

Chapter 2

Introduction of the Bodos

India is a meeting ground of diverse races, cultures, civilizations, religions, languages, ethnic groups and societies. Streams of different human races like Austro-Asiatic, Negritos, Dravidians, Alpines, Indo-Mongoloids, Tibeto-Burman and Aryans penetrated in India at different periods through different routes. They migrated and settled in different parts of India making their own history, culture and civilization. They had contributed to the structuring of the great Indian culture, history and civilization. The Tibeto-Burman people are predominant in whole North-Eastern region. The Bodos are one of the earliest settlers in Assam.

The older generation of scholars used the term 'Bodo' to denote the earliest Indo-Mongoloid migrants to eastern India who subsequently spread over different regions of Bengal, Assam and Tripura. Grierson identifies the Bodos as a section of the Assam-Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman speakers belonging to the Sino-Tibetan speech family.¹ S.K. Chatterjee subscribes to the same view. According to him these people migrated to eastern India in the second millennium B.C. and a large portion of them was absorbed within societies of plains-man at quite an early state.² Isolation caused fragmentation of the original stock and ultimately the branches assumed independent tribal identities like the Tipra, the Bodo-Kachari, the Rabha, the Dimsasa, the Chutiya etc. Rev. Sydney Endle, in his monograph, *The Kacharis*, used 'The Kachari' in the same wider sense incorporating all these branches. In present day socio-political terminology 'the Bodo' means the plain tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley known earlier as 'the Bodo-Kachari'. The media at the regional and national level; officials at the Centre and the state political parties of all hues and the people in general have accepted what may be termed as the contraction of the original denotation. In

the light of this situation, in this study also the term 'Bodo' has been used in the new sense, meaning the Bodo-Kacharis of the Brahmaputra Valley. Rev. Endle identifies trans-Himalayan region between Tibet and China as the original home of the Bodos.³ S.K. Chatterjee is more specific when he suggests that 'the north-western China between the headwaters of the Huang Ho and Yang-Tsze Kiang rivers was the early home of the Proto-Bodos who migrated to eastern India in waves between the second millennium B.C. to the first millennium A.D. There are also other theories which we need not go into since the determination of the original home of the Bodos does not have any direct bearing on our study.' However, for our purpose, it is necessary to remember that scholars like Edward Gait, J.D. Anderson and K.L. Barua hold the Bodos as the autochthons of the Brahmaputra Valley. At present, they are concentrated mainly in the districts of Kamrupa, Goalpara, Darrang and Nagaon of the Brahmaputra Valley. According to the Census of 1971 the Bodo population of Assam was 6,10,450 in 1971. Amalendu Guha, on the basis of the Census of 1881 thinks that in the late nineteenth century the Bodos formed one third of the indigenous population of the Brahmaputra Valley.⁴

The Bodo or Boro are the largest indigenous tribe of Assam. The term 'Bodo' was for the first time used by B.H. Hodgson as an ethnological term to refer the Meches, the Bodo speaking people of Darjeeling District in 1846 while writing about them. Since then the word 'Bodo' has been used as a generic term to denote the different branches of the Bodo language group.

The Bodos are spread all over the plains of Brahmaputra valley of Assam along the foothills on northern boundary adjoining Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. The Bodos are the earliest Indo-Mongoloid migrants to eastern India who subsequently spread all over the different regions of Bengal, Assam and Tripura.⁵

G.A. Grierson in his work “Linguistic survey of India” identifies the Bodos as a section of Assam-Burman group of the Tibeto-Burman speaker belonging to the Chino-Tibetan speech family”.

Dr. Sunity Kumar Chatterjee is also of the same opinion. According to him, *“these people migrated to eastern India in the second millennium BC and large portion of them were absorbed within societies of the plains.”*⁶

The Bodo speaking people called themselves as the Bodo or Boro fisa (means son of Bodo). According to G.A. Grierson Tibeto-Chinese stock of language originated in the plain areas of Yung-Tsze-Kiang and Huang-ho river of china. This family is now widespread throughout the western and the southern of the Asia continent including Burma, Assam and North east India. As per the classification given by the Robert Shafer, the Bodo language belongs to the branches of Baric section under the Baric division of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The Language survey of India describes the Bodo language under the Bodo subsection under the Assam Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman branches of Sino-Tibetan Chinese family. G.A. Grierson had also designated the Bodo as ‘Boro’ or ‘Bodo’. The Bodo groups comprises (as stated in the Linguist survey of India Voll-3, part-ii), the following tribes: Kachari or Bodo, Lalung, Dimasa, Garo, Rabha, Tripuri (Kok-Borok), Koch, Chutiya (Deori) and Moran. The group of tribes known as Bodo or Boro forms the most numerous and important section of non Aryan tribes of the province of Assam. Modhuras Boro says *“the Bodo or Boro speech community is now well spread throughout the north Eastern states of India including Assam, Arunachal, Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and North Eastern parts of West Bengal and adjoining area of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan”*.

Racially the Bodos of Assam belong to the Mongoloid stock. S. K. Chatterjee refers to them as ‘Indo-Mongoloid’ and the terms “defines at once their Indian connection”.⁷Some

other scholars prefer to use the term Indo-Tibetan. The physical features, such as snub nose, wide forehead, round face, scanty body hair, and high cheek bones, slit eyes and yellow skin colour points to their Mongoloid origin. This seems to pointing to Tibet and China as the original home of the race.⁸ S.K. Chatterjee located North-West China as the original homeland of Sino-Tibetan speakers. According to the Imperial Gazetteer of India, the upper courses of the Yang-Tsze-Kiang and the Huang-ho Rivers in the North-West China were the original home of the Tibeto-Burman races.⁹ It can be suggested that the original homeland of the Bodos was in the Bodo country, now known as Tibet. Ajoy Roy believes that the name 'Bodo' was derived from 'Bod' from where they migrated.¹⁰ Most of the scholars have used the term to denote a community speaking the Sino-Tibetan Bodo languages rather than to denote a race. The generic term 'Bodo' was applied first by T.C. Hodgsons to Bodo group of languages and includes Kacharis (Bodos and Dimasas), Koches, Garos, Rabhas, Chutias, Tipperas, Hojais, Lalungs, and other allied tribes of North-East India.

Realistic approach in the study of Bodo History, culture and society was started only with the English writers. The Bodos living in different parts of India have been identified by different names. In addition to the Kacharis proper, S. Endle has classed the following tribes of Boro, Rabha, Mech, Dhimal, Solanimiyas, Mahaliyas, Phulgurias, Sarniyas, Di masas, Hojais, Lalungs, Garos, and Hajongs within the fold of the great Bodo race. To this Endle says, "May be one or two smaller communities e.g. the Morans, 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 the Kochari (Bodo) race. The Bodos or Meches of Bengal called themselves as Bardhanari or Bwrdownari. The term Bardhanari is a 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 Varmana, the king of

Asura dynasty of ancient Kamrupa. The term Bardhan or Bwrdown may have close connection with the Thardhan Confederation, Bardwan, Bardhaman, Boudha, Bodo etc.

The term Kachari is a generic term for a number of groups speaking a more or less common dialect or language and claiming a common mythical ancestry¹¹ and others regarded the Kachari as aborigines, or the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley i.e. the whole of modern Assam, North Bengal and parts of Bangladesh. They ruled the whole of Assam up to the 12th century A.D. and moved to the western part of the Brahmaputra valley, North Cachar hills and the plains of Cachar in the 16th century A.D. to evade the Ahom onslaught. In the course of time they spread over a larger area, and some of their groups became isolated from others. The census of 1881 listed 12 subgroups of them,¹² whereas counted fifteen of them identified nine communities as members of the Bodo speaking group. If we combine all the lists, we get a list of eighteen groups, e.g. Bodo, Dimasa, Lalung, Madani, Mech, Rabha, Saraniya, Hojai, Garo, Rajbanshi or Koch, Chutiya, Moran, Hajong, Tippera, Mahalia, Dhimal, Solaimiya, Phulgariya.

According to Dr. N.N. Acharyya, the Kacharis are the earliest known indigenous habitants of Assam. They are known under different names in different places and ages throughout the North-Eastern corner of the Indian sub-continent. In Goalpara and North Bengal they are called Mech, in the north Cachar Hills, Dimasa. In the Brahmaputra Valley, the Kacharis are called Bodo or Bodo-fisa (son of the Bodo or Man). They were known to the Ahom as Timasa, clearly a corruption of Dimasa and therefore, this name must have been applied to them when they were ruling the Dhansiri Valley. "The idea of Dr. Acharya 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, Meghalay, Bangladesh. His concern is the present and not to the history of the past.

He is far distance from the Pre and archaeological part of 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 the Bodos 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.

Eastern Bodos were known as Kacharis. They established Kingdom at Dimapur and later shifted to Kachar. Chutiyas, Borahi & Moran in upper Assam they also established Kingdoms of their own. In the last part of twentieth century number of archaeological sites have been discovered in different parts of upper and middle Assam. To ascertain the race, culture and civilization of these archaeological sites a systematic study with scientific approach is required.

The Kachari are now represented by the Mech in Western Assam, the Bodo in central Assam, the Dimasa and Hojai in the North Cachar hills and the Sonowal and Thengal in the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley. In the Cachar plains the Kachari are known as Barmans. As the Thengals are not schedule tribes, they have to be treated separately. The Dhimal, Mahalia, Solanimiya, and Phulgaria groups of the Kachari couldn't be traced during 1991 census.

Migration and Early Settlement of the Bodos

Regarding the migration of the Bodos in India the scholars are of different opinion. As the Bodos racially belonged to the Mongoloid race, it is most probable that they might have migrated from the Central Asia, the mainland of the Mongoloid people. Most of scholars are of the opinion that the people of Bodo origin migrated in India about 5000 B.C. and the Bodos or the Kiratas are the latest migrants before the Aryans.

According to Sydney S. Endle, there are possibilities of two migrations of the Bodos from the North and North-East into the rich valley of Brahmaputra. One group entered North-East Bengal and Western Assam through the valley of the Tista, Dharla, Sonkosh, and founded the powerful kingdom of Kamrup. The other made its way through the Subansiri, Dibong and Dihong valleys into Eastern Assam and laid the foundation of Chutiya kingdom. Historians like Gait and P.C. Chaudhury have unanimously accepted that the Bodos filtered into the Assam valley cutting across various mountain passes and river courses from the North.

