlier movement of the Bodos was very negligible. Bodo women's response was noticeable only from the movement for implementation of the Roman script launched by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) in 1974. During the Bodoland movement of the ABSU, under the leadership of late Upendra Nath Brahma, the participation of the Bodo women became more prominent and it helped the movement in various ways.

As per the ABSU movement is concerned two trends noticeable: one trend is non violent protests through organising mass rallies, processions, protest rallies, hunger strike, road blocked, etc. and the other trend was violent in nature. All Bodo Students' Union established a military wing known as *Volunteer Force* to conduct armed struggle. It worked as an underground wing of the ABSU movement. Its activities were bomb blasts at public places, extortion of money, looting arms and ammunitions from armed forces and Police station, firing on security personnel etc.

During the movement member of volunteer force worked as soldiers of the Bodos. The ABSU and BVF leaders felt it necessary to recruit women members in the VF to carry out the activities. The strong action was taken by the Government of Assam as well as the central Government against the members of the ABSU and BVF compelled to recruit women members. Since its inception, Bodo women were part and parcel of the movement. Therefore, they also felt it utmost necessary to help the activities of the ABSU and BVF for the cause of Bodos by joining armed struggle and accordingly joined in arms training. So from 1989 onwards, Bodo women joined in the Volunteers Force but they were not involved directly in action. They were given training for firing of rifles and pistols for their own safety. They were trained particularly to carry messages and other necessary articles. A sizable number of Bodo women from different areas in Assam received nursing training in the rural primary health centres for treatment of their members in case of emergency. But the recruitment of women in BVF was not consulted or informed by the BVF leaders. Therefore, some of the women leaders and members did not know the joining of Bodo women in BVF. So, the joining of Bodo women in the BVF was criticised by the AATWWF on the ground that the young Bodo girls in the BVF might face problem in matter of their social marriage. In spite of criticism by the AATWWF, the BVF continued with their armed training to Bodo women<sup>16</sup>.

In 1986 under the initiative of the ABSU leaders like U.N. Brahma, S.K. Biswmutiari, Subash Basumatary and others, the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) was formed. According to the constitution of the AATWWF, "It is considered expedient to form a federation of the women folk belonging to all tribal groups of entire Assam to unite themselves in a common platform through mutual understandings being imbibed in a common ideology with a

view to fighting for ensuring rights and justice of the tribal women in the spheres of socio-economic, political, educational, cultural and for their emancipation from their socio-domestic drudgery and thereby to enable themselves in rendering services to the promotion welfare and preservation of the indigenous self identity of all tribal groups living in Assam"<sup>17</sup>.

As the time and situation changed, the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation also changed its name to All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF) in 1993. From its inception the ABWWF working towards the development of the Women folks and fully cooperated with the ABSU movement till the signing of Bodo accord. Till today the ABWWF is seriously working for the interest of women folks and particularly for the development of the social, economic, educational and cultural aspects to make the Bodo as a master race in the world. The new name of the organisation was more acceptable to them as its members belonged to the Bodo community. But it does not mean that they did not receive co-operation from the women of other tribal communities in Assam. The All Bodo Women Welfare Federation consisted of Central Committee, District Committee, Ancholik Committee and village council level Committee like ABSU. The Central Committee of ABWWF had very close co-ordination in order to carryout their activities throughout different parts of the state and accordingly cooperate the ABSU movement whole heartedly for the separate state of Bodoland<sup>18</sup>.

But due to strict action taken by the Government of Assam the ABSU leaders and its members did not have easy access to all the places of their mobilization. Therefore mobilization groups were formed at different levels and members were also taken from the ABWWF. Therefore, in areas where the members of the ABSU could not mobilise they became dependent on the members of ABWWF. According

to U.N Brahma, foot march was the best way to mobilise people, and so in the beginning of the movement mobilization was done through foot march. He himself had covered a vast area of Kokrajhar, Chirang, and Bongaigaon etc. on foot. In such mobilization programmes the leaders and members of the ABWWF played a significant role in fulfilling the aims and objectives of the ABSU.

Till now no sufficient books have been written on the leadership of the Bodo movement. According to Anil Boro, it is the movement of the middle class. It is observed that most of the leaders and activists of the Bodo movement, BSS, ABSU, PTCA, PTCA (P) and the UTNLF belong to educated families. Almost all the leaders are teachers in schools and colleges, employees of government and semi-government organisations, banks, lawyers' and private companies. There were no any women leadership in the Bodo organisation prior to the formation of the All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation (AATWWF) and All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF). The AATWWF was the first Bodo organisation in which a large number of women participated and most of them were educated.

Before 1987, hardly Bodo women leaders were there in any Bodo organisations. ABSU leader's like- U.N Brahma, S. K. Bwiswmutiary and few others were felt the needs and importance of women's participation. U.N. Brahma had a strong belief that a society cannot develop without the progress of the women folk. In 1970s also a young dynamic PTCA leader Kanakeswar Narzary travelled extensively in north-east and met many tribal leaders and thereby felt the necessity of joining of women folks in the movement as well as in the organisation. Upendranath Brahma and Kanakeswar Narzary had very close relationship and due to their active initiation Bodo women organization was formed in 1986 known as *the All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation* (AATWWF). The first Bodo women leader, MLA and

former Minister of Agriculture and WPT & BC Government of Assam, Pramila Rani Brahma was also deeply influenced by Upendranath Brahma and had a close relationship with him. Till the signing of Bodoland accord she had dedicated her life in various ways for the cause of Bodoland movement launched by the ABSU. All the leaders and members of the AATWWF were directly or indirectly had a close relation with the ABSU, the BPAC and the BVF leaders as well as its members.

The most crucial period of Bodoland movement was started from 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1987 and lasted till 20<sup>th</sup> February 1993. During their six years movement period the ABSU along with its allied organizations carried out numerous activities throughout the state and the centre. The ABSU published a number of books, distributed leaflets and submitted a number of memorandums to the central as well as to the state government in order to resolve their problems. Its underground wing (BVF) also carried out innumerable violent activities like bomb blasts, kidnapping, extortion, attacking and looting police station, snatching arms and ammunition etc. particularly present Bodoland areas<sup>19</sup>.

In order to meet the demands of Bodo community Bodo women of different age groups also participated in the Bodoland movement. In the programme launched by the ABSU like mass rally, processions, dharna, picketing, rail and road roko etc. women of different age groups participated in huge number. At organizational level also the participation of women can be identified. Pramila Rani Brahma, the first leader of the Bodo women, deserves a special mention in this regard. Being a close associate of Upendranath Brahma, she was very much inspired by him and under his guidance she founded the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) just before the launching of Bodoland movement by the ABSU.

Regarding the formation of AATWWF, P.R. Brahma said, "I have seen many protest movements since childhood such as the Udayachal and script movements. I never participated in those movements. I have seen how people were exploited and betrayed by the PTCA leaders. But I did not know how to get rid of such a situation. During 1980 my husband and I rented a house at Kokrajhar town. Upendranath Brahma was my next door neighbour. I was disappointed with our leaders as the PTCA leaders compromised with the leaders of the ruling parties to fulfil their self-interest. Upendranath Brahma and I would discuss the situation regularly. I felt the need to join those who were against their leaders. When the ABSU decided to launch a fresh movement in 1986, I was not sure what I should do. At that time I was requested to form a women's welfare organization by Upendranath Brahma and Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmutiary. Accordingly, on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1986, a meeting was convened at Debargaon Higher Secondary School of Kokrajhar and accordingly the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation was founded"<sup>20</sup>.

Malati Rani Narzary one of the top leader's of AATWWF had been participated in various protest rallies, picketing etc, organised by the PTCA, ABSU, UTNLF, and Bodo Sahitya Sabha from her school life. According to her, the growing atrocities on the Bodo women provoked her to establish a women organization through which the injustice done on the Bodo women can be protested on a large scale. Prior of the ABSU and the AATWWF the Bodo women were not involved in any organizational activities. Malati Rani Narzary was also a close associate with S. K. Bwiswmutiary and Upendranath Brahma; so she was inspired a lot by them in forming a women organization. She was a young, energetic, courageous lady and being an executive member of the ABSU, she had participated

and co-operated in various ways. Besides, she was also the founder secretary of the Plains Tribal Women's Welfare Association.

In 14<sup>th</sup> July 1986, first general meeting of the AATWWF was held at Kokrajhar under the active initiation of ABSU top leaders like UN Brahma and SK Bwisumutiary. In the said meeting a large number of women folks of different districts irrespective of age groups, participated and an executive body was also formed in order to carryout various activities of the AATWWF. Women leaders like Pramila Rani Brahma, Malati Rani Brahma, Supriya Rani Brahma, Hira Rani Brahma, Umarani Basumatary, Kamali Rani Basumatary, Latika Hajowary, Meera Basumatary, etc. were present. Thus the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation was established in 1986 under the initiative taken by the leading the ABSU leaders. The aim of this organization was to make aware the tribal women for the development and welfare of the tribal people. In this regards, the contribution of Pramila Rani Brahma as a founder president of the AATWWF is remarkable in bringing the backward tribal women in a single platform and maintaining one of the leading organisation of the tribal women<sup>21</sup>.

Thus, under the leadership of Pramila Rani Brahma the AATWWF mobilised one village to another to bring tribal women to a single platform to fight against the injustice as well as for the welfare of the Bodo people. In the beginning they mobilised the entire Kokrajhar district and founded district committee and Ancholic Committee in order to carryout their activities. According to the information given by some of the AATWWF leaders, in the initial stage the AATWWF did not get good response from the tribal women. But due to the frequent mobilization and hard work done by some of the central AATWWF leaders they were influenced and ultimadedly

a large number of women belonging to Boro, Garo, and Rabha came forward to co-operate with the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF).

According to the information given by one of the founder member of the AATWWF Darrang district, before the establishment of the AATWWF, Darrang District a number of meeting and discussion was held in various areas of Darrang district. Thus, finally after long debate and discussion Darrang District AATWWF was founded in 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1986. Prior to the establishment of the AATWWF, Darrang district, some leaders of Darrang District ABSU mobilised for the formation of women organisation for the cause of Bodo society and for the upliftment of Bodo women. Besides the mobilisation along with the AATWWF central leader's one village after another, they met the Bodo women intellectuals and requested them to lead the organisation from the front for the cause of women welfare of the Bodo society. In the mean time the Central ABSU leader Upendranath Brahma announced that they were launching a fresh movement for separate state of Bodoland and solicited women's participation. According to their opinion most of the Bodo women are illiterate and backward so it was not easy to approach and bring them in such organization. Therefore this task was a challenging one and had to be done by educated women only. According to the AATWWF, the ABSU movement would not be successful without the active participation of women folks. The AATWWF leaders highlighted the importance of women in the family and in the society. Thus, the educated women come forward to lead women organisation in the central as well as district level. The formation and organization of the AATWWF was not easy everywhere in the backward areas Bodo. For example, in Baksa and chirang district it took more than two years to form the women organisation. It was due to the enormous effort of some leaders of the ABSU and the AATWWF that the formation

of women organisation became possible. Due to the inspirations of the Central ABSU and the Central AATWWF, they realised the importance and the need of women organisation for the welfare and upliftment of the women folks and also for the cause of Bodoland.<sup>22</sup> That way, AATWWF played an important role during the time of Bodoland movement of the ABSU. Thus, under the initiatives taken by the District and the Central ABSU, the first meeting was held in Kumarikata village under Tamulpur police station. In the said meeting, irrespective of age groups, a sizeable number of Bodo women along with a good number of Central and District ABSU leaders were present. In the meeting they unanimously elected Giribala Brahma as a president and Guneswari Brahma as a secretary respectively for Nalbari district AATWWF<sup>23</sup>.

#### **Organizational Role of Bodo Women:**

The All Assam Tribel Women Welfare Fedaration (AATWWF), later changed to the All Bodo Women Welfare Fedaration (ABWWF) had remarkable contribution in organising the Bodo people as well as in taking care of the ABSU and the BVF members during the Bodoland movement. In the initial stage; as a women organisation they took up the issues of responsibility of mother in taking care and educating their children, family planning, health and hygiene, eradication of drink and drugs from the society, effect of polygamy etc<sup>24</sup>.

In the Bodo society, some evil practices existed which generally brought problems in the progress of women. One such practice was addiction of male member of the family to country liquor. Due to the addiction there are many unwanted problems take place in the families, in the villages and in the society. Therefore, beating wife was a regular nature of backward poor Bodo family. In the early part of their settlement polygamy was also prevalent in the society. It was a

normal practice of the rich men marrying more than one wife in those period. Thus the activities of ABWWF received wide appreciation of the rural people. They tried to help the rural women in various ways. According to the information given by some of the core members of the AATWWF, they organised a number of meetings and formed committees in many areas of different part of Assam in order to bring awareness about the evil practices carried out by the Bodos and its impact on the Bodo society which hampered the progress of Bodo women.

