

**TOPIC- ASPECTS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC HISTORY OF THE BODOS  
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO BODO WOMEN IN ASSAM.**

*A thesis submitted during July, 2017 to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Ph.D degree in Centre for Women's Studies, School of Social Sciences*

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Aspects of Socio-Economic History of the Bodos with Particular Reference to Bodo Women in Assam**” submitted by **Suchitra Boro** bearing **Regd. No. 11CWPG03** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in **Gender Studies** is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance which is a plagiarism free thesis.

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**DECLARATION**

I, **Suchitra Boro**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled "**Aspects of Socio-Economic History of the Bodos with Particular Reference to Bodo Women in Assam**" submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. M.N Rajesh is a bonafide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/ INFLIBNET.

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### **ABBREVIATION**

ABSU- All Bodo Student's Union  
AASU- All Assam Student's Union  
AILM- All India Muslim League  
ABWWF-All Bodo Women Welfare Federation  
AATWWF- All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation  
BAC- Bodoland Autonomous Council  
BLT- Bodo Liberation Tiger  
BNC- Bodo National Conference  
BPF- Bodoland People's Front  
BPPF- Bodoland People's Progressive Front  
BPFWW- Bodoland People's Front Women Wing  
BrSF- Boro Security Force  
BTC- Bodoland Territorial Council  
BSS- Bodo Sahitya Sabha  
BVF- Bodo Volunteer Force  
BWJF- Bodo Women Justice Forum  
ICUN-International Union for Conservation of Nature  
NSCN-The Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland  
NDFB- National Democratic Front of Bodoland  
NMA-Naga Mother's Association  
NRLM-National Rural Livelihood Mission  
PTCA- Plains Tribal Council of Assam  
ST- Schedule Tribe  
UNWGIP-United Nations Working Group on Indigenous People  
UPP- United People's Party  
VCDC- Village Council Development Committee

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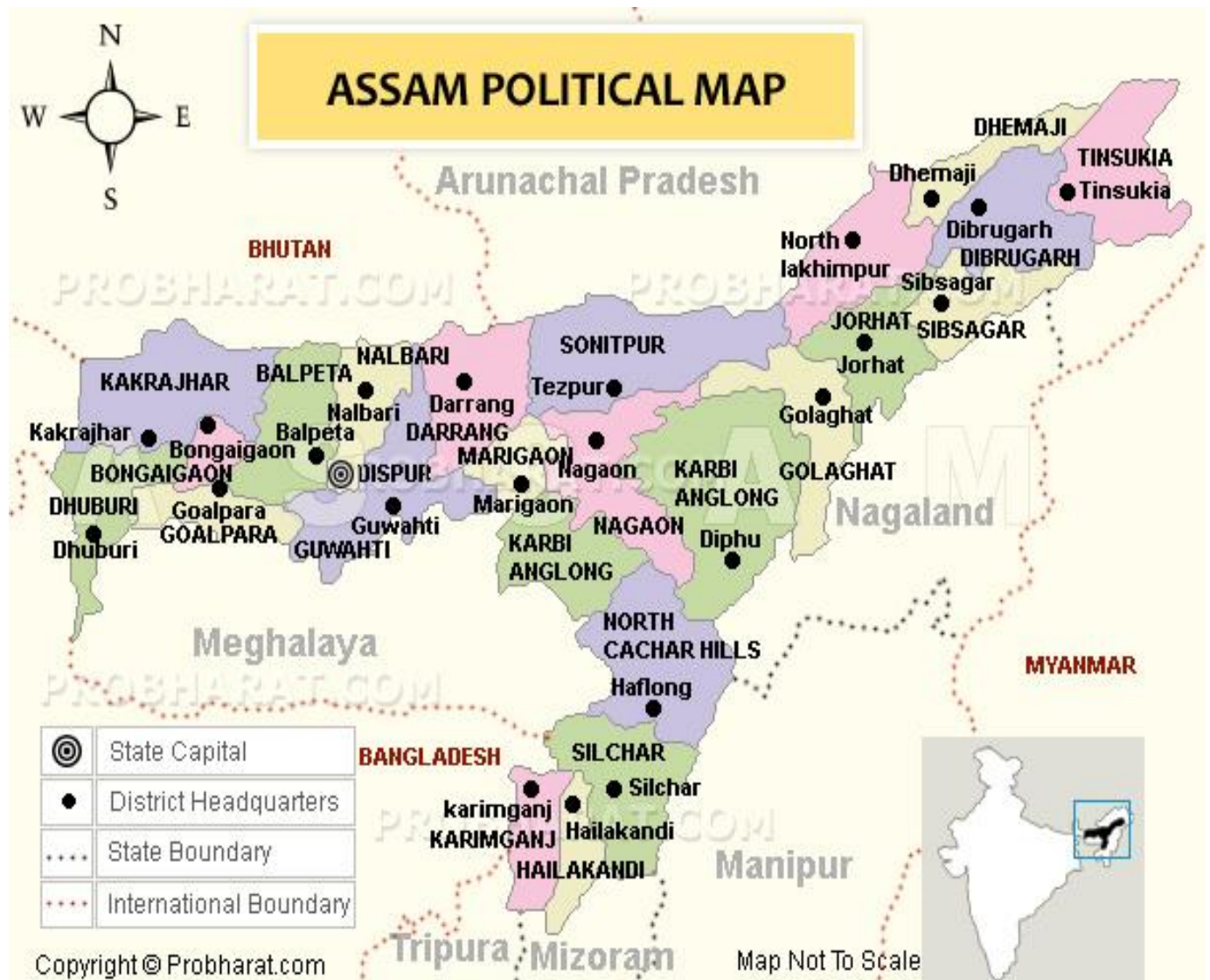
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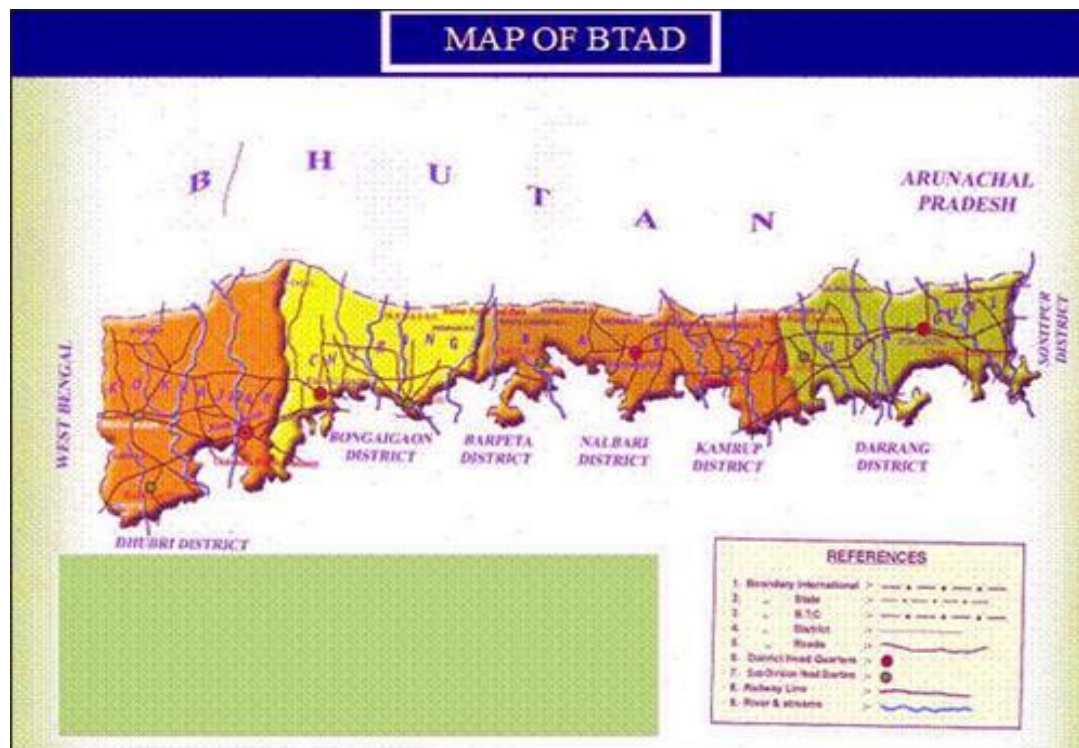
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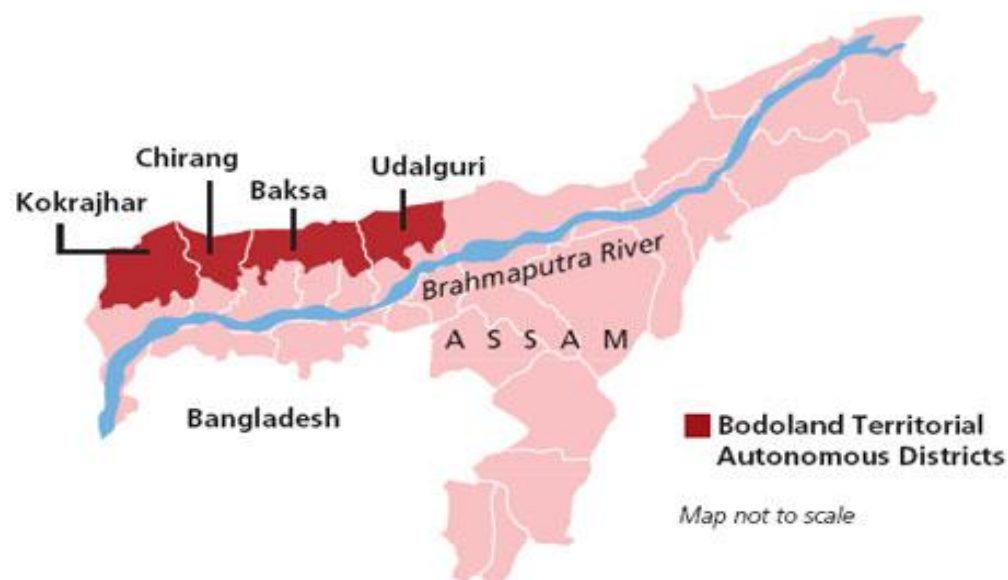
## MAPS



Source: Assam Political Map, Map of Assam, India



Source: Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts(BTAD).



Source: Bodoland Administration, Kokrajhar.

## **Chapter-1**

### **Historical overview of the Assam and Bodos**

#### **1.1.0 Introduction:**

Women's studies in India in the past decades have been engaging with new themes and approaches opening up new vistas of enquiry. In this journey, the earlier approaches which represented tribal societies as simple and monolithic categories characterized by low levels of technology and backwardness, the simple gender roles have been questioned.

New research in this area has not only addressed the question of diversity and change but also the speciality of each tribal community and their linkages with larger questions like patriarchy, modernization, globalization, migration etc. In this thesis, an attempt has been made to study Bodo women by situating them against the background of the rapid changes in the last two decades. In the scene of hectic political activity, new voices have surfaced displacing the earlier narratives. This is partly on account of the rapid changes in the political scenario of Assam that is informed by both political movements and electoral politics. It is also partly because of the large scale economic changes that have led to a restricting economy of Assam and also the Bodo economic patterns as a result of the faces of neo-liberalism and market economy. Ethnic assertion, militancy, migration, religious revivalism and other factors have also contributed to their change. This thesis, therefore aims to study these changes and locate Bodo women in this larger scheme.

In brief, this chapter presents the complete picture of the historical overview of Assam and the

Bodos. It presents the geo-political changes that took place over centuries till date. The Bodos are the largest ethnic and linguistic aboriginal group of the North Brahmaputra valley in the Northeast part of India in the State of Assam. Bodos are recognized as the largest plain tribe among the tribal groups of Assam under the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution. They are spread almost all throughout the North Brahmaputra valley reaching up to the Bhutan border; a majority of them residing under the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (B.T.A.D). *Edward Gait* regarded them as the earliest inhabitants of Brahmaputra valley<sup>1</sup>. Demographically, though the Bodos are scattered in many places, they follow a similar pattern of culture, tradition, language, religion etc, with certain degree of modifications in tune with time and space. They are the indigenous inhabitants and the earliest settler group before the advent of Ahom kingdom in the 12th century (Brahma2011)<sup>2</sup>.

### **1.2.0 Brief Geography of Assam:**

Well known as the gateway to the Northeastern States of India, the State of Assam lies at the foothills of the mighty Himalayas. It shares boundary with seven Indian States viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. It also shares international boundaries with Bangladesh and Bhutan. Geographically Assam is connected to the mainland India through Silliguri corridor situated in the State of West Bengal (Economic survey of Assam, 2013-14)<sup>3</sup>. The rainy, hot summer and dry, cold winter, with the mighty Brahmaputra River flowing along the middle of the land have made the state of Assam the settling ground of many civilizations of different tribes, languages, traditions, cultures etc. at different intervals of history.

The composite culture of the different tribes of Assam has made Assam the land of unity in

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<sup>1</sup> Gait, Edward. 1926. '*A History of Assam*', Panbazar: Guwahati, Spectrum Publications.

<sup>2</sup> Brahma, Kalidasa. 2011. '*Understanding the history of the Bodos*', 25 December.

<sup>3</sup> Economic survey of Assam 2013-2014, Government of Assam.

diversity. With their unique cultural identity, each of the tribes has concentrated themselves in a particular cultural realm claiming their identity. The spatial concentration of some tribes is mentioned below: 1. The Boro Kachari tribe: the Bodo Kacharies of Assam is a branch of great Bodo group of Indo Mongoloid family. Presently, a majority of them reside in the Brahmaputra plain. 2. The Mising tribe: they are the second largest schedule tribe of Assam. They are mostly based in riverine areas like Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Sonitpur. 3. The Deori tribe: they are one of the four divisions of Chutiyas. Nowadays they are mostly settled in Sibsagar and Jorhat Districts. 4. The Rabha tribe: they are widely scattered but mostly concentrated in Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang. 5. The Tiwa or Lalung tribe: they are mainly concentrated in the districts of Nagaon and Morigaon. 6. The Khamti tribe: the Khamti is a branch of Tai race. They are mostly concentrated in North Lakhimpur and Sadia region. 7. The Sonowal Kachari tribe: they mainly live in Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Jorhat and Golaghat districts. 8. the Dimasa Kachari tribe: they reside mainly in the north Cachar hills and Karbi Anglong districts. 9. The Karbi tribe: they are concentrated in the Karbi Anglong district. 10. The Hmar tribe: they are scattered around Manipur, Mizoram and North Cachar hills in Assam. 11. The Garo tribe: they are found in villages across the Brahmaputra valley including many in and around the Guwahati Metropolitan area (Sen, 1999)<sup>4</sup>.

The unique geography of Assam with a favourable climate has always been a dream destination for people of nearby countries and Indian states. With the presence of vast plain land, the earliest settlers have made these Great Plains their homeland. Today the explosion of population has not even spared the hilly areas as majority of the highland regions today are inhabited by people of different tribes. The natural environment has dictated the economic activities of the people

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<sup>4</sup> Sen, Sipra .1999. '*Tribes and Castes of Assam*', Gyan Publishing House, Oxford University press, New Delhi.

turning them into plain dwellers and highland dwellers. This is reflected even in the division of tribes in Assam. For example, officially the state of Assam distinguishes the plain tribes and hill tribes among the scheduled tribes. The people of plains and hills live their way of life through the geographical constraints and possibilities. With the growth of human knowledge and technology, today both the people of plains as well as hills have opened up many vistas through change in agricultural practices and promoting industry suitable to their geography. But even though their economic activities differ, their cultural affinity is unquestionable, making the state of Assam the melting pot of many cultures. For example, the culture of Assamese people of Brahmaputra plains and Bengali people of the Barak plains is very different, in spite of living in the plain areas.

On the contrary, the culture of the Bodos of Brahmaputra plain and the Bodos of the Karbi Anglong plateau are very similar, in spite of living in a different topography. Thus, it can be easily said that the people of Assam are bound by their cultures though they live in different geographical landscape. It is important to note that the geography of Assam made it possible for the Britishers to flourish the tea plantation. Several uninhabited fertile lands were converted into large tea estates. This economic activity seems to be a turning point in the history of Assam, as majority of the workers for these tea estates were fetched from neighbouring states of India, assimilating into the new world of numerous cultures already existing. The people from Chhotanagpur plateau area, mainly Jharkhand and Orissa were hired as labourers by the Britishers to work in the tea gardens. People from undivided Bengal and Nepal also poured in. With the dawn of India's Independence and redrawing of boundaries, another wave of migration turned towards the vast stretch of fertile lands causing a major rupture in the social fabric of Assam. Recent instances of ethnic riots in Assam are a manifestation of these complex realities

resulting from the complex realities of geography, the fertile uninhabited lands and the porous boundary with undivided Bengal. The state of Assam with its unique diversity across culture, language, religion, caste, community etc is one among the seven sister states of Northeast India.

### **1.3.0 The major regions of Assam and their physiographic structures:**

Assam is a land surrounded by mountains, valleys, rivers and hills. Assam can be broadly divided into three physiographic units: the Brahmaputra valley in the north, the Barak valley in the south and the North Cachar hills and plateaus separating the two valleys. The northern part of Assam is wholly occupied by the lengthened valley of the mighty Brahmaputra and most of the population resides in the Brahmaputra valley. It is made up of two parts- the Lower Assam valley where plains are broken by isolated groups of hills and the Upper Assam valley with unbroken plains. Karbi Anglong and parts of North Cachar Hills form a part of Meghalaya plateau which is a range of mountains in the centre of Assam and divides the Brahmaputra valley from Barak valley by the Barail range of Cachar which is contiguous with the densely populated country of Bangladesh (Sen, 1999)<sup>5</sup>.

The forest of Assam is home to a variety of luxuriant trees catering to the needs of fuel for the local people and timber for small scale industries. However in recent years environmental imbalances, large scale deforestation and practice of shifting cultivation have resulted into problems like soil erosion, landslide, floods etc.

- **Habitats:** India has the distinction of being one of the 17 Mega biodiverse countries in the world accounting for 7-8 % of the recorded species. The state of Assam occupies a

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<sup>5</sup> Sen, Sipra .1999. '*Tribes and Castes of Assam*', Gyan Publishing House, Oxford University press, New Delhi..

special place in this regard; reason being the State of Assam is a constituent unit of the Eastern Himalayan Biodiversity "hot spots" in India. The varied geographical features accompanied by different micro climatic conditions have resulted in a host of diversity of ecological habitats such as forests, grasslands, wetlands etc. sustaining and nurturing endless floral and faunal species since time immemorial. It is needless to mention that many species are endemic to this region and it is also the centre of genesis for many important commercial plants. The forests of Assam can be broadly classified into following types; 1) Tropical Wet Evergreen Forests 2) Tropical Semi Evergreen Forest 3) Tropical Moist Deciduous Forests 4) Sub -Tropical Broadleaf Hill Forests 5) Sub-Tropical Pine Forests 6) Littoral and Swamp Forests 7) Grassland and Savannahs. The Bodo dominated areas mainly fall under moist deciduous forests.

Assam accounts for nearly around 24.42% of orchid's occurring in India. It is interesting to note that altogether 38 naturally growing species of bamboo are recorded in Assam. Bamboo has significantly played an important role in the socio economic life of the people of Assam. The importance attributed to bamboo can be realized from the fact that every household grows bamboo in its Bari land (backyard). Assam is also well endowed with a good number of plants having medicinal purposes. Another noteworthy feature of the landscape of Assam is that the state of Assam has more fresh water wetlands than any other states of the north eastern region of India. The floodplains of Brahmaputra and Barak displays marshy depressions and swamps locally called as bheels, hola, pitoni etc. For example, the Deepor Beel near Guwahati is a Ramsar site. These water bodies serve as the live saver for numerous aquatic plants and animals. Certain rare and endangered species recognized by IUCN have also been reported in the



forests of Assam. Primate species like golden Langur (locally known as Sonali Bandar), capped monkey, Assamese macaque etc. are the names of a few attributed to the richness of faunal diversities of Assam. The natural habitat of the golden langur is between the river Sankosh and Manas along the marginal part of the foothills of eastern Himalayas in the BTAD region. The one-horned Rhinoceros which is found only in the state of Assam is famous worldwide but unfortunately it has fallen prey in the hands of poachers every now and then, endangering the pride of Assam. Also a variety of fish diversity like Botia, Katla, Magur, Rohu, Singi etc. is witnessed in the water bodies of Assam. (Source: Assam State Biodiversity Board)<sup>6</sup>.

- **Rivers:** The Brahmaputra River flows from Sadiya in the east to Dhubri in the west through the middle of Assam including the four Bodoland Territorial Area Districts. Besides, there are about 40 large tributaries that fall into the Brahmaputra from the Himalayas in the north and Naga Hills, Karbi plateau and Meghalaya plateau in the south. By the side of these rivers there are numerous ox-bow lakes, swamps, marshes and grassland. Some of the important north bank tributaries of the Brahmaputra are Subansiri, Ranganadi, Jia Bharali, Pagladia, Manas, and Sonkosh etc and the important south bank tributaries are Dhansiri, Kapili, Burhi Dihing etc. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries often causes bank erosion destroying villages, roads and bridges as well as cultivated lands, creating havoc with the lives of the local people. It is to be noted that Majuli, which is said to be the largest river island in the world and which is on the Brahmaputra in Jorhat district is repeatedly attacked by rapid bank erosion, is ultimately reduced in its area. Towards the southern part of the state there is the Barak River flowing through the Barak plain. Barak River has several north bank tributaries like Jiri, Jatinga, Madhura etc.

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<sup>6</sup> Assam State Biodiversity Board, Assam.

and several south bank tributaries like Sonai, Dhaleswarisingla etc. Thus, the state of Assam is blessed with many perennial rivers, whose sanctity needs to be sustained (Source: Assam State Biodiversity Board)<sup>7</sup>.

- **Highland region of Assam:** There is a picturesque highland region in between the Brahmaputra plain in the north and Barak plain in the south. This highland region covers the districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. The northern part of this highland is the Karbi plateau and the southern part is the North Cachar Hills. The Karbi highland is the easternmost portion of the old Meghalaya plateau and is highly denuded into many isolated hills due to continuous erosion by the river Kopili and its headstreams. To the northeast, beyond the Kopili, there lies the main Karbi Plateau. The highest central part of the Karbi Plateau is occupied by a hill range called Rengma Range. Many rivers like Kaliani, Nambar, Misa, Nanoi etc flow from here. The Dhansiri River separates this plateau from the Naga Hills. The hills of North Cachar area are geologically the southerly extension of the Himalayas. A relatively high hill range, named the Barail range running from Jaintia hills border in the south-west to Nagaland in the north-east, further increases the scenic beauty of this region (Source: Assam State Biodiversity Board)<sup>8</sup>.

- **Water logging in Assam:** The menace of water logging is witnessed very often in the state of Assam. In both the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys, flood occurs almost regularly inundating the human inhabitat areas and makes the whole region prone to waterlogging. The concentration of most of the yearly rainfall in the monsoon season is one of the major causes of water logging in the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys. Districts

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<sup>7</sup> Assam State Biodiversity Board (ASBB).

<sup>8</sup> Assam State Biodiversity Board (ASBB).

like Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Dhubri etc are always the victims of floods year after year. Another regular feature of water logging is very well noticed in the urban areas of Assam with the growing population pressure. The high degree of concretization of the urban landscape allows very little or no water to percolate and hence, the net result is the problem of water logging. The city of Guwahati is notoriously famed for water logging. The situation is the same for most of the urban centres of Assam (Source: Assam State Biodiversity Board)<sup>9</sup>.

#### **1.4.0 Production patterns of Assam:**

The highland region of Assam is also unique in its agriculture. As a hilly region it is expected not to be advanced in agriculture. Traditionally agriculture is carried out through shifting cultivation, known locally as the 'Jhum cultivation'. In this cultivation a plot of land on a hill slope is chosen and the bushes are cleared by burning. Then the plot is tilled by hoe and no plough is used here. The cultivators then grow hill rice, corn, ragi, sweet potato, ginger, chilly, mustard etc. The field is not used continuously for more than 2 to 4 years. Therefore, the land is kept fallow at regular intervals. It is interesting to note that there are occasional patches of plain land by the side of the rivers and streams because the top soil of the Jhum field is soon worn down by heavy rainfall. In such flat patches of land one can carry out wet cultivation of rice during the kharif season. Rice being the staple food, the farmers give greater stress on growing rice. Maize is the next important crop of the hilly region. Besides, small amount of mustard and pulses are also grown. Tea and rubber are the important cash crops. The hilly region also produces small quantity of coffee.

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<sup>9</sup> Assam State Biodiversity Board (ASBB).

Large quantities of orange, pineapple and a very good quality of papaya are the treasures of the hilly regions of Assam.

Assam is divided physically into two divisions: the hill and the plain. The Brahmaputra valley and the Barak valley of Assam, which is separated by the hills, have a very fertile alluvial soil. A variety of tea qualities are produced every year and the products are being exported to other countries. Agricultural is one of the major sources of the economy of Assam. Different types of cash crops like jute, cotton, oilseeds etc and food grains like Sali, Ahu etc are cultivated. The economy of Assam is predominantly agrarian. The crops of Assam are divided into three patterns-the wet and summer crops, winter crops and plantation crops. The Jhum cultivation is mostly practiced in the North Cachar hills by burning and clearing the jungles. The land is equally distributed by the village councils to the families. Paddy is the main crop for them. Besides that, they cultivate potatoes, maize, chillies etc. and even in hill slopes they practice terrace cultivation of paddy by irrigating through artificially constructed channels (Sen, 1999)<sup>10</sup>.

Assam is dominated by the mighty Brahmaputra River which is also known by various names as, Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet and Dihang in China and Jamuna in Bangladesh. It is one of the largest rivers in the world with a total length of 2900 km. It originates in Tibet and passes through India and Bangladesh. After running 1609 kms through Tibet, the rivers turns South-east making a hairpin bend at a place, a few miles east of Namcha Burwa where it is joined by its tributaries. Flood is very common in Assam. Due to heavy monsoon rains and the narrowness of the valley, the river Brahmaputra cannot maintain the normal channel resulting into frequent floods. Therefore, lots of crops and lives of people are affected every year due to heavy rainfall and floods.