The Bodos migrated in successive waves and settled down at different locations in the Brahmaputra valley. Since they were nomads, they kept moving within the valley. Further, the pressure from new settlers forced them to penetrate deep into the valley. Hence their population is scattered all over Assam and even beyond the state. A faction of the Western migrants settled in the Jalpaiguri and Koch Behar districts of West Bengal, while another faction of the same flow settled in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Goalpara districts of Assam. It further spread out in the districts of Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang and Sonitpur. In course of time these scattered groups acquired variations in language, customs, and culture and even, to some extent, physical features, through inter-marriage and close association with other inhabitants Koches and Sonowals in the Brahmaputra valley, Dimasas in north Cachar Hills, Drumans in Cachar Plains, Tripurians and other allied tribes in Tripura, Garos in Meghalaya, Hajongs in the adjoin foot-hills of Banglaesh, Meches in Lower Assam, North-Bengal and South-Eastern Nepal.

Anderson, in his introduction to Endle's book, 'The Kacharis', observes that no one who has heard the Kacharis, the Garos, the Meches, the Rabhas, and the Tipperas of the Bodo race speaking their own language can ever fail to recognize that they belong to the same linguistic group.¹³ Endle has divided the Great Bodo race under two sections: the Bodo-

Kacharis or the Plains Kacharis and Dimasas or the Hill Kacharis. In his division he has kept the Brahmaputra as the dividing line partly because he was influenced by the tradition he had narrated in his monograph. The tradition describes the prolonged struggle between the Chutiya Kacharis and the Ahoms and its aftermath which was responsible to a large extent for the wide division of the above mentioned two sections. He, however, believed that despite the separation, the two sections are of the same origin racially.

Endle writes that the people known to us as Kacharis and to themselves as Bada (Bara) were in early days the dominant race in Assam. In ancient Sanskrit literature the Indo-Mongoloids or Kacharis or Bodos were known as Kiratas or Mlechchhas, a people outside the Varna fold. It is believed by historians that this tribe must have covered the whole of Brahmaputra valley as is evident from the Bodo syllable 'Di' meaning water in the names of the rivers such as Dikhu, Dibong, and Dibru etc. Undoubtedly the Kachari people were very widely distributed.

The present day Bodos of North-East India were of course not known by the name of the Bodo by the others. During the time of epics and Puranas the present day Bodos were known as Danavas, Asuras, Rakhshasas, Daityas, Mlecchas, 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 10th century B.C., when the Vedas were compiled and the composite Hindu culture and civilization reached the Mongolian people's of North and North-Eastern mountains and plains from about that date. "Dr. S.K. Chatterjee proposed the name Indo-Mongoloid' as an equivalent to what the ancient Hindus was understood by the term Kirata. In the history of Assam the Mlecchas or the Mechas were the most important people as these people had molded and shaped the history of ancient Assam then known as Pragjyotishpur or Kamrupa". S.K. 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 they form one of the main basis of present-day population of these tract. 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 and Dinaspur district). They may have pushed 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. Dr. T.C. Sarma stating the distribution of the Bodo people says, *“from the records in the Epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (dated c.1000-800 B.C) it is known that the north eastern frontiers kingdom of India, a Mleccha territory ruled by the Bodo kings, referred to as Danavas and Asuras by Aryans of the Ganga Valley, was known as Pragjyotishpura (the eastern land of astrology) and later as Kamrupa with its Central shrine of mother Goddess Kamakhya on Nilachal hill overlooking the mighty Brahmaputra within the present metropolitan complex of Gauhati”*. He also goes on to say that, North Bengal and parts of east Bengal were ethnically and politically an extension of the Bodo Kingdom in ancient Assam.

Racial and cultural identities of Kiratas appear to have changed from age to age and from region to region. The evidences furnished in ancient Indian, Greek, and Roman classical literature may be taken as the source of information to ascertain their migration and settlement and which can further be supported and confirmed by philology, archaeology, history, ethnography and also processes of social, economic and political change; religious institutions and organizations of that time.

The descriptions provided in Rigveda, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas, Brahmana and other classical Indian literature indicate that the Kirata settlements in different parts of ancient Indian sub-continent were as old as the civilization of the Vedas and epics, even

earlier. Ancient Indian classical literature depicts the socio-cultural interaction between the Kiratas and Non-Kiratas, i.e., Aryan, Dravidian, Austric etc. Vedic literature indicates the Kiratas as the people of low status, and living outside the Aryan fold during the Vedic age. “The Pulindas, Sabaras and Mutibas and other cognate sub-groups of Kiratas who lived together in the extensive forest tracts of the Vindhya region much later with each other are said to be the off springs of the cursed elder son of Viswamitra. They were outside the Brahmin community and were called Dasyus. During the Sutra period there were massive interaction between Aryans and Non-Aryans. The Kiratas living beyond the Aryandoms in western, northern and eastern sides were represented by other countries” and refers one section of Kiratas of the eastern region were gold complexioned and of extra-ordinary strength, nomadic, cannibals, and fair looking with sharp pointed hair knots or conical heads, whereas, the another section were island dwellers, raw fish eaters and fierce by nature. From this picture depicted in the text, it appears that they were none but the ancestors of Kiratas of North-Eastern India and the eastern land, which, according to R.D. Banerjee” and Buddhayana, this area referred to Anga, Vanga, Kalinga, Magadha. In ancient time there was no clear cut geographical boundaries between Bengal and Assam on political, linguistic and socio-cultural bases. They might have shared common socio-cultural zone with similar racial, and socio-cultural features, which were different from the Aryans.

According to Hodgson “*the basin of the Sapta Kusika or the country of the seven Kosis was the original homeland of the Kiratas of Nepal, who were once very powerful and the dominant race. This clearly indicates that, the people of Kirata origin inhabited the Sapta kosika regions. Some Orientalists historians say that Aryans drove out these people to Nepal. The process of extension of Aryan culture and civilization indicates that the Aryan culture and civilizations extended to all directions of India from Aryabatta. War and invasion were not essential part of the extension of Aryan culture and civilization. The Non-Aryan people*

accepted it because the social institution of the Aryans as the ways of life and instrument of social order proved to be far better in comparison to that of their own. Rajatantra, the system of absolute monarchy, as an instrument of governance, which was developed by the Aryan civilization, allured the non-Aryan kings and rulers and they accepted the system primarily because of the political, economic, administrative, religious and socio-cultural advantage of the ruling class through conversion to Hinduism. And like other Hindu kings, myth was created connecting his genealogy with one Hindu God and assumed the status of Kshatriya. These new Kshatriyas were not given equal status along with other Hindu Kshatriyas. As their Kshatriya origin is not racially based on Aryan race, for that reason Manu referred them as debased Kshatriyas”.

The views of Hodgson was also supported by S.K. Chatterjee and he says, *“The Aryan speech with the Vedic tire-cult does not appear to have been established over northern India beyond north Bihar-Bidegha or Mithila before 700 B.C. prior to that, in the area of North-Bengal and Assam, a powerful non-Aryan, possibly Tibeto-Burman, state may have arisen, with a mixed population of Austrics, Dravidians, and Tibeto-Burmans, the last, representing a group who were aggressive invaders from the east, perhaps being the dominant ruling class, as has happened many centuries later when the Ahoms came to Assam. This non-Aryan state, possibly ruled over by Indo-Mongoloids, was susceptible to upper Gangetic Brahmanical influence from the beginning. Traditionally, a ruler of this early Indo-Mongoloid state, Bhagadatta, took part in the Kurukshetra battle”.*

The Kiratas are to be found in northern and southern slopes of Himalaya, i.e. in Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. They inhabited much of the areas to the eastern side of Aryabatta. Uttarkhanda, extending from Kali on the east and to the Tong River on the west comprising Garwal and Kumaon region are inhabited by the people of Kirata origin. Since time immemorial, they lived in these regions. In the epic age, Uttarakhanda formed a part of

Kosala. Some scholars including S.K Chatterjee says that, Kassas, Kunidas, Nagos, Sakas, Gurjaras and allied tribes living in between the Satluj and the Beas in the Punjab hill; the tribes living in East-Punjab and North-West United Province Hills, all belongs to Western groups of complex pronominalised Himalayan Tibeto-Burman dialect. They were Hinduised long before and had completely given up their ancestral dialect in favour of the Aryan language.

The original home of the Sino-Tibetan speaking tribes or the people of Mongolian race were the North-western China. They spread from the upper reaches of the Yang-tsze-Kiang and the Hoang-Ho or Yellow river in different directions. They infiltrated into India partly from Tibet down the valley of Brahmaputra and partly from China through Burma by the Mekong, the Chindwin, Salween, and Irrawadi. Gradually they spread into different parts of Assam, Bengal, and sub-Himalayan tract of Nepal and down to the Ganges valley. Tibeto-Burman group of Sino-Tibetans speaking tribes dispersed in some groups to the west and north of Tibet (the present day Chinese province of Si-Kiang) from where they begin to spread east and south. Some of these early Tibeto-Burmans had penetrated within the frontiers of India either along the southern slopes of the Himalayas through Assam or by way of Tibet and further crossing the Himalayan barriers they established themselves into Nepal and Garwal-Kumaon. According to some historians, all categories of Mongoloid people cannot be brought under the category of Kirata, because the very term Kirata was meant only for those who settled in India extending from pre Vedic age down to the tenth century AD. This argument is not tenable, because the concept of the Kirata or Indo-Mongoloid is based on race not on time.

Greek and Roman classical literature mentioned about the Kirados' or Kirhodoeis (Kirhadai) located on the northern side of Ganga and Brahmaputra delta. Greek classical literature mentioned about the Nonos, who are identified as Kiratas settling near Arriana or

Aryabarta to the north-western side. The Kiratas, on the whole, as described in the classical literature, can be identified with those tribes of north-western and north-eastern India, including Assam, Bengal, Tripura, Orissa, and Sikkim and of Nepal, Tibet and Burma who had settled in the plains, valleys and hills between the epic age and the fifth century A.D. But classical literatures show that there were also Kiratas settled in other parts of India such as in Vindhya ranges, deltas, Ganga basin etc, with different names and biological features or physiognomy. Beyond the features of racial theory, classical Indian literature mentioned about the dark and very dark Kiratas. The dark Kiratas, might have been due to their dark skin did not figure in the study of 19th century anthropologists, social scientists and historians. Just because their complexions were dark, we cannot exclude these people from the category of Kiratas. We should examine the hypothesis from the point of bio-dynamics and influence of geographical conditions and natural environment. From the known zoological record it is said that, Africa is the original homeland of human beings. Zoological evidence of human settlement before 60000 years has been discovered in Africa. With what skin and physical traits did they migrate to the other parts of the world? Obviously it was with dark skin, similar types of physical features that of a Negroid built. Variation of men in physical traits in skin colour, body built etc. were the subsequent development in different geographical and socio-cultural circumstances.