When the ABSU initiated the movement for separate state of Bodoland, the PTCA and its allied organizations did not like it. As a result, in Kokrajhar, Nalbari, Barpeta, Darang and Kamrup district where PTCA supporter were majority frequent clashes took place between the ABSU and the PTCA. The members of the AATWWF played very important role in such critical period. According to them, they maintained peace during the clashes between the ABSU and the PTCA supporters. In their word: "We, the AATWWF members, wanted to stand as a guardian organisation of the Bodo People. We wanted to stand united for the cause of our people. They were demanding a state for our community. So, they are not committing any crime. They are sacrificing their lifes for the cause of the Bodos. So we have to help them"<sup>25</sup>.

During the ABSU movement, the Assam Police, CRPF and Army personnel raid the Bodo villages in search of the ABSU activists but they often targeted the enocent Bodo women. Besides that, most of the state police had the habit of stealing valuable items like ornaments made of gold and silver, money, watch, radio, tape recorder and torch light etc. To protect women from various atrocities made by police personel, village women were advised to stay in groups during any police or army operation in their respective villages. They were trained by the AATWWF

leaders to handle the cases even of molestation or rape. They were also instructed to bring the victims to the civil hospital and state dispensary for medical examination so that filing of the FIR would be convenient for them.

In the early period of the ABSU movement there was critical situation in various districts of Assam. Due to the different ideology between the supporters of the ABSU and the PTCA there were incidents of arson and clashes in different parts of the state in 1987- 88. Thus the AATWWF members devoted much of their time to resolve the misunderstandings between two rival groups. Due to the diffencess between two groups, the ABSU members and supporters had no access to some of the places in the state and in this situation the AATWWF members came forward to cooperate and to rescue the ABSU. Besides, the members of AATWWF were also assigned the job of supplier and cooks for the ABSU members. The ABSU and Volunteer Force members always moved in groups and never stayed in one particular place. It was the duty of the district and sub-division level members of the AATWWF to keep constant touch with them wherever they stayed for the night. However, staying in those camps during night was completely prohibited for women. In that way the members of the ABSU depended a lot on the AATWWF members for organising people and keeping communication between common people and the ABSU members for the cause of Bodoland.

In the Central Executive meeting of the AATWWF held on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1989, a decision was taken to provide a *aronai* to each members of the Bodo Volunteers Force. Accordingly, all the district committees of AATWWF were directed to weave *aronai* for the Volunteer Force activists. According to the tradition of the Bodos, when the Bodo men go to the war should wear *aronai* to protect themselves from all evils and to win the battle. The *aronai* which the Bodo soldiers wore in the battle field were

woven by a close relative like sister, wife or mother. Further, those *aronai* were woven over night before they go to the battlefield. Preparation of threads, patterns and all others works related to weaving had to be done within a single night. This was how the AATWWF members boosted up the morale of the ABSU and VF members. In case of police or sudden army raids in any village, they rushed to protect the innocent villagers. In case of arrest of innocent person they forced them to release him or her. They were instrumental in minimising atrocities on women by armed forces.

For example, the Bhumka rape case of Kokrajhar was successfully carried out by the AATWWF and the culprits were punished. On 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> January 1988, the women of Bhumka area of Kokrajhar were raped repeatedly by the Assam police personnel. The AATWWF came to know the incident on 28<sup>th</sup> January and brought the victims to Kokrajhar district court. But the then government tried to hide this heinous crime done by Assam police. The then government did not take action against the police who were involved with the incident though there was a hue and cry of the AATWWF and ABSU. After some time, the then Chief Justice of Guwahati High Court, G.M. Lodha invited the petitioners to submit an affidavit on the Bhumka rape case. On behalf of the victims the AATWWF took the initiative and submitted an affidavit to Guwahati High Court. Many other women organisations like YWCA, Nari Mukti Sangathan and Pradesh Mahila Congress Samiti supported the AATWWF in organising a protest rally at Guwahati Judge Field. On the basis of their appeal Mr. Justice G.M. Lodha and Justice J. Sangma jointly gave a 22 page judgment on 14/03/1988. Similarly, AATWWF members handled such cases successfully in other places well<sup>26</sup>.

### **Bodo Volunteers Force and role of Bodo Women:**

In order to fulfil ABSU Bodoland movement number of organization of the Bodos came forward to cooperate the ABSU movement. Among them the Bodo Volunteers Force was one of the allied military wings of the ABSU. So in order to carryout their activities they need number of messengers to carry secret messages. A sizeable number of AATWWF members of different District Committees were involved in this service. The BVF specially trained them to perform their activities. Carrying special messages and money for ABSU and Volunteers Force were also a part of their service. Sometimes they had also to accompany the ABSU and VF leaders in their journey by train/ by bus in order to hide the suspects of the police or armed forces.

### **Nursing Training:**

A good number of Bodo women were given nursing training by doctors in different parts of the district in primary health centres. During 1989-90, not less than 50/60 girls from each district received nursing training. The raining was based on courses, which are actually given to the general nurses. Courses are as follows:

It includes learning to bandage on different parts of the body, stop bleeding, take out bullets from any parts of the body etc. They were taught to identify the causes of disease, nature of treatment and the names of medicine used for diseases like - diarrhoea, fever, viral infections, allergy, malaria and jaundice etc. Training was given to handle the burnt cases, injuries, fractures, bleeding, unconsciousness, vomiting, acute pain, muscular pain. Use and function of different surgical instruments, techniques of pushing saline water, etc. were also taught<sup>27</sup>.

The motive of such training was to help the ABSU and Bodo Volunteers Force activists in time emergency. The trained girls were instructed that whenever they would come to know about injured persons and activists, they must nurse them. These trained girls proved very affective during the long Bodoland movement by the ABSU. Some of the AATWWF leaders, who were the head of nursing team, told that during the peak years of the movement (1989-1991) most of the doctors left their jobs and the primary health centres of the Bodo dominated areas were running without doctor and medicine. At that time the trained girls were helpful to the poor common people. Apart from nursing the activists they performed duties of doctors.

By knowing the gravity of the movement, the leaders of the ABSU and the VF felt the need of arms training to the Bodo girls. Thus from 1989 onwards, girls began to receive training in the use of weapons. Such training was given in the remote places of Bodo dominated areas. The motive of weapon training to them was to provide measures for their safety. There was no immediate plan to bring them to action but they were trained in such a position that they can face to any situation.

In order to mobilise the common peoples, the ABSU and the BVF leaders were always on move from one place to another in different parts of Assam. Besides, in order to avoid the police and army personnel, they usually moved from one village to another village in small groups. Thus it was the responsibility of the AATWWF members to take care of and arrange food and shelter for them. Sometimes, the AATWWF members went to hideouts to prepare food for them. The Volunteers Force members entered villages during night time. They spread themselves to various houses at the time of food for the advantage of logistics as well as to avoid being arrested all together.

### **Various activities Organized by Bodo Women:**

The AATWWF organised number of seminars on the theme of '*Women*' during the Bodoland movement. Apart from the local educationists the executive members of the AATWWF were regular speakers in such seminars. The intensity of women's participation is understandable from the theme of seminars and speeches. It is believed that none of the previous movements demanded women's participation so clearly and deliberately.

Besides seminar, the AATWWF also organised some conferences and conventions. The conferences were held after two years when new committees were formed. The conventions were held in alternate years. A reception committee was formed before holding of conferences and conventions. Such committee was usually formed with the local members though some central committee members were also incorporated. There were two types of sessions in conferences and conventions. One was open session and the other was delegates' session. The open session was open to all Bodo and non-Bodo whereas delegates' sessions were closed door session and restricted to the delegates only. The delegate selected the executive members of central committee in such sessions. The general secretaries of various sessions submitted annual reports in delegates' sessions. Important resolutions adopted in the delegates' sessions were read out in the open session. Generally a conference was held for 3 days and Scholars in different fields were invited to open sessions for delivering lectures. Cultural programmes were also part of everyday programme. These conferences and conventions were mainly organised and participated by women. The All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation (AATWWF) was renamed as All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF) at the Tamulpur conference held in 1993. In the said conference the delegates proposed

the new name of the organisation and it was accepted unanimously in the delegates' session and the resolution taken by the delegates' house was read out in the open session of the Tamulpur Conference<sup>28</sup>.

The first Bodo women magazine 'Songdan' was published by the AATWWF for Bodo women in the year 1991. In the same year another women magazine called 'Rwikhamuti' was also published. These magazines were published once in a year and women related issues were primary concern to them though they also published other writings of women. Though the editorial board members were women, all the writers were not necessarily women.

Thus, the Bodo Women contributed in many ways during the Bodoland movement initiated by the ABSU in order to maintain unity and integrity, feelings of brotherhoods and co-operation not only among the Bodos but also among different castes, creeds, sexes, religions etc. living in Assam. Therefore, participation and contribution of Bodo women in the Bodoland movement should be appreciated and given important place in the history of Bodoland movement. Politics, governance, movements etc, are men's domain in the world view of the Bodos as it is so with many other communities in India. If the men need the women to participate in a movement it is still within the extended domestic domain which includes cooking food for the male activists, weaving *aronai* and offering it to the males, nursing them if they are injured and the like. But when it comes to position and honour in the society, they are always placed in the second line in the row. They also never demand any position and status or price for the services they have rendered. They have accepted their services as a service demanded by the society or by the community.

According to Swami Vivekananda, "There is no chance of welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly only on one wing." We can examine this statement in Indian context, where almost 50% of population are women. Therefore, their socio-economic and political development can not be neglected.

The average representatives of women in politics all over the world are mere 12.5%. Even the advance countries like the US and the UK have not more than 6% women representatives. India the largest democracy in the world has mere 7% of women representation. Besides the demand of 33% reservation for women in parliament and state legislatures is yet to be fulfilled. In case of Bodoland also women are completely ignored in politics. In Bodoland, so far no record of women candidate participating for parliamentary election after six decades of Indian independence. In the Assam Assembly also we find only one Bodo women legislator during the ABSU Bodoland Movement. After the creation of BTC we find two legislators in the state Assembly and till today we have only two women legislators. In Bodoland Territorial Council Assembly, there are 46 member seats and so far two term of election have been held but surprisingly not a single woman has been elected or given party ticket by various political parties. From this it is understood that Bodo women are not getting due importance in Bodo politics. But if we look at the Bodoland movement, we find that the Bodo women played significant role and shared equal responsibilities with their male counterpart for the cause of Bodoland. But they have been completely ignored by their leaders as well as by their political parties in case of power, policies and decision making etc.

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## Chapter - 6

### Development projects taken by the State and BTC Government towards the empowerment of women:

National Policy for Empowerment of Women 2001 admits that there still exist, a wide gap between the enunciated goals and situational reality of status of women in India. The need for strengthening the legal system at elimination of all forms of discrimination has been emphasized time and again. The First Five Years plan viewed the issue of women and their development from the welfare points of view. The latter Plans took this issue with a strategy for their empowerment. But instead of broad frame work and perspectives this strategies are not translated into social, political, educational and cultural empowerment of women.<sup>1</sup>

Status of women is the indicator to the progress of a society as well as of the country. Women could play an important role in the development of the society and the country. In that case education is the major force which can bring far reaching change to the society, as well as to the status of women. At the same time, in a representative democracy, participation and representation of women in the decision making bodies is also vital for the empowerment of women. Education is considered as an important factor which could shape not only the personality of an individual but also could develop the social set up of the community as a whole. The social set up of the community could be developed by imparting same type of education both for males and females. Women should be given free hand to impart all sorts of education for the fullest development of their personality.<sup>2</sup> Since women also

constitute 50% of the total population of the society, therefore, they are also equally responsible for bringing social change.

Empowerment of women appears to be much publicized concept of 21<sup>st</sup> century through political participation. The politicians, the policy makers, the national leaders, the media and even international community talk about political empowerment of women. Yet women are nowhere near to bring full and equal opportunities in policy choices that affect their lives. The lack of opportunities for participation in the decision making bodies has far reaching consequences of Bodo women. It deprives women from their important rights and responsibilities as citizen, their viewpoints and representatives tend to be remained unheard or under represented.

In the societies women had been considered naturally unsuited to political activity and had been formally or informally excluded from it. The legacy of this old belief, reinforced by unequal domestic division of labour not only handicapped women in the pursuit of political office but also prevents them from being active in political participation of any type of nature. Bodo women need protection of their rights and interests. Male alone should not make laws pertaining to the rights of women. According to J.S. Mills, women require more political right as they are more dependent on law for the protection of their rights and interests.<sup>3</sup> Their active participation in law making is of vital importance as there are good reasons to be believed that issues effecting women are not taken seriously by men.