An inhabited island, named Majuli of Assam which is said to be the largest river island in the

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<sup>10</sup> Sen, Sipra, 1999. '*Tribes and Castes of Assam*' Gyan Publishing House, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

world which covered an area of 1,250sq kms has decreased in area to only around 352sq kms in 2014 due to erosion of river Brahmaputra. It is surrounded by the waters of Brahmaputra and Subansiri. Again the smallest river island in the world named Umananda is also situated in the middle of the Brahmaputra river in the city of Guwahati, famous for Shiva temple.

Assam is rich in mineral resources like petroleum, natural gas, coal, limestone etc. Oil was first discovered in Assam in 1889 at Digboi and thereafter the Digboi oil refinery was started in 1901 by Assam Oil Company. Coal is found in the place of Namdang, Koliajan etc. It was first discovered in 1825 in Dibrugarh and later it was used commercially by the local railways, hydropower stations etc.

**1.5.0 Agriculture** – As the majority of the population of Assam lives in rural areas, agriculture and its allied activities plays an important role in the socio - economic development of the state. But the position of farmers seems to be at the subsistence level compared to farmers of certain rich states. It is pathetic that around 90% of the farmers belong to small and marginal groups. The abundant rainfall is very advantageous for agriculture but its full potential is yet to be explored. The various geographic features coupled with climatic effects have resulted into various types of soil from alluvial to marshy land. It is to be noted that there is a considerable area under barren and uncultivable land (around 14.25 lakh hectare). This land is mainly in the form of swamps and hills. While the swampy area can be developed for fishery, the hilly areas could be developed for horticultural crops. Also the area under cultivable wasteland (around 0.77 lakh hectare) and fallow land (around 1.57 lakh hectare) is very large. Efforts should be made for afforestation programmes in this wasteland<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> A *Textbook of Social Science* published by The Assam State Textbook Production and Publication Corporation Limited, Guwahati, 2009.

Even today, after decades of India's independence, the agriculture of Assam exhibits most of the characteristics of underdeveloped agriculture, with widespread use of traditional farming techniques, low usage of modern farm inputs and inadequate agricultural infrastructure. Thus, the net result is low productivity and lower incomes. Majority of the farmers being poor, the practice of intensive agriculture, which uses large amounts of capital and labour relative to land area, is not noticed on a wide scale. In fact commercialization of agriculture is not up to the mark. A key area that needs to be focussed is on increasing the cropping intensity and productivity through proper utilization of the limited water resource. It is interesting to note only around 30% of the net cropped area is under assured irrigation through various agricultural and irrigational schemes. Notwithstanding the lack of agricultural infrastructure, water intensive paddy cultivation has survived throughout the state and it owes a lot to the indigenous canal system of dongs. The dong system involves building temporary bunds on permanent stream or river courses. Then the part of the water is diverted through the dongs so that water reaches the fields. Each of the networks of these dongs is overseen by the community institutions called dong -band committees, a unique example of participatory irrigation management. With the growing population, accompanied by the climate change, the pressure on the scarce land and water resource will always remain as a big challenge for all the policy makers<sup>12</sup>.

**1.6.0 Plantation of Assam:** The green blushes of tea gardens in Assam have not only added to the greenery of Assam, but have also added to employment, revenue and growth generation of the state. Tea is normally to be grown in large estates by employing a large labour force. However in recent years, some young farmers have started growing tea in small plots of land

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<sup>12</sup> 'A *Textbook of Social Science*' published by The Assam State Textbook Production and Publication Corporation Limited, Guwahati, 2009.

also, turning themselves as small tea growers. The tea plant is grown in the lowlands of Assam, unlike in Darjeeling and Nilgiri hills, where tea plants are grown in highland areas. The Brahmaputra plain is very famous for tea. There are about 700 large tea estates in the Brahmaputra valley especially in the districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Nagaon, Sonitpur and Udalguri (BTAD). Each of the large tea estates employs a large labour force and the end product (tea) is processed in a large factory and then it is packed and sent to market as a directly consumable product, adding revenues for the economy of Assam.

**1.7.0 Pastoralism:** With the change in time and geographical landscape, the people of Assam have adopted various economic activities for their livelihood. Starting from the hunting and food gathering period they have now become settled cultivators. Hunting was a part of most of the tribal societies including the Bodos throughout the uninhabited thick jungles of Assam. For instance, the Bodos living in the Brahmaputra valley used to go for hunting in the jungles of the foothills of the Himalayas. However, with the passage of time the pressure of human population dwindled the areas of hunting zone. Coupled with geographical limitation was the enactment of various laws related to protection of wildlife, which largely restricted the activity of hunting. Nevertheless cattle rearing were always a part of the lives of the people of Assam. This age-old activity has survived till date though on a small scale. In other words, pastoralism, the practice of breeding and rearing certain herbivorous animals for meat, milk, skin etc is being practiced till date with the dominance of cattle rearing. As the geography and climate of Assam do not favour large tracts of grassland, the activity of ranching, where there are permanent farms managed scientifically is visible in case of cattle rearing, mainly for milk. Also the people of highland regions like Kabi Anglong and North Cachar hills do not practice transhumance, where there is

seasonal movement of animals in search of grazing land as practiced in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The potential of Pastoralism or animal husbandry for cattle remains the area to be tapped for the betterment of the local population. Now the majority of the population of Assam are settled agriculturists. They are well engaged in crop farming, dairy farming, mixed farming and plantation agriculture notwithstanding the adversities of limited land and climate change.

**1.8.0 Small scale Industries in Assam:** Like any other Northeast Indian states, the state of Assam is also industrially backward judged even by the Indian standard. So a host of large scale industries is unexpected and out of the picture. The state also does not have the basic infrastructure development needed for the industry, nor do the local people have the required entrepreneurship to develop it. However, the traditional cottage industry and modern factories on a small scale exists and have been thriving well. Weaving is the most important traditional industry since time immemorial. Apart from the cotton cloths produced by the handlooms working in the Brahmaputra plain, these looms also produce local silk products such as muga, endi and pat (common silk). It is widely claimed that Assam is the only region in the world where muga, endi and pat silks are extracted from domestically reared worms. Another traditional cottage industry of the Brahmaputra plain is the bell metal and brass industry. Bell metal utensils are manufactured at Sarthebari of Barpeta district while brass ones are produced at Haldibari of Barpeta and Hajo of Kamrup rural districts. Certain household industries of Assam also include goldsmith, making of wooden furniture, pottery, food processing, etc. Plywood and normal wood products comes from districts like Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, and Jorhat. The huge demand for thousands of wooden boxes to pack tea for local, national and international marketing has thrived the plywood industry. There is also the paper mill of Hindustan Paper



Corporation at Jagiroad in Morigaon district. Jute textile mill and small sugar mill can also be noticed. Moving towards the southern part of the state, the Barak plain is also industrially backward. The only industry worth mentioning is tea plantation and manufacturing. There is a sugar industry at Chargola in Karimganj district and a paper mill at Panchagram of Hailakandi district. When it comes to the highland regions of the state, they are very backward in modern industrial activities. Lack of all weather roads have always acted as a hindrance in their industrial development. Having abundant natural resource like coal and limestone, a cement factory at Bokajan of Karbi Anglong dist has grown up.

#### **1.9.0 The Ethnic map of Assam- a brief description of Assamese society:**

Assam is one of the beautiful places and the gateway of the Northeastern part of India. It has magnificent hill and mountains with rich flora and fauna. Assam consists of different tribes and follows different religion and cultures. The people of Assam inhabit a multi-ethnic culture, multi-linguistic and multi-religious society. Indo-Aryan, Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto- Burman are the main language groups spoken by the people. Assam was being ruled by different civilizations and rulers of different dynasties. Because of different number of ethnic and linguistic groups, followed by different culture and language of the people, Assam can be rightly called as a 'Miniature India'. The process of social formation in Assam has been marked by sanskritization and tribalization of the different groups of people and settled in different periods which can be studied in three historic periods- pre- colonial, colonial and postcolonial periods. Historically, Tai-Ahom was the dominant group of Assam and was the ethnic groups which were associated with the term Assamese. During the medieval period, along with Tai-Ahoms, some prominent groups like Chutiyas, Kacharis and Koches etc ruled the Assam valley. Apart from the

Assamese, Bengalis and Nepalese are the groups that settled in Assam but majority of the Bengalis settled in the Barak valley. A number of tribal groups like Bodos, Rabhas, Dimasas, Garos etc which are called as Mongoloids also settled in Assam. According to Mahabharata, the Mongoloids are the earliest inhabitants of Assam. Linguistically, these Mongoloids belong to the Sino-Tibeto Burma groups. Among them, Bodos are the dominant group of Assam who settled in the North bank of Brahmaputra valley who speak the Tibeto- Burman language. They have been demanding separate Bodoland State which has resulted to the insurgency in the state. Sociologically, they are one of the most important tribes of Northeast India, particularly in the State of Assam.

#### **1.10.0 Peopling of Assam:**

The ancient Assam history generally covers the period from the days of the Epics to the early part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The reconstruction of the early Assam history is a difficult task, mainly because of the shortage of reliable historical materials and evidence. The history of ancient Assam consists of neoliths, megaliths and pottery. It help us in studying the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan elements in Assam and give us an idea to link with the people of ancient Assam and other parts of India and help us to understand the origin and the foundation of Assamese culture and tradition.

Koch Kingdom, whose ancestors has been ruling in Assam from time immemorial, lost in the hands of Ahom kingdom. The Ahoms were the descendants of the Tai people who accompanied King Sukhapha to establish an Ahom kingdom from 1228-1826 in Assam. The main cause of the invasion of Assam was the dispute to the succession to the throne of the Kingdom of Pong. Sukhapha, one of the rival claimants left his native country with his 900 followers mostly men.

After wandering in different places for some years between the Irrawaddy and the Patkai range, they crossed the range and reached the Brahmaputra valley in 1228 A.D to establish their kingdom. They defeated hill tribe Nagas and easily occupied the tribes of Borahis and Morans. They did not harm them but instead adopted and mixed with the culture, treated them equally and even encouraged inter marriages with them (Gohain, reprint, 1999)<sup>13</sup>. Sukhapha established kingdom at Charaideo, now Sibsagar in 1253 and began the formation of the state. During his expansion, they defeated many ruling kingdoms like Chutiya kingdom, Koches, Dimasa Kacharis and Ahom- Mughal etc. The expansion success was not only to increase the military power but also to bring changes in socio economic and political outlook. Ahoms could establish a modern Assam by bringing all the different tribes and groups together inhabiting in different places of Assam. The Ahom dynasty ruled for six hundred years and expanded the kingdom but in the later half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Ahom dynasty started declining and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Burmese army invaded the Ahom kingdom and uprooted their capital. And again the Burmese army was defeated by the British in the First –Anglo Burmese war resulting in the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 which marked the end of the Ahom kingdom. Assam was annexed by the British and made the identity of Ahoms as Assamese. The Ahom people became more Indianite and adopted the Assamese culture and traditions and even converted into Hinduism. They even started speaking Assamese language leaving their Tai- language.

#### **1.11.0 Divisions of Bengal- Partitions of Assam events leading to 1947:**

In 1905, the partition of Bengal was carried out by Lord Curzon, the British Viceroy in India despite strong opposition from the Indian National Congress. The partition of Bengal transformed the Indian National Congress from a group of middle class into a mass party capable

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<sup>13</sup> Gohain U.N, 1999. '*Assam under the Ahoms*' Panbazar: Guwahati, Spectrum Publications, p15.

of organizing mass movements. During 1765, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa had formed a single province of British India with a large area and population more than that of France and Britain. By 1900, the province had grown too large to handle under a single administration. Therefore, the former province of Bengal was divided into two provinces, Bengal comprising Bihar and Orissa as western Bengal and Eastern Bengal and Assam with Dhaka as the capital. The Eastern part was very much neglected and under-governed; therefore they believed that after partition of Bengal there will be an improvement in the administration and creation of separate region would give them more job opportunities in the field of education, employment etc. The Muslims of East Bengal supported the partition and their support was motivated by both their poor economic conditions in the east Bengal as well as by the dominance of the Hindu business and landlords in west Bengal over the governance of Bengal. This created huge political crises. However, the partition was not liked by the Hindu people of Bengal and a large number of nationalist literatures were created during this period and a series of demonstrations, mass meetings was done against the partition and a Swadeshi Movement was launched to boycott the import of British products. In 1911, the capital Calcutta was shifted to Delhi, the east and west Bengal was reunited: Assam came under a chief Commissioner, while Bihar and Orissa were separated to form a new province.

After the partition of Bengal 1905, the geo-political reconstitution of the region increased the flow of Bengali speaking population particularly the Muslim peasantry from the over populated East Bengal to the densely populated fertile lands of Brahmaputra and Surma valley. In 1906 at Dhaka, the formation of All India Muslim League (AIML) also hatched a political conspiracy to expand its numerical strength in Assam and initiated organized migration of Muslims from East Bengal. By 1930s the influx of Muslims has increased and became a chronic problem in the

provincial politics of the State where a new socio-political environment adversely affected the already existing socio-cultural scenario of Assam.<sup>14</sup>

Right after the Independence in 1947, the illegal migration from East Pakistan again increased due to absence of proper Government population planning and lack of awareness to control population. This made the people of Assam, faced the problem of finding a living space for their survival. It not only increased the demographic imbalance in the State but also scared the Assamese middle class people regarding their socio-cultural identity in their homeland itself. In 1979, Assam Agitation(or Assam Movement), a popular movement started against the illegal immigration in Assam which was led by AASU and AAGSP to compel the government to identify and expell the illegal migrants and prevent any new migration into Assam. As a result in 1985, Assam Accord was signed by the Government of India and the leaders of AASU. And later the agitation leaders formed a political party, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) which came to power in the Assembly elections of 1985 in the state of Assam. Though the Assam Accord was passed, the Assam Government could not stop the illegal migration into Assam from the neighbouring Bangladesh, creating a volatile situation in the region<sup>15</sup>.

Soon after the Assam Accord, the Bodo community of Assam also awakened, giving rise to Bodo Nationalism. The illegal migrants even occupied in the tribal areas which has not only threatened the identity of the indigenous Bodos, but has created lingering tension between them and the immigrants, culminating violence and communal clashes with the non-tribals groups making thousand of lives homeless, living in the relief camps in the year 1994. Thousands of

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<sup>14</sup>Article on- Partition of Bengal-1905-newworld encyclopedia)

<sup>15</sup> Article on-Partition of-Bengal-1905.-newworld encyclopedia.

Santhals, Bengalis, Bengali Muslims, and Assamese Muslims were largely affected. As the State Government and Indian Government ignored the issue of Bodos, therefore the Bodos started the demand of separate Bodoland for the development of their community and to preserve their identity (Islam2012)<sup>16</sup>.

### **1.12.0 Events leading to the formation of BTC and their long struggle:**

The movement of the Bodos started with the socio-cultural movement among the Bodos attempting to secure their socio-economic, political and cultural identity. The Bodos remained largely undeveloped in the post- independence period. After the independence, belief of the tribal leaders that the Assam government would take care of the plains tribes but it went in vain. Therefore, they deliberately emerged for their separate political identity with the mainstream politics of Assam and devoted more towards the socio-cultural and economic development of their society. The Bodos, along with the other tribal groups of Assam also encountered the problems of illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, land alienation, economic, political and cultural exploitation. They could not access government jobs, better education and other economic opportunities resulting into a sense of feeling of alienation (George, 1994)<sup>17</sup>.

Unemployment of the Bodos was also another major issue. With large influx of illegal migrants mainly from neighbouring countries, particularly from Bangladesh into the northern bank of Brahmaputra valley, the economic opportunities of the Bodo community further aggravated. Not only their economic opportunities were snatched, but also brought serious repercussions on the local demography. This alteration in demography disturbed the social fabric of a peaceful atmosphere, being witnessed since time immemorial. They even had to struggle to implement

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<sup>16</sup> Islam, Baharul. 2012. '*Ethnic Conflicts in Assam: Understanding the Complexities in a Historical Perspective*'.

<sup>17</sup> George, Sudhir Jacob, 1994. '*The Bodo Movement in Assam-Unrest to Accord*', Asian Survey, Vol-XXXIV, No. 10.

their Bodo language in schools and colleges in Bodo dominated areas. All these socio-economic conditions resulted into the demand of autonomy for all Plains Tribes of Assam in 1967 under the banner of Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA). But due to certain weaknesses of the organization and prevailing political condition, the demand of separate Bodoland was dropped. Then the PTCA was replaced by All Bodo Students Union (ABSU). During that period, different political aspirants of different ethnic groups of Assam increased. The young youths started to follow the path shown by the AASU. The Bodos were aware without political autonomy their economic and other grievances would not be addressed. From 1987 to 2003, the Bodo identity assertion shook the Brahmaputra valley. (Deka, 2014)<sup>18</sup>. In 1993 the ABSU movement ended formally and the Assam government entered into a bipartite Bodo accord with ABSU to form the Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC). But it was a failure because the Bodoland legislation was rushed through the Legislative Assembly without any discussion with the opposition. There was no demarcation of the boundary and the council was not given privilege to prepare the annual budget of the Bodoland (Deka, 2014)<sup>19</sup>. And again in 2003, a second tripartite Bodo accord, Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) was signed between the Bodo Liberation Tiger (BLT), Central and State Government under the sixth schedule of Indian constitution.

#### **1.13.0 Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC):**

In 2003, the Bodo militant group BLT (Bodo Liberation Tiger) laid down the arms and decided to join the mainstream by an agreement with the Central Government known as ‘Bodo Accord’. Under the Bodo Accord the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) was established. BTC is an

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<sup>18</sup> Deka Hiramoni, 2014. ‘ *Politics of Identity and the Bodo Movement in Assam* ’,(New Delhi: Scholar World-A Division of Astral International Pvt. Ltd.

<sup>19</sup> Deka Hiramoni, 2014 ‘ *Politics of Identity and the Bodo Movement in Assam* ’,(New Delhi: Scholar World-A Division of Astral International Pvt. Ltd.

autonomous self governing body within the state of Assam among the Bodos with a purpose in order to provide constitutional protection under the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution. The BTC accord was signed on February 10, 2003 by the three parties-i) The Government of India under the BJP Government, ii) Government of Assam and iii) Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) with the Memorandum of Settlement on Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) to create a self-governing body 'Bodoland' of the Bodo dominated areas in the state of Assam. The main motive of BTC accord was to safeguard and preserve their ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity, and for preserving their land rights, education and the economic development; and to speed up the infrastructure development in the BTC area (Mochahari, 2014)<sup>20</sup>. After the surrender of the Bodo Liberation Tiger (BLT) cadres under the leadership of Hangrama Mohilary on December 6, 2003, the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) came into existence. On December 7, 2003 he was sworn as the Chief Executive member of the BTC region and continues to do so till date. The proposed area of BTC comprised all the 3082 villages notified by the State Government. These 3082 villages were divided into four contiguous districts Kokhrajar, Udalguri, Baksa and Chirang. The accord provided for an Executive council comprising of a maximum of 12 Executive Members, including a Chief and a Deputy Chief with adequate representation from the non-tribal population (Memorandum of Settlement, BTC, 2003)<sup>21</sup>. The jurisdiction of the BTC has extended over 3082 villages and the BTC was given a legislative power over 40 subjects within its area and have the power to make laws with respect to:

1. Agriculture;
2. Animal Husbandry & Veterinary;
3. Forest;

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<sup>20</sup> Mochahari, Monjib. 2014. 'State Hegemony, Identity Politics and Resistance in Bodoland' Journal of Tribal Intellectual Collective India (ISSN 2321 5437), Vol. 2, Issue 2, No. 4, October.

<sup>21</sup> Memorandum of settlement, Bodo Territorial Council, 2003.



4. Small, Cottage and Rural Industry;
5. PWD;
6. Sericulture;
7. Education (Primary Education, Higher Secondary including vocational training, Adult Education, College Education (General);
8. Cultural Affairs;
9. Soil Conservation;
10. Co-operation;
11. Fisheries;
12. Panchayat and Rural Development;
13. Handloom and Textile;
14. Health & Family Welfare;
15. Public Health Engineering;
16. Irrigation;
17. Social Welfare;
18. Flood Control;
19. Sports & Youth Welfare;
20. Weights and Measures;
21. Library Services;
22. Museum & Archaeology;
23. Urban Development – Town and Country Planning;
24. Tribal Research Institute;
25. Land & Revenue;

26. Publicity/Public Relations;
27. Printing & Stationery;
28. Tourism;
29. Transport;
30. Planning and Development;
31. Municipal Corporation, Improvement Trust, District Boards and other local authorities;
32. Welfare of Plan Tribes and Backward Classes;
33. Markets and fairs;
34. Lotteries, Theatres, Dramatic performance and cinema;
35. Statistics;
36. Food and Civil supply;
37. Intoxicating liquors, opium and derivatives etc
38. Labour and employment; 39. Relief and Rehabilitation;
40. Registration of Births and Deaths (Memorandum of Settlement, BTC, 2003)<sup>22</sup>.

Almost all the above 40 subjects have been implemented already. The officers and staff connected with the respective subjects will have full control in the BTC area. The BTC will have full right to make appointment for all the post in accordance with the rules followed by the Government of Assam. Development functions and bodies within the competence of BTC shall be transferred to BTC. The Council shall have full discretion in selecting the activities and choosing the amount for the investment under the same in any year covering all groups of people in a fair and equitable manner. This plan will be a sub set of the State plan and would be treated as its integral part. Once the plan of the State, including BTC plan, gets the approval of the

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<sup>22</sup> *Memorandum of Settlement*, Bodoland Territorial Council, 2003.

Planning Commission, the BTC authority will start execution of their plan in the BTC area. Modifications, if any, made by the Planning Commission in the BTC, proposal shall be binding on the BTC authority. The State Government shall not divert the funds allocated to the BTC to other heads and also ensure its timely release. BTC may have Planning Department to prepare the plans for BTC area to be submitted to Planning Commission through the Government of Assam. The state government will finance the amount every year on population ratio basis, as grant –in-aid in two equal installments to the development of the BTC area. The Council shall be responsible to the State Legislature in all matters relating to the funds transferred to the Council and for this purpose, the Principal Secretary and other Secretaries to the Council shall be made available for examination by the Public Accounts Committee and other committees of the State Legislature. The Council shall appoint a Principal Secretary who shall be an officer in the rank of Commissioner and Secretary to the Government of Assam, and for this purpose, the Government of Assam will place the services of an IAS, officer of Assam Cadre, of this rank, at the disposal of the Council. The State Government will make available the services of officers in the rank of Joint Secretaries to the government of Assam for appointment as secretaries to the Council. The State Government will also make available Deputy Secretaries, Under Secretaries from the Assam Civil Service and from Technical Department as may be required for appointment of Joint Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries respectively of the Council. The services in the rank of EAC from Assam Civil Service and officers of equivalent rank from Technical Department also would be placed at the disposal of the Council for appointment as Under Secretaries. All these officers shall be on deputation, 43 from the State government to the council as per usual terms and condition and their services shall be placed at the disposal of the Council with prior consultation with Council (Memorandum of Settlement, BTC, 2003)<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> *Memorandum of Settlement*, Bodoland Territorial Council, 2003.

#### **1.4.0 Geographical boundary of BTC:**

Bodoland is the gateway to the Northeastern Region of India. Kokrajhar District which is also the headquarter of the BTC serves as the gateway to the Northeastern region of India. The districts of Kokrajhar is the only route where the roads and rails to seven sister states connect. It passes through the district on their way to the other northeastern states. The BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council) lies in the North of Brahmaputra valley close to Bhutan border. The geographical boundary of BTC lies between 260 7'12"N to 260 47'50"N latitude and 890 47'40E to 920 18'30"E longitude and 990 16'38"E latitude. The BTC area is divided into four main districts for the administrative purpose namely Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang (Source-Bodoland .gov.in)<sup>24</sup>.

These four districts comprise the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (B.T.A.D) region. Among the four districts, Kokrajhar is the headquarter of the BTC region, where major offices and official administration work is done.

#### **1.15.0. Population of the Bodos:**

Today, Bodos are the single largest ethnic group among the plain tribes of Assam. According to the census of 1951, the Bodo speaking population of Assam was estimated at 1,70,000. According to the census of 1961, it was 2, 80,345 and according to the report of 1971; the total population of Bodo was about seven lakhs. These figures shows over 100% decennial growth of Bodo population, however the Bodo socio-political organizations did not accept this figure and they claim that their population will not be less than about 14 lakhs and about 28 lakhs by 1991. At the time of Bodoland agitation in Assam in the late 1980s when only the 1971 census was

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<sup>24</sup> www. Bodoland .gov.in

available, the Bodo leaders claimed that these figures were incorrect; the actual figures of Bodo population would be much higher because the Bodo population was nearly forty lakhs in Assam itself alone. The following table shows the distribution and number of various plain tribal groups in the population of Assam according to 1971 census report (Kundu, 2010)<sup>25</sup>.

**Table 1.1**

Name of the tribe		Number
1.	Burman of Cachar	13,210
2.	Bodo Kachari	6,10,459
3.	Sonowal (including Kachari)	1,93,619
4.	Rabha	1,3.8,630
5.	Mech	2.570
6.	Hojai	5,380
7.	Mishing	2,59,551
8.	Lalung	95,609
9.	Deori	23,080

*Source:* Census of Assam, 1971 (Kundu, 2010)<sup>26</sup>.

But in 1981, there was no census report conducted in Assam due to political disturbances. The census of 1991 recorded Assam's population as about 22.4 million of which approximately 9.2 percent were recorded as plains tribes (Kundu, 2010)<sup>27</sup>. The following table 1.2 depicts that

<sup>25</sup> Kundu, Dr. Dilip Kumar. 2010. *The State and the Bodo Movement in Assam*. A.P.H Publishing Corporation, New Delhi.

