

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 19th 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 6th 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, Bagsa 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^o and the northern belts is the coolest, the temperature going below 10^o. 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 14th century up to the beginning of the 18th 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.