To give women their proper role in the society and to vest them with human rights and equality with men is nothing short of a major social revolution. Its origin can be traced in the minds of liberal thinkers' of the pre-independence era such as

Raja Ram Mahan Roy, M.K. Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru etc. who gradually started the work of emancipation of women. But the urge still remains largely unfulfilled as she is searching for her place in the society. By simply observing colourful programme of "International Women's Days" every year on 8<sup>th</sup> March can not help in solving the problems of women folks in our country. It is only through her awareness and assertion of rights and privileges in various domains of social activity that can alone help her to attain the status of equality.

The seed for development and social change should be implemented at the grassroot level i.e. in the curriculum in schools and colleges. Every school, college, and University ought to become an entry point of right to education. The right to education must be offered to all without discrimination as this gives everyone the benefit of education and an awareness of other rights to which they are entitled. Modern studies and researches have shown that women, educated, healthy and enjoying elementary human rights, are at the basis of the progress and prosperity of a society. Women's education has, for example, a beneficially multiplier effect on social development and eventually on economic development. Kerala is an example of this development. Infantile mortality, population growth and average expectation of life in Kerala is equal to that of many developed countries.

National development will be more effective when citizens irrespective of being a man or woman have an active share in all its activities. Women are considered as most of the powerful resources for the development of any country. Women in developing countries face a double deprivation; overall human development achievement is low in these countries and women achievement is lower than that of men's. Despite the Constitution of India guarantees 'equality of

status' to women, they do not enjoy full equality in the society. The majority population of women are illiterate, unpaid, deprived and disadvantaged.

Empowerment is the process of generating and building capabilities to exercise control over one's own life. Empowerment is the means as well as goals of self development. Women's empowerment is a model of gender analysis that traces women's increasing equality by empowerment through five phases, viz. welfare, access, conscientation, participation and control. It is a process whereby women can establish their control over various assets and which helps them to develop their confidence. Women constitute almost 50% of human resources. Until and unless women resources are not properly exploited society would continue to be deprived of its full development. Besides the existence of deep-rooted patriarchal social structure and traditional mindset of people, due to low self-esteem, lack of skill, lack of conceptual understanding etc., women fail to realise their potentiality. In this regard, education is the key tool to abolish evil practices from the society and to literate women from their ignorance and narrowness of thinking. Education helps women not only externally but also internally. It gives women confidence, liberty, identity, security etc.<sup>4</sup>

Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building to greater participation, to greater decision making power and control and to transformative action. Today women empowerment is considered as one of the prime issues for building nation all over the world. Empowering of women pre-supposes a drastic, dynamic and democratic change in the perception of and expectation from women in our society. Women are the assets who can reshape and reconstruct the society in all aspects - socially, economically, politically, and culturally etc. So women should be empowered with greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy

in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives or to have greater control over their circumstances that influence their lives and free them from shackles imposed on them by customs beliefs and practices. Empowering women is the need of the hour and has been deeply realized by all sections of people in today's world. As we are aware of the fact that women constitute half of the total population of the country, the responsibility of making them more powerful and stronger also lies in the hands of conscious citizens of the country. The goal of attaining and strengthening Indian women empowerment must be accomplished through a well planned, well defined and well organised efforts extended by every citizen of India. Empowerment is the expansion in peoples ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability previously denied to them. Women empowerment is closely associated with the nation building, since women is responsible for enriching healthy life and living to make it more meaningful and enjoyable; therefore, empowering them is very essential rather urgent need of the day.<sup>5</sup>

The term empowerment is widely used in the context of development particularly for women. It is way of overcoming barriers in one's life through which the individual increases her ability to shape her life and environment. It also means to strengthen women's positive outlook, confidence and values of an individual through which they can participate in all kinds of activities and able to co-operate with men folks in the field of social, economic and political sphere, public administration, science and technology etc. The fact that women need to be empowered has been stressed times and again by socially and educationally enlightened groups of people by realizing the fact that women can play a very

significant role in the development of human resources and in shaping the character of the nation's future generation.

Thus, empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process which should enable women to realise their full identity and power in all spheres of life. It would consist of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives and free them from shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice. Education is the only means of empowering women to protect their rights, to fight against exploitation and discrimination, and impart skills and self confidence. Besides the women movement and a wide spread network of non-governmental organisations, which have strong grassroots presence and deep insight into women's concerns, can also contribute in inspiring initiative for the empowerment of women. Gender equality and empowerment to women is recognised globally as an element to achieve progress in all areas. The Charter of the United Nations signed in 1945, the first international agreement that proclaimed gender equality, was fundamental right. The principle of equality is also written in Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Right, Duties and Directives Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures for the upliftment of women folks. Though the Constitution of India guarantees equality to status to women, they do not enjoy full equality in the society due to illiteracy. To highlight the importance of women education, Jawaharlal Nehru said, "Education of a boy is education of one person but education of a girl is education to the whole family." Until and unless women are educated, they can not help in modernisation and development of the society.<sup>6</sup> Thus, education is indispensable; the future prospects of women depend also on

economic, social and legal changes that will promote the access of women to education.

Socially conscious and literate society has a vital role to play in democracy. Education helps the capacity to learn, read and use mathematics, to acquire information and to think critically about information. Women are a vital part of Indian economy, constituting one third of the national labour force and a major contributor to the survival of the family. Women are builders of the nation right from the early days in their homes and the children received their first education at their hand. According to Gandhi, 'the home is the first university and parents – especially mothers are the first teacher'. Women as mothers take care of their family, advice and guide their children and mould the character and personality of men. They are not only teachers of children, performing all the domestic tasks, but they also take part in various economic activities. In public life women are considered more competent and pragmatic than men. The empowered women may become agents of their own development and may be tool for economic change. Jawaharlal Nehru rightly says, "To awaken the people, it is women, who must be awakened, once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves".<sup>7</sup>

Women Developmental Programmes undertaken by the State Govt. and BTC Govt. in Bodoland:-

As per the guideline of Central Govt., the State and BTC Govts implemented a number of schemes and programmes for the weaker sections of the community in rural areas. A number of Ministries as well as Officials both in the state and in the BTC areas have been entrusted with the responsibility of implementing these programmes. Developmental activities for women in the state as well as in BTC are being taken care of by the Department of Social Welfare, Women and Child

Development. There are a number of central schemes and programmes for the development and empowerment of women in Assam/Bodoland such as ICDS, DRDA, DWCRA, SGSY, PMGY, JRY, IMY, KSY, RMK, BSY, STEP, DPEP, NSAP, etc.

*Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)* schemes was conceived in 1975 and continue till today with an integrated delivery package of services to improve the nutritional and health status of vulnerable groups including pre-school children, pregnant women and nursing mothers. It envisaged supplementary nutrition, pre-school education, immunization, health check up, referral services and health education. It also sought effective coverage of inter-sect-oral services through community based Anganwadi workers and helpers. Besides, ICDS is a meeting ground where women or mothers groups can come together with other frontline workers to promote awareness and joint action for child development and women's empowerment.

ICDS as a service delivery programme has certain features which constitute its areas of strength. The scheme is village-based and conducted by workers (Anganwadi workers and helpers) who are normally residents of the same locality. The workers maintain close contact with individual households of the village, thus taking away the impersonal approach generally found in Government run programmes. The programme enlists the active help and participation of voluntary organisations, social activists, academic institutions and professionals and there is a built-in scope for convergence of health, nutrition and childhood education services at Anganwadi level. The impact of the programme is evident from the remarkable improvements made in child survival and development indication. There is a tremendous decrease in the prevalence of malnutrition among pre-school children

and increase in immunisation coverage in ICDS areas, while school enrolment has improved. Besides, school drop out rate has also come down in ICDS areas.

ICDS today provides vital services to more than 2.88 crore children and 54 lakhs women in 4388 blocks and major urban slums. The govt. has approved a proposal to extend ICDS services in 390 projects with domestic support and 461 projects with support from the World Bank. In a phased manner, it is committed to universalise the scheme as early as possible during the Ninth Plan. In consonance with the life-cycle approach of development, a nation-wide unique intervention aimed at empowerment of adolescent girls was also tried in all community development blocks in the country during the specific plan. It is estimated that 12.8 lakhs adolescent girls from the deprived sections of the society will be benefited under the scheme renamed as Kishor Shakti Yojana. Besides, a new initiative in the form of Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY) has been introduced in order to achieve the objectives of sustainable human development at the village level in Assam as well as in Bodoland Territorial Council. PMGY envisages allocations for additional central assistance to the states and union territories for minimum services in order to focus on certain priority areas including nutrition. The allocation under the nutrition areas component of PMGY is to be made under the supplementary nutrition programme component of ICDS. It has been specifically outlined with the objective of eradicating malnutrition among children less than 3 years by increased nutritional coverage of supplementary feeding through ICDS.

*Integrated Rural Child Development Programme (IRDP)*, which was a loan linked and subsidy oriented programme, was first initiated in 1978 in some selected districts of the country but extended all over the country by 1980. The basic objective of IRDP was to enable identified families in rural areas to cross the poverty line. By

1990 IRDP was implemented in all the districts of the state. As the coverage extended to remote and far off areas, the ratio of credit disbursement started declining. Since there were multiplicity of programmes associated with rural development programmes associated with rural poor, Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (SGSY) was launched in 1995 by clubbing all the existing rural development programmes. SGSY is a major self employment program under implementation in the entire rural areas of the country. It aims at creating self employment opportunities for rural poor with emphasis on Self Help Groups (SHG) by providing them assistance through government subsidy and bank credit. The very purpose was to bring every assisted family above property line in three years.

*Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)* was started in 1982-83. Its main objective was to improve the living conditions of women and thereby of children through provision of opportunities for self employment and access to basic social services. The strategy adopted under this programme was to facilitate access of poor women to employment, skill up-gradation, training, credit and other support services so that these women as a group can take up income generating activities for supplementing their incomes. There were about 12 lakhs organised groups under DWCRA through out the country. Such activities included weaving, knitting, tailoring, piggery, poultry, fish vending, broom and rope making, brick making, candle making, etc. DWCRA was inaugurated in Assam in the year of 1985-86 especially in backward districts.

*Mahila Swayam Sidha (MSS)* which was previously known as Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY, 1995) was also introduced in Assam with the objectives of ensuring empowerment to ST women by encouraging thrift through small savings. It is proposed to recast the MSS into an Integrated Women's Empowerment Programme

(IWEF) and to expand throughout the districts of Assam. The long term objective of the IWEF is empowerment of women (socially and economically) by ensuring direct access to and control over resources through a sustained process of mobilisation and convergence of all ongoing sectoral programmes. Its immediate objectives are: a) to establish self reliance women's SHGs, b) to create confidence and awareness among members of SHGs regarding women's status, health, nutrition, education, sanitation, hygiene, economic upliftment and other social, economic and political issues, c) strengthening and institutionalising the saving habits of rural women and their control over their economic resources, d) improvement in access to micro credits, e) improvements of women in local level planning and f) convergence of services of department of women and child development and other related departments.

*Balika Samridhi Yojana (BSY)*, under this programme Rs. 500/- as bonus given to each girl child born after 1998 August whose parents belong to below poverty line. More than 2000 beneficiaries are benefited from this scheme till March 2003 in BTC.

*Udisha*, it is a training scheme under ICDS funded by World Bank. It is a new scheme introduced in 1990-2000 by the Government of India for imparting training to all field functionaries under ICDS. Under *Udisha* programme Govt. of Assam established one training centre in all the districts of the state for proper implementation of the said scheme. More than 5000 Anganwadi workers have so far been trained and above 2500 were given refresher training. Besides, a training calendar was prepared for various centres so as to cover all untrained Anganwadi workers and helpers of all projects by the end of 2002-2003.<sup>8</sup>

*National Social Assistance programme (NSAP)* has got three components namely,

i) *National Old Age pension (NOAP)*: under this scheme as old age person above 65 years of age and living below the poverty line is provided @ Rs.100/- per month.

ii) *National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)*: under the scheme an amount of Rs. 10,000 is provided as one times grant to kin in case of death of a primary bread winner of the family.

iii) *National Maternity Benefit Schemes (NMBS)*: Under this scheme an amount of Rs. 500/- as one time grant is provided to pregnant mother for health care of the new born baby.

*District Primary Educational Programme (DPEP)* became very affective in the State and in BTC area since 2000 with the objectives to revitalise and expand primary education especially in remote and backward villages of the state as well as with special gender focus to universalise elementary education

Besides, Distance Education and National Open School have formulated and innovative project aimed at providing schooling to:

- a) Neo-literates who have acquired functional literary.
- b) Early school drop-outs with rudimentary literary skills.
- c) Drop-outs who have attended non-formal education programmes skills and whose literary skills are marginally better developed.