<sup>26</sup> <sup>26</sup> Kundu, Dr. Dilip Kumar. 2010. *The State and the Bodo Movement in Assam*. A.P.H Publishing Corporation, New Delhi.

<sup>27</sup> Kundu, Dr. Dilip Kumar. 2010. *The State and the Bodo Movement in Assam*. A.P.H Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, pp-35-37.

total tribal population in the State, according to the Census of India 2001, has been recorded as 33,08,570 accounting for 12.41 percent of State population. Among the main tribes of Assam, Bodos and Miris together account for roughly half of the total tribal population of the State. Bodos alone constitute 41 percent of the total tribal population. The spatial distribution of the tribal population across three districts of Assam is not uniform. The Bodos are mainly concentrated in five districts of Assam viz. Darrang, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta and Nalbari. In these five districts the total Bodo population in 1991 was 7.15 lakhs, accounting for about 13.43 percent of the total population of these districts. After a decade i.e in 2001 the Bodo population increased to 8.2 lakhs, accounting for 13.73 percent of the total population (Basumatary, 2012)<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Basumatary, Dr. Keshab, 2012. *“Political Economy of Bodo Movement”* Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, p-74.

**Table: 1.2**

<b>Tribal population in Assam, 2001</b>				
Tribe	Population		Percentage of total Tribal population of the	
	1991	2001	State	
			1991	2001
Bodo	11,84,569	13,52,771	41.12	40.9
Miri	3,81,562	5,87,310	13.27	17.8
Karbi	3,55,032	3,53,513	12.35	10.7
Rabha	1,35,905	2,77,517	4.73	8.4
SonowalKachari	1,14,779	2,35,881	3.99	7.1
Lalung	1,12,424	1,70,622	3.91	5.2
Dimasa	84,654	1,10,976	2.95	3.4
Deori	32,633	41,161	1.41	1.2
Others	4,72,863	1,78,819	16.45	5.3
Total Tribal Population	28,74,421	33,08,570	100	100

Total State population- 2,24,14,322      2,66,55,528      -      -

Source: Census of India, 1991 & 2001 (Basumatary)<sup>29</sup>.

The BTC region also reflects a miniature India with a large number of other tribal communities like Rabhas, Garos, etc. and non-tribal communities like Assamese, Bengalis, Nepalis, Santals,

<sup>29</sup> Basumatary, Dr. Keshab, 2012. *“Political Economy of Bodo Movement”* Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi.

Adivasis and North Indian Hindi speaking people living together with their own languages and cultural traditions. In Assam the Bodos forms around 46% of population in Bodoland area. And again according to the 2011 census, the four Districts Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Chirang, Baksa altogether covers a total area of 8,969.98 sq.km and the total population has increased to 31,51,047 in BTC (Bodo Territorial Council) area (Sonowal, 2013)<sup>30</sup>.

#### **1.16.0 Nomenclature of the Bodos:**

The Bodos are the largest plain community and the earliest inhabitants among the other tribal's in modern Assam; it was the Bodos who introduced culture and civilization into the Brahmaputra valley. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman speaking Indo Mongoloid ethnic group. The term Bodo is used to refer to a large number of tribes – the Garos of Meghalaya, Twippera of Tripura, the Boro Kachari, Koch, Rabha, Lalung, Dimasa, Hajong, Chutia, Deuri and Moran of Assam and the other parts of the NorthEast. They settled in the northern areas of the Brahmaputra valley mainly in Kokrajhar, Darrang, Goalpara and Kamrup districts and adjoining areas like Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan and other states of northern West Bengal, Bihar, Meghalaya and Tripura (Brahma,1983)<sup>31</sup>.

#### **1.17.0 Origin of Bodos:**

The Bodos or the Boros are the ethnic group of the Mongolian people who are described as the inhabitants of a country lying to the north of Himalayas and in the western Belt of China. This country is known as Bod and the word Bod means 'Homeland'. The inhabitants of Bod country

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<sup>30</sup> Sonowal Khema,2013. '*Why Bodo Movement?*' Panbazar, Guwahati: Eastern Publishers, India.

<sup>31</sup> Brahma M N, 1983. '*The Bodo Kacharis of Assam-A brief Introduction*', Bulletin of the Tribal Research Institute, Guwahati.



are known as the 'Bodo Phiccha' or 'Bodocha' (Bod means land and Phicha means son), hence the son of the Bod or country are simply known as Boddo-Bodo-Boro (Brahma, 2009)<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, the term Bodo is a generic name of the people which means Tibeto-Burman speaking group of Sino-Tibeto origin people. Earlier the tribe 'Bodo Kachari' is now called as 'Bodo'. The Eastern Bodos of Cachar or Kachar districts called themselves as Kacharis (Brahma, 2008 Reprint)<sup>33</sup>. In literature the term 'Bodo' is understood differently. Many researchers and scholars' have given different opinions regarding the use of the term. Sidney Endle referred them as 'Kacharis' in his monograph book 'The Kacharis' (Endle, 1911)<sup>34</sup>. In Ahom Buranjis, they were known as Kacharis. The transformation from Bodo Kachari to Bodo is widely accepted now in the state. The Bodos or Boros particularly of some districts like Kamrup, Sonitpur are known as Boro-Kachari or Bodo-Kachari although they are popularly known as Bodos, According to some ancient Indian literatures, it is believed that during the epic of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana in the eastern region of India, the Indo –Mongolian and the Sino-Tibetan were known as 'Kiratas', 'Danavas', 'Asuras', and 'Mlechhas', because of the physical appearance as they were short and flat physical features and addicted to meat and drink (Brahma, 2008 Reprint)<sup>35</sup>. It is believed that one of the Mongoloid groups settles in Tibet and after many centuries might have migrated to India from china via Tibet and Bhutan. Slowly they migrated towards Northeastern part of India and settled on the banks of the Burlungbuthur River, now known widely as the Brahmaputra River. It is also widely acclaimed that the old name of Tibet was Tibod and it is presumed that the Mongoloids that lived in Tibod were known as Bod

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<sup>32</sup> Brahma Dr.Kameshwar, 2009. '*A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*' Guwahati-Assam: Bina Librabry, p13 (Reprint).

<sup>33</sup> Brahma Dr.K ,2008. '*Aspects of Social customs of the Bodos*', Guwahati-Assam: Bina Library.

<sup>34</sup> Endle, Sidney. 1911. '*The Kacharis*' Bina Library, Guwahati.

<sup>35</sup> Brahma Dr.K , 2008. '*Aspects of Social customs of the Bodos*', Guwahati-Assam: Bina Library (Reprint).

and later on it came to be known as Bodo (Pulloppillil & Aluckal, 1997)<sup>36</sup>.

The Bodos have typical and different surnames with different meanings. It is believed that the main social groups with different surnames were created or given names according to their work distribution and duties assigned to them by their king. Some of the surnames are- Basumatary, Daimary, Baglari, Goyari, Khakhlari, Boro, Islary, Moshahari, Hajowary, Ramsiary, Kherkatari, Lahari, Owari, Ganlari, Narzary etc( Brahma, 1998)<sup>37</sup>.

### **1.18.0 History of Bodos:**

After entering into Assam, the Bodos migrated to different places at different intervals of time in search of fertile lands and other economic opportunities. So they took a long time in settling at one place permanently. In search of their livelihood, with the passage of time they scattered throughout the north of Brahmaputra valley and some moved on and settled in Tripura, Garo hills, Cachar hills and North Cachar hills (Sonowal, 2013)<sup>38</sup>. The Bodos had established the mighty Kachari kingdom with a large area running about 140 miles from north to south and about 100 miles from east west. On the north, the Kachari kingdom was surrounded by the Brahmaputra River and kingdom of Assam, on the west by the Jaintias, in the east by Manipur and on the south by Tripura. The ancient name of this territory was known as Hairumbo, although the inhabitants were described as Kacharis, meaning the eastern Bodos. The Bodos built a strong capital in Dimapur, present Nagaland, where some of the historical monuments are found even today (Narjinari, 2014)<sup>39</sup>. But the glorious Kachari Kingdom fell after the arrival of

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<sup>36</sup> Pulloppillil Thomas and Aluckal Jacob (Eds), 1997. '*The Bodos Children of Bhullumbutter*' Guwahati: Delhi: Spectrum Publications.

<sup>37</sup> Brahma. Dr. Kameshwar, 1998. '*A study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*', Bina Library; Panbazar: Guwahati, Assam.

<sup>38</sup> Sonowal Khema, 2013. '*Why Bodo Movement?*' Panbazar, Guwahati: Eastern Publishers, India.

<sup>39</sup> Narjinari Hira Charan, 2014, '*The Saga of the Bodos*', Kolkatta: Regent Greens.

Ahoms and it was a tragic point in the history of the Bodos as they lost their identity along with their kingdom. In their quest for their identity, the struggle of the Bodos throughout the history becomes a subject matter to be introspected. Acknowledging the fact that 'history cannot be rewritten'; a brief study of the Bodos is inevitable in trying to secure a healthy future, particularly of the women's section of the Bodo society, at all walks of life. Presently, to the northern side of the Brahmaputra valley is the homeland of the Bodos close to the border of the country, Bhutan. It is said that the Bodos were once a powerful community who ruled over the whole of Kamrup. But at present, they are spread mostly in the northern bank and are well recognized for their rich cultural heritage, sharing their homeland together with the non-Assamese people of Assam. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, before the arrival of Ahoms, the Kacharies and the Chutiyas (including Maran and Matak), the two branches of the Bodos ruled over a large part of eastern Assam. Moreover the Bodos had royal glories and occupied the thrones of Koch Bihar, Bijni, Darrang and Beltola at Guwahati. The Bodos of the eastern part established a powerful kingdom with its capital near Sadia and also at Dimapur, Maibong and Khaspur. But the glorious history of Bodo kingdom declined with the continuous invasion of the Ahoms and the neighboring kingdoms till the time of the British rule in Assam (Saikiai, 2013)<sup>40</sup>.

According to James C.Scott in his book 'The Art of Not Being Governed : An Anarchist History of upland Southeast Asia' used the concept of 'Zomia' to capture the highland people of Southeast Asia related to Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in the India-Bangladesh –Burman border area. Historically, the modern nation states of Southeast Asia formed in lowland plains region, which are more favourable to surplus agriculture, trade and most importantly the ability of the state to control people. But Zomia on the other hand, which is referred to the highland

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<sup>40</sup> P.D Saikia, 2013, '*Indian Rural Women (A study on role and status of Rural women in Assam)*', New Delhi: Mittal Publications.

people, is beyond reached by any government and are relatively unaffected by the practices of the modern civilization in South east Asia. The northeast states like Nagaland, Mizoram etc who were regarded as the highland people never stayed under the control of the Government from the early times. This people always stayed independently and were never ruled by the plain people. But the concept of 'Zomia' applied to the highland from the Northeast India to Vietnam, does not explain to the historical situation of a non state highland people. Because, though the Bodo people settled in hilly regions in early period, their culture and people were ruled by the government of the lowlands of the Southeast Asia.

Though Bodos are the earliest settlers, their history is not enriched well in Indian history as well as Assam history books. This has arisen due to the lack of proper maintenance of records and also due to the lack of proper nourishment of historical facts. As the history itself is not properly recorded, it is immensely difficult to get the complete chronology of the historical facts and introduce the Bodos of Assam. In addition to that, different tribals and non-tribals have different concepts regarding their introduction, which further complicates the flow of history. It is also found that in all the narratives of Bodos, Assam is always included and mentioned but in the narratives of Assam, Bodos are less mentioned in history. Whatever little history we have, they have survived the time only through oral history. From the historical point of view, Bodos were the early inhabitants of Brahmaputra valley. As no written account, manuscript, documents or inscriptions of Bodos are found at present which could have supplemented the minute details of the history of the Bodos; the oral narratives and poetry are the only source from where we could get the trail of the past history of Bodos. The oral history has played an important role in Bodo historiography. Oral history is the collection and can be defined as the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information based on personal experiences, families, important

events, individuals and everyday life. The Bodos of Assam have a distinct and rich tradition of oral poetry and prose narratives and their contribution to the growth and development of Assamese society and culture in general can never be denied. Though Bodos had a glorious past and are rich in inheriting social and cultural status, still they are struggling against the socio-economic exploitation and political oppression in Assam, particularly in the post independence period. The term Bodo can be understood in two ways, in the broader sense, it is founded on the nineteenth century colonial ethnography and in other anthropological studies it is based on the assumption that 'language family' tells a definitive story about community (Basumatary,2007)<sup>41</sup>.

#### **1.19.0 Aims and objectives:**

- To study the historical overview and the origin of Bodos
- To identify the importance and the social status of Bodo women in society.
- To study the economic structure and contribution of Bodo women in society
- To study the political participation of Bodo women and their contribution
- To study the role of women's organization like ABWWF, BWJF and BPFWW in Bodo region.

#### **1.20.0 Methodology:**

Methods are largely taken on from social history, ethnic studies and gender studies. For the present study, the resources and the information for the research work is based on secondary data

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<sup>41</sup> Basumatary Amrapali, 2007, '*Fashioning of Identities: Nationalising narrative of the Bodoland Movement*', Land and Territoriality in the Northeast, Manipuri Research Forum, Vol.4 Issuell, New Delhi.

and partly on primary data. The primary sources are oral history, observation and data collections, and the secondary sources will be based on literature review using journals, monograph, published books, magazines, articles, contemporary books etc. However, on my study I have mostly focused on the available secondary sources as well as on my personal observation and the general perception of womenfolks of the Bodo society. My work is based upon qualitative method as I have found very limited source for my research work.

#### **1.21.0 Limitations of the study:**

The study has of course a few limitations. As the present districts were carved out from the original bigger districts of Assam, therefore some unavoidable restrictions are imposed. The complete census data and the information directory of the Bodoland districts and the Bodoland authority are yet to be complete. And lastly, lack of infrastructure because Kokrajhar has the only administrative buildings and offices. Other districts are yet to set up their offices.

#### **1.13.0 Statement of the problem and significance of the work:**

The central idea of this research work is to analyze the socio-economic and political history of Bodo women in the post colonial discourse of Assam. Therefore, gender is one of the main categories employed in this study. As less research work has been done about the Bodo women how do we narrate the story of Bodo women based on similar standard narratives about ethnic groups in Assam though the Bodos have some specificity-they are plains tribes (and not hill tribe though much of the generalizations of hill tribes are attributed to them). Secondly, they had a state society and diverse political organization and are analyzed through the concept of simple society. The statement of the problem is thus to locate Bodo women's status as a sub-regional

continuum in the region particularly of Assam. This study is also to look upon the socio-economic and political participation of the Bodo women in the present context and their contribution towards the Bodo society. My study of work also attempts to highlight the problems and prospects of Bodo women and how gender as an active actor can be analyzed for the benefit of the Bodo society. However I sincerely regret the lack of written records of various historical developments, restricting the flow of events for a crystal clear understanding. With its unique socio-cultural and economic identity of the community their unique history cannot be cornered by any research scholar. Therefore as a researcher scholar whatever approaches can be undertaken in order to promote the welfare of Bodo women from my work have been sincerely endeavoured.

#### **1.14.0 Structures of chapterization:**

The thesis is divided into six chapters including introduction and conclusion followed by synoptic account of the various chapters-

The first chapter is an introductory part which gives an overall idea about the work. It deals with the geographical location of Assam and Bodo areas along with historical overview, origin of the Bodos, aims and objectives followed by research methodology, scope of the topic and its problems and significance.

The second chapter focuses on the review of literature.

The third chapter is on the social status of Bodo women, their position and certain social aspects like marriage, religion, rituals etc. and their contribution to the Bodo society at large. It also deals with the Bodo women playing an important role in different ceremonies in the Bodo society.

The fourth chapter focuses on the overall economic structure of the Bodos and the contribution of Bodo women towards the economy of the Bodos. And throughout history, how women played

a pivotal role towards the economy through active participation contributing towards the growth and development of the society. It also studies the role of Bodo women in agricultural and allied activities, cottage industry and service sector in the Bodo society.

The fifth chapter focuses on the political participation of Bodo women and their contribution to politics. It also focuses on the role of Bodo women's movement like those undertaken by ABWWF, BWJF and BPFWW etc and their role and contribution towards the Bodo women in society. It also deals with how the Bodoland movement has brought changes on Bodo women in society.

The last and the final chapter are the conclusion and summarization of the findings of the study of this thesis.



## **Chapter-2**

### **Review of literature**

The predominant use of ethnographic reports and colonial writings created an image of Bodos as a backward tribe that had to be civilized. This was a challenge during the nationalist period of freedom struggle in India and the post colonial period when many of the new generation Bodos challenge the colonial writings. The rewriting believed that the large scale discordance had to be corrected and hence the authentic wishes of Bodos should be discovered. However, most of the Bodo scholars and scholars of Northeast India believed that as the Bodo areas comprise of Pre-literate society, there is no need of literature alone and hence this is a 'moment' to understand Bodo society the non-literary sources like materials, culture, statistics, folk traditions, photography, audiography and visual video. In the past as Bodo was an illiterate society, to understand the history it was necessary to collect all this literatures and oral history to make a history of the Bodos.

In the book "*Assam under the Ahoms*" (1942, Reprint 1999) Gohain wrote this book during the British rule in Assam. Here, he discuss about the difficulty that he face while collecting the materials and the monograph studies particularly in English because during at period very few study was done about the Ahoms and the people of Assam. The writer attempts to study about the rise and fall of the Ahoms, the economic structure of the government and also about the administration system. He also discuss about the conditions about the people under the British period.

‘*A History of Assam*’ (1926 second edition) by Gait is an oldest book written about the history of Assam. In his book, he gives an account of the ancient rulers of different kingdoms from the rise of the Koch to Ahom Kingdoms. It also deals with the rise and fall and the Ahoms and the system of Ahom Government. This book also gives an account on the Burmese war the consolidation the British rule in Assam and the relation of the frontier tribes of the neighbouring states and the growth of the tea industry under the British rule in Assam.

In the book ‘*The People of Assam-Origin and Composition*’, (1987) has given a various population groups of Assam and their socio-cultural background of Assam. He also critically examined the racial elements that have entered into the various population of Assam. In this book he also deals with the various factors causing population variations in Assam also providing a holistic opinion of population dynamics particular in Assam and in the Northeast India.

Dr. Baruah in his book “*The Status of Women in Assam-with special references to Non-tribal society*”, (1992) highlights the status of Assamese women in North East India. This book is a contribution of seventeen papers written by different scholars and researchers. Here Dr. Baruah has used the term ‘non-tribal’ as the theme in his book. This book is basically focused on the Assamese women society where the women of plain and hill tribal society were not included. Through this book he has compared between the tribal and non- tribal women in the society in some of the papers. This book discusses about the status of Assamese women since ancient times to modern times in different fields including the role and the status of the Assamese women in

their society, laws, economy, administration, women healthcare, literature, women participation in politics etc and also discusses about the socio-religious activities prevalent in the patriarchal society.

Dr. Kameshwar Brahma, in his book, *“A study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros”*, (1997) has brought about all the aspects of society and cultural life of Bodos. He discusses social structure, economy, social life, seasonal festivals and food habits of the Bodos in his book. The author has divided the book into three parts. In the first part of the book a brief introduction of the inhabitants of Boros has been given. The food habits, the social structure of the Bodos, the dresses and ornaments and the social offence of the Bodo society are being broadly discussed in this chapter. In the second part, he deals with various traditions, widow remarriage, customs, and different types of marriages systems followed in a traditional or modern way by the Bodos. Lastly in the third section of this book, he discusses about the various agricultural and seasonal festivals of the Boros and the culture and the various ceremonies relating to agriculture and non-agriculture ceremonies of the Boro society of Assam.

Sen in the book, *“Tribes and castes of Assam”*, (1999) brought together the people of Assam and different tribes of Assam. It is a multidisciplinary book on Anthropology and Sociology. It covers the description of the entire Assam and ethnology of the tribes and caste of the Tribal people of Assam. The author has covered all the aspects of arts, geography, caste, culture, language, demography in this book. This book is a multidisciplinary of sociology and anthropology. The book covers all the writings on tribes and castes of Assam in the pre and post independence period about the culture, custom, agriculture, festivals, food habits, marriage,

family etc. its main motive was to fill the gaps and help the people to research more about Assam and the tribes of Assam in various disciplines.

Sidney Endle was a Christian missionary who lived and worked his whole life among the Bodos. In his book "*The Kacharis*" (edt 2007) he describes about the origin of the Bodos in Assam and their settlement in North valley. He describes the physical appearance, social and domestic life of Boros, their laws, beliefs, traditions, customs, religions, and the morals and folklore that they follow etc. In this book he provides some photographs and also some maps showing the places occupied by the Boros were highlighted. The author also describes different folk stories in this book and has added reference of grammar of the Bodo kachari language. This book is basically a monograph study and is written on the basis of his life experiences and the study of the Boro tribe for several years. Through his work the sociologist, the historians and the anthropologist could study about the aborigines of the Bodos of Assam.

In '*A Comprehensive History of Assam*' (2002) by S.L Baruah has given an analytical and a comprehensive account of the history of Assam from the early period to present times. Its main object was to give notice to the readers about the factors moulding the culture and the society of Assam particularly the northeast India through the ages of the Brahmaputra valley. It analyses the silent feature of Assamese people giving proper account to the contributions made by different ethnic tribes of both plains and hills as well as the follower of different faiths towards the growth and development of this region. Basically this book is divided into four parts- first part gives a brief account of the present state of Assam. It also discusses about the historical sources as well as the pre-history and pro-history of the Assam land. Secondly, the chapter deals

with the beginning of the ancient period with the legendary kings that rule in Assam till the dismemberment of the ancient Kamrupa in the close of the twelfth century A.D. The third chapter deals with the history of the medieval period from the rise of different tribal states of northeast India on the ruins of the ancient kingdom Pragjyotishpur till the fall of the Ahom kingdom in 1826. And lastly the fourth chapter deals with the modern period covering the British rule up to the attainment of the India independence in 1947 and also briefly deals with the events after the independence.

*“Pilgrimage to Bodoland”* (2002) written by Daimary deals with the political history of the Bodos in his book. Firstly, it deals with the emergence of Bodoland Movement and along with that he traces the circumstances that led to the historical movement, the socio-economic, cultural problems, languages and the Assam Accord etc which led to the movement for the demand for separate Bodoland in Assam.

Saikia in her book *“Assam and India Fragmented Memories Cultural Identity and the Tai-Ahom Struggle”* (2004) explored in 1990’s how socially and economically, the marginalized people in Assam sought to produce a past in order to create a distinctive identity for themselves recognized within the contemporary India. She also describes about the specific groups of Assamese as Tai-Ahom a people with a glorious past invading Assam in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In her book she talks about the problems of competing identities in India and also the significance of place and culture in building the Tai-Ahoms.

Brahma in his book *‘Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition’* (2006) tried to

analyze the different religion that came into existence to break the sole domination of the Bathou religion which was the indigenous religion in the Bodo society. He also deals with how the different religions among the Bodos moulded among the Boro society and how these religions were responsible for creating social tensions and support for the political aspiration among the Boro people. The book also reveals the development process of all the religious movement, social mobility, ethnic crises etc which laid the foundation of Brahma dharma and the spread of Christianity in the early part of the twentieth century. And how these new religion movement brought a changes among their lives in the society. He also discusses about their customs, beliefs, and practice etc and has a better understanding of changing mode of every aspects of their life in this book.

Choudhury in his book '*The Bodos-Emergence and Assertion of an Ethnic Minority*' (2007) attempts to trace and discusses the different phases of history of the Bodos through which the Bodo people emerged as the most dominant ethnic minority group of Assam. In this book, the term 'bodo' is used in the new sense as the Bodo -of the Brahmaputra valley. On that aspects Bodo history has been traced on the basis of evidences, direct or indirect and at the same time throwing some light on the complex process of the formation the Assamese nationality concerning the evolution of Bodo society.

'*Aspects of Social Customs*' (2008,reprint) written by Brahma briefly discussed about the socio-religious aspects of the early inhabitants of the Bodo people of Assam- the Bodos or the Boros of the Kachari flock. In Northeastern region various ethnic groups have different culture, religions, customs and beliefs. Here, he attempts to study into the depth of the social customs and traditions

of the Bodo people of the Northeast region especially the Assam. In the first chapter, he describes about the social customs relating birth, deaths ceremonies and puberty etc. In the second chapter, he deals with the life cycle and the customs relating to different system of marriages followed by the Bodos or Boros and female chastity in the Bodo society. And in the third chapter, it deals with the seasonal and agricultural beliefs and practices of the society. It also deals with different seasonal ceremonies related with the lifecycle of the people relating to agricultural etc. And in the last chapter the writer discuss about the religious ceremonies and some superstitious belief of the Bodos. He also discussed the role played by women as Dhoudini in the Kherai puja which is regarded as the big festival among them for the future of the Bodo people.

K. Radhika on the book '*Women in Agricultural Development*' (2008) attempt to make a micro level study on Chittor district, one of the drought prone Rayalaseema regions in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Here, the writer discuss about the women's participation in agriculture and allied activities, the problems confronted by the women and also brings a policy measures to help them play a productive role and act as effective partners along with men in rural and development and in agricultures.

The writer Boro in his book "*A History of Bodo Literature*" (2010), covers the introduction of the Bodos which traces the origin, migration and settlement of the Bodos and throws light on their social life like culture and religion etc. Along with the introduction, he discusses about the Boro literature and the early phase of Bodo poetry, dramas, essays, novel and the criticisms in his book.

In the book *“Political Identity Crises of the Bodos and their Bodoland Movement”*, (2011) Dr. Mosahari talks about the early history and the historical kingdom of Bodos in the past. This book is based on how the Bodo people who had rules earlier Assam and early settler of Assam are facing political identity crises and struggling to survive in their own homeland Assam. He tries to analyze the struggle of the Bodos for their survival with political identity in their homeland upto the year when they got BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council) in 2003. It also gives a general resourceful account and idea about the events, movements, protest, rallies etc that happen during the struggle of the movement.