According to the lexicographer, Amar Sinha, Kiratas, Sabaras and Pulindas are the three different branches of the Mlecchas. According to him there is no basic difference among these three groups. Kautilya also refers to the Sabaras, Pulindas, Candalas, and other wild tribes together. The Kiratas and the Sabaras have been mentioned by Dandin again and again as the same people. The identification of Kiratas with hills, the aboriginal tribes of Vindhya hills and Rajputana also corroborated by the accounts of Kalhana. It is generally held that the name Kirata was applied to the numerous fair complexioned or yellow coloured hills tribes of

Mongolian race who lived in all parts of the Himalayas. But on the basis of the description of their physical features available in the epics and Puranas, we find that they were of both yellowish and darkish complexion.

Grierson observed that the dialects of so called Kiranti group are closely related to dialect spoken by tribes, who have never claimed to be Kiranti. The historians and philologists have never paid any attention in this regard. Comparative studies of the languages spoken by different groups may be helpful to find out the truth. Hodgson with classical 'Cirrhadai' or Kirata has correctly identified the Kiratas living between the Sapta Kausaki and Sapta Gandagki. The Kiratas of Nepal, a very powerful people in the neighbourhood of the tribes on the northern frontier of the Himalayas are said to have held dominion down to the delta of the Ganges¹⁴.

In Bengali the term Karat or Kiret is applied disparagingly to moneylenders, extorting from poor debtors, to an exceedingly miserly person and to those, who were noted for their cruelty. 'Kirad', a common caste name in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Berar in Maharastra is used in the sense of a (Hindu) merchant. In Buddha's time people of non-Aryan origin conducted trade in the areas of sixteen Janapadas including Mithila, Kusola and Magadha. These merchants were identified as Kiratas. These Kirata traders, later on, might have developed in to a homogenous group forming a common caste category. In western Punjab, the Hindus who were in majority were scornfully scalded by their Mohammedan neighbours as Kirat. This fact indicates that, a large group of Hindu people living in western Punjab once might have been Kiratas and at some point of time they became Hindus.

The Kiratas of south are mainly identified with Bedars or Boyas inhabiting mostly in the Hilly regions, forest tracts and outside areas in Mysore and Andhra Pradesh. They are found in Bellary and Karnool districts. They are believed to be the descendent of the old

Kirata class as forest tribe, hunters, mercenaries or fighters. The census of 1891 and 1901 showed that there was a district named Kirataka which is a clear indication that this land was once inhabited by Kiratas. (The Boya Tilari, on subversion of Vijayanagara dynasty seized various other districts. Karris, another Kirata group were found in existence in the Madras Census Report, 1891 and 1901, in northern Taluka of North Arcot and in the adjoining district of Cuddapa. The Bedars also figure in the early epigraphic records of Mysore. In ancient time they were regarded as Mlecchas and in course of time, they came under the great impact of Sanskritisation and consequently attained a higher grade of culture. As a result of their gradual cultural transformation, most of them joined the fold of Hindus and assumed the Hindu names. That is why, at present they mostly represent the Hindu caste.

Bodo concentration in the North-East

The Bodos are found in almost all the areas of Assam in various configurations though they came from Tibet and settled in the lower parts of Bhutan, later got scattered to the different parts of North- East India diachronically. They moved west and reached Cooch Behar, Rangpur, and Dinajpur districts of North Bengal and even North Bihar. Some sections of the Bodos moved southwards and settled in the Garo hills, Tripura, and Sylhet and Mymensing districts of the present Bangladesh. A section of the Bodos also migrated towards the east and crossed the river Brahmaputra, got settled in the North Cachar Hills district. Gradually, with the passage of time many changes crept in their language and culture and they acquired a new identity called the Dimasas. Some of them moved farther and in course of time got crystallized into distinct communities such as Morans, Borahis, Chutias, Thengal Kacharis, Sonowal Kacharis, etc.inhabiting the eastern part of Assam. The main concentration of the Bodos is in Assam. Their main habitat is now on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra, starting from Dhuburi and Kokrajhar district, Goalpara district in the west,

Dhemaji sub-division of Lakhimpur district to the east. The northern tract of Assam covers the following areas:

- a. North and Eastern parts of Dhuburi district, the whole of the Kokrajhar district and the northern most part of Goalpara district,
- b. Northern parts of Barpeta and Nalbari and northernmost part of Guwahati sub-division in the district of Kamrup.
- c. Northern part of Mongoldoi
- d. and Tezpur Sub-division in the district of Darrang ,
- e. Northern parts of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji sub-division in the district of Lakhimpur.

The southern bank of the river Brahmaputra and these are as follows:

- a. Dudhnoi and Dhupdhara areas in the southern part of Goalpara district.
- b. Dhupdhara – Boko- Chaygaon areas, Chaygaon Rani areas, South Gauhati-Sonapur-Khetri areas in the Southern part of Kamrup district.
- c. Jagiroad-Morigaon areas and Rupohi – Dhing area of Nowgaon district.
- d. Southernmost part of Sibsagar district c) Northeastern part of Dibrugarh district
- e. Howraghat – Langhin areas of Karbi – Anglong district.

In the neighbouring states

- a. Tikrilla area of Garo hills in the Meghalaya state.
- b. Dimapur area in the Nagaland.
- c. Northern part of the Jalpaiguri district in the state of West Bengal. Among the areas of the northern tract of Assam; Kokrajhar is the highest Bodo concentrated district in the state of Assam.

Bodo population in Assam state

The physical area of BTC (Bodo Territorial Council) will comprise of four new districts-Kokrajhar, Baska, Udalguri and Chirang. On the north bank of Brahmaputra, the present BTC area is being carved out of eight districts Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur. The area of these eight districts is more than 27,100 sq. kilometers and about 35% of the total area of Assam. The following two tables show the total population pattern of undivided eight districts of Assam and the total population of BTC as per the census report of 2001.

Table No. 1.

Districts	Population
Dhubri	6,3965
Kokrajhar	9,304,04
Bongaigaon	9,06,315
Barpeta	7,74,229
Nalbari	11,84,564
Kamrup	1,12,796 (1991)
Darrang	7,59,712
Sonitpur	1,02,369 (1991)

Census report: 2001

Table No. 2.

Total Population of BTC-26,31,289

Kokrajhar	8,98,991
Chirang	3,43,626
Baksa	7,17,642
Udalguri	6,71,030

Census report 2001.

The Bodo people are one, if not the largest, of the eight plains tribal people of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam.¹⁵

Comprehensive History of the Bodos

The Bodo people do not have written history of their own. Classical Indian literatures provide -us a lot of information regarding prehistoric civilization of the Kirata-Bodo people. We cannot accept all these information as it is. The historicity of the classical Indian literatures is to be tested and supported by archaeology, religion, and language, political system, economic system, culture, tradition, geography etc. of the people living in this vast region since prehistoric time. We cannot say with certainty about the history of the society, culture, civilization of the Bodos and their allied groups. Information based on interdisciplinary approaches provides us some genuine premises on the basis of which we can understand about the migration, settlement, and extension of culture and civilization of the Bodo people since prehistoric time. Nobody has taken appropriate initiative for the discovery of history of Kirata-Bodos living in India since prehistoric time. The information collected so far from classical Indian literature and the archaeological evidences are not interpreted properly and failed to expose the actual history of the autochthonous people and their contribution to Indian culture, history and civilization. Though it is impossible to reconstruct the Bodo culture and society in its original forms and characters with the areas they established civilization in the past with glories and pride; but at least we can make an honest endeavour to reconstruct their history as it was and help understanding their relation with other groups. In the First Chapter, "Historical Perspectives" ethnographic descriptions of the Bodos are made in brief. Extensive discussion is made on migration, transmigration, and areas of settlement in which they established kingdoms and domination of the Bodos and other Kirata-Mongoloid groups in different parts of India since prehistoric time.

Great writers on ethnography, history, language, anthropology, religion, society etc. identify Bodo people as distinct from the rest of the Indian people socio-culturally, racially and linguistically. Recent studies conducted on the origin, growth, development and change in

Indian societies, extension of Aryan culture, language, religion, and traditions, turned this proposition as a fallacy. Rather it is clearly exposed that the complete segregation of the Kirata-Bodo people from Aryan, Austric and Dravidian speaking people or Vis a Vis, linguistically, racially, socio-culturally and demographically is historically and scientifically quite unrealistic. Complete segregating of these people from Aryans and other neighbouring people is quite unscientific. Variation in Physical feature of man is not only determined by mutation or gene but also determined, by other factors. Without interbreeding also there can be physical variation in human organism due to influence of certain physical and socio-cultural circumstances.¹⁶

Geographical and Topographical studies made by geographers, geologists and ethnographers discovered a number of toponamical evidences, i.e. the names of places, rivers etc. in Bodo language. This also indicates that the people of Bodo origin once inhabited these areas. Since prehistoric time, great waves of socio-cultural changes swept over the Bodo society. From Bodo Socio-cultural existential point of view we can divide these changes into two major phases as, phase of Deconstruction and phase of Reconstruction. Again the phase of Deconstruction may be divided into two broad categories. First one, starting from prehistoric time till the advent of the Islamic culture and civilization. This phase of Deconstruction encompasses the socio-cultural interactions between the Kirata-Bodos and Aryan speaking people since the time of Vedas and subsequently extension of Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism amongst them in the form of Tantricism, Saktoism, Saivism and Vaisnavism consecutively. These series of Changes alienating the structural and functional system of the Bodo Society may be explained with reference to the concept of Sanskritisation. The process of Sanskritisation covers imitation of Hindu ideals and conversion to Hinduism. The imitation often brought partial change in different aspects of social structure; on the other hand conversion commonly replaces the total structural and functional system of the society.