These strategies have shown a marked increase in the number of girls and women participating in technical, tertiary and vocational educational programmes started by the Government such as the VTI and ITI. Similar schemes extended to handicapped women in vocational rehabilitation centres have tried to promote and encourage women's education. Yet, these are found to be inadequate and show a need for a lot to be done in this area.

### **Self- Help Groups in empowering rural Bodo Women:**

Today women are being gradually recognised as important, powerful and meaningful contributors to the society and in the life of men. Women empowerment is generally defined as a confidence building, insight into and understanding of developed mechanism. It also refers to increasing the political, social and economic strength of individuals and groups. The impact of new technologies and globalization on women's job is very much limited and unrewarding. The new market, tools and rules of the global era have failed to generate adequate job opportunities to the Indian women, especially (Bodo) who do not have adequate competence needed by the modern sector. In Bodoland, more that 80% women population reside in the rural area and are illiterate, ignorant and exposed in a male dominated society. Therefore, the status of Bodo women would rise only when the rural Bodo women are emancipated.

There is growing realization that rural Bodo women have been underestimated and discriminated against in all walks of life, despite their substantial contribution to the household economy and in turn the national economy. The UN commission on status of women observed that women who contribute half of the world's population, perform two thirds of the world's work, receive one tenth of its

income and own less than one hundredth of its property. The poor women of Bodo society are always deprived of their economic status, especially in rural area. Therefore, the degree of exploitation, instead of declining, is on the rise in rural area.

Despite the existence of huge banking network in the state, a large number of poor rural Bodo women do not have access to formal banking system. This is because formal banking sector demands high discipline in procedure and repayment and hence they fail to address the credit requirement of the poor. But, after the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council, present BTC government has initiated a number of schemes through various banking network existing in BTC area in order to improve the poor economic condition of the people as well as of the rural Bodo women in particular in Bodoland. Besides, the BTC government recognised Micro Finance through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) as one of the most promises and effective tools of poverty alleviation and empowering rural women and also as a potent tool to increase growth of economy through increasing the profit earning capacity of the borrower. This principal is based on the philosophy of Grameen Bank of Bangladesh. The experience of Grameen Bank believes that with the appropriate support, the poor women can be productively employed in generating activities including processing, manufacturing, transportation, storing, market, agricultural produce and rising livestock.<sup>10</sup>

**Accessible and Affordable Health care System:** - In healthcare sector also Assam Govt. and BTC Govt. have been initiating new schemes for the weaker section of rural people particularly for women folks. The advent of the National Rural Health Mission into the health care delivery system has brought about radical and visible developments in the entire health sector.

## **Outreach and Referral Services:**

### ***Mobile Medical Units:***

- 27 Mobile Medical Units have been deployed to reach out the marginalised communities residing in rural and remote areas of the state.
- Introduction of additional Mobile Medical Units for 23 sub-divisions in the pipeline.
- 14, 81,083 patients already treated through this initiative.

### ***Mritunjoy 108:-***

- Deployment of 280 Mritunjoy Ambulances for referral transport including obstetric emergencies.
- Deployment of 5 boat ambulances scheduled in the pipeline.
- 1 million services have been rendered in 812 days of operation and 22,539 lives have been already saved.

### ***Ensuring Referral services –Ambulance distribution:***

- 350 ambulances procured under NRHM and placed in Govt. Hospitals.
- Additional 250 ambulances procured and deployed under Tea garden hospitals under PPP with NRHM, Assam.

### ***Evening OPD – Availability of quality health services even during evening hours:***

- A total of 28, 52,651 patients have been treated in evening hours under the evening OPD initiative.

**To ensure availability of Medical & Paramedical personnel:**

- Construction of 3 new BSc Nursing School and Hospital Building (Kokrajhar Dibrugarh and Silchar).
- Construction of 8 new GNM School and Hostel Building (Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Karimganj, Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao, Darrang, Morigaon Goalpara).
- Construction of 126 Rural Health Block Pooling Complex having 3 Doctors Quarters , 3 Nurse Quarters and 3 attendance quarters.

**Initiatives under the Assam Bikash Yojana:**

**Majoni:** Special assistance to the girl child (in the form of fixed deposit of Rs.500/-). So far total fixed deposit issued to beneficiaries- 1, 03, 764.

**Mamoni:** Nutritional support to pregnant women (Rs.1000/- for 3 antenatal checkups).

- Number of women who have received first instalment of Rs. 500/- 4, 92,747.
- Number of Women who received second instalment of Rs. 500/- 3, 60,113.

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**Strategies to be taken by BTC for Women's Empowerment: some relevant Policy and Programme Information:**

Till today, in Bodoland Territorial Council there is no residential Ashram school for tribal girl students although where more than 80% population are tribal in the Council. Only few school hostels for girls and boys for tribal students are running in BTC with very poor infrastructure facilities. Therefore more and more residential

schools are necessary particularly from upper primary level onwards in BTC. Ashram schools for tribal girls must be expanded throughout the Bodoland area. Education incentives in addition to free schooling such as supply of free text books, uniforms etc. to girls must be considered along with full security and modern infrastructure facilities for motivating parents to send their daughters to schools. The mid-day meal programme for school going children must be extended up to higher secondary level.

Better quality of schools, better standards of teaching, better motivation of teachers and better teacher-students ratio are very important for improving girls' enrolment and retention in schools. Schools also must be located close to habitations. Flexible school hours can also contribute to better enrolment and retention of girls. Adjusting school hours so that girls can combine schooling with other chores, at least in the short run, in one way of reducing opportunity costs of girl's time to parents. Special helps in science and maths needs to be arranged particularly in the upper primary levels if drop-out of girls is to be checked. Primary schools will have to be upgraded to include upper primary and secondary levels as a matter of strategy. The impact of peer group interaction on girls' education has been found to be a positive factor and a large extended school system can ensure this better. While setting up institutions like the commissioner for Women's Rights and Crime against Women Cells, gender sensitisation of police personnel including the rural police force should be given priority.

### **Education is a tool of Empowerment:**

Education plays a vital role in the life of individuals as well as society as a whole. It assumes special significance in the context of a quasi-traditional or transitional society like that of India. The crux of interventions aimed at women's education as visualised in the NPE 1986, should be a process which can bring about

a change in women's perceptions about themselves and that of society in regard to women's traditional roles. It should create an environment where strategies emerge from priorities set by women themselves. Women in the village must mobilise in support of education and literacy for women and girls. There must be continuous efforts and awareness generation, conscientisation and active participation of women's groups in the educational, social and economic processes. The local educational project must become accountable to the community and parents, particularly mothers, through the village education committees.

There should be a forum for the convergence of services to support sibling care, health and economically productive activities, to address the needs of girls and women holistically and education must have a central role in this scheme of convergence. The Indira Mahila Yojana is a combination of awareness generation and conscientisation, mobilisation and organisation, convergence of services and accountability of local educational and other programmes to women. The Women's organisation, village educational society under the panchayat/village development council should be used as model points for setting up Indira Mahila Kendra at village level. These should ultimately become forums for initiating action; seeking solutions and pressurising village block and district structures to respond to the needs and demands of women in respects of their daily routine such as child-care, health, fuel, fodder, drinking water, education problems relating to domestic violence, alcoholism, status, self-image etc.

The problems of girls and women's access to and participation in education must be viewed in the totality of their situations and in the context of their multiple roles and their responsibility and the process of doing so must be stimulated from within by women themselves. Women must themselves understand the implications of their reality and must start viewing education as a pre-condition for fighting against oppression. It is this synergy of impact of the IMY, DPEP, ICDS etc., which holds the

key to creating an orchestrated demand articulation by women which is the best and most enduring guarantee of a responsive and accountable delivery system. In all plans, strategies and interventions gender must be mainstreamed. Therefore all plans and programmes in education must operate to reduce gender disparities. A progirl child slant must be consciously integrated in all strategies and programmes. Groups of women and girls with special needs such as SC/ST girls, disabled girls, specially gifted girls etc., must be identified for special care. There must be women participating in all decision making related to education.

In the context of female education in India, social thinkers in recent years have developed a large body of empirical evidence demonstrating how education can promote greater capabilities such as the freedom to participate in political and economic processes, use new technologies, projects one self against exploitation of all sorts (legal, economic, sexual), exercise personal mobility; attain higher social status and increase child and maternal well-being. Impacts of female education are enormous at the societal level – a more productive work-force, lower fertility, lower infant and child mortality and improvement in social image. UNICEF's *The State of World Children 2000* and *2001* state that children who grow up without basic education find it harder to sustain themselves and their families. It becomes quite difficult for them to make their way in society in a spirit of tolerance, understanding and quality. Education helps people learn how to achieve fundamental human rights such as health, nutrition, safe motherhood and employment while improving the quality of life.<sup>13</sup>

If education is to be a tool for empowerment, the content is of critical importance. This must be thorough revision of curriculum, text books and material to ensure removal of gender bias and stereo-types. Gender sensitisation of teachers on

a regular basis should be institutionalised through the NCERTs, SCERTs and state governments. Women's participation in all committees dealing with education at all levels starting with the village to the state should be increased.

UNESCO has rightly called upon all the nations to chalk out plans for providing free education to all children by 2015. Representatives of various nations have pledged that their respective Governments would work towards setting up welfare institutions for quality improvement among the youth and also to strive for removing gender bias at the primary and middle school level education. There is need to see how far the Indian Government has been able to translate its old constitutional obligations and the UN suggestion of universalising education into a reality so far.

Universalisation of Education and present Indian Scenario: India is one of the least literate countries in the world. There were all together 302 million illiterates in the country according to the 1981 census. This number rose to 328 million in the 1991 census, marking an addition of about 22 million in a decade. Out of 328 million illiterates in the country, 281 million live in rural areas, which are larger than the total population of the USA - the world's third most populous country.

From the above data one can easily understand the fate of the government's constitutional commitment concerning universal education under Article 45 of the Indian Constitution. Article 45 of the Indian Constitution under the Directive Principles of State Policy envisages, "The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years". Accordingly the constitutional provisions under Article 45 should have been fulfilled

by 1960. But unfortunately, this commitment has proved to be futile so far. The government of India made another solemn promise of 'Education for All' by 2000 at the *Educational for All Summit* in Delhi in December 1993. Government's current programmes and policies for achieving Universal Primary Education by 2000 and Universal Literacy by 2005 too could not succeed. The sad saga of our failures does not end here. The worst part of it is that the number of illiterates in India continued to increase steadily with the rapid rise in population and lack of commensurate increase in infrastructure to provide education to the in-coming members of society. However for the first time since independence, the census of India recorded declining trend in absolute number of illiterate from 328 million to 296 million during 1991-2001. The illiterate's population in India is still greater than the total population of any country in the world except for the People's Republic of China. About 50% of the total illiterate population in the world lives in India alone. This is indeed a very disgraceful distinction.

In term of persentance, mere 65% of the total population of India was recorded literate in the 2001 census. Further the level of literacy is much poorer in rural than urban areas; about 59% of the people in rural areas are illiterate as against 80% in urban areas according to 2001 census. India's population continues to be predominantly rural, as according to the 2001 census rural areas comprise 72% of the country's total population. It is true that the current level of education is far below the targets set by the government from time to time, the progress made during the post independence period in the field of education is partly satisfying nevertheless. It is also true that the pace with which literacy has increased has been slower as compared with some developing countries placed in a similar situation during the same period but the number of people recorded literate (562 million) in

2001 is greater than that of the total population of all individual countries in the world now, except for the People's Republic of China.<sup>14</sup>

**Programmes for Training and Employment:** Through the developmental planning in Assam there has been an effort to improve the skill endowments of women in all economic activities. In recent years, with the questioning of the status of women in society and the felt need to recognise them as a valuable human resource for the economy, the economic empowerment of women has become an important issue and concern. The Ten Five Year Plan, which coincides with economic policy transitions need to pay special attention to the distinctive characteristics of women's employment both to their economic status and employment with equal remuneration.

The most important employment oriented programme for women implemented by the *Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD)* is the *Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP)* launched during the VII Five Year Plan. This programme consists of a series of action plans intended to strengthen and improve women's work and employment in the sectors where women are predominantly engaged such as agriculture, small animal husbandry, dairying, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, Khadi and village industries etc.

The next important programme of training and employment for women implemented by the *Department of Women and Child Development* is the training-cum-employment-cum-production centres scheme assisted training programme. This programme extends financial assistance to both governmental and non-governmental organisations to train women in traditional trades' like electronics, manufacturing, watch assembly, computer programming, fashion technology etc.

The condensed courses of education and vocational training and the socio-economic programmes are the other employment oriented programmes in the department of women and child development which are being undertaken by the Central Social Welfare Board. The purpose of socio-economic programme is to fund training-cum-employment generating programmes which are similar to the STEP programmes.