Dr. Anil Boro on his book *“Folk Literature of Bodos”* (2011) has traced the literature of the Bodos, their traditional folk songs, folktales, proverbs and myths etc. Through this book he has narrated how Bodos are rich in their cultures and folk literature like any others tribes in Northeast India. The author has divided this book into ten chapters; here he refers about the origin of Bodos and their migration. He also discusses about the civil society, culture, religion, language, polity and the social, educational and economical institutions of the Bodos. He also describes about the oral histories and tales that have enriched and acted as a catalyst in the formation of a written literature.

Kalita in his Book *‘Cultural Relations of Assam and the Bordering States’* (2011) attempts to study the relation with the neighboring states of Assam. As Northeast India is an epitome of India conjured with different cultural diversity, religions, and traditions which always challenge the researcher to study. The Northeast states like Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram,



Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura which were independent before the advent of the British rule and interacted among themselves at various levels over the periods of history. It also gives a passage of history of this region with the ages of rivalries, political, social and cultural interrelationships among the people of this region. Through this book, we can look at the cultural relations which bound these states for centuries as a homogeneous zone.

In the book *“A Treatise on the Bodos”* (2012) by Basumatary covers the lost dynasties of the Bodos and how the Bodo kings had to sign a treaty and surrender all their sovereignty to the British kingdom. This book talks about the origin of Bodos and also covers the aspects of the Bodos in respect of their faith, culture, language, social traditions etc. It also gives a brief account of Bodos who feared extinction of their culture and total annihilation of entire Bodo community in their own homeland and the successive Assam Government’s assimilation policies would endanger their ethnic identity.

Sonowal in the book *‘Why Bodoland Movement?’* (2013) clearly discuss about the context of the current socio-political situation of the Northeast India and the problems of the region which led to the Bodoland movement among the Bodos in Assam. The Bodos who were the earliest settlers and the ancient tribal ethnic group belonging to Tibeto-Burman Mongoloid group had once dominated the area but later were neglected by the advance communities of the area. The Bodoland movements of the twenty century created and attracted and were given much attention both from the international and international communities. Here, the author made an attempt to study the historical background, the socio-political status and the different phases of the Bodoland movement. He also analyses the participation of the Bodo people in the democratic

politics of India and examines the causes for demanding such facilities and political share in the light of Bodo ethnic movement for their self-determination in the society.

The book '*Women's Agency and Social Change-Assam and Beyond*' (2013) attempts on the historical processes that transformed the women of Assam to bring active agent of social change. It focuses on various oppression, power relations, social, economic, political and legal structures of women. It also deals with the women's history, concept of gender and illustrates the feminist methodologies for retrieving women and gender through archeology, myths, literatures etc.

In the book '*The Tribal at the Threshold of the Millennium*' (EDT, 2013) by Brahma is a bi-lingual book which made a depth studies on the impact of modernity on different aspects of tribal life especially Bodos, their culture, traditions etc of Assam. This book discusses with the ongoing debates over the impact of modernity to the traditional societies and also gives an introduction to the problems, prospects and the issues prevailing in various indigenous people of the Northeast states of India. This book is divided into four different English sections and the fifth is in the Bodo language section.. The first section is Impact on Modernity of Tribes of Assam. Second section is on the language and culture of different tribes of Assam. The third section is on religion- their customary law and discusses the impact of modernity on their traditional religion of Bodo and in the fourth section the writer discuss about the growing youth, students and women and how the modernity and modern culture in the Boro society has brought a changes among the young generation among the Boro society.

The book '*Politics of Identity and the Bodo Movement in Assam*' (2014) by Deka talk about the Bodoland movement of late 1980's in Assam. This massive and violent movement has shocked

the politics of entire Assam from 1987 to 2003 for to a certain extent. On this Bodoland movement an innumerable studies have been done by the different scholars and intellectuals from different perspectives in nature but all these studies has not fully cover the movement from 1987 to 2003 of the region. Therefore the writer made an attempt to study to present the overall history of the Bodos, their identity assertion in political sphere of Assam in a comprehensive and interesting manner. The Bodo politics of identity forms an important part of the post-independence political developments in Assam which brought an identity aspiration among the other tribal communities of Assam. In her book, the writer not only discusses about the causes of the Bodoland movement in Assam also tries to analyses the technique, the leadership quality and the impact of the Bodoland movement in Assam among the Bodo people.

Narjinairi in his book 'The Saga of the Bodos' (2014) tries to reflect the history of the ancient Bodo people, who were the ancient ruler of the Eastern India and their struggle to existence. However, the Bodo do not have any Bodo history and the Bodo historical materials were scattered in different historical books. Here, he attempted to study about the short account of the Bodo history. On the first chapter and the second chapter, he furnished about the mythological history of the Bodos dealt with the historical period. In chapter three gives a brief account about the Bodo language spoken since early period among the Bodo people. The fourth chapter deals with the illegal migration of the neighbouring countries from Bengal, Nepal and Bangladesh etc which have change the demographic situation of the Bodo dominated areas. And the other chapter like fifth and sixth deals with the protective measures taken by the Assam Government and how Bodos started the self-assertion which culminated to the formation of the Bodoland Territorial Council comprising the four districts of Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Chirang and Baksa of

the Bodo area. In seven chapters, he attempts to document the barbaric acts of the Government of Assam in the name of containing the Movement for a separate state spearheaded by the All Bodo Student's Union (ABSU) in the 80's. And in the eight, nine and ten chapters, a brief account of the progress and development is being focus in the Bodoland Territorial Council of the region. and the constitutional provisions of the state are briefly discuss and lastly, the writer analyses the mindset of the Assamese people opposing the demand of the separate statehood of Bodoland.

Dr. Nirjay on his article "*Dresses and Ornaments of the Bodo women: A sociological study*", talks about the traditional attire and the ornaments of the Bodos. In this article, he argues that like any other tribes of Northeastern Region, the Bodos also have preserved their culture till date. The dresses are the symbol of their traditional art and culture. From earlier period onwards till today the Bodos have the production of Eri and Muga which is used as different thread for making different kinds of dresses (Dokhona) etc. Though modernity has changed the ways of dressing but the traditional dresses which is called Dokhona, jwmgra still exist among the Bodos and Bodo women have carried it till today and are very fond of wearing the traditional dress which is less seen in other community.

George in his article "*The Bodo Movement in Assam*" (1994) traces the origin of demand for a separate statehood, Bodoland in Assam and its consequence upon the society. In this article he traces and attributes the problems like unemployment, economic status, and lost identity that raised the political consciousness among the Bodos, which ultimately culminated into the demand of a separate Bodoland from the mainstream Assamese society.

Merina (2012) on her articles talks about the status of women in Bodo society. She describes

Bodo society as a patriarchal society with some features of matriarchal society because in Bodo society both men and women play a key role in decision making whether in terms of family matter, religious rites or at village community. She also points out that though there was an intermixed marriage in 19<sup>th</sup> centuries with the mainstream Hindu, social evils like purdah system, child marriage, sati system were practiced among them.

Here in her paper, Amrapali tries to illustrate about the Bodoland Movement which is associated with the revolution and liberation. She also highlights how after struggling a lot and gaining a lot from the historical experiences, the Bodos have moved out to construct their lost identity through the demand of a separate statehood. She has traced the problems and struggle associated within their own state and territory that provided the initial thrust to come out and fight for their nationhood. In her writing she also talks about the history of Bodoland movement and the clashes witnessed, where women and children were the worst sufferers, harassed and victimized physically and mentally with countless human rights violation.

Boro in his article points towards the Bodos of Assam with their rich tradition of oral history, prose, poetry, myths and narratives. He argues, Bodos have very few written records though they are the early inhabitants and have ruled once almost the entire region of Assam. He has regarded that Bodo language is an ancient language that did not get the adequate attention and standard status, until recently and very lately Bodo languages is been being introduced in the schools and Universities as the medium of instruction. Nowadays many writers and scholars have started writing down the history and the experiences but the progress is very low due to lack of written records. The writers have to depend on the oral history, prose and poetry to pen down, oral

history and poetry being a very rich source, through which we can find the culture and traditions of Bodos. The oral narratives, myths, prose and poetry also closely relates the religion and culture, which brings into cultural communication among the Bodo people and the other mainstream people of Assam.

The article *“Emerging of new Bodo women at the Background of the Bodoland Movement”* (2012) by Pratibha Brahma is taken from the newspaper, The Times of Assam. Here, she clearly discusses about the Bodoland movement in order to regain their lost identity and the formation of a women organization ABWWF (All Bodo Women Welfare Federation). She argues about the continuing Bodoland movement and also for their recognition in mainstream India.. Though the demand is not yet successful, yet under the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution the Bodos were provided with an autonomous body called BTC (Bodoland Autonomous Council) in 2003. She also clearly depicts the struggle of Bodo women who silently joined and supported the men to take up the challenges and prospects through active participation. Here, in her writing she also mentions the names of some heroic Bodo women like Jwhwlaojw Birgwshri, Gambari sikhla and Thengphakhri. She also mentions the heroic efforts of Late Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma who could manage to bring different sections of Bodo women together to participate along with some women leaders from ABWWF in order to fight for their rights in the sphere of socio-economic, education, political, cultural, health etc. and to bring them under a common platform for their mutual understanding . Through this organization, the Bodo women have gained leadership quality and now they are more exposed to the world as we have come across many Bodo women, subsequently who have shown their value in every sphere of their life, playing an important role towards the upliftment and development of the Bodo community at large.

Fatima in her article “ *Status of Women in Assam* ” (2009) traces about the fundamental rights and directive principles given in the Constitution of India to bear the principle of non-discrimination so that both men and women get equal rights but unfortunately women for e.g. in politics are not treated equally with men. Likewise the representation of women in the state legislature is very less compared to other parts of India. Earlier there were no instances of practices of social evils like dowry system, child marriage in Assam. But now with the migration of many people from other parts of India many social evils have sprung up in different parts of the state. Many instances of dowry deaths, molestations, rapes, and human trafficking have risen up. Assam was in a better place compared to all India average in the field of education and work participation though there were paid and unpaid jobs due to lack of industries and lack of other infrastructures. She also remarks about the less participation of women in politics. She also suggests that women should be made economically independent and by providing them with a proper economic security; she even suggests that the government should conduct awareness programmes regarding the rights available to women. Therefore, it is very necessary for the government and voluntary organizations to work together for raising the awareness level among the women.

In the article Ajanta B discuss about the socio-economic life of Bodos and the role of women in society. Bodos are spread in almost all parts of north Brahmaputra valley and also in Dimapur, Bengal, Tripura and Bhutan. According to her the Bodo society is patriarchal and economically they are not so sound. Their main occupation is agriculture. Here, she writes about the variety of crops and methods of agricultural activity that is practised among the Bodos. In her writing she

also mentions about the contribution of women in socio-economic development. As it is an agricultural society women are engaged along with men in household work, animal husbandary, harvesting etc. These women are expert weavers and the educated women have joined different jobs and organizations and slowly they are becoming much aware of their rights. According to her view Bodo women are very hard working and though their works are not visible but directly or indirectly they have contributed a lot towards the development of the society. They also manage the household activity along with men.

Uddippa Goswami from her writings wants to reflect the rise in consciousness related to literary works among the Bodo women raising their voice against their suppression which was not found before among the Bodo women. In every field like political, socio-economic, cultural the Bodos are being dominated by the Assamese speaking people. Further she highlights the atrocities faced by Bodo women during the peak of Bodoland movement. There were many instances where Bodo women were raped and physically tortured but they were forced to stay silent due to their socio-cultural milieu. In spite of all these odds, they led many protests and even participated in the Bodoland movements. After the years of clashes and sufferings by the Bodo women, many have now started penning down their experiences, problems and realities that they are facing continuously. There are a few women writers who have found recognition through their writings. She mentions some of the Bodo women writers like Pramila Narzary, Anjali Daimari who have been writing on solving social and cultural issues through empowerment of Bodo women. Goswami thinks that writings are very necessary to bring them together on a platform and to spread their stories to the world, carrying a strong moral force. Therefore we should motivate them to write down through books, journals, poems, stories, so that they can



express their work and thoughts.

In his articles, *“The Bodoland Movement: Transformation of power and its future prospect”* by Jogendra talks about the Bodoland Movement which too have a history to emerge. He argues that a movement cannot emerge all of sudden, there should be some root cause coming from the ground level. In his articles his main motive was to find out the socio-economic and political positions of the Bodos in the state and the society and to see their condition for the growth of the Bodoland Movement and its future prospect as well.

The article *“All Bodo Women Welfare Federation and its role on peace make progress in Assam”*, the writer Champa focused on the role of ABWWF in peace making process in the society. Here in her article she discusses how and when this organization was formed and what the motives behind the formation of this organization were. She even raises about the various issues and challenges that the organization as a whole faces.

In the article *“Participation of the Bodo Women in Agriculture and Allied Operations: A case study in Baksa District of Assam, India”* (2015) Swargiary tries to study the challenges and prospect of the Bodo women in agricultural field. He also tried to study the agricultural impact in income generation for the Bodo women to uplift their family economy.

In the article *“Impact of Education in women empowerment: A case study of SC and ST women of Sonitpur District, Assam”* (2013) Sonowal tries to find out the effect of education among the SC and ST community in the Sonitpur District. He also tried to find their attitudes towards the girl’s education among these tribal groups in this area and what is the present status of women in

their society.

The article “*Political participation of Assamese Women*” (2011), here the writer talks about the Assamese women participation in politics. The writer trace out though Assam has a brilliant political history, women participation in politics and decision making is very low.

Mochahari in his article “*State Hegemony, Identity politics and Resistance in Bodoland*” (2014) traces the origin of Bodo struggle and connects the struggle for the rightful recognition, territory, constitutional rights against the hegemony of the ruling class. The writer also examines the state government and the civil society who have opposed the demand of Bodos in his paper.

Bhuyan (1998) in the article examines the major role of the agricultural sector in Assam’s economy and the problems associated with agricultural development in Assam.

In the article, “*Political participation of Assamese Women*” (2011) the writer argues that women’s participation in the decision making process is very low in India since Independence. He also traces this low level of political participation in the context of Assam, and finds that women participation in politics is very low. But comparing Assam with other neighboring states, Assam is in a better position in the overall participation because as a voter, women showed a remarkable progress in politics.

Verma (2008) in his articles “*Women’s movement in Northeast*” discusses about the different women movement in the northeast and what were their achievements and consequences in political, economic and social arena. Also he discusses the reasons why the local women in the community have to start this kind of movement in order to bring peace and harmony in the

society.

In the article, Brahma (2014) summarizes the traditional dress and its place in the Bodo community. He also talks about the geniusness of weaving in different designs and colors especially by the Bodo women.

In the article *“NDFB Movement: An examination of role of civil and political organizations in peace process”* Mochahari critically analyses the various role played by two civil and political organizations of Assam namely the Bodo National Conference (BNC) and the People’s Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement (PJACBM) to bring into peaceful negotiation between the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Central Government of India. The NDFB is one of the powerful armed groups of BTAD region in Assam. They are fighting for a separate Statehood for the Bodo people in Assam.

Goswami (2012) on her paper reveals about the ethnic background of the Bodos, their social cultural and religious background. The writer also talks about the traditional institutions of marriages, economy, their daily food habits etc. And what were their struggle and reason for the Bodoland movement since independence.

## Chapter- 3

### **Social status of Bodo women in their society- role of women in marriage, religion, culture.**

#### **3.1.0 Introduction:**

The Bodos are one of the earliest immigrants in Assam belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family and are the largest plains tribes of Assam. They are spread all over Assam but are predominantly settled in the northern bank of Brahmaputra valley. They are said to be the most culturally rich community in the state of Assam

#### **3.2.0 Social status of Bodo women:**

The social status is a position of a person or a group, which includes attendant rights, duties and lifestyle within the society. According to *Duncan Mitchell*, Social status refers to “the position occupied by a person, family, or kinship group in a social system relative to others. This determines rights, duties and other behaviours, including the nature and extent of the relationships with persons of other statuses” (Rao, 1990)<sup>42</sup>. The women are the most vulnerable sections of the society where most of the women are unaware of their own rights and policies formulated for their betterment by the Government. But the women in modern times have become more conscious about their rights and every now and then tries to utilize their own thoughts and ideas for empowering themselves in the society. It is very challenging task for the

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<sup>42</sup> Rao, C.N. Shankar. 1990. “*Sociology-Primary Principles of Sociology with an Introduction to Social Thought*”. S.Chand & Company LTD. New Delhi, p-127.

women to improve their social status in all the fields of their participation, especially in a male dominated society. In the Northeastern region of India, the status of tribal women is higher when compared to those living in the rest of the country. This may be due to absence of caste system, dowry system, purdah system, freedom to choose their partners, and economic independence. Though the society is patriarchal in nature, matriarchal system functions well in terms of socio-economic life because women are well placed in the society. Even the Assamese women of Assam possess a great amount of freedom to pursue any economic activity.

Likewise, the position of Bodo women is high in terms of their social status, despite practicing a patriarchal system. Due to the active role played by the Bodo women in socio-economic, family and in religious activities, the Bodo women are given due respect in the community and their position is never regarded inferior to that of men. Social customs and traditions play an important part in the cultural life of Bodos. It is seen that the social life of the Bodos is well organized and though they have to follow certain rules and customs in their social life, women enjoys an honored status at every rules and customs in their society and family. In fact, Bodo women are never discriminated for being born as a female at all walks of life in their society. Though in the beginning the condition of women was not well enough, with the spread of Brahma Dharma and Christianity, a new change arrived in the lives of Bodo women. Their living conditions became far better than other tribal women in their society in terms of education, economy etc.

### **3.3.0 Social structure of Bodos:**

Many sociologist term the ‘social structure’ to refer the enduring, orderly and patterned relationships between elements of a society. In sociological and anthropological studies, the term

‘social structure’ is relevant because the main task is to discover the general characteristics of those social structures and the component parts of human beings. It is one of the basic concepts of sociology (Rao, 1990)<sup>43</sup>. The Bodo family follows the pattern of patriarchal society and partly matriarchal society. The senior male members like father, brother or sons become the head of the family. After the death of the father, the eldest son of the family inherits the property. Nowadays it is observed that properties are being distributed even among the daughters if they do not have any sons.

One interesting feature of the Bodo society is that if there is a single girl child in the family, she can bring the bridegroom in her house which is called as “Gwrjia lakhinai”, where the youth leaves his house and family and settles down in the house of his bride along with her family. In this scenario the bridegroom can inherit the entire property of the bride’s family after marrying and staying at her house (Brahma, 1989)<sup>44</sup>. Their social life is well organized one. They have their own characteristics with certain mores to be followed in the society and it applies even within the community services among the villages. It is a common sight in most of Indian societies that discrimination of women begins at the womb itself through the inhuman act of sex selection. However, it can be said that a baby girl receives the same level of hospitality as that of a baby boy in the Bodo society. The Bodo women are fortunate that there is no class division, caste system or other social evils like practice of dowry system, child marriage, unequal access to education, unequal access to nutrition, female infanticide, honour killing etc. within the society. It is true that the Bodo women do not occupy much influential position in the society but gets equal rights to inherit properties and land of their ancestors, which in itself is something

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<sup>43</sup> Rao, C.N. Shankar. 1990. *“Sociology-Primary Principles of Sociology with an Introduction to Social Thought”*. S.Chand & Company LTD. New Delhi

<sup>44</sup> Brahma, Dr. K, 1989. *‘Aspects of Social Customs of the Bodos’*, Bina Library, Guwahati: Assam.

very positive. Not only men but a woman also enjoys the right to choose their life partners. Perhaps it might be a reason why inhuman acts like honor killing and dowry deaths do not take place in the Bodo society. In fact undoubtedly Bodo women are empowered socially to a great extent even though there are many more miles to go in the social sphere. It is also equally true that many social evils still exist in the Bodo society.

#### **3.4.0 Social groups of the Bodos:**

The creation of different social groups has a popular story among the Bodos. In a certain period of time, Bodos live in an unsystematic and undisciplined state of things. So, in order to preserve the traditional social customs, the people of the society realized the necessity of creation of different groups for certain specific work or duties. It is believed that, to solve the problem the first human being Monsing-Sing-Borai came down from heaven with the help of a golden ladder to earth and presided over the convention. It is said that the convention lasted for twelve years. Along with other things the groups called *ari* or *hari* were created by him (Brahma, 1998)<sup>45</sup>.

The Bodos represent one of the largest ethnic groups living in harmony, though with different surnames with a different meaning in itself. It is believed that in ancient times, the Bodo people were divided into several groups to do the daily chores of the king. Accordingly to the work occupation and duties their social division and surnames were created. Till today though this typical social division is being carried by the Bodos, there is no class division and social barrier in the society among them. Every group has equal status in the society and no bar exists even in the inter marriages, unlike that of some of the tribes of northeast India. Though the social groups

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<sup>45</sup> Brahma Dr.Kameshwar, 2009. '*A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*' Guwahati-Assam: Bina Librabry.

were formed in ancient days among the Bodos, at present only the surnames have survived till date within the Bodo society. The surnames are Daimari, Basumatari, Boro, Moshahari, Goyari, Khaklari, Lahari, Islari, Ganlari, Ramsiary, Narzari, Kherkatari, Hajaowary, Owary, Swargiary etc (Brahma, 2009)<sup>46</sup>. The meanings of their surnames are as follows:

**3.4.1.** In Bodo Daimari- (daima-water and ari-folk) related to big river. It is said that, the people belong to this folk used to live by the bank of the big river got their livelihood by fishing or collecting wood logs floating down the rivers. Even Endle, describe this group as ‘Fisherman clan’.

**3.4.2.** Basumatari- means mother earth (the landlord class people), these group is related with land. This group was entrusted with the responsibility of solving the land problems, distribution of land, and settlement of any dispute relating to landholding.

**3.4.3.** Moshahari- (Mosha means Tiger and ari-group), these clan group is related to Tiger. Their duty was to protect the domestic animals from the other wild animals. In early period when the tigers created trouble to the villagers, the Musahari folk were supposed to protect them from wild animals. It is also belief that in early period among the Bodos that some persons had the power of transforming themselves into tigers and while in tiger form they kill and devour domestic animals.

**3.4.4.** Goyari- In Bodo ‘Goy’ means areca nuts (bettlenuts), traditionally these clan's duty was to plant the bettlenut trees. The bettlenuts are used in different occasions like marriages; pooja etc. and Bodo people consume them a lot.

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<sup>46</sup> Brahma Dr.Kameshwar, 2009. ‘A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros’ Guwahati-Assam: Bina Librabry,p13.



**3.4.5.** Lahari- Lai means leaves. These are also some wild leaves which is collected during the Kherai festivals. So to collect this leaves, some people were engaged during this great festival. so, those persons who were entrusted to collect the leaves were designated as 'Lahari'.

**3.4.6.** Khakhlari- Khangkhla is a plant which is used in the Kherai festival. Kherai festival is the precious festival celebrated among them. The groups who were engaged with the collection of these plants were known as Khakhlari.

**3.4.7.** Narzari- Narzai means a dry leaf which comes from the jute plant. The Bodos are very fond of it and its taste is bitter when dried. It is believed that the groups of clans were supposed to collect and supply the leaves in the sraddha ceremony after the cremation of the death person of the family. In the Shradda, all the persons who attend the ceremony are given small quantities of narzoi gwan as compulsory item, which is still being followed among the Bodo Hindu family.

**3.4.8.** Kherkatari- A very few people are found by this surname in the bodo society. Kherkata means those who cut the straw or thatch etc.

**3.4.9.** Hajowari- In Bodo Hajo means hill and ari means group. The group of people who lived in hilltops or hilly areas were called as Hajowari.

**3.4.10.** Owary- The name owary is originated from the word Owa means bamboo. It is said that for the festivals of Bodos in the society a large number of bamboos were collected. They are believed to have planted bamboos for the first time.

**3.4.11.** Swargiary - In boro Swarga means heaven. Therefore, Swargiary means heavenly folk, the descendant of their deity Bathou. This group claim themselves top positions of all groups in

earlier period. The Bodo society entrusted the duty of worshipping the God upon this group. From the Swargiaris, the Bodos select worshippers called dairies or ojas (Brahma, 2009)<sup>47</sup>.

These social groups with the surnames are found everywhere among the Bodos. Some surnames like Sibingari and Bingiari etc are not found according to some scholars. Though these groups were formed according to their work divisions, they have equal status and no class division exists in the society (Goswami, 2012)<sup>48</sup>. So far as the Bodo society is concerned, there is no classification of groups or clans as high or low although there is a system of division of the people seen in different groups or clans in the society.

### **3.5.0. Role of women in Marriage:**

Marriage is one the universal social institutions. It is union of man and woman to form a family and to strengthen the network of social relation in the society. According to E.Westernmarck in his 'History of Human Marriage' defines marriage as-'the more or less durable connections between male and female lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of offspring'. It has different forms of marriage e.g-Polygamy, Polyandry, Monogamy and Group marriage. Polygamy is a form of marriage in which one man marries more than one woman at a given time. This system was mostly practiced in ancient times. Polyndry is a marriage of one woman with several men. Monogamy is a form of marriage in which one man marries one woman. This form of marriage is largely practiced by the civilsed people of the present society

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<sup>47</sup> Brahma Dr.Kameshwar, 2009 '*A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*' Guwahati-Assam: Bina Librabry,p13.

<sup>48</sup> Goswami Dr. Madhurima, 2012. '*The Bodos: Culture and Society*', Journal of Business Management and Social Sciences Research (JBM&SSR) ISSN No.2319-5614,Vol-I,No.I Ocober.

and most widespread form of marriage (Rao, 1990)<sup>49</sup>. Marriage is recognized socially and ritually sacred within the Bodo society. In Bodo society, Monogamy is the chief form of marriage and largely practised with some exceptional cases of polygamy. They consider marriage as an important part of their social and cultural life. Polyandry is absent in their society (Brahma, 2006)<sup>50</sup>. They have high regard and believe in chastity of both men and women regarding marriage. Among the Bodos they believe that a girl or boy who led a pure life before the marriage will always remain faithful to their marriage vows.