The total changes brought in the structural and functional system of a society through the acceptance of Hinduism is defined as the 'Process of Absorption of Tribes and non-Hindus into the fold of Hindu'. These two processes brought thousands of Bodo people into mainstream Bengali and Assamese society or even more to other societies with Hindu Social structure. The second phase of the Deconstruction started with the advent of Islam and it was the last and greatest wave of Deconstruction that ever came and swept Over the Bodo society. Since the advent, growth and development of Aryan culture, language and civilization in India continued constantly for thousands of years, the Bodos and other Indo-Mongoloid people had been in the constant process of socio-cultural absorption under Aryanisation of language, religion and culture. The great variety of social changes that have ever taken place in structural and functional system of the Bodo Society within the jurisdiction of the concept of Sanskritisation/Aryanisation and Hinduisation is discussed in Chapter-IV. It covers basically the process of Hinduisation in different forms, Sanskritisation, Hinduisation, Vaisnav movement etc. The phase of reconstruction started only with the advent of British and their establishment of imperialism in India.

The earliest mentioned king of kamrupa or pragjyotisha, as it was known in more ancient times was a non Aryan named Mahiranga danava. His name was evidently Mairong for a hill on the seven mile of the Gauhati-Shillong road is still known as 'Mairong parbat'. The name Mairong was sanskritised into Mahiranga. It is clearly a Bodo name and the people of this race who then inhabited the country were called Kiratas and Mlechhas as they were Mongolian immigrants. Mahiranga is said to have been succeeded in direct descent by Hatakasur, Sambarasur and Ratnasur. Mahiranga is called a danava but his descendants were called asuras. This shows that epithets like danava and asura were applied indiscriminately to all non-Aryans. After the Kings came Ghatakasur who is described as the ruler of the Kiratas perhaps he belonged to the same dynasty to which Hatakasur, Sambarasur and Ratnasur

belong. He was overthrown by Naraka who founded a new dynasty. Naraka was also known as Narakasura in some of the epics and he claims himself to be the descendant of Bhauma dynasty (Born of earth). Again the word Bhauma is a Bodo word meaning the earth. That is why it is probable that Naraka also was a Bodo King.

Therefore the oldest legendary figures in history of Assam, Mahiranga Danava, Ghatakasura and Naraka were all Kiratas. Mention about them in Puranic records, Ramayana etc proves their contact with the Aryans. In Mahabharata, references have been made about Bhagadatta, the ruler of Pragjyotishpur, who might have had some sort of tributary relation with the powerful Kaurava kings till 650 A.D.¹⁷ It is said that Bhagadatta took part in the battle of Kurukshetra with a large number of Chinese and Kirata soldiers.

There is no definite record available about the Kings of Assam. The first epigraphical record of any royal kingdom in Assam is found in Allahabad Rock Inscription of the powerful North-Indian King Samudragupta (335-376 A.D.), wherein Kamrupa is mentioned as a frontier kingdom paying tribute to Samudragupta. Pushya Varman, who claimed his lineage from Bhagadatta, was a Bodo King who laid the foundation of Kamrupa kingdom and the Varman dynasty in the North-East of Brahmaputra. It was the time when the power of Pragjyotishpur was declining. To protect himself from the wrath of the powerful North Indian king, whose territory was extended up to Bengal, the Kamrup King might have entered into the above mentioned tributary relation. It is probable that by that time a process of Hinduization and Sanskritization had started among the Bodo royalty. As Bhagadatta claimed himself as the descendant of Naraka-Bhauma dynasty, therefore it is no doubt that the Varman dynasty was of Bodo origin.

From the middle of the seventh century A.D. source materials in the form of epigraphs are available for the reconstruction of the history of Assam. E.A. Gait states that there are properly speaking no historical data available till Heien Tsang wrote his travelogue. He

further remarks that form the store narrated by Tsang, all that one can gather with certainty is that the Brahmaputa Valley was known to the Aryan invaders of India at a very early period and that the process of converting the aboriginal tribes into Hinduism is much older than existing records on the subject.¹⁸

It was during the reign of Bhaskar Varman that Hieun Tsang visited Kamrup on the former's request. Bhaskar Varman was a great ruler of Assam and he maintained friendly relations with the greatest contemporary ruler of North India, Harshavardhana. His dominion had spread over a considerable part of North Bengal. Thus a Hinduised Indo-Mongoloid empire was built by the middle of the seventh century A.D.¹⁹

After the end of Varman dynasty, the Salstambha and the Pala dynasties who both claimed themselves to be descendants of Naraka-Bhauma dynasty ruled Assam till 100 A.D. Salastambhas have been mentioned as Mlechchha in the Borgaon Copper Plate Inscription of the eleventh century and it is a fact that they were Bodos. So far as the Palas are concerned historians differ in opinion. S K Chatterjee puts them as separate entity from the Bodos while B K Baruah does not consider them as being separate from the Salstambhas.

After the death of Tyagashimha, the last ruler of Salstambha dynasty, Pala dynasty rose into power. According to another inscription of Ratnapala, the first king of Pala dynasty was the relative of Tyagashimha of Salstambha.

The close observation of the historical dynasties of Kamrupa and Pragjyotishpur it is seen that right from Naraka to the Palas all claimed themselves to be the descendants of Bhauma dynasty. That is why there is no doubt that all of them belonged to the great Bodo group of people.

Minhaj-Ud-din, in his work, *Tabagot-i-Nasiri* stated that, the country (Kamrupa) between Gaud and Tibet was inhabited by three Races, i.e. Koch, Mech and Tiharu. Khara Vana, a Mech Chief founded a kingdom in Sylhet and he was also completely Hinduised and

his dynasty traced their descent from Bhima-Hiddimba". The Mech Kings of Sylhet were given "the same pedigree as the ruling house of Kachar, as they had the same speech Bhima-Hiddimba's son Ghatat Kacha was made their ancestor." The southern Maches or Bodo, who ruled over the old kingdom of Patti Kera (Comilla) were entirely Aryanized in speech. The Maches known as Tipra in Tripura were under the title of Manikya who also had been Hinduised at an early period.

During 1416-1418 a King named Donuja Mardana ruled over Bengal. He was Koch chief of North Bengal, that is, he was racially Bodo or Mech tribe. Another Branch of Bodo belonging to Kamboja tribe came from north-western Punjab to Bengal and founded a new ruling house. The Kamboja or Koch-Bodo domination did not last long. The Pala King, Mahi Pala I, (c-992-1042) drove them out from their ancestral sovereignty.

In 1205, the Turks under Muhammad Bin Bakhtyar Khilji invaded Kamrup with an intention to conquer Tibet. According to the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, of Minhaj-us-Siraj, at that time the inhabitants of Kamrup belonged to the Koch, the Mech and the Tharu communities. The Turks were defeated but in the beginning of the thirteenth century the Turks again attacked Kamrup and occupied the kingdom for some time until the Kamrup King fought back and defeated them.

In the thirteenth century it would seem that the Kachari kingdom extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra, from the Dikhu to the Kallang, or beyond, and included also the Valley of Dhansiri and the tract which now forms the North Cachar Sub-division.²⁰ It was the time when the Ahoms appeared in the political scene of Assam and laid the foundation of Ahom rule of long six hundred years. They found the Kacharis as the most important and prominent of their western neighbors. Historical records of the eastern branch of the Bodos show that under the name of chutiya they had established a powerful kingdom in the eastern corner of the province, at or near Sadiya. They were engaged in prolonged wars with the

Ahoms. The Ahoms subsequently subdued the Morans, Borahis and other Kacharis tribes living in the northern slope of these hills. With the establishment of Ahom rule, the political history of the Bodos became clear. The first collision between the Ahoms and the Kacharis occurred in A D 1490, when the Ahom king Sudan-pha was defeated and driven across the Dikho.²¹ This defeat made them cautious and later they handled their turbulent neighbours with greater wisdom and care. In 1536 the Kacharis were defeated by the Ahoms and their capital Dimapur was annexed. They removed their capital first to Maibong in North-Kachar Hills and then to Khaspur on the southern Barail. From that time onwards the Kachari princes were regarded as “feudatory chiefs”²² of Ahom King. But the Kachari Kings resented this very much and tried to regain their independent status whenever the Ahom government was involved in some sort of trouble.²³ The tributary capacity of the Kachari kings helped them retain their hold over some selected tracts like Kapili valley within the fringes of Ahom territory even till the beginnings of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, during the reign of Kamaleswar Singha, the Kacharis and Moamorias attacked the Ahoms near Raha in the Kapili valley which was described as Kachari territory.²⁴ So despite Ahom subjugation, the Kacharis had been able to retain certain territories under their control.

The Koches were the only branch of the widely spread Bodo race with authentic history . In 1515 A.D. Bishwa Singh laid the foundation of a powerful Koch kingdom that extended from river Korotoya in the west up to the river Barnadi in the east comprising a greater part of North Bengal and Western Assam. Bishwa Singh was the descendant of Chickna Jwhlwao, a Bodo chieftain of western Assam with his capital at sicknajahar, some 18 kilometers away from Kokrajhar town, on the bank of river Samoka in Bhutan foothills. The sixteenth century Assam was dominated by Ahom-Koch relations. The reign of Koch king Narnarayana (1533-1540) represents the zenith of the Koch power and his armies which were led by his brother Sukladhwaj or Silarai, met with almost unvarying success. Nara Narayana

entered the Ahom capital Gargaon (modern Nazira) and did not leave till he had received the submission of the Ahom King. The Kachari Raja and the Raja of Manipur were reduced to the position of feudatory chief. After his death, the Koch Empire was divided into two states- Koch-Hajo in Goalpara and Koch-Bihar in North-Bengal. This division eventually weakened the Koch power.

Ahom-Kachari clashes continued with intermittent breaks only during the Muhammadan invasions. Even then the Kacharis were regarded as subjugatory or *thapita sanchita* in their dealings with the former. Rudra Singha (A.D. 1696-1747) brought the Kacharis under his jurisdiction. He then compelled the Kachari kings to cede further plains territories in the southern part of the present Nowgong district. The Ahom subsequently occupied the whole tract from Sibsagar to Nowgong. They allowed the Kacharis to retain a small portion of the southern part of Nowgong and the hilly tracts on condition of payment of an annual tribute to the Ahom kings.

Various circumstances compelled the once powerful Kacharis to recognize the supremacy of the Ahoms and abandon their plains territories to them, but still they do not give up their hostile attitude towards the Ahoms till the end of Ahom rule in Assam. As the Ahom kingdom started to decline, the Kacharis too were losing their strength. Towards the later part of the eighteenth century the Bodos had fallen so swiftly on the slide of history that for more than a century the Bodo-Kacharis were left in complete oblivion.