A scheme to set up *Women's Development Programmes (WDP)* in all the States and Union Territories was formulated in 1986-87 with the objective of creating sustained income generating activities for women. The corporations were supposed to help women entrepreneurs identifying projects and in obtaining credit as well as to provide them with suitable marketing support. Besides, another important programme of the DWCD is the setting up of the *Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)*, an innovative institution for extending credit to poor women. Varied experiences in the financial sector have established the need for informal credit delivery systems which should be client friendly and have simple and minimal procedures, disburse credit quickly and have flexible repayment schedules.

The two programmes, *Mahila Sambriddhi Yojana (MSY, 1993)* and *Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY, 1995)* have been started recently. MSY seeks to bring about self-reliance among women by improving their saving and thrift habits while IMY is a strategy to converge the several beneficiary oriented schemes being implemented by different departments of the Government of India. The very objective is the economic empowerment of women by ensuring direct access to resources through mobilisation of savings and their actual participation in the development process.

Development of Rural areas and Employment Ministry who are responsible for a massive poverty alleviation programme in the country, implement wage

employment programme like the *Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY)* and *Prime Minister Rozgar Yojana (PMRY)* for wage employment and the *Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)*. Under the wage employment programme, 30% of the employment is reserved for women beneficiaries. Under IRDP, 40% of the beneficiaries have to be women. Training of Rural Youth for self-Employment which is a supporting component of the IRDP also provides for *Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)* and it was initiated in 1993 on a pilot basis as a sub-programme of IRDP with assistance of UNICEF. The objective of DWCRA is to focus on women members of families in rural areas below the poverty line by organising them into self-help groups and by providing them with economic activities and comprehensive services like health, sanitation and literacy. DWCRA aims to improve women's access to various services through the formation of self-help groups.

The Ministry of Urban Affairs and Employment is also implementing a country-wide employment oriented programme called *Nehru Rozgar Yojana (NRY)*. The Urban-micro Enterprises setup under NRY extends higher subsidies (Rs. 5000 for women while for others it is Rs. 4000) for women entrepreneurs. Similarly women also enjoy their share of benefits under the wage-employment services extended under NRY. A separate cell for entrepreneurship has been set up in the office of the Development Commissioner, Small Scale Industries to provide counselling to women entrepreneurs. There are several schemes e.g. the self employment for educated unemployed youth and others in which women are among the intended beneficiaries.

The Labour Ministry who have the major responsibility for vocational training have expanded and vocational training facilities for women. There are 154 Industrial Training Institutes/centre for women and 129 general ITI with women wings specially

catering to vocational training needs of women. The National Vocational Training Institute for Women at NOIDA and 6 regional vocational training institutes provide facilities for training in basic skills, advance skills in selected trades.

Employment exchanges in some states also operate self employment schemes. For instance, in West Bengal, a self employment scheme for the registered unemployed provides subsidy, subject to ceiling of 25% of the loans sanctioned by banks. In MP, assistance towards margin money is provided to entrepreneurs seeking loans from banks. In Assam, employment exchanges motivated as guide for the job seekers for self employment according to the availability of the schemes introduced by their respective government.

#### **Women Reservation:**

It is said that the civilization of a country is judged by the status that it accords to its women. An ideal society is one in which women are not subjected to inequality, injustice and ill-treatment. But inspite of having several legislations the condition of Indian women has not improved as desire level. Thousands of women in India are still dying everywhere while giving birth to a child. Girl children are being killed everyday before they come out this world. They are given marriage forcefully before attaining puberty. There are numerous instances of molestation and outraging the modesty of women every now and then.

There has been huge hue and cry over the last few years regarding Women's Reservation Bill seeking 33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures. But very unfortunately till today the bill has not been in practice. Now the greatest question is whether the Women's Reservation Bill will cure all the ills of women? What are the advantages we are going to achieve by providing 33% women

reservation? In reality the problems that Indians women are facing today have nothing to do with women reservation. By increasing women's representation through reservation only the women of rich and high class families will reserve the women seats in Parliament and State Legislatures. Therefore, instead of general women only a few privileged sections of women will be benefited from the women's reservation system. If we look at the developed countries there is no reservation for women representation. In the national Assemblies of many countries the women's representations is not more than 12%. In England the representation of women in the House of Common is just above 10%. In America women representations is not more then 7% - the country which speaks so much about women's empowerment has no women President in its history. On the contrary, the President of India is a woman and our history is full of women who have been the nation builders without reservation.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, we may state that reservation is not everything for improving the status of women in Bodoland, because Bodoland Territorial Council is one of the most neglected areas in lower Assam, particularly socially, economically and educationally. So, besides reservation the most important is to improve the living condition of women, their educational level and standard of health. They need social protection, justice and equality. The most important of all is the need for change in our outdated attitude towards women.

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## Chapter- 7

### Conclusion

The Bodo is one of the earliest and largest indigenous tribal communities of Assam belonging to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. The society of the Bodo is primarily patriarchal with a few elements of matriarchal characteristics. Most of the Bodo family live in nuclear family, though a few extended families also exist. As per the evidence a normal Bodo family consists of parents and 4 to 6 children (Boys & Girls). Father is the head in the family; he is honoured and obeyed by other members of the family. In absence or death of father the eldest son assumes the charge of the household and discharges his responsibilities in consultation with his mother. In important matters or in decision making cases related to the family, the opinion of sons in the family is always given importance, though daughters are also present. In traditional Bodo custom inheritance of property is patrilineal as daughters have to leave parents' house after getting married. The eldest son of the family inherits half of the father's property and the rest is distributed among other sons. The daughters can claim from their parents before getting married, but if married she can claim nothing.

In the Bodo socio-economic set up, it is the women who occupy more dominant role rather than the men; consequently their social status is much higher when compared to their counterparts in other parts of the country. Moreover, their contribution to the family starts from childhood and continues unabated till their death. If we see the ratio of male and female workers to the total population of the country is 5:1 and for the tribal population it is 3:1. Among the non-tribal women, 12% are workers and it is 21% among tribal women. So, from the above ratio it is

confirmed that women's initiatives is foremost in tribal family affairs and so also in the Bodo family affairs.

There is no doubt that the status of the Bodo women in Bodoland is better than that of their non tribal counterparts in many respects in the society. However, the status of Bodo women in Bodo society cannot be looked upon in isolation as it is closely integrated with the status of women in general. Their problems have to be considered equally with the women in general in the context of time, space, region, socio-cultural and political upheaval and family system, which differ among the various women of India. Though the Bodo women contributed lots to the development of their community, yet their contribution is not duly recognised by the society. Despite their massive contribution, there is no comprehensive study, which looks into the social, political and economic condition of the Bodo women and also there are hardly any schemes for the upliftment of the Bodo women. This study may be the first of this kind in this very backward area of Bodoland Territorial Council.

During the Bodoland movement also the contribution and role played by the Bodo women was indispensable. The exhortation of the Bodo women was first and foremost, very new and unexpected. It threw a challenge to the women, and also it provided an opportunity for them to enter into the political arena which was absolutely monopolised by male until then. The Bodo women responded positively and formed the nucleus of the women participants in the movement and gradually brought other women, particularly from the rural areas. This movement also gave them privileges to test their leadership capabilities and some of them proved themselves to be highly successful in their political life. The very foundation of the All Assam Tribal women Welfare Federation (AATWWF) and its prominent role in the movement was a landmark not only in the history of the Bodo women but also of the

Bodo society as a whole. The existence of women organization is not new in India, but the active participation of such an organisation directly in the movement for a separate Bodoland under their own banner was unprecedented. But the fact is that during movement period, it is the men who often commit senseless crimes and the women have to bear the consequences, the men blow off bridges, public buses and railways, and women have to answer why they do it, and finally the men are acclaimed for their martyrdom; but for women the job continues as they did before. If one observes practically in Bodoland, the case of Bodo women is not much different from the above opinion.

In the traditional social set up, the Bodo women might have played an indirect role in decision making at family or village level. But their opinion was always neglected by their male counterparts. This neglecting attitude of the men folks in decision making was challenged for the first time in the oftumath of the Bodoland movement. The All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) leaders took over the authority to make decisions on issues relating to women and even implemented such decisions both at family and village levels. One of the important impacts of their participation in the Bodoland movement is perhaps the widely shared sense of belonging to a category called 'women'. This sense was further widened and consolidated in the process of the spread of awareness regarding education, health, child rearing etc. among the rural Bodo women.

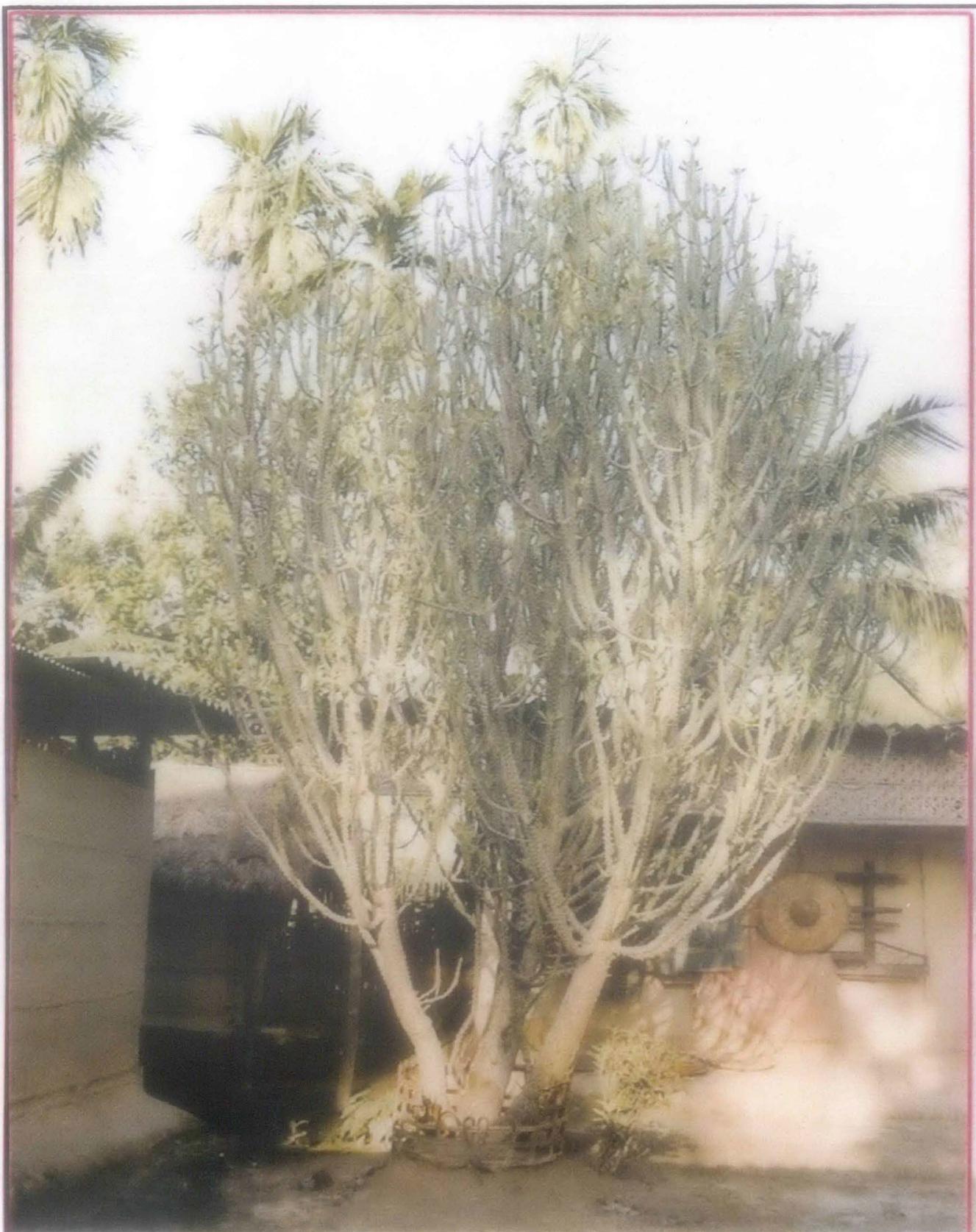
Women constitute half of the total population of Bodoland. They control over neither resources around them, whether it is physical resource, human resource, intellectual resource and the self, nor over ideology. Analysis of women status reveals that women even in the present age are suffering from many disabilities and discriminations everywhere. In Bodoland, Bodo women enjoy much higher status

than the women of others part of the country as women are free from the caste related problems and other social problems such as dowry, child-marriage and bride-burning etc. which are rampant in most of parts of India. But they are economically dependent and vulnerable, politically and legally powerless. We can simply define power as control over resources and control of ideology and it is exercised through a series of orders or decision making capacity. Therefore, to establish gender equality there is need for the empowerment of women in society. The concept of 'empowerment' refers to a range of activities from individual self-realization and self assertion to participation or involvement in projects in a functional sense, to the control over decision regarding all aspects of one's life and livelihood. Women are very important segment in development from local to global levels. But women are treated as secondary status in social life, economic activities and decision making. Among their families their role in work productivity, employment generation and income oriented activities are hindered by many socio-economic constraints. So the upliftment of women is essential for the over all socio-economic development of the society.