The Bodo society is found to be strict and they have certain mores and traditions where they follow the rule of the tribe exogamy in their marital relationship. Brahma quotes that Marriages is a social system of the human beings. A man becomes social after the marriage. The social ties become strengthened with the help of marriage. The marriage institution is an important social system for the welfare and discipline of the human society. The marriage is one of the important ceremonies in the life cycle of the Boro people. The Boros called it as 'Haba'. 'Ha' means the earth and 'ba' means to bear something on the back. So they used this word to bear the responsibility of the earth (Brahma, 2006)<sup>51</sup>. The Bodo women have always played an important role on marriage ceremonies. They take part in all the rituals of marriage. A noteworthy feature of the Bodo Hindu marriage is that two young girls become 'Bwirathi' to perform the pujas along with the priest. The Bodo people follow three religions that is Bathou religion which is the indigenous religion of the Bodos, the Brahma dharma which is a monotheistic religion founded

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<sup>49</sup> Rao, C.N. Shankar, 1990. '*Sociology-Primary Principles of Sociology with an Introduction to Social Thought*'. S.Chand & Company LTD. New Delhi.

<sup>50</sup> Brahma Shekhar, 2006, '*Religion of the Boros and their Socio-cultural Transition*' Panbazar, Guwahati: DVS Pubhilshers.

<sup>51</sup> Brahma Shekhar, 2006, '*Religion of the Boros and their Socio-cultural Transition*' Panbazar, Guwahati: DVS Pubhilshers.

by Kalicharan Mech and Christianity. Though these people follow different religion their languages, culture is the same but only the marriage rituals are little different from each other which they perform in the marriage ceremonies. Traditionally, they follow six types of marriages. The traditional marriage laws and customs of the Bodos are as follows-

- **Swngnanwi lainai haba (Arranged Marriage)** - is regarded as power and standard marriage where a bride is selected by the elders and is solemnized with full social customs, rituals and traditions. This type of marriage is regarded as regular marriage.
- **Kharsonai haba (Girls flee away to boy's house)** - is considered as an irregular marriage where the bride enters the groom's house before the settlement of their marriage by the elders of the two families. This kind of marriages happens only when a bride and groom have their mutual understanding.
- **Gwrjia lakhinai haba** - this kind of marriage is seen in the Boro society even now. This kind of marriage where a bridegroom or where a young man has to leave all his entire family and properties to live in bride's house forever and has to shoulder up all the responsibility and look after the household of the bride's family.
- **Bwnanwi lanai haba-** in this marriage a bride is forcefully taken from her house to bridegroom's house and marriage ceremony get solemnized. Previously, this kind of marriage system was prevalent, but nowadays this kind of marriage does not occur in the society and it is regarded as crime under the Indian law. This kind of marriage is not seen and followed in modern times.

- **Dwngkharlangnai haba ( Elopel Marriage)** - Socially, this kind of marriage is not approved but this kind of marriage happens when a boy and girl fall in love but the parents does not agree with their relationship, then both boy and girl elope to some other places and get married. The mutual understanding of a bride and bridegroom is enough for this kind of marriage. But this marriage is regarded as an irregular marriage. The Boro marriages are divided into three stages firstly, it is the selection of the bride, secondly the proper marriage conducted with proper customs and traditions and the third is the post marriages (Brahma, 2009)<sup>52</sup>.
- **Dongkha habnai (widow remarriage)** - In the Boro society, the widows re-marriage is allowed in the society. They are never neglected or discriminated and can remarry and socially it is recognized as a regular marriage. She can marry any man whom she likes. If a man lives with his wish in the widow's house as a spouse then they are recognized as husband and wife in the Bodo society but there are some certain social customs and traditions which they have to follow and perform in front of the elders and entire village community. This kind of marriage is less witnessed but this system is approved by the Bodo society for the future of widows who have to suffer their whole life (Goswami, 2012)<sup>53</sup>.

Earlier the Bodos were against the inter caste marriage in the society. But nowadays, inter-caste and inter-tribe are being well accepted in society but they have to follow certain social norms and customs during the marriage in the society. Though monogamy is socially recognized practice in

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<sup>52</sup> Brahma Dr.Kameshwar, 2009, '*A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*' Guwahati-Assam: Bina Librabry.

<sup>53</sup> Goswami Dr. Madhurima, 2012, '*The Bodos: Culture and Society*', Journal of Business Management and Social Sciences Research (JBM&SSR) ISSN No.2319-5614,Vol-I,No.I October.

Bodo society, It also seen that men can marry for the second time. The Bodo societies recognize polygamy in certain cases, if his wife is dead or bear no child or suffering from incurable diseases and none to look after the household work. Unlike some states of South India, where there are cross- cousin marriages, such kind of marriage system is not witnessed or accepted in the Bodo society. In the Bodo society, pre-marital sexual relationship is strictly prohibited. For every young girl female chastity is considered to be the qualification of marriage (idib).

The traditional system of marriage of the Bodos is known as *hathasuni khurnai*. In this system, both bride and groom seat in front of Bathou in the courtyard and the priest (Deuri) perform and recites mantras, and becomes husband and wife after applying sindoor in the forehead of the bride. The Brahma religion is a monotheistic religion and is based on the belief in the existence of a supreme being called Brahma. According to Brahma Dharma, the wedding ceremony is performed with Vedic rites. In the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, thousands of Bodo people embraced the Brahma religion under the guidance of Gurudev kalicharan Brahma. Their marriage system is slightly different from the traditional system of marriage but it has polished the old custom to suit the new religion. Though they follow all the marriage ceremonies like the traditional systems of Bathou, the Brahma Dharma have a traditional system of performing of 'Hom Yogya' i.e burning and worshipping of fire (Brahma, 2006)<sup>54</sup>. All the main marriage functions especially among Bathou and Brahma religion are performed at night according to the Hindu calendar; a sacred time is fixed for the performance of marriage. Thus, the follower of Brahma Dharma introduced a new system of marriage in the Bodo society, which is akin to that that of Aryan marriage. Nowadays, even the followers of the traditional Bathou dharma and other Hindu cult of Bodos perform Hom Yogya in the wedding.

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<sup>54</sup> Brahma Shekhar, 2006, '*Religion of the Boros and their Socio-cultural Transition*' Panbazar, Guwahati: DVS Pubhilshers.

As usual the Christian marriages are performed in the church by the pastor. In the Christian weddings, which is a registered marriage the Christian Bodo people discourage the use of alcohol. Christianity brought a change in Bodo marriage because the religion played more important than the social custom of marriage. The woman wears their traditional dress dokhona in their marriages. All the marriages of the Bodos are followed by great feast of pork and rice. With an exception to Christian marriage, in the Bathou and Brahma religion marriages, a large quantity of rice bear is consumed by all the section, including both males and females of the society. In the villages irrespective of sex and age enjoy singing and dancing in their traditional music (Brahma, 2009)<sup>55</sup>.

Divorce is not well approved in the society even today. But in earlier days, if the couple wants to stay separate then all the village community would gather together and then there was a tradition of tearing of battle leaf (fathw bisinai). This was a sign of getting divorce between wife and husband accepted within the entire community, so that day onwards both the husband and wife will have no relation and can live their own lives separately. But nowadays, this kind of customs is rarely followed in some rural villages. Slowly, people are getting educated towards the law of the land and people have stopped to follow this kind of traditions. In Bodo society, there is a social rule that both boys and girls especially the young Bodo girls have to live a pure life before their marriage and it is also a belief that female chastity is very important in the Bodo society. We have studied different types of marriages but there is little ritual difference in performing marriage between the Bathou, Brahma and Christianity religion among the Bodos.

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<sup>55</sup> Brahma Dr.Kameshwar,2009, '*A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*' Guwahati-Assam: Bina Librabry.

### **3.6.0 Role of women in Religion:**

Religion is a set of belief and social institution which maintains the social relationship that exists in society. It has a tremendous influence on people's behaviour, action, faith for enforcing social forms and ethics (Brahma, 2006)<sup>56</sup>. From primitive to the modern age religion has occupied a very important place in all the societies. Like marriage; religion is also an important part of their social life and plays a significant role in their life. Earlier, the Bodos used to worship their forefathers and believed in a number of spirits and gods besides their indigenous religion Bathou. Another major influence of the Hindu religion on the Bodos was the Brahma religion, which was a form of Hinduism preached in Bengal in early 20<sup>th</sup> century brought by Kalicharan Brahma. In the meantime, Christianity entered Northeast India with the coming of the British missionaries.

### **3.6.1 Bathou religion:**

Traditionally, the bodos are practioners of an indigenous faith called "Bathou" which is being compared with the Hindu god Shiva. "It is the origin and traditional religion of Bathou. The Bodos believe in supreme god in the person of Bathou. Bathou is the highest god of the Bodo community. This religion of the Bodos is known as 'Bathou Dhorom'. Literally 'ba' means five which represents nature viz- air, water, soil, fire and sky and 'thou' means deep. Bathou is a form of worshipping forefather the 'siju plant' that belongs to the Euphoria genus and is taken as the symbol of Bathou. The worship in 'Bathousim' is not offered in the places like the temples,

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<sup>56</sup> Brahma, Shekhar.2006, *"Religion of the Boros and their Socio-cultural Transition"* Panbazar, Guwahati: DVS Pubhilshers.



the church or the mosque but it is worshipped under the Shijou plant in the open sky (Brahma, 2011)<sup>57</sup>. Mainao the spouse of Bathou is the chief female deity considered as the guardian and protector of the family wealth, paddy in the field and also the household. She is symbolized with the Hindu goddess of wealth, Laxmi.

In performing religious rituals and rites, the woman plays an important role. There are different types of seasonal festivals which are practiced and celebrated by the bodos. They are Kherai puja, Garja puja and the seasonal festivals of the Boros like Bwisagu, Magw to name a few. Among them Kherai puja is believed to be the greatest religious festivals of the Bodos, where 'Doudini' a female performs various dances to please the god and goddesses and she is the key dancer of the Kherai puja. Kherai puja is the biggest festival among the Bodos which is conducted for three days and nights. Kherai dances are performed to please the holy 'Bathou Borai' and other gods and goddess. They perform this puja on some specific occasions. Women play an important role in this puja because all the items of the Kherai puja are performed by "Doudini" a lady and she is the key dancer of the Kherai puja. She demonstrates as many as eighteen different kinds of dances carrying a shield and a sword in her hands. In the Bodo society women are equally allowed to participate in these festivals along with the men folk. At the end of the worship she tells the future of the villages regarding the loss and success in cultivation of the coming years. Across all the household and society pujas are performed by the women. Even women priest are seen in the community (Brahma, 2006)<sup>58</sup>.

In almost every religious ceremony the Bodo women plays an important role in performing all the religious rites and rituals except Garja puja. It is believed that Garja puja is another religious

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<sup>57</sup> Brahma Shekhar, 2006, '*Religion of the Boros and their Socio-cultural Transition*' Panbazar, Guwahati: DVS Pubhilshers.

<sup>58</sup> Brahma Shekhar, 2006. '*Religion of the Boros and their Socio-cultural Transition*' Panbazar, Guwahati: DVS Pubhilshers.

ceremony which is performed to purify themselves and the villages after the seasonal festivals where lots of meat and alcohol are used.

### **3.6.2 Brahma religion:**

The Brahma religion was led by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma to modernize the society by spreading higher education. They do not worship any idol as Bathou religion. The religious belief of the traditional Bodo is different from the Brahma religion. They are bodos but the way of worshipping is different as the Brahma dharma performs Hom-yojna before the sacred fire with the mantras. With the passage of time, some sections of the Bodos have converted into Christianity and other sects of Hindu religion.

### **3.6.3 Christian religion:**

Christianity came in the early part of 19<sup>th</sup> century among the Bodos along with the British missionaries, who came to preach the Christian religion and work for the humanity to attract towards Christianity. The Christian missionaries made a unique contribution towards the early creation of Bodo written language and paved the way for its growth and development that brought tremendous changes in the social and cultural lives of the backward tribal societies. Various denominations of Christian missionaries came among the Bodos. The District of Udalguri has adopted the highest of Christian religion. The spread of Christianity marks the enlightened awakening among the Christian Bodo people. The Christians gave up the old customs and ritual without changing the basic norms and values of the society (Brahma, 2013)<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Brahma Dhananjay, 2013, *'The Tribal at the Threshold of the Millennium'*, Publication Cell, Bijni College, Bijni, Assam .

Thus, all these religion became a part and parcel of their lives shaping and reshaping the social values among the Bodo women.

### **3.7.0 Bodo culture and Dress:**

The Bodos of Assam have very rich culture and traditions of their own. Bodos are known as the agriculturist community with the tradition of fishing, rearing pigs and poultry, silkworms, cultivation of jute etc. They have also introduced rice cultivation, rubber, tea, betel nut plantation which is in great progress now.

Weaving is the most integral part of their culture especially their traditional attire. Their traditional attire is called as 'Dokhona', 'Jumgra (phali)' for women which is two set of dress wear from chest to toe and wrapped in the waist and other set is taken as normal duppata and for the men folk its 'Gamosa' which is weared and wrapped from the waist to knee and 'Aronnai' is the most important and traditional piece of cloth weared as muffler around the neck. It is made with multi colour and designs. It's given to the guest to represent the symbol of respect and honour. Bodo Dokhona is the symbol of their traditional art and culture. It is mostly hand-woven but recently machine made is also highly in demand and has unique style of designs and colours. The attire is worn according to the climate like cotton dress being used in summer and polyester and silk in winter. The Bodo women have different style of clothing in every occasion whether its marriage functions or festivals etc. It is said yellow colour Dokhona which is called as Dokhona Thawsi, Sala Matha etc is the most favorite for everyone and it is mostly used in marriage and religious ceremonies. Even a bride has to wear during the time of marriage ceremony. But among the Bodo Christians white Dokhona with white veil is used in wedding

day and the groom wears pant with tie and coat which was adopted under the influence of western culture.

After the BTC (Bodoland Autonomous Council) status in 2003, in many of the educational institutions, wearing Dokhona is made compulsory for Bodo girl students. Bodos do not have much traditional ornaments and jewellery but they are very much fond of gold and silver. Kheru, Nagful (nose pin), Asan (Bangle) etc are some traditional ornaments. In early days the old women used Dola (a kind of earring). But now the Bodo women have adopted modern style of jewellery with different designs in both gold and silver (Brahma, 2012)<sup>60</sup>.

The Bodos girls are very expert dancers. Traditionally, the Bodos have different dance forms- Bagurumba, Kherai, Daosri Delai, Dahal Thungri, Bardwi sikhla, kobsri sibnai and mwsaglangnai etc. They are basically folk dances and each dance form has a different meaning of its own. Basically it has originated from the nature. Among them Bagurumba is regarded as the traditional dance in Northeast which was inherited from one generation to another. These dances are mostly performed by the young girls with their colorful traditional dresses Dokhona, Aronai and Jumgra accompanied by traditional instruments like flute, drum( long drum made of skin), gotha(made of metal), serja (violin) .

### **3.8.0 Food habits and festivals of Bodos:**

Bodos have a unique style of ethnic food habits. Rice is the staple food of Bodos. They are great food lovers and have a unique style of cooking their food. They use less oil and spices in their food and prefer home cook boiling, steaming of vegetables etc. They are mostly non – vegetarians and eat lots of meat and fish. Pork meat seems to be the most favourite of all. But

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<sup>60</sup> Brahma, Dr. Nirjay Kumar. 2012, '*Dresses and Ornaments of the Bodo Women: A Sociological study*', Sunoasis Writers Network.

recently many have turned into vegetarians by converting to different religions or for various health issues. “Bodos used many wild plants and leaves as vegetables and for medicinal purposes. Almost every household have their vegetables garden in their yard. The rice beer (known as ‘Jau’ or ‘Jumai’) made of sticky rice or normal rice is consumed by them in every festivals and occasions. It is especially offered to god and goddesses and is also used as a traditional drink, used for celebrations and social occasions but it is not consumed or used by the Bodo Christians. The dried fish (Nagwran) and dried pork (bedor gwran) are also part of their food. The Bodo women are expert in cooking different dishes. Their way of cooking is very simple and will have the flavor of sweet, sour, bitter etc (Brahma, 2006, Reprint 2011)<sup>61</sup>.

Festivals represent a significant part of the Bodo culture and tradition. There are many festivals celebrated by all the Bodos. They are Bwisagu, Magw, Kherai festivals etc. Among all those festivals Bwisagu is the most cherished and important occasion of merry making in the social life of the Bodo Hindus of Assam. The Bihu is also celebrated at the same time in Assam. Bwisagw is celebrated in mid-April as the advent of New Year celebration in the form of dancing, singing, drumming by all the sections of the society. And the Bodo Christians celebrates Christmas and New Year with joy and refreshment. There is no age bar and gender related issues in order to celebrate. They celebrate with much delight.

### **3.9.0 Social evils in Bodo society:**

The Bodos are superstitious in nature. Despite the unmatched role played by Bodo women in the Bodo society, as mentioned earlier there are many more social evils that need to be erased completely from within the Bodo society. The existing social evils have obstructed the

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<sup>61</sup> Brahma Shekhar, 2006, *‘Religion of the Boros and their Socio-cultural Transition’* Panbazar, Guwahati: DVS Pubhilshers.

empowerment of Bodo women in many ways. According to the popular website Ask.com, “Social evils” is defined as

*“Social evils are issues which in one way or another affects members of a society and is often considered controversial or problematic in terms of a moral values. Some of the most common social evils would be alcoholism, racism, (child) abuse, organized crime and inequality”.*

Social evils in the society in whatever degree is purely a made feature, embedded in the social fabric of all the societies in one form or the other. Social evils can be in the form of domestic violence, dowry system, child marriage, unequal access to education, unequal access to nutrition, human trafficking, sexual harassment etc. In Assam, since few years witch hunting is one of the most debated inhuman practice and a major social issue prevailing in the society. Even in this age of rationalism and knowledge society, the superstitious beliefs have been haunting the Bodos of Assam, mostly the illiterate and semi literate people. The superstitious beliefs have made some persons blind thereby prompting them to act in an inhuman way with no sense of recognizing what is right or wrong. Many a times in that state of mind they have even killed, tortured and burned to death a person labelled as witch. According to local beliefs, a witch can be a man ( ie. ‘Daina’) or women (i.e ‘Daini’), who have an extra supernatural powers that bring misfortune to any family or fellow villagers and neighbours of the community. When multiple villagers face health issues and have an epidemic in a village or even die then some illiterate people believe it to be an act of a black magic by somebody. In that case, a women who is widow and lonely, single women with property and weak to protest such blames and a self-proclaimed person called ‘Ojha’ or ‘Kabiraj’ who have a little knowledge of healing minor disease are

blamed as witch and are targeted in the villages. (Boro, 2016)<sup>62</sup>.

The common Districts where frequent cases are being heard of witch hunting are Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Dhemaji, Sonitpur, Udalguri, Baksa, Chirang etc. The practice of witch hunting is prevalent among many communities in the state of Assam and mostly practiced among the Bodos, Advasis, Rabha, and Garos and is gradually spreading to other communities. Though socially Bodo women are empowered, some social evils are seen in among the Bodo society like witch hunting, human trafficking, lower wages to women etc. From generation to generation, the practice of witch hunting has become a burning issue and it has been responsible for the loss of many human lives in BTAD region. There are many incidents in the Kokrajhar, Baksa and Udalguri districts where many are killed every year in the name of witches locally called daini or daina. Some of the incidents get highlighted whereas some do not get that similar attention. For instance On May7, 2011 Hadanbori incident in which two persons were killed were reported exclusively by the media and but on May18,2011, another person killed in Kachia Chuba under Bhergaon subdivision of Udalguri were unreported (Patowary, 2011)<sup>63</sup>. According to some government officials between 2010 to 2015 as many as 77 people died in so called witch- hunts. To eradicate the heinous practice of witch-hunting, many campaigns, rallies are being conducted in the remote villages. The local units like ASBU, the women organization like ABWWF, BSS and other local NGO's are actively taking part in spreading the awareness programme and even suggesting the civil and police administration to play a major role with civil society to end the dreaded practice in the BTAD region. The major cause of this superstitious belief is the lack of proper education and medical facility.

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<sup>62</sup> Boro, Kameshwar. 2016, '*Witch Hunting- A Mockery of Humanity*', Bodoland-post- blogspot.

<sup>63</sup> Patowary, Ajit. 2011. '*Call for all-out drive against witch-hunting*' The Assam Tribune Online.

Seeking an end to this violent act, the state Assembly has passed the Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition Prevention and Protection) Bill in 2015 making such inhuman acts as non-bailable, cognizable and non-compoundable in order to eliminate the superstitions of the society. Under the section 302 of the IPC, if men and women is branded as a witch or killed, there is a provision for imprisonment up to 7 years or life imprisonment along with a fine of Rs. 7 lakhs. This money will be realized to the victim or kin of the family. Various other measures like involvement of local NGOs, civil society, ABSU and AASS to educate the people of witch hunting have been undertaken in recent years. In this situation, Gram Panchayat should involve more women as VCDC chairperson in order to create awareness in this issue because the women are the worst sufferers and victims in this kind of situation. On the part of the administration and male members of the society they need to be more sensitive and responsive towards women. (Boro, 2016)<sup>64</sup>. Human trafficking is another social evil being reported from time to time from different parts of the Bodo region. Usually young girls and women of lower income groups are lured with lucrative jobs in cities and metros, with no knowledge of their destiny ultimately landing into the hands of traffickers. Another patriarchal mindset witnessed against women in the Bodo society is the lower wage paid to women workers compared to men, though they work for the same hours. It clearly reflects a patriarchal mindset of being superior in physical strength without considering the fact that women are no less than men even in terms of physical strength. It is only through change in attitude of men and society that an egalitarian society enjoying the fruits of equality can be achieved.

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<sup>64</sup> Boro, Kameshwar. 2016, '*Witch Hunting- A Mockery of Humanity*', Bodoland-post- blogspot.



### **3.9.10. Bodo women in Education:**

*“By education I mean an all around drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of Education or even the beginning” - Mahatma Gandhi.*

Education plays an important role in teaching and learning process and opens an individual mind to think anything in a systematic and better way. It's also help in creation of development and skills. Most importantly, education is the major tool in which bring changes in the status of women in the present society. It is a key factor of women empowerment and development etc. the history of Indian women into three periods i.e. Ancient, Medieval and Modern. Since 1757, during the East India Company ruled in India and during this period the education of men were modernized but nothing was done to promote education for women. But after the independence, the Indian national government introduced committees and commissions for women development in India i.e. Radhakrishnan Commission (1948) or Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh committee (1959) etc. (Sonowal, 2013)<sup>65</sup>.

During the pre-independence period, the tribal communities such as Bodos of Assam were not educationally advanced than the Assamese people especially among Bodos women. They were isolated from the education and reforms movement due to various reasons like language barriers, socio-economic backwardness etc of the people. . As far the Bodo women are concerned, the education status of Bodo women is very low compared to the Assamese women. The illiteracy of women is the main hindrance in the process of women empowerment and development in the society. The present literacy rate in Assam stands up to 64.28% whereas the rate of Bodos is only 33%. Though the Bodos are making changes for the improvement on education, there are some

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<sup>65</sup> Sonowal, Mukut Kr. (2013) ‘ *Impact of Education in Women Empowerment: A case study of SC and ST women of Sonitpur District, Assam* ’, IJCAES Special Issue on Basic, Applied & Social science, VOL-III, January.

problems which are lagging them behind to compete in various fields in the world for example- absence of Government recognized schools with proper facilities like textbooks, sanitation, proper toilets and no concrete buildings among the primary levels. The medium of instructions was also another factor.

But the Bodoland Movement has brought a social change in terms of education among the Bodo women. The women are now taking part in different activities of decision making process and economic activities. The younger generation boys and girls are taking up the formal education and especially parents are encouraging to provide their children a good education. The coming of Christianity and the spread of Brahma Dharma is another factor which brought reformation and changes in education sector among the Bodo women. Many schools, healthcare centres were opened for women and children in the remote villages for the benefit of the people. Social awareness programs related to family healthcare, hygiene and promotion of girl's education were emphasized in Bodo society. It was also one of the means of empowering women through which women gained confidence to fight against the atrocities of the society. Both girl and boy child are equally treated in terms of education among the Bodo community. The women literacy has been improving in the present days and they are actively taking part in various fields of economic, political and cultural domain. The changing trend of education is an indication of women's development which can lead to an empowered and developed Bodo society.

### **3.11.0 Bodo Language:**

Language being the medium of communication has always remained at the forefront in all the deliberations of Bodo history. Grierson describes the Bodo kacharis as a member of the Boro sub-section under the Assam-Burman group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan

speech family. The term Bodo was first used by B.H Hodgkin in 1847 to denote the group of languages. The Bodo term is generic. The word 'Bodo' or 'Boro' was originally used in the linguistic context. Many writers got confused with the word Bodo or Boro but later it was clarified that they are a branch of the Bodo or Kachari group. The Bodo language is one of the oldest language in India though historically no written records have been found. Initially, the Kacharies were the Tibeto- Burma group who spoke the Bodo language. Even at that period the Christian missionaries and British who came to Assam and created the language used the word 'Kacharis' as a racial name (Goswami, 2012)<sup>66</sup>. According to some historians and "Bishnu Prasad Rabha, renowned artist and poet of Assam, the Bodos brought the traditional language as Deodhai script of its own in ancient times but at present the script is not found anywhere( Sonowal 2013)<sup>67</sup>.