The Bodo had exercised sovereignty in Assam under different names at different times. The western section of the old Bodo (Kacharis) occupied the thrones of Koch-Bihar, Bijni, Darrang and Beltola. An eastern branch in the name of Chutiya also established a powerful kingdom with its capital near Sadiya and then a section of eastern Bodos maintained their kingdom with capitals at Dimapur, Maibong and Khaspur in the face of continuous invasions of the Ahoms and neighboring powers till the advent of British rule in Assam. This

section of Bodos is known to us as Dimasas or Dimasa kachari (hill Kacharis).²⁵ The last migration of Bodo King from Maibong (N C Hills) to Khaspur (North-Cachar) made Cachar Valley the ultimate seat of Bodo royal power. Eventually, the kingdom disintegrated beyond repair under the regime of Govinda Chandra Narayan into two parts: one under Govinda Chandra and the other comprising Northern and Central portion of the kingdom was taken over by Tularam Senapati with the help of British intervention Govinda Chandra was murdered on 24 April, 1830. Following which his kingdom was temporarily placed under Lieutenant Fisher, who was entrusted with the power of a Magistrate and a Collector. Finally on 14 August 1832, the Governor General of India annexed the plains of the Bodo kingdom of Cachar to the British dominion. Tularam Senapati who had been allowed to retain his dominion was pensioned off in 1854 and his dominion annexed to the paramount power.

S. K. Bhuyan states that the kingdom of Cachar was only one of the numerous states set up by the political genius of the Kachari people.²⁶ The Kacharis living outside the fringes of Cachar remained loyal to the Kachari monarch and the bonds of union among the Kacharis, whether within Cachar or outside, were very strong. There is no record of any attempt to fuse the scattered Kacharis into one political unit. The Kacharis living in Assam could never dream of transferring their allegiance from the Ahom monarch to the Kachari King at Dimapur or Khaspur, though the latter belonged to their own tribe.

Conflict and assimilation are part of any living society. No society can remain static. The Bodos went through both conflict and assimilation throughout their existence in the Brahmaputra Valley. Their socialization with various other communities has greatly metamorphosed the language and culture they brought with them from their original habitat. But despite interaction and assimilation they have retained some aspects of their cultural identity intact over the ages, i.e. language, religion, way of living etc.

Aryan influence over the Bodos remained confined mostly to the Bodo royalty. Although the process of Hindization continued till the advent of British in Assam, the masses remained untouched. No attempt was made before the ek saran dharma of Sri Sankardev to draw the masses into the pale of Hinduism.²⁷

The early Bodo settlers of Assam had spoken their own dialect. In course of time, the interaction, assimilation and integration of various cultures, religions, races and civilizations produced a distinctive synthesis of the Valley's culture, economy and polity,. As a result, Assamese language developed as a link language along multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-caste, multi-cultural and multi-lingual along with other tribal languages contributed greatly to the development of Assamese language.²⁸

The traditional religion of the Bodos in Bathou which is worshipped once in a year by the entire village community which is known as *Kherai*. The Aryan influence has definitely caused some changes in their social as well as religious life. They practice patriarchal system of descent and inheritance.

Traditional Bodo economy is agro-based. Before practicing settled cultivation the Bodos used to be Jhum cultivators. Rice is their main food. Rice beer or zou is their traditional beverage. Apart from consuming regularly this zou is used in almost every religious and social ceremony. They are very fond of chewing betel nuts. Weaving is ingrained in the blood of a Bodo woman.²⁹

Dress and Ornaments

Dresses and ornaments of the Bodos are the symbol of their traditional art and culture. Most of the tribes belonging to the Mongolian races in the North Eastern Region of India deserve the same character of dresses and ornaments. Their arts of such dresses and

ornaments are the intrinsic reflections of the nature within which they are shaped and moulded. However, at present the dresses and ornaments of the modern Bodos do not differ from their Aryan neighbours. Since ancient time, the indigenous people like Bodos were accustomed with the production of clothes from the tread of Eri and Muga. The Eri cloth is of dub colour and is durable. It is light but warm, in ordinary cold season, wrap of the Assamese (Referring to the people of ancient Assam including all tribes) is generally made of this cloth. Bodo women are expert in rearing the “EndiEmphou”(Eri worm) and Muga latha (Muga worm) and find out treads from them. They weave different kinds of clothes like “Dokhna” (Women’s dress for covering the whole body), zwmgra (Chadar or oruna or scarf of woman), Gamosa (Cloth for covering the lower part of the body by man and sometimes used in bath), Phali or Rumal (Handkerchief), Sima (Big and wide cloth used as rugs during the winter season) etc. out of the treads of Eri and Muga. Traditionally Bodo men folk used to wear a garment called Gamsa to cover the body from waist down to the knee. Previously Bodo old men used to wear wooden footwear known as Khwrwm (Karam in Assamese). There was no use of shirt in the past. They only used a type of cloth known as zwmgra made of Eri and a small cloth on the shoulder during the winter and summer season respectively. But now-a-days they put on modern dresses available in the market. The dresses of Bodo women are a distinguishable feature of Bodo culture. A man can identify Bodo womenfolk seeing the dresses of her. Bodo woman wears her Dokhna “covering the body from the chest down to the ankle. Its length and breadth is made in such a way that it can be tied one round at a time in the waist. Dokhna or Dokhona is made of varied colors and Agor. The Dokhna without Agor is called Salamatha or Matha. Dokhona Thaosi is generally meant for use of bride, “Bwirathi” (Woman receptionist of bride and bridegroom in Bodo marriage) and “Doudini” (A dancing woman in Kherai puza) or during the festivals or other ceremonies. Now-a-days Bodo woman wears blouse in her body and covers it with zwmgra (Scarf).

The zwmgra covers the upper portion of the body. Bodo women wears various colours of scarf with full of Agor to beautify themselves. Seeing this beautiful art of the Bodo women Lady Hydery (Wife of the first Governor of Assam) made this comment, “I have travelled throughout the world with my husband but I have not seen that a mother has spun and woven the cloth for herself and for her children.” A species of various types of Agor which bloom in the art of Bodo Women are given below:

- a. Phareo Megon (Pigeon eye).
- b. Daorai Muukhreb (Winkle of peacock).
- c. Phul Mwbla(Varieties of bloomed flowers).
- d. Daosa Mwkhhreb (Winkle of chicken).
- e. Maozi Agan (Footprint of cat).
- f. Dinkhia Mohor (A design representing fern of Dhekia).
- g. Gangu Godo (An Agor representing the shape of a kind insect called Gangu).
- h. Sinri Bibar (A design representing the Singri flower).
- i. Bwigri Bibar (A design representing the flowers of plum).
- j. Gonjar thaisip (A design representing the fruit of Nui tree).
- k. Thaigir Bibar (A design representing the flower of Thaigir plant and it also feeling of failed love).
- l. Gandola agor (A design representing an insect Gandoula).
- m. Khulshi Dentha (A design representing the spoon).
- n. Muphur Apha (A design representing the footprint of bear).
- o. Laoson Agor (A design invented by a Bodo girl called Laosong).
- p. Mokhordoma Agor (A design representing a litigation or zig zag).
- q. Banduram Agor (A design first crafted by Bandhuram kachari).
- r. Agor Gidit (A design representing a Diamond shape).

- s. Gorkha Gonbruui Agor (design representing twill).
- t. Daokhi Agor (A design representing stool of a hen).
- u. Mwitha bibar (A design representing a kind of vegetable's flower)

The favourite colours of the Bodos are generally Gwmw (Yellow), Gwthan (Green), and Bathogan (Colour of parrot's feathers). So Bodos most popularly used words "Gwmw-Gwthan-Bathogan" represents it.

Ornaments:

It is a well known fact that the Indo-Mongoloid Bodos used a lot of gold ornaments available in those days. Gradually silver, bronze etc. became popular among them. There were about ten streams which produced gold more or less abundant in the district of Darrang. British people extracted gold from those rivers when they ruled India. Bodo used varied types of ornaments in the nose, ears, neck and hands. They wore or still wear phulkhuri, dul, boula (For upper ear), phuti (A design of flower attached to earlobe) in ear. The ornaments of the nose are Nakhaphul (A hole is made on the skin of upper side of the nose for holding the), Nolot (Holding from the middle of two nostrils), buluki (Nose pendent) etc. Bodo woman wears ornaments in the neck also. The popular ornaments are-

- a. Chandra Har (A heavy necklace).
- b. Bisa Har (A necklace).
- c. Thanka Siri (Around neck ornament).
- d. Zibou Zinziri (A snake like chain).

The popular ornaments of the hands are asan or bangle both big and small. Small bangle is called asan Suri and big bangle is called asan. The dresses and ornaments of the

Bodo men and women have changed radically except Dokhna and Phasra/Zwmgra of women. All Bodo women still put on Dokhna and Phasra/Zwmgra to symbolize their culture. Their ornaments of ear, nose, neck, hair style are now modified according to the modern design of present time. Now-a-days they do not want to stick to old styles and fashions. They have used various types of treads or yarns for Dokhna suited for their use. Sometimes Bodo women are also found wearing other Indian dresses like sarees, churidars etc. especially in town.

Social Groups

There are beliefs associated with the creation of the social groups, five regulations of the Bodos known as the Baad system, beliefs and practices associated with various birds and animals, with agriculture and the penance method.

The main social groups are: Swargiari, Basumatari, Narzari, Musahari, Gayari, Owari, Khakhlari, Daimari, Lahari, Hajoari, Kherkatari, Sibingari, Sabairiari, Bibairiari, Bingiari, Mahilari, Ramsiari, Sangphramari, Phadangari, Islari, Ganjlerari, Bargawari, Thalirari etc.³⁰

These groups seem to signify some kind of kinship. According to the belief these were mainly created on the basis of certain specific duties entrusted to a group or a clan to perform certain functions by the Monsing-Sing-Borai (supposed to be the first human being on the earth). This resulted in a disciplined society with a healthy atmosphere.

1. Swargiari: Swarga (heaven) + ari (group). Endle describes as a heavenly folk. The priesthood dauris and ojas are selected from this class and the society entrusts the duty of worshipping the gods from among the Swargiaris.