Since 1990, women subordinate position has been recognised and the need to improve their status beyond the traditional spheres has become a significant step in international arena. In India also three important approaches were adopted one after the other by the central as well as state government towards the development of women through the welfare approach, anti-poverty approach and equality approach. Some of the basic empowerment mechanisms introduced in India are literacy and higher education, better health care, greater work participation, opportunities for higher position of power, knowledge of rights and self-reliance, self-respect and dignity of being a woman. Besides government initiatives, in BTC area

recently a number of NGOs and Self- Help Groups started to play a prominent role in the empowerment of women and gender equality. The income generating activities of the NGOs and SHGs resulted in various positive aspects such as arousing self confidence among women; women get recognition as an economic entity; women get to know about the outside world; they gain greater control over self, share their problems, and a feeling of oneness among women were developed furthering group solidarity.

Education of women has got immense importance for the upliftment of rural Bodo women and their social setup. Education is an essential factor in achieving economic development, individual development and technical progress and in creating a social order founded on the values of freedom, social justice and equality of opportunities, to avoid social evils and taboos through educating them. So I sum up my work with the tune of Jawaharlal Nehru: *"in order to awaken the people, it is the woman who has to be awakened, once she is on the move, the household moves, the village moves, the country moves and thus we built the India of tomorrow."* So, the empowerment of woman is the empowerment of all humanity.



An Altar of *Bāthou* at the Courtyard

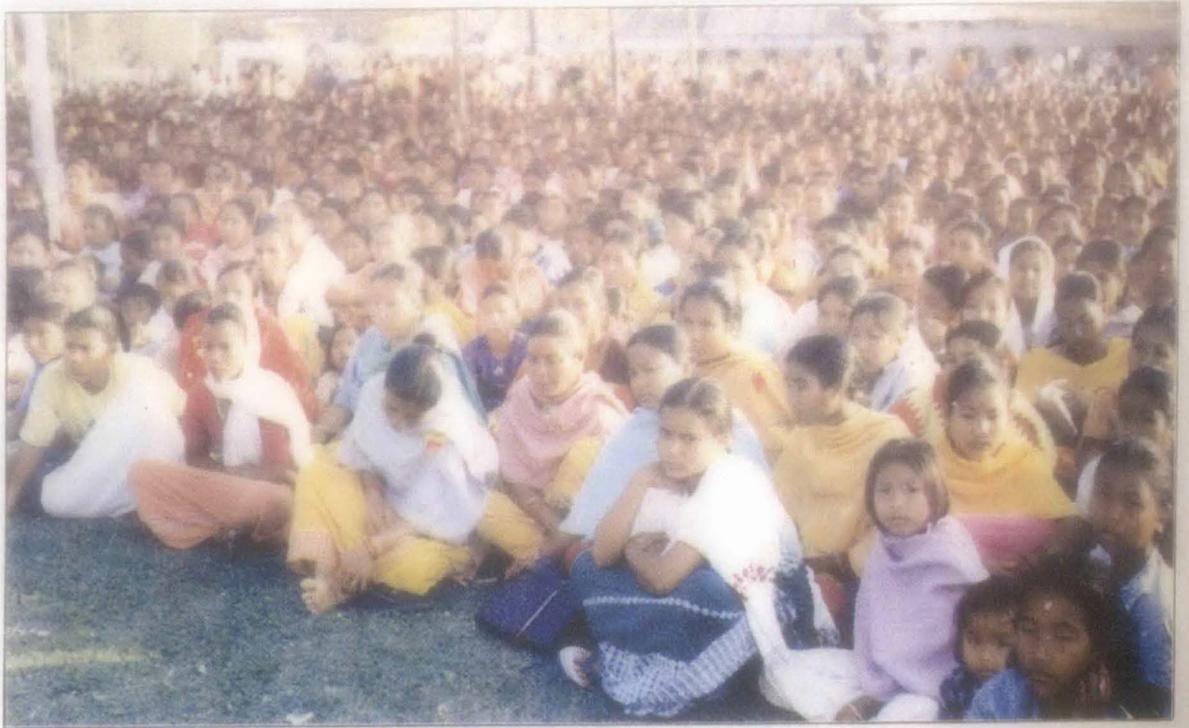


**Bodo Women Engaged in Weaving & Spinning**



Photoes of 10 Rape victims of No. 12 Bhumka on 25th & 27th Jan./88.

- Name of Rape Victims :-*
- (1) Miss Dubri Basumatary (18),
  - (2) Miss Habe Bala Basumatary(13),
  - (3) Miss Lalita Basumatary (13),
  - (4) Miss Tarli Basumatary (13),
  - (5) Miss Sunila Bala Basumatary (17),
  - (6) Miss Joymoti Narzary (15),
  - (7) Miss Subabala Basumatary (15),
  - (8) Smti Orge Basumatary (50)
  - (9) Miss Debala Mushahary,
  - (10) Miss Pramila Basumatary (15).



Bodo women's strength shown in the Conference of AATWWF held at Amjonga, Dudhnoi in Goalpara District and ABSU President U.N.Brahma is seen welcomed with 'Aronai' as the Chief Guest in the open session of the Conference.

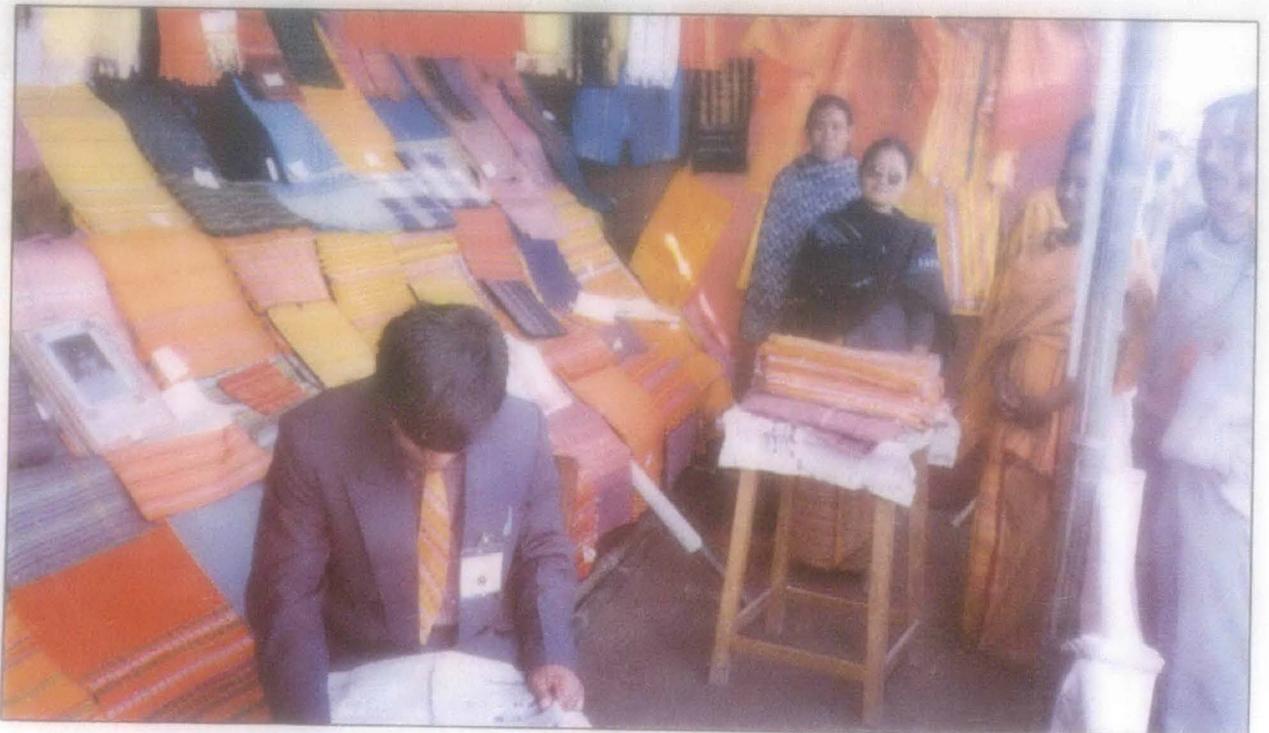


Show of Bodo women force and AATWWF President Smti Supriya Rani Brahma addressing the Volunteers during a prohibition day meeting on 4th April/89.





Bodo Cultural Programmes displayed during the Ceremonial Declaration of Bodo Accord on 7th March / 93.



**Cloths and garments, spinning and weaving of Bodo Women leading in the way of business**



Picture shows indifferent efficiencies of the Bodo Women in different fields.

**Appendix-A**

A memorandum submitted by All Assam Women's Welfare Federation on an appeal to intervene into the burning Bodoland issue on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1989.

OFFICE OF THE

ALL ASSAM TRIBAL WOMEN'S WELFARE FEDERATION

H. Q.: KOKRAJHAR.

P.O. & DIST.: KOKRAJHAR (BODOLAND)

Est. - 1986.

Pramila Rani Brahma B.A. (Hons)

Miss Kamali Basumatary

President.

Secretary.

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A

MEMORENDUM

TO

MR. R.VENKATARAMAN

HONOURABLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, NEW DELHI

MR. RAJIB GANDHI

HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA, NEW DELHI

AND

MR. BUTA SING

HONOURABLE UNION HOME MINISTER OF INDIA, NEW DELHI

DATED, NEW DELHI THE 29<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 1989.

SUBMITTED BY

ALL ASSAM TRIBAL WOMEN'S WELFARE FEDERATION.

SUB:- An appeal to intervene into the burning 'Bodoland' issue and save the annihilation threat-stricken peace loving innocent Bodo and other plains tribal people from the jaws of the on going State-Terrorism and calculated Bodo genocide plan of the present A.G.P. Govt.

Most Respected Sir,

With affluent stream of profound respect and references, we the following signatories, for and on behalf of the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) in particular and the whole tribal people in general would like to offer you our heartfelt thanks and at the same time convey our deep sense of gratitude to you for giving us this privilege to submit this significant memorandum which contains particularly the present burning "Bodoland" issue- a life and death question of the millions of Bodo people, age old genuine aspirations, deep rooted burning problems and grievances of the Plains tribal people the aboriginal people of Assam for your kind perusal and prompt necessary follow up actions for immediate amicable solution there of.

That sir, the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF), a well representative popular women organization of the tribal communities of the state of Assam came into being on the 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1996 with the sacred motto of fighting for emancipating the over all exploited, suppressed, depressed and deprived tribal

womenfolk from injustices meted out to them also for standing resolutely for the development, security and reformation of the tribal society.

That sir your honour is aware of the fact that the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation has been fighting injustice meted out the innocent tribal womenfolk by the chauvinist Assam Govt. headed by Sri P. K. Mahatma, since its inception. Therefore Sir, today we once again would like to remind your honour the ongoing popular, peaceful democratic and non-violent "Bodoland Mass Movement" which received tremendous spontaneous peoples support and gained momentum, which could not be tolerated by present parochial and the most communal A.G.P. Government. Instead of coming forward with an open heart and mind to solve the burning ethno-political question of the million of the Bodo and the other plains tribal people politically through peaceful negotiation with movement leaders, the AGP Government has continuously been attempting to crush-down the popular democratic movement of the aboriginal Bodo people by the use of the brute police force and by imposing various 'black laws' like, the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act.1987 upon the innocent Bodo people and also 144 Cr. P.C. in tribal areas with an intention to snatch away the legitimate constitutional and democratic rights of the Bodo.

That sir, since the beginning of the movement, the AGP Govt. started to create a reign of terror through systematic state terrorism to frustrate and crack-down the Bodo mass movement with an intention to perpetuate the political hegemony and dominion of the Assamese people upon the down trodden plains tribal Bodo people for all times to come.

That sir, in regard to the systematic and calculated state terrorism some glaring examples have been cited here in below for your kind information and taking immediate needful follow up action at the end.

### **THE BHUMKHA GANG RAPE:**

By unleashing an unprecedented state –terrorism, the chauvinist AGP Govt. could not satisfy its thirst only by slaughtering the innocent Bodo but also it deliberately indulged the barbaric Assam Police forces in committing heinous gang rape crimes upon teenaged Bodo girls at different places during the on going Bodo Mass Movement.

In this regard the nation wide known heinous 12 No. Bhumkha police gang-rape incident will always witness the nature and brutality of the 'Police Raj' let loose by the present AGP Govt. upon the innocent Bodo women folk in additional to men folk in the name of maintaining law and order situation. Most regrettable and woefully worth- mentioning fact is that on 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> January 1988 at midnight some wild beast like Assam Police personnel had committed a heinous gang rape crime upon teenage 10 (ten) Bodo girls in the village of 12 No. Bhumkha forest Village under Kokrajhar District during village raid. The helpless victims has been succumbed to brutal hang-rape by the police before the eyes of their parents. The parents of the victims were beaten up severely by the barbaric culprit police personnel while they attempt to safe their daughters.