Although in the past, the Bodos had to use the Roman script and Assamese script for institutional purposes, at present the Bodo people of BTC region have adopted the Devanagari script to develop their language and literature. Once upon a time the Bodo language had spread all throughout the north Brahmaputra valley but later on in the 13th century with the invasion of Ahoms, British colonization and also under the influence of different religious reformers and the interruption of Bengali and Assamese languages, the speaker and the spread of Bodo language started declining in Assam. In this state of affairs in November 16, 1952 Boro Sahitya Sabha, the biggest literary body of Bodo language was formed to preserve the Bodo language and literature and took their effort to popularize their mother tongue for the future Bodo people. The dialect of

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<sup>66</sup> Goswami Dr. Madhurima, 2012, '*The Bodos: Culture and Society*', Journal of Business Management and Social Sciences Research (JBM&SSR) ISSN No.2319-5614, Vol-I, No.1 October.

<sup>67</sup> Sonowal Khema, 2013, '*Why Bodo Movement?*', Panbazar, Guwahati: Eastern Publishers, India.

tribal groups of Assam like Bodo, Dimasa, the Rabhas, and the Khoborok language of Tripura, the Garo language of Meghalaya, the Hajong, and the Mech etc are almost similar and related to each other. A Bodo language is a branch of Sino-Tibetan language (Sonowal, 2013)<sup>68</sup>.

The Bodo language has a rich tradition of oral poetry, prose narratives, proverbs, and riddles. The oral poetry of the Bodos is enriched by a good store of lyrical, dedicated to the themes of love, nature and the countryside. These narratives exist in counter point to the established narratives that form an inseparable part of Indian epics and puranas. There are mythical narratives in Bodo which represent the 'ethnic groups' perception of cultural differences. They reveal how the narrator and the listeners handle the self and the other. Another feature of the oral narratives verse of the Bodos is their role of inter-cultural communication. Bodo oral narratives and myths appear to be independent of the classical Indian puranas but in reality it is dialogue and interaction. The Bodos have rich traditions of folk literature, folk tales, songs, riddles, proverbs (Narjinari, 2014)<sup>69</sup>. Unfortunately it is mostly verbal not much discovered in writings of books.

### **3.12.0 Impact of modernity among the Bodo women:**

With the emergence of 19<sup>th</sup> century, we can visualize the changing trends of the Bodos in society. The traditional beliefs have changed with the spread of Brahma dharma and Christianity. Apart from the changing trends in socio-religious and socio-political field, some changes have been seen in the living pattern also. The spread of Christianity brought changes in the field of education and health care among women. The impact of modernization brought a radical change in the marriages, social lifestyle, living pattern etc among the Bodo women in society. It has

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<sup>68</sup> Sonowal Khema, 2013, '*Why Bodo Movement?*', Panbazar, Guwahati: Eastern Publishers, India.

<sup>69</sup> Narjinari Hira Charan, 2014, '*The Saga of the Bodos*' Kolkatta: Regent Greens.

brought many achievements, motivation among them and the necessary growth and development in the society. Modernization helped women to be more empowered in all aspects of life; way of dressing, family planning, jobs, education, decision making, health etc. The changes in women's attitude have helped them to live a dignified life and have given a different outlook to the Bodo women of the BTAD region, where they had been following their age old traditional beliefs (Baglari, 2014)<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> Baglari, Neeta. (2014), '*Modernization in day-to-day life of Bodo Women in rural areas of BTAD-Assam*', Pratidhwani the Echo- International Journal of Humanities & Social Science, VOLL-III, Issue-II.

## **Chapter -4**

### **Economic structure and contribution of Bodo women in society**

#### **4.1.0 Introduction:**

Throughout history, women have played a pivotal role towards the economy through their active participation, contributing significantly towards the growth and development of the society. The status of women in both the developed and underdeveloped countries continue to be lower than men. Since ancient days, hunting and gathering were the only source of livelihood of human beings in the society. The men would go for hunting while the women would stay back to take care of their children and they would collect all the edible foods, leaves, roots etc. Knowingly or unknowingly, since then women were related and engaged to agriculture. When we talk about gender, it refers to both men and women and through gender we can differentiate the different role and activities which are assigned to men and women in the society. The agricultural activities were largely attributed to men. So whenever we discuss about agriculture we only mention about men but not women. Though women do lots of work in the field of agriculture but women get less recognition in agricultural activities. By and large the policy has farmer as ‘male’ (Pande, 2007)<sup>71</sup>.

In any economy, women have always played an equal role along with men at various levels, a fact that none can deny. Even the Bodo women have contributed to the family economy as a housewife or by working outside the family. In traditional Indian society, because of the

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<sup>71</sup> Pande Rekha, 2007, ‘Role of Women in Indian Agriculture: A Historical Perspective’, Anmol Publications, New Delhi, Pp-66-96.

prevalence of social norms of patriarchy, women's access to resources are very limited and this has institutionalized women's subjection in the society as well as in the family. Women in rural areas lagged behind their counterparts in urban areas, as opportunities for improvement especially in economic aspects are very limited with them. Although, different Government developmental schemes and projects have been undertaken for women, these developments could not raise the status of the rural women. Many empirical studies have revealed that women from the rural areas in addition to their household activities also gets involved in the agricultural activities of the family along with men, but their contribution as workforce has never been recognized fully and accounted for. The Agriculture and allied activities is the predominant sector, which provides means of livelihood and women are reliable workforce in it. Except ploughing, women are equal partners in all other agricultural activities like sowing, harvesting, transplanting etc with the male members in the field. They play an active role in maintaining the live stock production in the family. Thus, while contributing considerably towards the household income through agriculture and allied activities, they are always underestimated in terms of their economic involvement. Among the Bodos, agriculture still remains the main occupation. The work participation of Bodo women in the primary sector is higher compared to the mainstream Assamese women. Bodo women are very hard working and involves in agriculture wholeheartedly, but their hard work is not recognized and visible compared to men. Therefore, this chapter critically studies the economic structure of Bodo region in Assam and tries to trace how Bodo women have economically contributed to the society and household chores, not sparring even the agricultural field.

In the Northeast India the tribal population is predominantly occupied in agriculture and also it is observed that the participation of tribal women in agriculture is higher than the non-tribal women

in the society. Among the tribal women, Bodo women are considered to be laborious and are no less compared to their male counterparts. The status of tribal women in the society is comparatively better than that of non tribal women in general. The status of tribal women can be judged mainly by the roles they play in the society. Their roles are determined to a large extent through the system of descent. The family tries to pass their property by the line of descent. In a unilineal system, the descent is traced either through the male or female line. When the descent is traced through the mother's line, then it is called matrilineal system and when it is traced through the father's line, then it is called patrilineal. Most of the tribal's follow a patrilineal system. But there are exceptional cases of tribal community of Khasis, Jaintia, Garo etc of Meghalaya in the Northeast region who follow the matrilineal system (Roy Burman)<sup>72</sup>. But in case of Bodo people of Assam who are also a tribal community usually follows a patriarchal society with the father or the elder son as the head of the family. The property also passes among the female members of the family if necessary or if a family has no male members then the daughters or females gets the right to inherit their ancestral land and property.

#### **4.2.0 The economic structure of Assam- An overview:**

Assam being situated in the high rainfall zone and blessed with the fertile Brahmaputra plains, agriculture is the dominant activity of the people. Therefore undoubtedly the economy of Assam can be said to be based on agriculture. Compared to other states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu etc. which are moving towards industries and service oriented jobs, Assam is still lagging behind due to a host of factors. Over 70 percent of the total population of the state directly or indirectly depends on agriculture as marginal farmers, agricultural labourers etc for their

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<sup>72</sup> Burman J.J Roy. 2012, '*Status of Tribal Women in India*' Mainstream Weekly, Vol.No.12, March 10.



livelihood. Rice being the staple food of Assam, the focus on agricultural machinery to enhance paddy production is very high compared to other sectors (Bhuyan, 1998)<sup>73</sup>. The cultivation of paddy in the state across three seasons in a single year clearly depicts the importance of paddy cultivation.

#### **4.3.0 Agrarian structure of Assam and Bodo region:**

The economy of Assam is predominately agrarian, where agriculture constitutes significant part of the economy and is also the major contributor to the State economy providing livelihood to a significant proportion of the population of the State. Being a predominantly agriculture region, agrarian issues constitute the core of the economic problems in Assam. The agrarian character of the economy of the state is clearly visible from the proportion of rural population, occupational structure and the land use pattern. The nature of the social structures, topographical and ecological considerations have further strengthened this character since time immemorial. Therefore, any study in this area is bound to be one-sided unless a broader conception of the agrarian system is adopted, accommodating relational issues as a vital dimension of it. But many enquiries in this region are done only on the geographical dimensions associated with agricultural practices which have received the attention of researchers. The institutional arrangements defined and shaped by customary rules and obligations, the colonial economic system and the structured social hierarchy have usually been kept out of the purview of those investigations. Assam had a complex agrarian history. The evolution of its land system during different periods of historical developments has taken an indirect path. Under these

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<sup>73</sup> Bhuyan Sanjib, 1998, *'The Agricultural Sector in Assam: Its Importance'*. Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ08901-8520, May7.

circumstances, it is not easy to bring an economic and social history together (Karna, 2004)<sup>74</sup>.

The Bodos who are the plain tribes of Assam are basically an agrarian people. Many Bodo people especially in the rural areas still use the traditional means to cultivate their land which has deteriorate the agrarian economy of the Bodos compelling them to go for other occupations. Secondly, uneconomic division and fragmentation of land holdings have generated disguised unemployment and thirdly, land alienation from the Bodo tribals by the non-tribals is another factor ( Brahma,2004)<sup>75</sup>.

#### **4.4.0 Economic structure in the Bodo region:**

By and large 90 percent of the Bodos are dependent upon agriculture as their source of livelihood. Rice again is their staple food. Like the whole state of Assam, agriculture forms the backbone of the economy of Bodos. Besides agriculture, small scale industries, services, trade and commerce are being embraced and increasing in nature though on a small scale for the overall growth of the economy of the BTC area. As land is the only asset of the Bodo people, there are great number of social beliefs and religious practices connected with agriculture. Mostly the land is divided into three categories- the land belonging to individuals, the land belonging to particular community group and lastly the land belonging to the ancestor where it passed from one generation to another (Basumatary, 2012)<sup>76</sup>. Naturally, the Bodos regard land as the most sacred part in their public life. The land is not only sacred for their livelihood but it has also empowered them to live a noble and decent life in the society, identifying themselves with

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<sup>74</sup> Karna, M.N, 2004, '*Agrarian Structures and Land Reforms in Assam*' North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Shillong, Regency Publications, New Delhi.

<sup>75</sup> Brahma Shekhar, 2006, '*Religion of the Boros and their Socio-cultural Transition*' Panbazar, Guwahati: DVS Pubhilshers, p35.

<sup>76</sup> Basumatary K, 2012, '*Economic Structure of the Bodo Region*' Shodhganga.

their land (Narjinari, 2014)<sup>77</sup>. In 1991, after the economic reforms there have been significant changes in Assam also both in economic and administrative spheres. In order to make a rapid changes and development in the Bodo dominated tribal areas, the special administration has set up known as BTAD in Bodo region comprising the four districts viz. Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Chirang and Baksa. Rapid transformation is taking place in the socio-economic structures of the area under the imitative of BTAD with emphasis upon the emerging urbanization processes in the region along with new economic programmes. As we know, urbanization has direct impact on the economic advancement; the urban centers are hub of increased production, service and marketing infrastructure for the organized economic activity. It also pledges better social status and social opportunities among the Bodo people in the economic background (Bhadra, 2008)<sup>78</sup>.

Like any other primitive societies, the Bodos also used to practice barter trade in their subsistence economy. Barter trade, an age old practice followed since ancient civilization is a system where there is exchange of goods and services without any involvement of monetary transactions. But soon with the coming of the British administration and their introduction of new trading systems involving the use of new currency, slowly the practice of barter trade gave way to monetary transactions. The new trading system brought many evils to the existing society. A new generation of traders emerged on the scene, having much control over the resources through their huge capital resource. The indigenous people were totally alien to the new trading system; as a result they were exploited in all forms. Economically the backwash effects were borne by the Bodos directly. This was also a major reason in attempting to find out

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<sup>77</sup> Narjinari Hira Charan, 2014, *The Saga of the Bodos* 'Kolkatta: Regent Greens.

<sup>78</sup> Roy & Chakroborty (Edited).2008. 'Society Politics and Development in Northeast India' Bhadra Sujata, 'Some Aspects of urbanization and Economic Development: A Perspective of Kokrajhar town ' Concept Publishing House, New Delhi, PP-295-305.

the economic space for themselves, which eventually lead to the culmination of Bodoland movement.

In the 21st century, the effects of globalization have not spared the Bodo areas as well. Its effect on economic space can be witnessed with the growing banking habits of the Bodo women. With the penetration of public as well as private banks the effects of monetization has spread to every nook and corner of the Bodo areas. The introduction of Self Help Groups have brought the Bodo women to the doorsteps of banks as well, proving the wide acceptance of the monetary system of the Indian Government even at the remotest part of the country. Now when we talk about the barter system in context of northeast India, it would be injustice without mentioning the Jonbeel Mela, believed to be centuries old, of the Tiwa tribe of Assam. This Mela exhibits the age old barter trade, which is a three day community fair held in the weekend of Magh Bihu, conducted with fervor in the Morigaon district of Assam. This mela has kept alive the barter trade by the Tiwa tribe, living in the plains and hills of Central Assam and in Meghalaya. In the Jonbeel Mela the people of Tiwa and other tribes from the hills of Karbi Anglong and neighbouring Meghalaya engage in a barter trade with people of other communities living in the plains. Mostly items like ginger, turmeric , bamboo shoot, pepper, pumpkin, green chilly etc. from their jhum fields are exchanged for pitha ( a traditional rice cake), fish, chira (flattened rice) and other eatables available at the plains. This practice truly reflects the spirit of harmony and common brotherhood existing till date. In recent years the Bodo women are also seen to be actively participating in this fair, displaying their skill in handlooms with pride. Though in strict sense market conditions for barter trade do not exist in the Bodo society today, certain elements of barter system is visible even today. For instance the Bodo women are seen exchanging their vegetables and fruits grown at their respective backyard with their neighbours merrily. All these instances manifest the

feeling of community belongingness amidst all the chaos of this world<sup>79</sup>.



Photo 1: *Indigenous local spices for barter trade at Jonbeel mela.*

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<sup>79</sup> The 'Jonbeel Mela' festival- witnesses the practice of Barter Trading, the State of Assam, Incredible India. November 19, 2015.



Photo 2: *Bodo handlooms at Jonbeel mela.*

As Bodoland areas like Udalguri, Kokrajhar etc are connected with the international borders like Bhutan and other Northeastern states like Arunachal Pradesh of Himalayan areas, in earlier times many fairs and festivals used to be held in the border areas of Udalguri district, where they could do business by selling their goods. For example people from Arunachal Pradesh and the local people especially Bodo women used to set up market and sell their stuff, trade in chilies and spices. During the Losar festival of Arunachal Pradesh, people used to come to take the livestock from the market which is noticed even today in the Udalguri market. But nowadays due to militant groups setting up camps in the border areas and the requirement of inner line permit, the fairs and festivals are not held as before.

Besides that, the Bodo people used paddy as the medium of exchange, as it is important and essential article for all families. In Bodo society, male worker (Dahwna) and female worker (Ruawathi) is hired in the household mainly during agricultural season. Even , though money

economy has taken place, still in Bodo villages wages of agricultural labourers, ruwathi (female worker) and dahwna (male worker) are paid in terms of paddy. Dahwna (male worker) is paid ten maunds of paddy during the season of cultivation and seven and half maunds at the time of harvesting. Whereas the ruwathi (the female worker) of the household is paid seven and a half maunds of paddy during the month of cultivation and six maunds of paddy for the months from September to March/April. But urban people who are basically non-agriculturalist, pay the wages of the male and female servants in cash with the exact value of the paddy. In some interior villages, some elements of barter system still exist but only in a few cases where some rice are being exchanged. However today barter system stands as inconvenient to be the medium of exchange and it is gradually disappearing from the Bodo society (Brahma, 2006)<sup>80</sup>.

#### **4.5.0 Production process:**

For a long time, Bodos have been farmers and are engaged in agriculture with a strong tradition of cattle rearing, piggery, fishing, bee keeping, poultry, rice, jute cultivation and betel nut plantation. Rice is the main ingredient cuisine of Assam and also amongst the tribals of Northeast India. In Assamese pitha and in Bodo called as Onasi, anthaf, laodum made up of rice floor is shaped and filled with sweet and savory ingredients which are then baked, fried or steamed in the hot pot and pan. They are usually eaten at breakfast as snacks. These snacks are very common among both tribals and non-tribals of Assam. Though these kind of snacks are very popular among the people of Northeast India they are not marketed well, which could have been processed otherwise. Even pork which is the favourite meat among the Bodos can be profitably

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<sup>80</sup> 'Brahma Shekhar, 2006, *Religion of the Boros and their Socio-cultural Transition*' Panbazar, Guwahati: DVS Pubhilshers, pp 38=39.

turned into processed products like pickles. It is seen that the Bodo people are lagging behind in these type of food processing sectors as they do not have any market and mostly Bodo women in rural areas still uses the traditional tools *dinkhi* to make rice flour.

Betle nut is one of the major agricultural produce in the Bodo region. The northern belt is popularly known for the high quality of betle nut. Almost every day 50 to 60 trucks of betle nut go out of these areas. But due to the poor economic condition and lack of good industry, the small scale betle nut growers sell at low prices and even the large scale betle nut growers have to sell at low prices due to the cost of transportation and lack of good market. As there are no big industries they are not able to enter to production process which otherwise could have been a profitable enterprise for them instead of selling the raw materials to large scale producers. Even if the unemployed youths set up the supari industry (dried betel nut) the markets are controlled by traders from outside. Also the price keeps on fluctuating which makes the business very risky. The presence of good storage facilities, transportation and industry can engage the Bodo youths meaningfully.

#### **4.6.0 Rice beer production:**

In the traditional Bodo Hindu family, rice beer production is a normal household work prepared by the women folk. It is mostly prepared during the festivals, functions and any social ceremonies and is also used as herbal medicine for disease like stomach disorders. In the traditional belief rice beer which is also called as *Zou* is offered to a god for the protection of human life on the earth. It is usually prepared from normal and sticky rice and plants. It is a part of socio-cultural life but these days it is seen that consumption of rice beer is slowly decreasing



among the Bodo youngsters as many of the villages have restricted the consumption of beer among the youths. However among the Bodo Christian family preparing and consuming rice beer is not allowed, though many youngsters consume it outside. These days women from the backward families who are economically weak are gradually entering into a commercial business of selling rice beer. Through this business they are able to remain financially sound and are being able to manage their household with the income they get from this business. Though they are aware of the social aspects of selling rice beer, which is increasingly not accepted in the society, they still carry on the activity in order to secure their livelihood (Goswami, 2012)<sup>81</sup>.

Apart from rice cultivation, the Bodos also cultivate -potato, maize, mustard seeds, betel nuts, sugarcane, jute, coconuts, different types of green vegetables for their consumption as well as for selling them in the market. Nearly, half of the total population size of their society is women therefore; their participation in the economic development is highly indispensable. No doubt, Bodo women are actively involved in household chores but their contribution in other economic activities cannot be underestimated. Generally, the economic structure of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) region can be divided into three categories- agriculture and allied activities, small scale cottage industries and services sector.

#### **4.7.0 Role of Bodo women in Agriculture and allied activities:**

In Bodo region of Bodo Territorial Council (BTC), agriculture is the mainstay for their livelihood. So a day of no work is a day of no bread goes well in their lives. Therefore large

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<sup>81</sup> Goswami Dr. Madhurima, 2012. '*The Bodos: Culture and Society*', Journal of Business Management and Social Sciences Research (JBM&SSR) ISSN No.2319-5614, Vol-I, No.1 October.

numbers of women are engaged in agriculture for their bread and butter. Though, the Bodo society is patriarchal in nature, the freedom enjoyed by the Bodo women to pursue their economic activities is highly commendable. Known for their physical strength, Bodo women work in their own fields as cultivators and in the field of others as paid laborers related to agriculture. The Bodo women are actively engaged in different agricultural activities like sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting etc. In other words, agriculture in Bodo society is done in collaboration with men and women. As agriculture is the basic source of livelihood, both men and women, family members and even the students during holidays actively take part in their agricultural activities. Sometimes it is observed that women work for longer hours and harder than men, even with a much lower daily wage than men.

Along with the agricultural activities, they have to look after their children and family with all forms of domestic chores, which demonstrates the endurance of Bodo women. Compared to other non-tribal women, the Bodo women have represented themselves on various social and economic activities in their society on an equal footing along with their men counterparts. The Bodo community has a rich culture of folk songs and oral songs term as '*Khuga Methay*' which is associated with various festivals like agricultural and seasonal festivals. This genre of songs is so called as these are sung in the context of seasonal or agricultural or other festivals accompanied with the traditional musical instruments along with various traditional dances performed by both males and the females. The native term of Khamani- methay is used to suggest the meaning of work song. The songs which are sung by the workers at the time of their working in the paddy fields, or at the context of fishing or harvesting and so on, are called work songs. It is not easy to identify an independent genre which is solely used as work song, since any song may be sung as work-song. Both the menfolk and the womenfolk sing work songs

together while working at the paddy fields, without the help of musical instruments. A song which is given below is sung either by menfolk or womenfolk in the context of paddy cultivation during the monsoon period, e.g-

*Asar danao phwiyw*

*Okhani dwibana, ayo onjali*

*Baikhuni bwthwrao nulaikhuni jayw jwngha//*

i.e., In the month of Asara, i.e. during the monsoon period, flood comes. In the rainy season we can see each other while we are working at the paddy field. From above, it is noted that the Bodo people have a long tradition of Boro oral songs of different meaning which are sung in different occasion of seasonal or agricultural festivals by both males and females ( Sharma, 2011)<sup>82</sup>.

In most of the Indian societies, when it comes to division of labour activities, women are seen mostly doing all their indoor household activities, child rearing etc whereas men will work always outside in their fields and other workplaces. Bodo women play a vital role in social, cultural, religious and economic means of life in their society and even actively participate in agricultural and other allied sectors. They are involved in sowing, harvesting, weeding etc and in the meantime gets involved in the allied agricultural activities like piggery, poultry etc. The allied and agricultural operations are means of opportunities of income and economic empowerment for Bodo women in rural areas. In the economic decision making women generally do not have opportunities to represent themselves though they are capable of, which is not the case in tribal societies like the Bodos. The Bodo women represent themselves in various economic decisions making in their society along with the male members. Most of them actively

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<sup>82</sup> Sharma. Dr. N.C 2011. '*Oral Songs of the Bodos*', Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Odalguri, The 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference.

participate and engage in agriculture along the family members. Even the Bodo women from the landless households associate in this sector as the hired labour or part time workers (Swargiary )

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#### **4.8.0 Bodo women in agriculture and allied activities:**

Gifted with the fertile Brahmaputra plains the Bodos have traditionally been farmers enduring all forms of hardships. In the quest of finding out their bread, the womenfolk have always contributed equally along with their male counterparts. Rice being the most dominant crop, most of the time and labour is concentrated here, for most part of the year.

Since ancient times Bodo women have played a leading role in uprooting the seedlings and planting them in the fields after the fields have been prepared by the male members of their family. In this physical activity, a lot of community participation is being observed. They contribute towards each other in great harmony. In this participation, it is seen that women members of different families come together to the field and work together to complete the plantation of all the families starting from one family to the other. This contribution is extended even during the harvesting season, where again their collective activity is widely seen. Therefore undoubtedly a Bodo woman contributes equally in the rice fields with their great physical strength, which is widely acknowledged by all folks of the society.

However, it is very fortunate that even today Bodo women have to toil hard through their manual power due to lack of proper mechanization in the field of agriculture. For example even in the present times when harvesters are used in many states of India, the Bodo woman goes with a sickle to harvest their crop. Although an agrarian society the benefits of green revolution of

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<sup>83</sup> Swargiary, Detsung. *‘Participation of the Bodo women in Agriculture and Allied operations: A case study in Baksa District of Assam-India.*

1960s have not reached the Bodo areas in a satisfactory manner. First and foremost the mechanization of agriculture in the Bodo areas can be considered at the nascent stage even today. Most of the agricultural work is done manually. As the Bodo a woman who labours hard along with their male counterparts, being physically inferior, the women folks are bound to toil their soil and produce their subsistence through their physical labour. In addition to this, poverty and high input costs further aggravates their effort.

Weaving is one of the most important aspects of the cultural life of Assam and of the Northeastern states. Weaving looms are found in almost every household in the villages of Assam. The State produce three different types of silks- Eri, Pat and Muga but each has its distinctive characteristics which makes it unique from other silks. One of the most significant activities of Bodo women allied to agriculture is sericulture. Sericulture is mainly practiced by Bodos. It is associated with the socio-economic and cultural life. Therefore, Bodo families are engaged in sericulture and they produce various kinds of clothes like bed sheets, dokhona, curtains etc. It serves as an important source of employment and income generation for the unemployed Bodo women. The Bodo belt is the largest producer of eri raw silk in Assam. It can be observed that the Bodo women mostly the illiterate and semi literate conducts sericulture as a household activity. A small hut is kept aside for this purpose where the silkworms are reared. Very often two or three women come as a group and venture into this traditional skill, with very less incentives. Usually the eri feeds grown naturally are collected by them as a group activity. Some eri rearers directly sell their cocoon to the traders or middlemen through weekly markets and some use their own produced cocoon in spinning and weaving. The BTAD region produces all the three varieties of natural silks viz. Eri, Muga, Mulberry, which are commercially very important. But unlike eri, muga and mulberry culture is not so popular amongst the Bodo

populace (Phukan, Rumani Saikia, 2015)<sup>84</sup>. Even the Central Silk Board has acknowledged that the Bodo belt can serve as a role model in sericulture. But since the activity is carried out mostly by illiterate and semi literate women populace, they have no idea of scientific and commercial process in rearing silkworms. Moreover there is shortage of eri feeds grown naturally. The need of the hour is to rear healthy silkworm to get healthy silkworm to get quality cocoons. In this respect immediate transfer of technology to the field is indispensable to tap this hidden potential.