2. Basumatary: Bwiswmata (mother earth) +ari (group). They are known as the landlord class of people. This group is entrusted with the responsibility of solving the land problem, distribution of land, settlement of any disputes relating to land holding.
3. Narzary: Narzi (dry leaf of jute plant) + ari (group). It is believed that the person of Narzari group were entrusted with the duty to collect and supply narzi gwan (dry leaves of the jute plant during the sraddha ceremony. After cremation takes place, people chew narzi leaves to sever relations with the dead person. In the present Bodo (mech) society of West Bengal the people of this group use the surname Narzinari.
4. Mwshahary: Mwsha (tiger) + ari (group). The duty of the clan is basically to ensure the safety of the domestic animals from the danger of the attack by tigers. Some people also believed that people with magical powers could transform themselves into tigers and kill the domestic animals. Some people use the surname Baglari, instead ofMushahari.
5. Goyary: Goi (areca) + ari (group). This group of people were traditionally associated with the planting of areca trees.
6. Owary: Owa (bamboo) + ari (group). They are believed to have planted bamboo trees for the first time. Large quantities of bamboo were collected by this group for the elaborate festivals like Kherai and Garja.
7. Khakhlary: Khankhala (a plant) + ari (group). A long grass like plant which is used during the Kherai festival. The belief is that people of this group were engaged to collect Khangkhala plant for the Kherai festival.
8. Daimary: Daima (big river) + ari (group). It is understood that some people who lived by the banks of the river got their livelihood by fishing. People also used to float down logs in the river to the towns or market centre where wood was sold. These people got their name Daimari also because they were suppliers of books.

9. Lahary: Lai (leaves) + ari (group). These were the people who collected leaves in large quantities for the festival.
10. Hajoary: hajo (hill) + ari (group). It is probable that the name of the clan was derived from the habitat. People who lived in the hills or the foothills might have been called Hajoary.
11. Kher Katary: kherkata (cutting of thatch) + ari (group). The people of this group are very few in number. The people of this clan are generally found in the districts of Kamrup in Assam.
12. Sibingary: Sibing (sesame) + ari (group). This commodity is essential in Assam. The people who were engaged in collecting or supplying sesame were called Sibingary.
13. Bingiary: Bingi (string instrument) + ari (group). Bingiary clan is supposed to have made this traditional instrument to play during the religious festivals.

At present people of this community is rarely found. These clans and many more have been accounted in the works of Bodo scholars. Many are no more found anywhere. The reason being that most of the duties and functions of the community barring a few are defunct. The status of the groups or the clans is of equal status. The Bodos of Assam and West Bengal have been maintaining their connection with the groups through their surnames only. Though it is observed that this clan's or group's social, cultural and economic significance has been lost today.³¹

Festival

Festivals constitute a significant part of the culture of the Bodo people. The Bodos have a rich tradition of festivals. They have many festivals where the Bodo people both men and women wear colourful traditional dresses and they dance and sing. These Bodo people

are known best for their colourful folk dances.

Festivals of the Bodos can be divided into: Seasonal or agricultural

- a. religious
- b. ritualistic and
- c. ceremonial

Further the seasonal or agricultural festivals can be divided into:

- i. Bwisagu, in the month of Bwisagu or Bohag (in the mid April): One of the most cherished festivals of this tribal group is Bwisagu. It is basically a springtime festival and is celebrated during mid April. Bwisagu is the most cherished festival of the Bodo Kacharis of Assam and is celebrated by the Bodo. The Bodos celebrate it as a springtime festival at the advent of the New Year, which is during mid April. Bwisagu begins with worship of the goat. The next day, which synchronizes with the first day of the month of bohag of the Assamese calendar, the actual merriment begins. The supreme deity Bathou or Lord Shiva is worshipped during the festival by offering chicken and rice beer.

The beautiful Bagurumba dance is an integral part of Bwisagu. This is mainly a formation dance with slow steps and outstretched hands. About a score of girls dressed in most colourful attire perform this dance accompanied by Bodo traditional musical instruments. The traditional musical instruments that are used in this dance festival are khum (drum), jotha (manjari), Khawan (taal), gogona (mouth-organ) and siphung (flute) zabkhring etc. It is also customary to use the same at the time of closure of the Bwisagu.

- ii. Domasi or Magw or Bhogali, in the month of Magh (in the mid January)
- iii. Katrigacha or Kati Bihu, in the month of Kati (in the month of October - November)

Religious festivals of the Bodos include Kherai, Garza and Marai.

Kherai Puza

Kherai, the greatest national festival traditionally celebrated by the Bodos has been more religious rather than social in its nature and content involving sacrifices but wears a look of great social and its performance with great pomp and grandeur in the mood and its performance.²⁵ In Kherai puza, the altar is placed in the rice field. This is the only festival where the entire atmosphere of the traditional society becomes fully surged. In the Kherai festival, Bathou is worshipped along with 18 (eighteen) Gods and Goddess in the various contexts. Bathou represent the five basic elements of life-processes i.e. the Panchabhuta. These are: earth, air, water, weather and fire. These basic elements are the root of everything. Kherai puja begins with various religious and traditional dances and songs and playing of musical instruments. These are performed in their honour and glory. The dances are essential and inevitable part of the Kherai worship and they are exhibited in items serially and chromatically. The items carry different and distinct significances of various Gods and Goddess. The dance represents the activities and behaviors of Gods and Goddess. The dances are initiated, guided and controlled by the deodhani or dwudini, who is the focal figure of the dances. The duudini or deodhani is supposed to be the perfect embodiment or representative of the supreme power. Dwudini or deodhani is the female Shaman or women oracle. The Kherai dance is strictly restricted to the womenfolk. Men are allowed only to play on various musical instruments, yet they have to maintain the honorable distance with the precinct.

Kherai festival is celebrated in the month of Kati (October - November), before harvesting and just after completion of all plantation work. It is believe that this festival has some sort of relationship with the fertility cult. Virtually Garza and marai do not fall within the range of festival.

Garza and marai festivals are associated with Bathou worship of the Bodo people. From the time immemorial they worship the Lord Shiva. These religious rites of the Bodo

people commonly worshipped and performed by all the villagers at a particular worshipping place; but the marai is a religious rite worshipped and performed privately by the individual families to satisfy the Goddess marai. Mara puja is not largely prevalent as Garza among the Bodo people. Other important festivals of the Bodos include aapsa hatarnai, wnkham gwrlwi zana.

Religion

The traditional religion of the Bodos is called Bathou which has been practiced since time immemorial in South East Asia. This religion is invariably linked up with and centred round the worship of Bathoubwrai or Sibwrai i.e. the supreme god of the Bodos. Hence it is known as Bathou religion. In the Bodolanguage, *Ba* means five and thoumeans deep philosophical thought. These five elements are- Bar (Air), San (Sun), Ha (Earth), Or (Fire) and Okhrang (Sky). Hence, Bathou means five principles, significances which are mysterious: not easy to understand and feel without meditation. Amongst the follower of Bathou religion, God is known as the Bathou Bwrai. In Bodo language, the word Bwrai signifies the oldest or most elderly man in power and knowledge or the supreme in all respects. Therefore, he exclusively represents supreme soul, poromatma, who is omnipotent, omniscientand omnipresent. Fire can't burn him, water can't moisten, air can't dryhim and spear can't pierce him. He is the illuminator of all earthly objects; He is the source of all knowledge and lights. He bestows us everything we need in this world.

The creator of these five elements is called ***Bathou Bwrai*** or the God. After creating physical form of a man with the composite elements, he confers his spirit to inanimate body which displays as the totality of living beings body. So, Bathou is religion and philosophy that embodies the spirituality of the creator or the God. The followers of Bathou religion is

spirituality through the prayers, offerings and sacrifices offered to the deities.

Many scholars observe regarding the religion of the Bodos. According to Sindney Endle, the religion of the Kachari race is distinctly of the type commonly known as animistic and its underlying principle is characteristically one of fear or dead.³² He again says in the same monograph-*“in the typical Kachari Village as a rule neither idol nor place of worship is to be found; but to the Kachari mind and imagination earth, air and sky are alike people with a vast number of invisible spiritual beings. Known usually as Mwdai all possessing powers and faculties far greater than those of man. Mwdai is a Bodo word which means deity (God or Goddess) and should be mistaken for invisible spirits.”* Dr P. Bhattacharjee strongly objects “the religion of the Bodos is not animistic”. They are worshippers of Bathou, the supreme God. They have other Gods and goddesses. They believe in Ghosts and Spirits also. But the concept of the Supreme God is predominantly. The Bodo scholars and writers are of the opinion that their religion cannot be regarded as animistic. They worship Bathou. He is the illuminator of all earthly objects; he is the source of all knowledges and lights. He bestows us everything we need in this world. Frankly speaking the Bodo peoples are fundamentally nature worshippers. They are believers in the hidden power of the nature which can strongly dominate the social life. It is thought that the nature is the cause of peace and sorrow.

The religion of the Bodos cannot be said to be purely animistic. Some scholars of Assam like Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya also do not agree with the opinions of these foreign writers who described the Bodo religion as animistic.³³

Fair and Festival of Bodos

Fair & festival reflect true picture of a particular society. These traditional fair & festival have bases deeply rooted in socio- economic and religious believe of a community. The traditional Bodo culture is no exception of that and the socio- economic and religious

believe have great impact on the fair & festival of the Bodo. There are basically three kinds of fairs & festival in Bodo society:-

Firstly, there are festival predominantly social by nature and strictly performed according to religious believe.

Secondly, there are festival which are religious in nature and purpose but these are entire free from social elements in it including laws and customs.

Thirdly, the most of the fair & festival have economic roots. The Bodo society is predominantly an agricultural society so the festival celebrated by them are naturally connected with their occupation. Such festivals are celebrated in larger scale thanking god & goddesses seeking their blessing for good harvest. Some of the fair and festival of the Bodos which have great impact on Bodos are mentioned below-

Bwisagu festival

It is the prime religious pre-monsoon festival of the traditional Bodos. It is a kind of worship as well as festival performed for good agriculture product. This festival is performed by the Bodos in first week of Assamese Month i.e Bohag or Baisakh (the Aryan word). It is almost similar to the Assamese Rongali Bihu, which celebrated in the month of Baisakh (mid April). The term Baisagu is derived from Bodo word Bwswrni agu, which means beginning of the New Year. Celebrating the Bwisagu Bodos welcome the New Year and bid farewell to the old Year. This festival starts celebrating from the day of Sankranti of Chaitra and Baisakh (14th April) and continues for seven days. The normal domestic activities become a stand still during these days and spend festivals through merriment of singing, dancing and feasting etc. This is, in one sense merry making festival where young and old, men and women, boys and girls take part in songs and dance to pay respects to Bathou.