Name of the Bhumkha Gang-rape victims of 25<sup>th</sup> January 1988 are:

1. Miss Debala Mushahary, 14 years.
2. Miss Pramila Basumatary, 15 years.

3. Mrs. Orge Basumatary, 50 years.

Name of the Bhumkha gang-rape victims of 27<sup>th</sup> January are:

1. Miss Tharli Basumatary, 15 years
2. Miss Lalita Basumatary, 13 years
3. Miss Sunila Bala Basumatary, 17, years
4. Miss Subala Bala Basumatary, 15 years
5. Miss Jaymati Narzary, 15 years
6. Miss Habe Bala Basumatary, 13 years
7. Miss Dubri Basumatary, 12 years.

Like wise, in the village of Rupnathpur under Kachugaon PS within the district of Kokrajhar, some police personnel of the 4<sup>th</sup> Assam Police Task Force gang-rape one Sonali Basumatary 13, year's daughter of Suren Basumatary on 4<sup>th</sup> March, 1989 and the mother of the victims Rinti Basumatary was also severely molested. Again on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1989 too, one Barki Murmu a helpless Adivasi widow of village Nandorbari under Sidli Police Station within Kokrajhar District had been gang rape by the police personnel. Mrs Siloda Brahma(30) W/O Pabitra Brahma (35) of village Gambaribil under the Gossaigaon PS in Kokrajhar District was also gang-rape by the Assam police during the village raid and several other women were also molested by the same party. Besides this so many teenaged Bodo girls and women have been gang-rape and molested by the barbaric Assam Police forces at different places within the movement torn tribal areas particularly in the district of Kokrajhar and Darrang. In this way gang-rape and molestation of Bodo girls and women become a routine work of communal Assam police forces during the on-going Bodoland Movement.

## **BRUTAL KILLINGS OF INNOCENT BODO GIRLS AND WOMEN:**

The barbaric Assam Police forces killed not only Bodo men folk but innocent girls and women also have been succumbed to injuries by the calculated Bodo genocide plan. Very shockingly, on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1988 one Gaide Basumatary (32) mother of seven children of the village Suripara under Gossaigaon Police Station within the district of Kokrajhar was shot dead by the Assam police while she was coming to market. On the same day, another teenaged Helena Basumatary of the village Motambil under Gossaigaon Police Station was also brutally shot dead. Again one three month old baby of the deceased Gaide Basumatary name Rambha Basumatary died on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1988, out of starvation due to lack of mothers breast feeding and care. Even the death body of Martyr Gaide Basumatary was not handed over to the deceased family.

Another, innocent pregnant Bodo women name Baduli Basumatary (25) was shot dead by the barbaric Assam Police at Belsor near Gareswar under Kamrup district on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1989 in the fake encounter. Kingkri Basumatary (12) under Barpeta district was also shot dead by the police on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1989 and another Bilaishri Boro (17) was also killed by the Assam police during village ransacking on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1989 in the village of Borigaon under Darrang district.

In this way, more than 20 Bodo girls and women have been shot dead and killed by both the communal Assam police and the planted Assamese agent-provocateurs at different place in the district of Kamrup, Darrang, Sanitpur and Goalpara.

Over and above, more than 10 innocent Bodo girls and women feared to have been killed by AGP Govt. deployed Assamese agent-provocateurs in a pre-

planned attack with lethal weapons just after the explosion of bombs planted the opportunist political hooligans at Bongaigaon town on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1989. Most of the victims were gang-raped by the chauvinist Assamese provocative agent culprits prior to their being killed. It was the handy work of the present AGP Govt. designed with ugly political motive to implicate the Bodo agitations with an intention to crack-down the movement and also to arouse the sentiment of the non-tribal people against the Bodo people and there by to escalate a boldly communal rioting between tribal and non-tribal during the Bodoland Movement.

Very surprisingly, it is a worthmentioning fact that even several innocent women and girls had been arrested, tortured brutally and kept in jails on various concocted charges.

KILLINGS OF INNOCENT BODOS, ADIVASIS, RAJBANGSHIS PEOPLE, VILLAGE RAIDS AND OPERATIONS LOOTINGS POISONING OF FOODSTUFF AND DRINKING WATER, MASS ARRESTS, BRUTAL TORTURE, SETTING FIRE ON HOUSES OF BODO FAMILIES AND DESTRUCTION OF HOUSE OF BODO FAMILIES AND DESTRUCTION OF HOUSEHOLD PROPERTIES BY THE ASSAM POLICE AND PLANTED GOONDAS OF A.G.P. GOVERNMENT :

It has become already a well known fact that since the beginning of the movement deadly anti-tribal AGP govt. has been attempting to crush-down on-going popular "Bodoland Movement" through the application of sophisticated political devices, sabotaging tactic, imposition of black law like- Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (prevention) Act.1987 upon innocent Bodo people,144 Cr. P.C. in the tribal areas and also by creating a marvelous reign of terror among the down-trodden

annihilation, threat stricken Bodo people through pre-planned killings, torture, mass arrests, day and night village raids and operations ransacking of the houses, looting and damages of the household properties, poisoning of food stuff and drinking water by the deployment and use of brute police forces.

Until now more than 300 innocent Bodo man and women and including children have already been killed by the beastly Assamese police personnel in entire proposed Bodoland areas mostly in Kokrajhar, Darrang, Sonitpur, Dhubri, Kamrup, Barpeta, Lakimpur and Goalpara districts. Nearly 4000 innocent men and minor boys and even physically handicapped too are now languishing in different jails of Assam upon whom even the torture of "*THIRD DEGREE METHOD*" is being applied. The detained have been deprived of the due medical aid and proper foodstuff due to which some of them expired under the jail custody and some of them are now suffering from various diseases.

Day and night village raids and operations are still continuing in Bodo dominated tribal areas within the proposed Bodoland state areas during which most abominable, inhuman and criminal activities have been carried out by the Assam police force. Even like 12 no. Bhumkha gang-rape has again been repeated in the village of Rupnathpur under Kochugaon police station and also in many other places within the proposed Bodoland areas. During the village raids and operations hundreds of innocent men and women had been shot dead and killed bayonet charge and brutal tortures in fake encounters wherein even the innocent Adivasi and Rajbongshi people also had not been spared. As a result, so many innocent men and women now have been crippled with the loosed of their vital limbs for good.

The systematic lootings, damages of house-hold properties have become a routine work. During the village raids, houses of more than 1500 Bodo families have

already been burn down and plundered by the most communal Assamese police forces with the help of deployed political stooges in a plan way. Now, more than 7000 helpless Bodo people are sheltering in locality arranged relief camps in different places without govt. assistance. For example the relief camps of Gerua Bazar under Dolgaon P.S. in Darrang district and Bangaldoba, Patakata, Gambaribil in Kokrajhar district can be cited.

### **CONSPIRACY OF THE A.G.P. GOVERNMENT TO ESCALATE COMMUNAL CLASHES BETWEEN TRIBAL AND NON TRIBALS:**

'The All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation' has bitterly been observing that the present chauvinist Assamese A.G.P. Government has been attempting to escalate bloody communal clashes between the agitating tribal and non-tribal people with a view to diverging the agitation from their cherished political goal. To cite example, in Darrang district, Assam police forces had forced some 200 Muslim people from Chikamati area to accompany with them during the raid under Dolgaon Police Station on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1989 and these Muslim people had been applied in burning down the houses of hundreds of Bodo families of the villages like Lailangpara, Jhargaon, Gerua Bazaar, Chutia Para and Madhagossai under Dolgaon Police Station. In Kokrajhar district, the AGP Government provocative agents shot dead an innocent Munda Adivasi boy namely Thatu Dhanwar (17) of the village Dakin Sabhaijhar under Kokrajhar P.S. on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1989 at Gaurang-Tinali with an intention to incite the Adivasi people against the Bodes for communal rioting. Again in Goalpara district and also at Bongaigaon town these planted agents caused the explosion of the two time bombs on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1989 killing 17<sup>th</sup> innocent people and injuring many others with a motive to arouse the sentiments of other non-tribal people against the agitating Bodo for communal clashes. Taking the advantage of

this incident the afore-said agents attacked the Bodo people in pre-planned way where more than 10 (ten) Bodo men and women might have been killed. All this activities done by the AGP Government and its agents are quite deplorable and systematic move and attempt to escalate clashes between tribal and non-tribal.

Under the above circumstanced, the aboriginal Bodo people and other plains tribal people of Assam now badly required your kind constitutional safeguard in all respect. All Constitutional, Democratic, Fundamental, Civil Rights and also the basic human rights of the down trodden tribal people of Assam as a whole have totally been violated and snatched away by the present Assam Government and it has been aggravating the situation more and more grave by the deployment of more Army, CRPF, Paramilitary forces and police battalions in Bodo dominated areas instead of solving the burning Bodo land issue through peaceful political negotiation with the movement leaders. The present situation warrants immediate intervention of the Central Govt. of India into burning ethno-political question of the Bodo people to solve the issue politically through the negotiation, since the Bodo and other plains tribal people-the aborigines' people of Assam as a whole lost confidence in present AGP Government.

Therefore, the AATWWF would like to place the following genuine demands before your honour for favour of your prompt action and consideration for the safeguard, development and survival of Bodo and other aboriginal tribal people.

#### **CHARTER OF DEMANDS:**

1. The Govt. of India should immediately settle the burning "Bodoland" issue and other political demands of ABSU through peaceful political negotiation with the movement leaders once and for all to bring permanent peace on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra.

2. The Govt. of India should immediately make concrete arrangements to provide full safeguard to the down-trodden Bodo people.
3. Central Govt. should immediately inquire into the heinous gang-rapes of the Bodo girls and women committed by the Assam Police Forces repeatedly through the CBI and punished the involved culprits and should rehabilitate the unfortunate victims by providing ex-gratia grants of amounting of Rs.1 lakhs each.
4. Govt. of India should make immediate arrangements to provide 30% reservation quota to tribal women in all Govt. and semi Govt. services.
5. Central Government of India should take prompt initiative to stop the state terrorism in the garb of systematic killings of innocent Bodo men and women, firings, brutal torture with "Third Degree Method", mass arrests, day and night village raids, lootings, gang-rape, damages of household articles, poisoning of food stuffs and drinking wells by the Assam police.
6. All detainees during the on-going Bodoland movement should be released unconditionally and all concocted pending cases also should be withdrawn forthwith.
7. The imposition of Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (prevention) Act.1987, upon innocent Bodo people and 144 Cr. P.C. from the tribal areas should be withdrawn immediately.
8. All Army, CRPF, Para-Military force and police camps should immediately be withdrawn from the Bodo tribal areas with a view to restoring congenial atmosphere.
9. Central Govt. of India should take concrete steps to policy to eradicate illiteracy and poverty from amongst the tribal women.

10. Central Govt. of India should take all needful action and steps to protect the self identity, all constitutional, democratic and human rights of Bodes and other tribal ethnic groups of people of the present Assam.

11. Government of India should take needful initiative to provide ex-gratia grant amounting to Rs. 1 lakhs to the nearest kin of each Bodo martyr and Rs.50, 000 to each wounded person.

We, do sincerely hope your good will would surely take prompt initiative with a view to fulfilling the above cited charter of demands for all development, security and survival of Bodes in particular also of other plains tribal people in general and thereby ensure the growth of all aboriginal tribal people as distinct nationalities with their own genius and accord as per with the rest of the country<sup>29</sup>.

Yours faithfully

For and on behalf of the

All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF)

S/d illegible

1. Mrs. Pramila Rani Brahma,  
President, AATWWF.
2. Miss Mira Rani Brahma,  
Asstt. Secy, AATWWF.
3. Mrs. Sukantala Basumatary, Secy,  
KDC, AATWWF.
4. Miss Mithinga Basumatary, Member,  
AATWWF.
5. Miss Fullmoon Brahma, Member,  
AATWWF.

**Appendix-B**

A memorandum submitted by All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation on demand to set up CBI inquiry against Bhagmara Gang Rape on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1990.

OFFICE OF THE  
ALL ASSAM TRIBAL WOMEN'S WELFARE FEDERATION

H. Q.: KOKRAJHAR.

P.O. % DIST.: KOKRAJHAR (BODOLAND)

Estd.-1986.

Pramila Rani Brahma B.A. (Hons)

Miss Kamali Basumatary

President.

Secretary.