Photo 3: *Bodo women rearing silkworm.*

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<sup>84</sup> .Phukan. Rumani Saikia. 2015. '*Eri, Muga and Pat: Assam's Timeless Silks*'. Maps of India.



Photo 4: The above photo shows weaving their Boro traditional dress 'Dokhona'

In the Kamrup district of Assam, Sualkuchi Silk Industry is the region in Assam which is exclusively into silk weaving and referred to as 'Manchester of Assam'. According to the the Department of Industries and Commerce, Assam has presently all about 7,00,000 looms , but powered looms are of limited quantities and are mainly found in Sualkuchi. These are mostly used for the commercial production of silk fabrics. Infact, the handloom industry of Sualkuchi deals with the three varieties of textiles commercially –Cotton, Silk and Khadi (Phukan, 2015)<sup>85</sup>.

#### **4.10.0 Livestock Farming:**

Poultry farming is the most organized sector in animal agriculture. India is the third-largest egg producer after China and USA and the fourth largest chicken producer after China, Brazil and

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<sup>85</sup> Phukan, Rumani Saikia. 2015. '*Eri, Muga and Pat: Assam Timeless Silks*'. Maps of India, March 6.

USA. The per capita eggs consumption has gone up from 30 to 68 and the chicken from 400 gm to 2.5 kg. Few years ago, eggs and chicken were ‘agriculture produces’ but are ‘food items’ today<sup>86</sup>. The Northeast region has total eight states comprise- Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland and Sikkim which is one of the mega bio-diversity hotspot. Around 80% of the people live in the rural areas where the society is predominantly agrarian. By and large the indigenous people of this region are non-vegetarian, for which meat and meat products plays an important role in their daily food habits. Almost every household rears poultry birds and pigs for family consumption as well as for sale. The northeastern region is considered as home of the original poultry, the Red jungle fowl, which is still found in the forest of Northeast India. Apart from this, Miri, Daothirgir and Nakedneck frizzle fowl breeds are also reared as family poultry in the region under the backyard system. Although the region contributes towards the development of improved poultry breeds, it lags behind in terms of production and productivity partly because of the extensive system of farming of local breeds. Approximately around 1 lakh farm with a flock size ranging from 25-250 birds are reared across the country under this system with little or no investment. These free roaming indigenous birds have low production potential with only 40-80 eggs per year. The advantages of these birds are that they are less susceptible to most of the common diseases requiring less veterinary care. Due to their poor production, 60% of poultry meat and 56% of eggs are produced under intensive system. The country has roughly around 60,000 poultry farms under intensive system some of which have a flock size of over 1 lakh. In order to meet the deficiency gap in poultry meat and egg sectors, adequate and sustained efforts will have to be made to improve the production efficiency of the rural poultry which has been responsible to produce

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<sup>86</sup> Dr.Kotaiah. T 2016. ‘Poultry production in India-The current Scenario’ FnBnews.com Thursday, March 10.



40% of meat and 44% of egg requirement in the country<sup>87</sup>. The Bodos could be a part and parcel of this effort with their enhanced scope in present times.

Piggery, poultry, animal husbandry and goat rearing are the other significant activities carried out by the Bodo households. In a Bodo traditional family although, different domestic animals like cows, goats, pigs and buffaloes etc are mostly kept for family requirement. Pork being the most favourite dish, piggery occupies a central place. Piggery is usually undertaken by most of the families as a source of supplementary income. It is reared at the backyard either in open or small huts either for social ceremonies like marriages or other religious ceremonies. In the religious ceremonies among the Bodo Hindus pork is cooked in different style and consumed with rice beers. But now with the changing trend and lifestyle, most of the Bodo households have given up rearing pig at their household as they think it is unhygienic to keep them on the backyard of their house along with the human habitation and also due to shortage of feeds given to pigs. The feeding activity is usually done by the Bodo women, the caretakers are also usually the women. Its commercial practice is seen only in certain pockets of the region. In other words, piggery as a farm activity for commercial purpose on a large scale is not impressive. Besides agriculture, nurturing of animals is mostly done by the women in most parts of the Bodo region. Animal husbandry is another activity, where cows are kept for the purpose of selling their milk, adding another supplementary income to their family. Here also the Bodo women are the ones who milks the cow, takes animals for grazing and even collects the cow dung. However, animal husbandry in the form of co operatives is negligible. Earlier only the local breed was preferred, but off lately many families have shown their enterprising qualities by venturing into hybrids breeds. Many families have started to conduct this activity as a profit generating enterprise by

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<sup>87</sup> BujarBaruah.K.M & Gupta.J.J 'Family Poultry for the Development of NEH Region' ICAR Research Complex for NEH Region, Umiam, Barapani, Meghalaya ([www.Poulvet.com/poultry/articles/poultru-development.php](http://www.Poulvet.com/poultry/articles/poultru-development.php)).

organizing into small farms. But problems of many diseases, lack of proper market mechanism, lack of scientific training etc haunts this sector every now and then.

Bodos have the traditional involvement in poultry farming. It is used as a delicacy in various socio- religious functions and occasions in the society. But in recent times, they have taken poultry farming as commercial ventures as the demand of eggs and chickens in the market has grown up. Poultry is undertaken by almost all the families of the Bodo community. Even this activity is done at the backyard in small huts. Bodo women are the real actors in this farming activity; infact they are the feeders and the caretakers. Mostly the local breed is reared either for home consumption or as a future earning source. Many Self help Groups have come together in this kind of poultry farming. In recent years broilers and croilers are also attracting their destination. In the case of broiler farms Bodo women helps their members in the overall management of the farm, which is very impressive.

Though goat rearing as an activity is practiced by many of the Bodo women, yet it is not on a large scale. There are several factors behind it, the most important being the lack of grazing fields. In addition to the above mentioned practices, the Bodo women are not behind even in Olericulture. The backyard of Bodo families are seen with vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower, leafy vegetables like (lai, lafa, dhania etc), potato, tomato etc. where the Bodo women are witnessed to take the lead role in maintaining the farm. They are the ones, who usually sell these vegetables along with their husband, adding another supplementary income to their families and produce partly for domestic consumption. The Micro-enterprise development is related to allied agriculture and agricultural activities like cultivating vegetables, making pickles, chutneys, jams etc. Many Bodo women are engaged and are very active in these kinds of activities but they do it only for their consumption.

During the 1860-90s, when the British started the tea plantation on a large scale in Assam, they brought the labourers from the predominantly backward caste and tribal people from the state of Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh into Assam in tea industry as labourers. These people are mostly found in the district of Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Gossaigaon, Tinsukia, Jorhat and Dibrugarh etc. The Bodo region is also well known for the plantation crop, most importantly the tea. It has been witnessed in the recent years that the numbers of small tea growers have grown up in rapid pace (Burman, 2012)<sup>88</sup>. This venture has really brought rich dividends to the Bodo families. Here also the Bodo women have been playing a supporting role in the form of supply of cheap labour and other forms of manual work. In tea plantation, as large number of labourers are needed Bodo women take the work in tea garden as tea pluckers. They are even paid less even though they work for the same hours along with men. Last but not the least Bodo women are highly skilled in fishing. Traditionally unlike the coastal areas of local populace of say Gujarat, paddy fields have served as the playground of learning how to catch fishes. Fishing is also done in the fresh water rivers, ponds, small streams etc. But pisciculture as a whole is not done on a large scale due to lack of proper training and other incentives. Fishing as an activity is carried out for consumption at home and also adds another supplementary income. The local fish of paddy fields and streams fetch the Bodo women a good price, as they are in high demand in the local markets.

#### **4.11.0 Role of Bodo women in Cottage Industry:**

Weaving is an important industry among the Bodos as well as other tribes of Assam. Nowadays Bodo women have learned to commercialised line their products from their handloom industry. A large number of Bodo women weavers maintain their livelihood and gets the scope to engage

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<sup>88</sup> Burman. J.J.Roy 2012. '*Status of Tribal Women in India*' Mainstream Weekly , Voll-No.12, March 10.

themselves in this industry. Most of the bodo workers are small and marginal farmers residing mainly in rural areas. The nature of the work mainly involved in the Sericulture industry includes harvesting of leaves, rearing of silkworm, spinning and reeling of silk yarn and weaving.

Like any other women from Northeastern States, the Bodo women are also stepping out from their small surroundings to try different occupation to break-off the cycle of poverty. In the unorganized sector, independently they have taken up micro-enterprises of various descriptions. However, self-employed groups are not strong enough. Mostly, the Bodo women are engaged in selling vegetables, tailoring, maintaining small business like tea stall etc. Bodo women are compelled to take the lower level of occupation because they do not have experience, training, education, marketing knowledge and finance to start a business of their own. Only a few women are successful in business. Lack of industrialization is almost a regular feature across all the regions of the Bodo belt. It is an accepted fact that the presence of light as well as heavy industries have always been a distant dream; i.e. the presence of such industrial units is almost nill. However, the Bodo women are traditionally well versed in the participation of cottage industries. Weaving as an activity is in the blood of every Bodo women since time immemorial.

In tribal society, handloom is a part of their cultural heritage. Different communities produce different style of dresses who identify themselves towards their community. Handloom industry is an important cottage industry for the Bodo people where Bodo women plays the lead role. Mostly women are more involved in this weaving industry than men. The designs and the method of weaving have passed from one generation to the other. As agriculture is a seasonal occupation, the time after the harvesting season is the usual time Bodo women love to weave. Weaving itself is another important part of their culture and tradition. It occupies a significant

position in the socio-economic life of the Bodo people in their society<sup>89</sup>.

About two decades ago, every unmarried girl was supposed to learn and get trained to weave by their elders at home and every Bodo man expected that his wife could weave a cloth. The importance of weaving attributed to a Bodo woman can be gauged from this very fact. Mostly, Bodo women weave their own Dokhona and jumgra (the traditional dress of Bodo women). Almost in every Bodo household we can see a loom. They are expert weavers with splendid colors and designs. They love to wear their traditional dresses in their social and religious ceremonies and even in marriage functions as well. Though they are excellent weavers the production is very limited and is done for their domestic use only. In the BTAD area, many weaving industries have sprung up in recent years to empower the Bodo women economically and financially so that they can support their education and support the family income. For Bodo women handloom weaving is an important cottage industry. All sections of Bodo women right from their teenage are engaged in weaving. Besides weaving cloths, they even make different handicraft materials like traditional bags, jute bags, file covers, carpets etc. Through these activities they promote the economic development of the Bodo women in the rural areas and uplift the socio-economic status of the tribal women. The items of weaving industry as a whole with the colorful designs have slowly reached many parts of the country. For instance, the traditional bags prepared by the Bodo women can be seen in many colleges and universities across India. Students seem to love to carry their note books, dairies, pens etc in the colorful bags, actually weaved by the Bodo women. Also the traditional Aronai is seen nowadays being used even by the non Bodos.

With proper marketing strategy and mechanized looms, a new picture can arise among the lives

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<sup>89</sup> Boro. Indiira. '*Sericulture and Weaving Industry of the Bodos: A brief discussion*'.

of the Bodo women. Right now only Kokrajhar is the hub of dokhona industry, which needs to be expanded to other areas of the Bodo region. In recent years some enterprising self help groups and women entrepreneurs have come forward with industrious zeal by selling their handmade products in the distant and the local markets. It has empowered these women economically, making them self-dependent and has definitely brought changes in the condition of the Bodo women to live a more confident life in the society.

Despite having unique designs and colours the weaving industry as a whole is not up to the mark as the market is very small and is not much recognized globally. Moreover the women who are weavers are mostly from the rural areas and are uneducated. Therefore most of them are unaware of the Government schemes in addition to their outdated thinking, creating hurdles for the weaving industry in particular. As the weaving activity involves a lot of physical effort, being a women they are faced with different health hazards that needs to be addressed adequately.

#### **4.12.0 Bodo women in service sector:**

The adoption of economic liberalisation also called the LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalisation) model in the early 1990s in India has brought a sea change in the overall economy of India. In the services sector the benefits are immense in the context of the Indian services sector as a whole. The effects of liberalization have reached even to the Bodo dominated areas, at however small scales it may seem. But the effects of liberalisation on services sector have not been very kind to the Bodo women in terms of employment generation or job creation. As the service sector requires high skills, the lack of proper education coupled with the hesitation of various corporate to enter the Bodo dominated areas due to a host of factors are contributing to the present state of affairs. It is heartening to know; despite all odds the Bodo women have

entered the banking service sectors in many corners of the country as employees, both in public as well as private banks. Also many Bodo women have ventured into metro cities and are being employed in various IT and IT enabled services like BPOs. However in certain areas like financial services, mass media, real estate services etc. the involvement of Bodo women is almost negligible. The Bodo region being situated at the foothills of Himalayas offers tremendous scope in the tourism sector. Tourist places like Manas Wildlife Sanctuary, Orang Wildlife Sanctuary, picturesque picnic spot at Bhairabkunda etc. offers ample scope for eco tourism and hospitality. These places can serve as an employment ground for many of the unemployed Bodo women. A lot more can be done through public private partnership in the whole of BTAD region.

The participation of Bodo women in the service sector is not impressive at all. Various reasons are associated with this sorry state of affairs. The lack of proper education and skilling is the major cause, which has rendered them ineligible for many of the Government jobs as well as private jobs. When compared to other Assamese women, Bodo women holding a government job is very less. In rural areas, as most of the Bodos are from the agricultural occupation, financially they are not sound and they cannot afford to admit their children in good English medium schools, whereby language becomes a barrier for competing in higher level of education to compete with the other non-tribal girls of the town or India as a whole. As a result till date no IAS and IPS officers are found among the Bodo women. In Bodo society, Bodo women are traditionally housewives but now gradually they are entering into various occupations in different fields like medical, engineering, banking, government teachers, state government services, beautician, contractors, anganwadi workers, etc. They are employed in both the public and private sectors. . However a section of Bodo women in recent years mostly semi- literate

have ventured to become contractors, which was otherwise an exclusive zone of men, is a welcome sign of women's empowerment.

Also under the influence of modern civilization and spread of modern education, the young Bodo women have taken up the challenges in stepping out of their comfort zone to live in other major cities like Delhi, Mumbai etc for their higher studies and many are involved in corporate jobs as well.

#### **4.13.0 Self Help Groups:**

Besides all the agricultural and allied activities, Self help groups have played a significant role among the Bodo rural women in the BTAD areas of Udalguri and Kokrajhar districts for the overall development of the society. Though Bodo women are highly active in all sorts of economic and allied activities, self help groups are very new to them, providing a helping hand to empower Bodo women socially, economically and politically. The Self help groups (SHGs) are a small voluntary organization where a section of rural women form a group together to solve the common problems among the women in the society and make themselves self sufficient to support their family along with their men. SHGs have helped the Bodo women to come out of their private sphere to public sphere and helped them to take part in decision making process in the society. It has helped them to exposure to the world through these groups. For example, in the Districts of Udalguri, NRLM (National Rural Livelihood Mission) has done a tremendous work for the upliftment of bodo women through Self Help Groups. NRLM was started in June 2011 and implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) Government of India for the rural women. The main motive of the scheme was to bring out the rural women out of poverty and empower them to be self employed through the establishment of Self Help groups.



Under Udalguri District block the total numbers of Self help groups are 2608. Out of these groups, the two most successful self help groups are Baibaisri Self Help Group and Golap Bibari Self Help Group, of village Belguri VCDC Sastrapara of Udalguri District. Both groups have been sanctioned a loan of Rs.200000 and Rs. 50000 from NRLM respectively. They have used their financial resources in financing different source of work like renting tent house, vegetable cultivation and lending money on interest to the local people at a low rate of interest etc. Presently their monthly income source ranges approximately between Rs. 3000 to Rs. 4000 respectively. These two groups have been able to pay back their loaned money from the banks through NRLM. Starting from a humble beginning these Bodo women have turned more confident to earn money and lead a decent life, looking after their families. Also with the rise in participation in different economic activities, the banking habits of Bodo women have increased manifold (Source- Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India)<sup>90</sup>.

As half of the size of the total population is women, it is very necessary to study the problems in the context of the economic development of the Bodo women in their society. Among the Bodos, the most common economic activity is agricultural and its allied activities which are also the primary means of livelihood of the Bodo people in the society. The post modernization has brought changes in the lives of Bodo women. Due to these social changes and modernization, the economic status of Bodo women has increased. Modernization has brought a positive side in education sector among women. Empowered Bodo women are seen to be participating in each and every economic and social activity of Central Government as well as State Government, which have definitely brought women at the forefront in a changing status with a new role in the society. Although, there is scope for improvement in the socio-economic status of Bodo women,

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<sup>90</sup> Ministry of Rural Development, National Rural Livelihood Mission, Government of India.

presently the male counterparts are still dominating in all the spheres of their socio- economic life.

## **Chapter-5**

### **Political participation of Bodo women and their contribution**

#### **5.1.0 Introduction:**

The wishes and aspirations of the people of the Indian society have been accomplished through various institutions right from the ancient to modern times. The structure of institutions varied from tribal kingdoms to the present form of republic.

India is a land that has been nurturing and shaping civilizations, the earliest being the Indus Valley Civilization. This civilization had municipal cities and a centralised system which was completely changed with the coming of the Vedic Aryans. A new institution in the form of tribal kingdom emerged in the Indian society. This rudimentary form of polity was just to protect their clan, property and maintain the law and order in their society. Later on this rudimentary form of polity took the concrete form of monarchy, where the relation was between the king and his subjects. During the medieval period the king in ministry became the usual form of Government till the last rule of the Mughals.

But the coming of the British brought a new change in the already established set up. The administration of India passed into the hands of the British Parliament. The establishment of East India Company made a colony. However, in the course of the struggle for freedom, the Indian leaders could learn a lot from the British administration that ultimately resulted in the freedom from the alien rule. The attainment of Independence from the colonial rule made India a Sovereign State with new ideals and principles incorporated in the new Constitution, accepting the representative Parliamentary form of Government. Thus, the current political system is a product of a long evolution process.

It is however very unfortunate that the hard fought struggle for freedom resulted into partition of the country. So the first and the immediate challenge was to have a United India amidst the vast diversity. The welfare of the citizens was the topmost priority of the ruling party, namely the Congress being the dominant party. During this phase the personal relationship between the leaders of different political parties was very cordial, but the party competition grew more intense with the passage of time. By the late 1960s party competition rose its ugly head to such an extent that criminalization of politics as well as politicisation of criminals entered the political arena. In the midst of this chaotic situation, a women leader with her charismatic qualities endeavoured to reach the highest echelon of democracy, the leader was none other than Indira Gandhi. Her rising was very surprising for a patriarchal society like India. But sadly after many ups and downs she was destined to rest with the dust of this earth.

By that time party competition was at the highest peak. With the newly attained education and empowerment many groups like Dalits; Other Backward sections also entered the political scene with their renewed vigour, making the field further competitive. By 1989 with the losing of Congress party at the centre, a new era of coalition politics entered the political theatre. The growing maturity and realisation of inclusive growth also attracted different regions of India to enter into politics and get their proper share of development. Thus, the emergence of regional political parties is a direct manifestation of the growing awareness about their Constitutional Rights.

Time and again the complexities of politics in India have increased tremendously, leaving very less space for the participation of Indian women. However Indian women cannot and will not be bogged down. Indian women having the distinction to become Prime Minister (Indira Gandhi), Chief Ministers Sucheta Kriplani, Jayalalitha, Mayawati, Mamta Banerjee, Uma Bharti,

Vasundhara Raje, Speaker of Lok Sabha Meira Kumar and even the President of India Pratibha Patil are leading examples that Indian women will always follow.

The term ‘political participation’ is not only related to right to vote but it also relates to participation in decision making, political consciousness and political activism. Right to vote and political activism are some of the strongest areas of women’s political participation (Saikia, 2011)<sup>91</sup>. Unlike some western countries Indian women including the Bodo women were fortunate enough to get the right to vote since India's Independence. But Bodo women like the rest of the Indian women did not enjoy the opportunity to get involved in various decision making process. This was so because the decision making process was considered to be the exclusive domain of men. Therefore naturally political consciousness among the Bodo women too came very late though they have voted for men at every election.

### **5.2.0 Northeast: a brief in politics:**

The Northeast which is a part of India combines various societies consisting of different tribes and ethnic groups of different culture, language, customs and traditions. It presents a spectrum of growing fragmentation, division, divergence and discord among various ethnic communities residing in the region. These have resulted to ethnic unrest, violence and political conflict in different parts of Northeast India. Each with its unique identity has different hopes and aspirations. Some sections are consistently seeking for a separate state and some for autonomous regions within the state, while some of them have even demanded for a sovereign State, seceding from India. Accordingly, the level and intensity of the people's participation in politics differs

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<sup>91</sup> Saikia, Dipankar. 2011. ‘Political Participation of Assamese women’ News and Society-Women Issue, April, 22.

from one part of the land to the other. Almost every tribal community in Northeast India has their own history and geo politics. In the context of Northeast India, ethnic assertion and mobilization by various tribes is a part of social change and development. Even the tribal society of this region is undergoing a transition from a primitive community based on shifting cultivation to modern techniques and ways of life.

On the eve of Independence of India, several ethnic groups of the States have variously made effective use of the factors of ethnicity and regionalism as the basis of their democratic struggle for self-rule, greater autonomy and militant actions. The other factors such as frontier location, development process, rise of Christianity and democratic process, partition of country, influx of infiltrators and minority syndromes variously led to claims of separatism among the communities. The Constitution Drafting Committee of independent India set up a sub-committee as “The North East Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee” in 1947, in order to protect and preserve the hill ethnic tribal population in the region. And in 1948, the sub-committee recommended the creation of ‘autonomous districts’ and ‘autonomous region’ to safeguard the hill tribes in respect of their land, language, social customs and culture. This special recommendation was also incorporated in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution (Basumatary, 2012)<sup>92</sup>.

The states like Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura reside close to international boundaries and have ethnic and cultural similarity with the tribes across the border. Even today the inner line permit is required to enter into some parts of the region which brings a sense of isolation from the remaining parts of the country. History is clear that the hill areas of Northeast were not completely integrated with the political and economic system of the British Empire. Considering the geo-political factors, the relative isolation from the rest of the country is felt by

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<sup>92</sup> Basumatary, Dr. Keshab. 2012. “*Political Economy of Bodo Movement*” Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi.

many of the sections among the tribal community, a major grievance, accepted even at the mainstream. In addition the small number of representatives in the Parliament from the northeast region always brings a sense of underrepresentation from the entire region. Therefore unarguably the predominant form of tribal movement has been political, seeking goals of autonomy and freedom with reliance on measures ranging from constitutional agitation to often resorting to insurgency. In Northeast India, the main reason of tribal movement is their struggle for regional identity and to safeguard their land from outsiders by gaining the political and economic power in their own hands. The sense of alienation and of step motherly treatment by the mainland have attracted the emerging youth, including the women section of the entire northeast region. Therefore, fighting against their adversaries has been witnessed with much vigour in the recent years. Likewise in the state of Assam also the tribals have the same sense of insecure feeling, thus attracting more and more of women to join the men folk. This widely includes the participation of Bodo women in politics for the cause of Bodo sections at large which needs deeper analysis and interpretation (Bhuyan, 1989)<sup>93</sup>.

### **5.2.0 A brief about politics of Bodos:**

Having such a glorious past with a vast empire of Kachari kingdom, it is needless to mention that the Bodos naturally were bound to fight in order to revive their past identity, which was bulldozed by the ruling elites. It is also said that the Bodos were once a powerful community who had ruled over the whole of Kamrup, the present day Assam, which the Bodos claim with dignity. With such a chequered history, it became impossible for the Bodos to stay quiet. With many youths gaining education, further sensitization occurred culminating into a vigorous Bodoland movement, knocking the ears of the state government as well as the central

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<sup>93</sup> .Bhuyan.B.C 1989. '*Political Development of the Northeast*' Vol-I, New Delhi: Omsons Publications, pp-80-81.

government. The Bodoland movement served as a rehearsal ground for the Bodo women for their future participation in active politics.

In Assam too after the Independence the demand for autonomy as well as separation came to the forefront. Each community group with their own culture, language and tradition has contributed to the growth and development of the Assamese society. The independence from the British raj paved the way for the Assamese community to rule and dominate over the tribal community in almost every sphere ranging from socio-economic to political sphere of Assam. With more opportunities at hand they could corner the benefits, which was otherwise to be shared along with different tribal groups. In this way the Assamese tried to safeguard their social and economic space by firstly imposing the Assamese language on the diverse section of people and during this process it gave rise to various political conflicts around the different identities of Assam. Since then Assam has witnessed a number of identity movements among the tribals' but the Bodos were among those who have raised their voice for their ethno-cultural identity (Deka, 2014)<sup>94</sup>.

### **5.3.0 Bodos in the Pre-Independence period:**

The advent of Ahom kingdom in the 12th century was a dead letter in the history of Bodo kingdom. The Kachari kingdom was crushed to death met a tragic end losing their pride and identity for the rest part of the history. In 1911 Rev. Sidney Endle published the first ethnographic account of the Bodos of Assam. By then the Bodos known as Kacharis at that time had already made inroads and settled in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. After Independence they were recognized as the Scheduled tribe in Assam. The European scholars like Hodgson

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<sup>94</sup> Deka, Hira Moni, 2014. *"Politics of Identity and the Bodo Movement in Assam"*, New Delhi: Scholars Works-A Division of Astral International Pvt. Ltd.



(1828) and Grierson (1903) used the term Kachari and Bodo interchangeably to refer to this linguistic group of Assam. Grierson identified them as Indo-Mongoloid people belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language family and Hodgson first used the generic name of Bodo to refer a group of language. Therefore, it is difficult to analyze the position of Bodo during pre-independence period (Basumatary, 2012)<sup>95</sup> .