According to traditional customs of Bodos, they clean houses by throwing old earthen cooking utensils on the first day of the New Year, and replace them with new ones. They offer prayer to the family deity Bura-Bathou maharaja and Ai Bishahory at the altar. Next to them they offer food and drinks to their ancestors. This ceremony is performed after the house is made clean and members take bath. All family members, men, women, young boys and girls exchange their mutual respects. They forgive each other's misdeeds and exchange Gamosas.

The first day of Baisagu is called Makhou or Mahau. . This meant for 'cattle', as cows and bullocks that provide them most of their livelihood. On that day in the morning cattle are decorated with garlands made of slices of raw gourd, brinjal and turmeric and are led to the nearest stream, river or pond for their ritual bath. While asking them for bath, the cowherds throw some of the pieces of gourd and turmeric at the cattle beckoning them to eat and recite the following rhyme:

Lao za phanthao za
Bswr bswr re hanza hanza
Bimani khither phiphani khither
Noncor zagon halua geder.
Bima gayda baidi daza
Phipha bolr baili za
Bari khonayao don embu bongla
Bibaidi za geder zogla.

The English gist of the above verse may be explained as follows- (Eating gourd, brinjal, let there be increase in your herd in abundance year after, year in revenge of your father, in revenge of your mother who stunted and sort statured, grow into long and tall like a big frog in the corner of homestead).³⁴

Social structures of the Bodos

Like the other tribal societies of India, the Bodos of Assam have hierarchical structure. Dumont has criticised contemporary anthropologists for their cultural bias towards equality which, in his view, has made them incapable of understanding the nature of hierarchy.' The term 'hierarchy' is culture-specific.

Anthropologists usually present the order of castes in their village in a vertically ranked series. Among the Bodos, the image of the hierarchy is not a ladder-like construction but a chyle with some sects in the centre and others in the surrounding rings. The implication of this model is that of moral universe with a sacred centre.

The social structure of the Bodos are Patriarchal in character. In patriarchal system father is the sole authority of the family. On the other hand in a matriarchal system the authority lies with the mother. In the Bodo society father is the sole authority of the household. After his death the sons inherit the property. In Bodo society the daughters do not have the right to property when there are sons.

The Bodo families in early days were composed from defence point of view. These were termed as compact families. Families of Bodos are, nowadays, reduced to a small size from economic point of view. The large or extended family, on the other hand, can be identified on an occasion like Kherai puza as people have to take meal together on that particular festival. There is a popular Bodo saying Boro-Buri zob zob, meaning husband and wife.³⁵ It means that only husband and wife can live together to spend conjugal life. Descent of a Bodo family is the important factor to be discussed. There is no doubt that the Bodos of Brahmaputra Valley remain patriarchal. Father is the sole authority of the family. The head of the family is called Nophang.' The property of the family is accordingly divested in the son.

Father, being the head of the family, represents his family in the village council or any other social function at the community level. Significantly, eldest son occupies an important place in the family. There are some matriarchal characteristics seen in the patriarchal Bodo society. The widow marriage system is practiced in certain cases among the Bodos. This system is called Dholca. In this case a man comes to live with the widow in her first husband's establishment.³⁶Hence, the widow wife becomes sole authority of the family and accordingly property descends to the children.

Marriage is an important institution from the social point of view. It creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the spouses and their families. It is called Haba by the Bodos, Ha means soil or earth and bei means to bear something on the back. Habil, therefore, signifies 'to bear the soil or the responsibility of the earth on the back'. It is interesting to observe that the Sanskrit word for marriage bivciha also has the same etymological meaning. Traditionally the Bodos have six types of marriages. They are given below:

1. **'Swngnanwi lainai haba'** or arranged marriage is the most common socially accepted marriage custom of the Bodos. The bride is selected by the parents of the bridegroom and then the marriage is settled after negotiation. Till today this form of marriage is solemnly celebrated. However the bride price is no longer compulsory.
2. **'Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba'** is very rare in the present times. Earlier in the families where there were no sons or male members, member of the community or a person who works in the family is asked to be the bridegroom with his consent. He becomes a member of the family. It may be called a marriage by service.

3. **'Kharsonnai Haba'** is a mutual agreement between the young boy and the girl. The consent of the parents is not considered important. The society frowns upon such marriages but tolerates it.
4. **'Bwnanwi Lainai Haba'** was always considered by the Bodos as an evil. This system was prevalent in earlier days. The girl was forcefully taken by the bridegroom and then the marriage is solemnized.
5. **'Donkharlangnai Haba'** is not socially approved, but is still in practice in some communities. This is the marriage by elopement of both bride and the bridegroom. This is the irregular system of marriage.
6. **'Donkha Habnai Haba'** is marriage between a widow and a man from the community who stay together as husband and wife. But, their marriage has to be regularized according to the social customs. Although widow re-marriage is allowed in the society, certain restrictions are there. A widow can only marry the younger brother of the husband and similarly a widower can marry the younger sister of the wife.
7. **'Hathasuni Khurnai'** Traditional form of marriage known as *HathasuniKhurnai* was a simple affair which bears testimony where the bride offers meals to the bridegroom in a simple function. The meal consists of a special chicken curry with broken rice without applying any spices or colouring agents. This is called *Ondlakhariin Bodo*. After consuming a portion of the rice the couple prays to Bathou Bwrai for peaceful conjugal life. Before offering the meal to the bridegroom the bride offers a portion of the meal to the goddesses and god of the main house (Nomano). Introducing the bride to the god the Deuri chants mantras and the advices are given to the bridegroom by the elders of the community. The meal thus prepared is served to the villagers. The marriage festival which used to run for seven days was restricted to three days later.

There was abundance of food and merry-making at various levels. Preparation of rice beer was given much importance and two persons (jau sirgra and jau rangra) were involved in distribution and making of the rice beer. The event was certainly a marked celebration for the individual and the villagers.

A few post-marriage customs are also prevalent in the Bodo communities today.

1. ‘**Kholar Gothainai**’ The act of returning the bride and the bride price (malsa) is known as kholar gothainai. This is done when the husband expires suddenly after marriage. The bride returns to her parents and the malsa is given back to the deceased husband’s by the parents of the bride.
2. ‘**Mamai Mara**’ The uncle of the deceased niece has to receive the bride –price of her female child in case it has not been paid during her marriage.
3. ‘**Athmangal**’ is performed on the eight day of the girl’s marriage. Only a few selected relatives are invited for a feast on the occasion. The couple leaves for the bridegroom’s place after receiving gifts by the bride’s relatives.
4. **Divorce** takes place in a Bodo society by tearing a betel-leaf into two pieces. This is known as *fathwibisinai leng* .The betel leaf is kept in the presence of the village elders in the house of the Gaon bura. However, if the reasons for divorce are not very serious from husband’s side, he has to pay for her livelihood. If the woman is been divorced for her unfaithfulness, the entire money spent on her by her husband’s side is to be returned. Once the amount is paid she is free to live with her new husband.

At present the Bodo society has undergone many changes. There are only a few marriages that are performed in the traditional manner. Due to the various factors that led to mass movements in this part of the state. People have mixed reactions to deliver when it come to asserting their own stand on the issue of orientation, involvement and apathy to the situation prevailing around. Most of the people who have been converted to some other religious faith

at the core of their hearts do still follow the traditional religious philosophy. The Bodo - Christians wear the same traditional Dokhonabut put a veil on their heads as a part of European culture. The customs followed in the pre-marriage rituals are strictly traditional. In some places it is the standard Assamese way of celebrating marriage except for a few interludes in the marriage that are strictly Bodo in nature.³⁷

Bodos do not have any specific generic term to denote the kin group, which is ordinarily described as kin from wife's side. But a common term, Kurma is used for the relatives from wife's side. Likewise the term Bhagi has been used for relatives from the father's side, Bodos have words for uncles, brothers and sisters. This type of family relationship comprises individual social group, called khell. The individual khell is so strong among the Bodos that they are bound by social customs and laws.

As family is the lowermost stratum of the society, one should know the structure of the household or family, how they live customarily in the society. A typical Boro-Kachari household generally consists of four houses, on four sides of a Sitla or inner yard and Langwna, or front yard in front of the southern house. According to the rank of occupants they have big house on the north, which is called no ma no. The senior most couple of the family resides here. This house comprises three rooms. The eastern room is called Ising, or kitchen. There are strict restrictions for the outsider. Here they have a seat for the goddess of prosperity. Therefore, they never allow other persons to enter the kitchen. The oven where they cook is by the side of the eastern wall of the Ising while near the northern wall are two molehill type foundations. On the tip of each an egg, alternatively a pebble, is kept. This is called Mainao Bindw or the house goddess of prosperity. Near the western well the cooking utensils are kept and washing is done inside.³⁸

The Bodo tribe was originally casteless. In process of time, a segment of Bodo tribe was converted into Hindus to adopt Brahma religion under the influence of Kalicharan (Mech) Brahma, the preacher of the Brahma movement. A segment of their tribes was influenced by Christian missionary, another section of the Bodo tribes remains unchanged and far from influence of either religion. This section of traditional Bodo Kacharis is the actual representative of their tribes. A traditional Bodo-Kachari is a smiling beauty, which attracts any outsider. He has pleasing manners. He lives a simple life and envies none. This kind of traditional society, therefore, can be guided properly to uplift their social status, so that they can cope with the modern civilised society.

Status of Women in Bodo Society

The status of the Bodo women reflected in the traditional Bodo society is quite different from that of the post independent society. Before talking about the status of Bodo women we need to understand the meaning of the 'status' as a concept of social science. Commonly, 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 member or group of members 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.

According to Ralf Linton "status are the polar positions... in patterns of reciprocal behaviour". A polar position comprises 'a collection of rights and duties'.⁶ Thus he conceived of status as a position based on socially approved rights and duties. Members of a society conform these rights and duties by performing certain roles. When a person is acting these rights and duties, he is said to be performing roles of a status of a member of a society as defined by the society. Social status corresponds to social roles, ascribed or achieved. In order

to I 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.