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A

MEMORENDUM

TO

MR. D.D. THAKUR

HONOURABLE GOVERNOR OF ASSAM

AND

MR. PRAFULLA KUMAR MAHANTA

HONOURABLE CHIEF MINISTER, DISPUR, GUWAHATI

DATED, GUWAHATI THE 20THMAY, 1990.

SUBMITTED BY

ALL ASSAM TRIBAL WOMEN'S WELFARE FEDERATION.

SUB:-DEMAND TO SET UP CBI INQUIRY AGAINST THE BHAGHMARA GANG RAPE ON 12 MINOR BODO GIRLS AND WOMEN AND 26 MOLESTED WOMEN AT DIFFERENT VILLAGE UNDER PATHACHARKUCHI AND BARPETA ROAD POLICE STATION.

Respected Sirs,

We the undersigned, for and on behalf of the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation have the honour to submit this significant memorandum for your kind attention and sympathetic necessary action to stop the unabated police atrocities especially on Bodo people.

That sir, you are aware of the fact that after the tri-partite talks held in New Delhi between the Central Govt., State Govt. and Bodoland movement leaders an agreement as well as an assurance was established in the minutes to stop all police atrocities to create a congenial atmosphere. But the Assam Govt. itself has been letting loose the reign of terror in the Bodo villages instigating the police personnel's to crush down the vigorous and spontaneous mass movement in order to create the Bodoland State.

The following stated complains are examples of such untold and extreme police atrocities:

That sir, on May 10<sup>th</sup> 1990 at 2.00 am – 5.00 am, the Assam police personnel with the help of joint forces of Madhya Pradesh Police Special Armed Forces (MPSAF), Assam Police Task Force (APTF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) raided the villages of Bagmara, Agranguri, Rebonguri, Hasjora, etc. under Barpeta Road Police Station and Patacharkuchi Police Station in Barpeta district in the name of nabbing Bodo extremists. During this raid, they had committed great crimes by gang raping 12 Bodo minor girls and women including two fragment women in a barbaric way. Mrs. Basanti Deory Boro who is 8 months fragment was also rape and was barbarously enjoyed by three police personals at the same time. Again Mrs. Tarani Boro, 18 years old who is 3 (three) months' fragment was also raped twice by different police personals and her mother-in-law who tried to save her from them was tortured as well as frightened up. Over and above Miss Reena Basumatary and Miss Mandrila Daimary, 10 and 12 years old respectively were raped before a number of women who were really in panic. In this way 26 women and girls were also molested as well as tortured very badly, a fact which is beyond the imagination in this civilized world.

With the above Stated, we are compelled to express our horror and helplessness to think of the plight of our people under the administration which is not capable to safeguard the minimum dignity and honour of the tribal people. As such we request you earnestly to take up urgent and immediate measures for the control of such repeated acts of atrocities protection of which they are created, our wards fails to adequately express the feeling of the society as a whole towards such systematic designs to deliberately cow-down the very spirit of our people for regeneration.

On behalf of the society and tribal women as a whole and the unfortunate victims of the police atrocities we demand of the Govt. for immediate fulfilment of the following demands:

1. C.B.I. enquiry must be instituted for finding out of the culprits and adequate punishment must be meted to the human beasts.
2. Adequate measures must be taken up for rehabilitation of the unfortunate raped and molested victims.
3. The Police out Posts in the Bodo areas must be vacated along with the Police personnel so that they are no longer able to perpetrate acts of atrocities on the innocent Bodo villagers.
4. The arrested Bodo people during the raid must be released forthwith unconditionally<sup>30</sup>.

Thanking you sir,

Copy to-

1. Hon'ble Minister Home,  
Govt. of Assam, Dispur.

Sincerely yours, of  
S/d illegible,

2. The Director General of Police,  
Assam, Dispur.

1. Pramila Rani Brahma  
President, AATWWF.

2. Supria Rani Brahma  
Joint Sect, AATWWF.

3. Bijaya Brahma  
Adviser, AATWWF.

**Appendix-C**

*A memorandum submitted by All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation in implementation of Bodoland Autonomous Council signed in between the Centre-State Government and Bodo leaders on the 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1993:*

OFFICE OF THE

ALL BODO WOMEN'S WELFARE FEDERATION

H.Q.: KOKRAJHAR.

P.O. & DIST.: KOKRAJHAR (BODOLAND)

Est. - 1996.

From:-

Mrs. Latikha Hajowary,

*President.*

Mrs. Hirabai Narzary

*Secretary.*

---

Ref. No. ....

Date 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1996.

A

MEMORENDUM

TO

SHRI H.D. DEVEGODA

HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

AND

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA

HONOURABLE HOME MINISTER OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

ON DEMANDS OF ARRANGEMENT OF A FRESH

TRI-PARTITE POLITICAL TALK ON

BODOLAND ISSUES IN NEW DELHI IMMEDIATELY

SUBMITTED BY THE

ALL BODO WOMEN'S WELFARE FEDARATION (ABWWF)

H. Q. - KOKRAJHAR, BODOLAND, ASSAM.

Most Respected Sir(S),

We, the undersigned, for and on behalf of the All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF), would like to convey our warm congratulations and best wishes and express our gratitude for giving us the privilege of meeting and submitting you this tiny memorandum containing the untold problems and miseries of Bodo people living in Brahmaputra valley of Assam. They are the earliest settlers of Assam, who contributed in the well being of the state and participated in the national Independent movement led by the fathers of the nation Mahatma Gandhi. The Bodo had their kings and kingdoms. They were the original masters and rulers of entire Assam and were self contained as well as developed and settled economy. However after the independence the situation began to change. The Bods, who fought against

the British found themselves in the power game of equation isolated. The emerging new political elites of Assam, after independence, began largely to depend on immigrants Muslims from Bangladesh as vote bank, ignoring the indigenous tribal people. Gradually the Bodo began to lose their political power as they were outnumbered by the immigrants Muslims and receded to oblivion. As a result, the tribal, particularly the Bodo had to lose their lands and properties, language, culture and traditions were threatened to be assimilated completely. The so called protective measure of Tribal Belts and Blocks provided in the chapter X of Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1886 which is practically a farce Act, have not been protected at all for the interests of the tribal and the 45 (Forty Five) Tribal Belts and Blocks covering an area of 1, 25, 28,320 Bighas and 1 Kata and 10 Lechas have also not been preserved and protected by the enforcement law to the reality. Lakh of non-tribal encroachers have illegally occupied lands in Tribal Belts and Blocks and they have got land pattas also in connivance with the Govt. officials. As such tens of thousands of common tribal people have been badly exploited and rendered landless and shelter-less. Now, many of them have become just like refugees. The problems are still unabated, migrants Muslims are still flooding in the state of Assam mainly in tribal areas. On the other hand, due to the failure of the earlier as well as present Govt. to protect the tribal areas, the non-tribal encroachers such as non-indigenous people have formed majority in tribal areas and oppressed and exploited the tribal people systematically.

Over and above the land problems, the Bodo have been deprived of the –  
(1) Constitutional benefits under the Fifth and Sixth schedule, (2) Justice under the Article 14, 15, 16, 21, 26, 28, 29, and 30 of the Indian Constitution and (3) other Fundamental Rights provided in the Constitution of India. Some more problems are

that the measures taken by the Assam Government for the development of tribal are quite ineffective but totally farce. The schemes of Tribal Sub-Plan, The Tribal development Corporation, Tribal Development Authority, Integrated Tribal development Projects, Welfare Schedule Tribe and Backwards Classes, Tribal Research Institute etc. meant for the development of tribal utterly failed to protect the interests of tribal and could not bring the expected and adequate developments of the plain tribal's of Assam. The plain tribal also could not enjoy the facilities properly provided in the Article 275 of the Indian Constitution due to the discriminatory policies of the Assam government and administration.

Due to all these reasons, all the Bodo organisations including the All Bodo Student's Union, in collaboration with the support of Lakh of Bodo and other tribal living in Assam had been compelled to launch a vigorous democratic mass movement from 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1987 to 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1993 demanding the separation from Assam by creating a separate state in the north bank of the river Brahmaputra from river Songkosh in the west to Sodia in the east, creation of Nilachal and Lalung Autonomous District Councils in the south bank of the river Brahmaputra and inclusion of Boro-Kacharis of Karbi-Anglong into the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution for their political self determination and gradually the movement took a serious and violent turn and there had been an unrest situation in Assam. Ultimately, due to the pressure of the urgency of the mounting situation, the government of India and government of Assam were compelled to arrange a tri-partite talk to solve the vexed Bodo problems politically and amicably. As a result of which the an accord was signed in between the Centre–State Government and Bodo leaders on the 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1993 leading to the creation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council.

But sir, we are painfully to mention that despite of full support and co-operation of all section of the people including the Bodes, the Govt. of Assam has completely failed to implement the Bodo Accord in letter and spirit as per the accord as desired by the people of the area to be included into the Bodoland Autonomous Council including the boundary demarcation of the council.

Following the failure of the Govt. of Assam to implement the Bodo accord in reality, the All Bodo Student's Union(ABSU) has been compelled to denounce the Bodo accord as the total failure and resolved to revive and go back to its original demands for creation of separate state of Bodoland in the north bank of the river Brahmaputra, creation of Autonomous District Council in the south bank of the river Brahmaputra and inclusion of Boro Kacharis of Karbi-Anglong into sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution and as such, the union in collaboration with the support of the mass people has already started its democratic movement in support of demands since 4<sup>th</sup> march, 1996. On the other hand many Bodo organisations including the All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation have also extended their full support towards the demands and the mass movement.

The All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation has already experienced during the previous Bodo movement that, innocent people are harassed, jailed, killed and handicapped either by the extremists or the police forces and women and teenaged girls are raped by the police forces and corers of value of properties of the Bodo people were demolished and destroyed. On the other hand, many non Bodo officials and general people were also killed and harassed by the anti-social and saboteur element during the movement period to malign the real cause of the movement.

Therefore, to avoid the recurrence of any such law and order situations destructive to the general human being and the society, we humbly request your kind honour to take an immediate step to arrange a fresh Tri-Partite Political Talk in New Delhi inviting all the agitating Bodo leaders and organisations to solve the aged-old unsolved demands of the Bodes permanently for restoring peace, normalcy, fraternity and integrity in the region and India as a whole. The All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation would also request your honour kindly to invite and hold talks with the underground extremists' organisation of the north-east India unconditionally to stop the continuation of the extremists in the region forever for the well being of the human society as a whole.

Sir, in regard to the recent communal riot in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon Districts of Assam, the ABWWF strongly condemns such a tragic human carnage and demand the punishment of the culprits responsible for the carnage. But we are sorry to inform you that the govt. of Assam did not take any effective political steps to stop the spreading of the riot during the initial stage as a result of which it could get the chance to spread in larger areas particularly in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon district. Even, till today no adequate measure have been taken up by the govt. of Assam to rehabilitate the riot effected people in their respective places for which the relief inmates are languishing in the relief camps in deteriorating conditions. On the other hand, no measures have been taken up to vacate the building of the Educational Institutions starting from primary to college levels by shifting their relief inmates in their own place as a result of which many schools and colleges have been compelled to shut down automatically causing to the loss of thousands of students of all levels. So, we request you kindly to take a prompt step to intervene in

the case personally and rehabilitate the riot affected people immediately ensuring of lives and properties of the people with the providence of adequate relief materials.

Sir, we also like to place the following genuine non-political demands before your honour for your kind consideration and needful actions thereof:

1. Reservation of 30% seats for women in the central and State Govt. jobs.
2. Installation of Bodo Bhawan in New Delhi.
3. Installation of Central University at Kokrajhar.
4. Installation of Major Educational Institution such as Govt. Medical College, Govt. Engineering College at Kokrajhar.
5. Installation of Indian Institute of Technology at Kokrajhar.
6. Installation of Bodo Language in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
7. Establishment of Agriculture University at Udalguri.
8. Recognition and implementation of Bodo as one of the Regional Language subjects in UPSC and other Civil Service Examinations.
9. Settlement of Boarder dispute between Assam and Nagaland and provide adequate security to the people living in boarder areas.
10. Launching of massive industrializations in the north bank of the river Brahmaputra.
11. Transmission of Bodo programmes and Bodo News from the Gauhati Door Darshan Kendra.
12. Detention and Deportation of Foreign Nationals and stoppage of political assassination and extremism in Assam.

Sir, we hope that your honour would be kind enough to study the demands mentioned above sympathetically and take a prompt step to solve all the

demands politically through mutual discussions across the table by arranging a tri-partite Talk in New Delhi comprising of all the agitating Bodo leaders and organisations immediately to bring back peace and normalcy in the region for the greater interest of the human society as a whole<sup>31</sup>.

Praying for the providence of the longevity all of you.

With thanks.

Sincerely Your,

For and on behalf of the

All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation

S/D illegible

(Mrs. Latikha Hazowary)

President

(Mrs. Hirabai Narzary)

General Secretary

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