Anthropologists or social scientists have identified 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 can be explained the status and role of the Bodo women in terms of age and kinship. The kinship system refers to a set of persons recognized 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. We may explain the status and role of women within the network of kinship relations. Age is another criterion on the basis of which roles is divided. Certain roles are specifically assigned to minor age group and important roles are assigned on adult. For the convenience of our understanding we may stratify the entire Bodo women population into three categories, like, (a) minor aged group (b) adult and (e) old aged group. Aidan Southal on the other hand identifies four '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.' Aidan's frame works of '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 as well. Efforts will be made of explain the status of Bodo women under the Aidan's frame work of role domains as it provides wider scope for the purpose.³⁹

The structure of the Bodo society is patriarchal in nature. Though man is the sole authority of the family, the families not having male issues transfer their property into their daughter's name. Though it is quoted by some Bodo scholars that women occupy a high position in the society it was observed that it was only partially true. The Bodo women are not the members of any traditional institution. It was found that the birth of a daughter is not

favoured as much as that of a son. Marital separation does not allow a woman to have a share of her husband's property. It is needless to say that the Bodo women are hardworking and industrious. They are expert weavers and have earned recognition worldwide in contemporary times. The Bodo women in the Darrang district have mainly depended on settled agriculture. Since most of the villages have been created by clearing of the forests, the Bodos had to stop relying on the forests and depend on settled agriculture as an alternative. The women too had to share some of the characteristics from the settled agricultural societies. They had to resort to some other means of sustenance. The women took up weaving and bamboo-craft as their past-time activities which later helped them in generating resources. It was felt that educated women are more in number than men. But the jobs would go to men only, which made the women frustrated and thus the families stopped supporting their daughters for education. The women in the village have gained control over the domestic and the social fronts by their potential to control or participate in the production process. In the socio-cultural sphere also women have been in the forefront as organizers, and at times as official representatives of the community. Women no more go to collect firewood as the forests reserves have been cleared off. Since women are generally not allowed to assist in ploughing. In the same group women do other works such as planting, weeding, spraying fertilizers, hoeing etc. Bodo women generally are not seen selling produce in the market. They do not have the access to the information on their production activities. Hence, they are unable to deal with the market.

The roles of the Bodo women under Kinship domain may 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 adoption. The family is the basic unit of social structure of every society. It is true both for simple and modern society with complex social structure. Statuses in the society are determined by the internal organization 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 social identity is initially fixed by family membership by being born to a given status and characteristic. The children take on the socio-economic class standing on the parents socio-economic positions in which they born including its behavioural pattern and definition of reality. In addition to internalizing family attitudes and beliefs children are treated and defined by others extension of social identity of their parents.

Before the marriage, a woman is a daughter of a "family of orientation." Father and mother, brothers and sisters are her immediate kinsmen. Daughter is regarded as the transient or non-permanent members of the family. Her relations to parents and other elder members 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 mores and values. She has to play different types of ideally set roles with different members of the family in different ways such as a daughter, sister, granddaughter, as niece, aunt, etc. Her role in the family is defined by her Kinship position. Her relationship to younger member 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 all a sacrifice to the family.

The actual position of a member of society is determined by the actual roles that one plays.' Actual roles played by women may be different from ideally set roles or expected roles. We have general perception only on the 'ideally set roles. But in the real scenario of the women's roles and statuses are totally different. If a woman performs her roles above the level of expected or ideally set roles she may be considered as a good woman and commands a

good position in the society. But when a woman performs her roles below the normally expected roles or contrary to the ideally set roles she may occupy low position in the family or society.

The role of daughters as Kin members 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 seer at home. A female child also performs as baby seer 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 could avail this chance for education. They are to drop out from schools due to poor economic condition of her family. The situation in a family with subsistence economy or below subsistence level is different from that of the wealthy family. Young girls, from wealthy families comparatively lead an easy life. In such families both boys and girls are oriented towards modern education. Parents are not interested to make their children a good man or woman skilled in traditional business conforming the 'ideally set roles' prescribed by traditional mores and values. Instead they desire their children to be highly educated and employed in government or non-government offices, which is non-manual in nature.

Religion plays a great role in upholding the status of Bodo women in the society. The impact of conversion in general and on the women is different in the process. Christianity has brought radical changes through the inputs of education, health and social reforms. The Bodos converted to Hinduism were comfortable to relate themselves with the mainstream society without relinquishing their identity, practices and customs. But, it is difficult to say that whether these reformations laid a positive impact on the women's status.

The culture of the Bodo society emphasizes the marriage of daughters. Earlier, the life was simple and the necessity of life was limited. Marriage of girls was not a problem. Now situation has changed.

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 and for a girl it is a curse and a state of sorrow and humiliation. Normally society doesn't like a girl to remain unmarried beyond age limit. Psychologically, they are aware of their positions. And, in order to get relief from anxiety they move to towns and cities and engaged themselves as household workers, and workers in small scale industries and started independent lives. The number of this category of woman is quite considerable now.

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 opened for boys than the girls. It is attributed by the fact that girls are to be disposed to another family after marriage. Daughters don't enjoy the rights of property inheritance. This is the most important factor that attributed to economic uncertainty for unmarried girls.

After marriage a woman is incorporated into her husband family with different family structure and economic conditions and psychological background. The family structure and economic condition of the husband family determined 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 to death. Her relation to husband is of love, friendly, mutual respect and affection and cooperative. Endle has stated that, the position of Bodo Woman was sub-Ordinate to her husband, but the direct observation of fact convinced Endle that, the Bodo husband treated his wife with distinct respect and regards her as an equal and a companion to an extent which can hardly be said to be the rule among many of the Indian people. In comparison to caste Hindu society Bodo women enjoy greater freedom in the society.

Stating the freedom enjoyed by the woman in Assam. W. Robinson stated that, the women of Assam were beautiful to look at and they go about in public without any artificial modesty unlike the woman of other parts of India. Definitely Robinson indicated to the women folk beyond the caste-structured society of Assam. 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 affairs. She maintains avoidance relationship with the elder brother of her husband. Her relations to younger member of the family are of love, affection, master and guide. Women in the family; are regarded as “Noni Mainao” or “Lakshmi”. These are the 'ideally-set of roles, normally expected to be performed by women 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. Desai and Thakkar observed that, women themselves sometimes become oppressed and oppressor." There are instances of Bodo women of becoming oppressed particularly by husband in drunken state. Barren woman: without child become a subject to dishonour in the Society. Woman without child is a great disqualification for her. A woman may be ill treated or-oppressed due to her miss-conduct and character.

Sometimes, it is seen that, woman herself usually become oppressor instead of being oppressed. Daughter-in-laws with better economic background and modern outlook-from

wealthy 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 other 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, envious cruel in nature create tensions not only in the family but also outside the family. Such type of women is referred as Rankhini, Khungkhini, Mwnsari, Jansari etc. Generally, people avoid such type of women. Due value is given to quality 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.

Though the work pattern of Bodo women is traditional in nature, it is the relative autonomy that these women enjoy in particular. Earnings of unmarried young women are not appropriated by the other family members. They save it for their own expenses or invest it in pigs, goats or yarn for weaving. The women here are seen working better in groups. Since one cannot force an external system on them as they will find it difficult to adapt in such a system. They rather try to build it on the lines of their own tradition and keep relating it to the contemporary trends. The transition from the traditional collectives to Mahila Samities is also a positive factor in this regard. It was seen that rural women worked through these groups to meet their socio-economic demands, women problems, and also thought in terms of welfare activities in village.

The roles of the Bodo women perform 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 recognized. Men are bread winners, so, they, not the women are head of the house hold." This statement is not appropriate in case of the Bodo Society. In poor family and in the families in simple society, women take very important roles in the economic domain of society...Earlier, it was stated that from her minor age Bodo women play vital, effective and contributory' roles to the family economy's In her studies on the economic life of the Karbi Women Upala Baruah made a beautiful remark as, "Daughters begin as soon as their strength permits to help their mother in all her works". "The poorer the household, the greater the dependency on women's work for survival". Similar is the picture of the Bodo women in poor families in rural areas. Newly settled poor families in reserved forest areas in Kokrajhar, Chirang, Bagnan; Dhekiajuli, Orang, Belsiri, Rangapara, Sonitpur, Mingmang, and Dhemaji etc. The women play similar roles in survival and continuity of the families. In traditional Bodo society agriculture was the primary and common occupation to all the families. There were instances of specialized occupations i.e., carpentry, bamboo craft, pottery, weaving etc. But these specializations were not based on hereditary or birth like that of the caste Hindu society. The poor families of the newly settled forest areas in Sonitpur, Darrang, Bagnan, Chirang and Kokrajhar districts women play equal roles to 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 seer in the family. It is exception to only the families with wealth and property. She helps the families by moving light household 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, booming of floor and courtyard of the house, are her regular works. Her orientation is towards becoming a 'good household worker'. Mother and other members

of the family help her in the construction of ideas and experience through socialization and training.

Traditional Bodo society was characterized by isolation, self-sufficiency, self content economic life and distinctiveness and homogeneity; all the essential features of the 'little community', as conceptualized by, Robert Redfield's. The introduction of new social structures or systems since the time of British rule in India has brought radical changes in structural and functional, systems of all traditional Indian societies. Changes have been crept into the Worldviews, modes of life, avenues of life, attitude of life, necessities of life, organization and structure of society, material culture, and value system etc. of the society. Society is directed to new dimensions of social change i.e. development, welfare, progress, unity peace etc. Indian society has achieved a lot in general but the national policies for development has failed to marginalize the gap between rich and poor, advance communities and backward communities, instead has 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 lives of the tribal people turn misery. 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. Their social-economic conditions become worst.

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 entirely done by woman folk. They also take care of vegetable garden in the family. They 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 the families above the substantial level of economy comparatively lead an easy life. They get their household works done by the maidservant. They take important role in the management of household works and the socialization of their children. The post independent India provided to the people new domains of economic roles in the forms of jobs in the public sector under different department, in the private sector in different industries, entrepreneurs, trade and business establishment etc. Educated Bodo women also accepted these chances and get employed as a government servant under different departments, public or private sectors. The percentage of serving under government departments is less in comparison to the Bodo male counterparts. The statuses of employed Bodo women are better economically and socially than those who are engaged in agriculture. Employment is the symbol of economic status in itself and sign of being educated.

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