Historically, it is observed that the Bodos were quite aware of their social dignity and honour. But suddenly, they had to suffer at every field from socio-economic to politics and became the victims of exploitation from the dominant Assamese ruling elite. For centuries, tradition of structural assimilation as a process of social change remained as a popular tradition among Bodos. As they were not much developed and recognized in the society they lived with their own values, culture and traditions within the Assamese society. The Bodos were unaware of the political and social rights in the mainstream society. But the coming of British and the Christian missionaries in India occupies a central place in the history of the Bodos. A tremendous change was witnessed in the ways of lives on the traditional mindset of the Bodos. The Bodo people developed the sense of self respect, identity consciousness of their society and tried to reassert their community identity and reconstruct their lost history. The spread of modern education and the new religion of Christianity enlightened and brought peace in their lives to a great extent. With the British at their step, they could establish, develop their self identity and reconstruct their lost history, culture, language, traditions etc of their society. The contributions of British missionaries like Sydney Endle can never be scored off from the history of the Bodos. Under the British rule, for the first time, the Bodos demanded for a separate electorate roll of Bodo people along with hill tribes of Northeast India. The Kachari Yubak committee in 1929 submitted a

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<sup>95</sup> Basumatary, Dr. Keshab. 2012. '*Political Economy of Bodo Movement*' Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, p-54-55.

memorandum to the Simon Commission demanding safeguard to ensure them an independent identity. Subsequently, the formation of All Assam Plains Tribal League in 1933 encouraged them and made conscious among tribal communities for their identity assertion in Assam. This consciousness gradually took a definite form and matured to a stage of demanding the development of Bodo language and literature, side by side fully supporting statehood demand of Bodoland in order to safeguard the interest of Bodos through political means (Basumatary, 2012)

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#### **5.4.0 Bodos in the post Independence period:**

With the new independent India, their identity and cultural affiliation got importance with the philosophy of self-realization and development of the Bodo language got a renewed vigor. In order to regain their glorious past which was lost in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, they tried to mobilize among themselves and visualized as sons of the soil and the early inhabitants of the State. The Bodos became more conscious about their distinctive identity, therefore took important steps for the development of their culture, literature and language. In the beginning, Bodos were on the modern line of education and recognizing the importance of education they strived hard to educate their generations to come. However, the Bodos did not have their own script for which they had to take education through Assamese script. It is therefore not surprising that many writers are well recognized through Assamese version. Before the emergence of Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) there exists no influence on Assamese nationality but the emergence of organizations like Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) created among the Bodos led to a new resolution on Bodo language and literature during the post independence period. Later these organizations

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<sup>96</sup> Basumatary, Dr. Keshab. 2012. '*Political Economy of Bodo Movement*' Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, p-55.

became the torchbearer of the Bodoland movement to safeguard the rights of the Bodos and worked for the welfare of Bodo society and under its banner it tried to unite all Bodo writers towards developing Bodo language. The Sabha has been demanding introduction of Bodo as a medium of instruction in schools ever since its inception (Basumatary, 2012)<sup>97</sup>.

The birth of Bodo Sahitya Sabha in the year 1952 brought tremendous change in the field of literature, culture and language among the Bodo society. Its main motive was to give a platform to the upcoming young Bodo writers to create Bodo literature in the Northeastern region among the Bodo tribes and to bring the Bodo medium of instructions in schools and colleges for the Bodo children. The Bodo leaders strongly felt the need to unite through the revival of their cultural traditions and develop the distinctive identity of Bodos as a socio-cultural group. The Bodo educated elite began to oppose Assamese cultural expansionism and sought to assert their culture particularly the linguistic identity as different from the Assamese with the formation of Bodo Sahitya Sabha.

The formation of ABSU (All Bodo Students Union) in the year 1967 was another milestone development in the post independence period. The main objective of the formation of ABSU was to unite the Bodo students for the preservation of the rich cultural heritage of the Bodos against the onslaught of the advanced culture of Assam. As mentioned earlier these two organizations were the torch bearers of Bodoland movement, which provided the platform for the Bodo women as well to venture into the arena of politics. The active participation of Bodo women in politics can be widely discussed under the Bodoland movement and language movement which is to be discussed in relevant chapters.

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<sup>97</sup> Basumatary, Dr. Keshab. 2012. "Political Economy of Bodo Movement" Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi.

### **5.5.0 A brief history of Bodoland Movement:**

Like any other social movements, the Bodoland movement has its own history, serving as a source of inspiration for all the coming generations in posterity. The Bodos have always faced the problem of identity crisis often witnessing political oppression and socio-economic exploitation by the majority population in the state of Assam. Firstly the movement of Bodos started over a period of two decades upto 1950 and focused on the issues of socio-cultural movement under the Tribal League. The second phase among the Bodos was the demand of language and script as well as their economic upliftment. The Bodos have asserted their identity through different phases of movement starting from the socio-religious movement under the leadership of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma who found no meaning in the already existing traditional Bathou religious beliefs and practices; he thereby introduced the alien beliefs and practices in the Brahma religion. The movement in the script and language by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) in the 1970s was a remarkable thrust, where amidst tough tussle Devanagiri script was chosen instead of the roman script as the written script of the Bodo language. And the last phase was the demand for formation of a separate state namely Bodoland in the north bank of the Brahmaputra river. As a result, these movements culminated into a large scale Bodoland movement and the same is being continued till date (Das, 1995)<sup>98</sup>.

During the post colonial period, the Bodos remained backward in all spheres of their economic life, a major cause for the Bodoland movement. The Bodos, along with the other tribal groups of Assam also encountered the problems of illiteracy, economic exploitation, cultural and political exploitation, poverty, and unemployment and land alienation. As most of the Bodos were

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<sup>98</sup> Das. K.Jogender. 1995. '*The Bodoland Movement: Transformation of Power and its Future Prospect*' NEHU Shillong, Presidential Address during the Fourth Annual Conference, March 30.

engaged in agricultural pursuits, they lost their lands in the hands of moneylenders and landlords. Secondly most of the economic activities of the Bodo dominated areas were undertaken by the Assamese people, whose living standard was better than the Bodos. They could manage to have easy access to government jobs, education and other economic opportunities resulting into a feeling of alienation by the Bodos in their own homeland. Unemployment of the Bodos was also another major issue, as very few seats were reserved in the government jobs for the tribal people of Assam (Das, 1995)<sup>99</sup>. The advent of cash economy further endangered their traditional social and economic conditions to a great extent which brought the tribal masses especially the emerging middle class into severe competition in the job market. Also the religious reform movement known as Brahma religion initiated by Kalicharan Brahma had a profound influence upon the Bodo society, culture and economy in 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kundu, 2010)<sup>100</sup>.

Under the colonial rule large scale plantation activity in the Brahmaputra valley strengthened the process of creation of market on land leading to emergence of a money lending class. The illiterate and ignorant tribals came into contact with the new type of commercial economy and culture which brought significant changes in the cultural traditions and social formation of tribals. In the later course of time the large influx of illegal migrants mainly from neighbouring countries, particularly from Bangladesh into the northern bank of Brahmaputra valley further aggravated the economic opportunities already being enjoyed by the Bodo community. Not only their economic opportunities were snatched, but also brought serious repercussions on the local demography. This alteration in demography disturbed the social fabric of a peaceful atmosphere, being witnessed since time immemorial. The colonial administration also imported a large

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<sup>99</sup> Das. K.Jogender. 1995. '*The Bodoland Movement: Transformation of Power and its Future Prospect*' NEHU Shillong, Presidential Address during the Fourth Annual Conference, March 30.

<sup>100</sup> Kundu. Dr. Dilip Kumar. 2010. '*The State and the Bodo Movement in Assam*', A.P.H Publishing Corporation, New Delhi.

number of labourers from Bengal, Orrisa etc to work in the tea plantations, road constructions, coalmines and oil fields. This resulted into growth of various small townships with immigration into the valley, mostly inhabited by the middle class people, from outside the province to the growing need of trade and commerce. Even the Assamese middle class faced difficulty for job and employment in their own territory. The huge influx of migrants appeared to be serious threat to their survival and growth as a tribal entity. The availability of cheap and fertile land attracted the Muslim peasants to migrate into the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. During the period 1911-31, the migrant population formed a significant portion of the population in the valley. The Muslim League led by provincial government of Assam also encouraged large scale settlement of Muslim peasants into Assam from East Bengal under its land development scheme.

In Assam, prior to the formation of Muslim League government, the provincial government introduced line system in view of indiscriminate settlement of migrants on government reserves and on lands belonging to local people especially the tribals. In the year 1920, the line system was introduced and it imposed restrictions in certain areas so as to protect the interest of indigenous people on land and forests but this line system was opposed by immigrants and Muslim league leaders. Its provisions were not implemented properly on account of pro-Muslim League policy of the provincial governments since 1926 to 1944 with a break of one year in 1939 when there was a congress Ministry led by Gopinath Bordolai in the province. Under the chairmanship of F.W Hockenbull, a committee was appointed to review the necessity and functioning of the line system. This committee did not ignore the need to develop extensive waste lands in Assam in its report but at the same time it favoured the retention of line system for the protection of tribal settlements. During this period the society and economy of the valley were in no position to absorb fresh migrants because the colonial government did not take any

significant initiatives for the development of agriculture but instead preferred to import cheap labour from outside (Kundu, 2010)<sup>101</sup>.

The continued flow of migrants brought tremendous pressure on the tribal land. The migrants tempted the poor tribal people with exorbitant prices and almost captured all the low lying fertile areas. The inconsiderable inroad of migrants in large tracts of traditional Bodo and other plain tribals held territories in lower Assam brought severe strain on the livelihood opportunities as well as on resources. It was estimated that about 60 to 70 percent were landless due to constant influx in the region. Economically, the emerging Bodo middle class felt insecure and threatening due to the pressure of immigrants in their territories. And even for small employment opportunities they had to face both the elite Assamese as well as migrants. In pursuit of the political aspirations of the Bodos, the Bodo leadership in 1967 formed a political party called the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA) representing Bodos and other plains tribals' of Assam. They realized that the tribal blocks and belts were being occupied by illegal migrants and rich landlords. The Bodos could not have proper access to economic package given by the Central Government to the Bodo dominated areas, forget about education that was a distant cry. During that time there were no good roads and other infrastructure to connect the Bodo dominated areas with the main cities of Assam. The Bodo areas were neglected especially in Assam and the financial packages which were meant for the tribal development never reached and it was misused halfway. These were some of the reasons; the PTCA then demanded a union territory called 'Udayachal' to be carved out of Assam which included mainly those areas known as tribal belt and blocks (George 1994)<sup>102</sup>. But the demand for Udayachal was not successful,

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<sup>101</sup> Kundu. Dr. Dilip Kumar.2010. 'The State and the Bodo Movement in Assam', A.P.H Publishing Corporation, New Delhi.

<sup>102</sup> George, Sudhir Jacob,1994. '*The Bodo Movement in Assam-Unrest Accord*' - Asian Survey Monthly Review of

immediately the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA-Progressive) was formed.

And in the 1980s the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) formed in 1967 under the leadership of Upendra nath Brahma undertook a mass campaign and accelerated the movement at different points of time with a never dying spirit. The ABSU realized about the decades of negligence and the apathy shown by the state government towards the Bodo community. By then All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) had been very active and they tried to unit PTCA and PTCA(P) but the effort was in complete vain. In 1984 the PTCA(P) was dissolved completely and a new organization called United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) was organized with the demand of Tribal land and submitted a memorandum to the Central and State Government. From 1986 onwards with the election of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma as its president, ABSU launched a direct political organization Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) demanding a separate land within India, to be called Bodoland. The main objective of BPAC/ABSU movement was to divide Assam 50-50. ABSU also submitted a 92- Points Charter of Demands both to the Central and State Governments for the greater interest of the Bodos (Das, 1995)<sup>103</sup>. Under the violent and boiled circumstances of the 1990s, bipartite Bodo accord was signed on February 10, 1993 between ABSU-BPAC (Bodo People's Action Committee) and State Government which led to the formation of self-governing council called the Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) (Mochahari, 2014)<sup>104</sup>. Its aim was to provide maximum autonomy in the field of social, economic, educational, and ethnic and language among the Bodos within the state of Assam in the form of Bodoland Autonomous Council. It provided for the establishment of

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Contemporary Assam Affairs, VOL-XXXIV, No. 10, October.

<sup>103</sup> Das. K.Jogender. 1995. '*The Bodoland Movement: Transformation of Power and its Future Prospect*' NEHU Shillong, Presedential Address during the Fourth Annual Conference, March 30.

<sup>104</sup> Mochahari, Monjib. 204. '*State Hegemony, Identity Politics and Resistance in Bodoland*' Journal of Tribal Intellectual Collective India (ISSN2321 5437), Vol-2, Issue.2, No.4, p79, October.



Bodoland Autonomous Council comprising the contiguous geographical areas between river Sankosh and the river Mazbat or the river Pansoi. Its jurisdiction covered an area of 23,000sq.km consisting of 2570 villages spread across seven districts situated on the Northern bank of river Brahmaputra. But unfortunately, the accord failed due to non-implementation of provisions of the accord and also it could not fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the Bodo people (Kundu, 2010)<sup>105</sup>.

Another glaring instance witnessed in the history of Bodos was in the year 1986, when the Secondary Board of Higher Education in Assam issued a circulation making Assamese a compulsory language in all schools and colleges, which was a major setback for the Bodos. The ideological hegemony of the Assamese people was to exclude the tribal people from Assam and make Assam their 'Asomland'. As the Bodo population was large in number they realized that they were soon losing their identity and were actually suffering socio-economically and culturally in the hands of Assamese people. So they attempted to raise their voice through different phases of socio- economic movement, cultural movement, socio-religious and script movement. These movements finally culminated into the demand for a 'Separate Bodoland' in Assam. Initially the Bodoland movement was a non violent one taking experiences from our freedom struggle against the British. The leader's resorted to constitutional means in the form of demands through charter of demands, talks, processions, mass rallies etc. But the lackadaisical attitude and the habit of procrastination of the Government soon frustrated the Bodo youths. Here comes the genesis of the insurgency among the Bodo youths. As we all know today the problem of insurgency is a stumbling block to the development of the northeast region of India. Hence it becomes necessary to examine and analyse the issue in depth for the benefit of all the

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<sup>105</sup> Kundu. Dr. Dilip Kumar. 2010. ' *The State and the Bodo Movement in Assam* ', A.P.H Publishing Corporation, New Delhi.

stakeholders. The insurgency groups like ULFA, NSCN, and NDFB etc of Notheastern states are the leading groups. In the Northeastern States of India, the genesis of insurgency is basically very different in character from what is being witnessed in other parts of the country. It did not develop all of a sudden and in all parts of the region but the root cause of insurgency lies in the economic backwardness as well as the political alienation of tribal population from the mainstream of national life in the region with illegal migration adding the fuel to the fire in the tribal areas (Pakem, 1997)<sup>106</sup>.

The Bodos of Assam also faced the problem of alienation in their own state among the Assamese society in terms of socio-economic and political exploitation. Bodo insurgency is therefore not a very old issue. Some sections of the frustrated youths could find their answer to all their oppressions only through insurgency. The formation of insurgency groups called NDFB and BLTF were a direct result of this belief. The formation of insurgency group like Boro Security Force (BrSF) in the year 1986, which was later renamed as NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland) under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary in order to liberate Bodoland through an armed rebellion can be gauged very clearly. With the formation of NDFB, the entire Bodoland region became a conflict zone and took more and more of violent form in the later part of the 1990s resulting into loss of many innocent lives, kidnapping, disappearance of youths etc (Mochahari, 2014)<sup>107</sup>. With much effort and understanding between the Government of India and the NDFB, today there is a ceasefire agreement and the process of peaceful talks continues till date. Another phase of agitation was prepared for a separate state Bodoland within India. This was emergence of insurgent group, BLTF (Bodo Liberation Tiger Force) formed in

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<sup>106</sup> B.Pakem, 1997. '*Insurgency in North-East India*' Omsons Publications, New Delhi, pp-273-288.

<sup>107</sup> Mochahari, Monjib. 2014. '*State Hegemony, Identity Politics and Resistance in Bodoland*' Journal of Tribal Intellectual Collective India (ISSN2321 5437), Vol-2, Issue.2, No.4, p79, October.

1996, who ultimately surrendered their arms to the Central and Assam Government under the leadership of Hangrama Mohilary, after a series of bloodbaths in the Bodo region. They gave up the demand of Bodoland state in 2001 and opted for an autonomous administrative region called “Bodoland Territorial council (BTC)” in 2003 under the sixth schedule of Indian Constitution comprising four districts viz Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Baksa and Chirang (Mochahari, 2014)<sup>108</sup>. The Bodo unrest changed the political landscape of Assam right from the very beginning and will continue to do so in the coming days. The BTC Accord was welcomed by majority of the section of the society, hankering for peace and stability. But the NDFB was not on board, while the Accord was signed. Thus the fissures were not completely capped, resulting into many more factions trying to garner the mass support required for a renewed demand of a separate Bodoland. Both these insurgency groups have attracted Bodo women as well, many of them had joined as cadres. Throughout the Bodoland movement Bodo women have taken active part in mass rallies, slogans and campaigns for the cause of Bodo society along with men.

#### **5.6.0 Women movement in Northeast India:**

In general, the term ‘women movement’ refers to mass participation of women on numerous issues like domestic violence, sexual harassment, right to vote, dowry, rape, infanticide, foeticide, social and political rights etc. In India, the women movement played a significant role among the women sections of the country. They have brought lots of changes in different forms in their lives. However, the nature of women movement in India can be differentiated between the pre-independence period and post independence period. In the pre independence period, it was mostly initiated by the men and it was fight against the social evils of the society like sati

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<sup>108</sup> Mochahari, Monjib, 2014. ‘*State Hegemony, Identity Politics and Resistance in Bodoland*’ Journal of Tribal Intellectual Collective India (ISSN2321 5437), Vol-2, Issue.2, No.4, p79, October.

system, widow remarriage etc. whereas in the post independence period it is more about the gender equality in all respects (Borah, 2012)<sup>109</sup>.

Like any other movements northeast has also a tale of women movements since the dawn of India's Independence. As northeast lies in the conflict zone, the women have played a significant role in peace making among the society. In Manipur, women have played a vital role in every women's movement. They are more empowered than any other tribes of the northeastern states. 'Nupi Lan (Women's war), Meira Paibis (Woman Torchbearers) and Nisha Bandh (No to Alcohol) are some of the milestone of Women's Movement in Manipur. In the 1970s, the women of Manipur started a mass movement for the maintenance of social order and peace in Manipur. In urban and rural areas they started an anti-liquor movement which was a victory for the Meira Paibis. The women localities gathered their strength and asserted their capabilities in obstructing the selling and drinking activities. They also managed to interfere with those persons involved in the transaction of liquor business. Since then the women learnt the power of collective effort and took up many social issues, got involved in resolving family disputes etc. The latest movement was of Manorama case in 2004, where dozen of Manipuri women stripped naked and protested against the AFSA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) in the state, which have shaken the conscience of the whole world. The current events in Manipur reflect how important women's groups are in civil society movements in Northeast India. Today the Meira Phabis have become an institution in their own rights (Verma, 2008)<sup>110</sup>.

Apart from Meira Paibis of Manipur, Naga Mother's Association (NMA) of Nagaland is one of the active organizations in the Northeast India. The theme of the association is 'Shed No More

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<sup>109</sup> Bora. Narayan, 2012. ' *Women's Movement- Women Empowerment and Women's Right in Assam*', IJCAES Special Issues on Basic, Applied & Social Sciences, Vol-ii, July.

<sup>110</sup> Verma Rajesh, 2008. ' *Women's Movement in Northeast*'. The Other Side, Vol-21, No.7, August, p3.

Blood’ and their agenda is bringing peace in the society and stop killing of civilians by the army and also by the militants. The NMA celebrates the 12th of May as Mother’s Day and appeals for peace within the society. They provide service for care of patients addicted to drugs and also work among the AIDS patients. Their greatest achievement is that most Naga women’s organizations are its collaborations. And the NMA believes that they are the only women’s group in South Asia who had participated and facilitated in the cease fire negotiation in 1997 between the Government of India and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) (Verma, 2008)<sup>111</sup>.

In Assam, the Women Movement is the oldest and historically it is linked with the India’s freedom struggle, especially between 1920s and 1940s when women played a significant role. In 1926, under the leadership of Chandraprabha Saikiani ‘Asom Mahila Samiti’ was established and later renamed as Asom Pradeshnik Mahila Samiti, whose main objectives included social reforms, weaving projects, education, maternity leave and child welfare. In Assam there are number of women groups trying to foster peace and stability in the region. The Mantri Manch based in Guwahati has also been conducting rallies for those sons of Assam, who got disappeared during the atrocities committed by the Indian army in 1989 and 1991. They also took a protest march on sexual abuse, violence against women, dowry etc. Despite the patriarchal setup the women in Assam played a significant role during the freedom struggle and politics as well. Along with these groups, Bodo women in Assam have also participated at various movements in due course of history (Verma, 2008)<sup>112</sup>.

In order to bring peace and protect the rights of both tribal and non-tribal women in Assam,

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<sup>111</sup> Verma Rajesh, 2008 ‘ *Women’s Movement in Northeast*’. The Other Side, Vol-21, No.7, August.

<sup>112</sup> Verma Rajesh, 2008. ‘ *Women’s Movement in Northeast*’. The Other Side, Vol-21, No.7, August .

women organizations like-the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) later renamed as All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF), Bodoland People's Front Women Wing (BPFWW) and Bodo Women Justice Forum (BWJF) were formed for the empowerment of the Bodo women and creating awareness about their rights.

#### **5.7.0 Role of Bodo Women Movement and Politics:**

The Bodoland Movement provided the central platform for the Bodo women to unleash their caliber and energy. Though Bodo women silently participated and supported men throughout the movement; it was at an embryonic stage. The leaders of Bodoland also understood that without participation of women, it was impossible for a mass movement for a separate Bodoland.

#### **ABWWF ( All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation):**

Under the leadership of Bodofa, U.N Brahma who was also the leader of ABSU (All Bodo Students Union) launched the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) a frontal organization of a Bodo women in July 14, 1986 at Debargaon High school to bring unity and consciousness among all tribal women residing in Assam. But unfortunately women of the other tribes did not cooperate wholeheartedly in the new organization. Therefore, they renamed it as All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF) on 6th of November 1993 to work only among Bodo women of Assam. The main objective of ABWWF was to bring all the women of Bodo community together into one platform through mutual understanding, to fight for justice and rights of Bodo women and to fight for the upliftment of socio-economic, cultural status, political rights and also to fight against various social evils like drug abuse, trafficking, sexual

abuse etc for the women in Bodo society (Mosahari, 2011)<sup>113</sup> . Mrs. Pramila Rani Brahma and Mrs. Malati Rani Narzary were the president and the secretary of the Central committee of ABWWF. The organization ABWWF has taken various measures and programmes for the development of the Bodo women culturally, socially, economically and politically and have always remained at the forefront in safeguarding the Bodo women as well as the society.

The ABWWF is the apex body and under it there are sixteen district level subordinates bodies. And it is divided into five different structures. They are-

1. ABWWF at Central level
2. ABWWF at District level
3. ABWWF at Anchalik ( regional) level
4. ABWWF at Unit level
5. ABWWF at village level

At the Central level, all the members selected from the different districts are included and part of the organisation. Each District level constituted within its district itself with the members selected from each Anchalik level. And at the anchalak level, the members are selected from different unit level constituted within a block circle. At unit level committee of ABWWF not more than 14 villages are constituted with the members selected from each village committee. And in each committee a president and vice president is being elected generally as the head by the members of the organization. Kokrajhar is the headquarter of the organization ABWWF. All the important meetings and conferences are held once in every year in Kokrajhar. The

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<sup>113</sup> Mosahari, Premananda, 2011. “*Political Identity Crises of the Bodos and their Bodoland Movement*” Guwahati: Kokrajhar, N.L Publications, December .

democratic functioning of this organisation clearly depicts the ability of Bodo women and will always serve as a stage to nurture the upcoming Bodo women (Wangsu, 2014)<sup>114</sup>.

#### Important role of ABWWF-

- They confidently participated and supported ABSU in all the constructive activities undertaken by ABSU. Slowly ABWWF became very active and participated in the mass rallies spearheaded by ABSU, demanding a separate state within the framework of Indian constitution. They even launched different programmes, dharnas, protest rallies etc related to women issues.
- During their struggle, to fight against the state barbarism and human rights violation during the Bodo agitation, a few Bodo women even joined the Bodo volunteer force (BVF) to carry out the messages, to disseminate information to male counterparts and provide basic nursing to the injured cadres of ABSU and BVF activities. The Bodo women acted like a wall between the state forces and Bodo agitators.
- The most successful protest of ABWWF was against the Assam police in Gauhati High court in the Bhumka Gangrape case which was a major victory for ABWWF (Brahma, 2012)<sup>115</sup>.
- To preserve their cultural and traditional identity, they made 'Dokhona' compulsory to wear in any special occasions, festivals or office duty and opposed Bodo women wearing 'Mekhla chadar'.
- They encouraged more women's literacy and education so that they can compete at the

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<sup>114</sup> Wangsu, Champa.2014. '*All Bodo Women Welfare Federation and its role in Peace making Process in Assam*' Academia.edu.

<sup>115</sup> Brahma, Pratibha. 2012. '*Emerging of New Bodo Women at the Background of the Bodoland Movement*' The Times of Assam, Vol-I :Issue No. 12, June 22 (Friday) .



higher level. They even joined hands with Bodo Sahitya Sabha in the field of literature and published magazines in Bodo language related to various issues of women.

- ABWWF launched a mass rally against the widespread of dreadful practices of witch hunting in society on April 12, 2011. They even undertook awareness programmes in the remote villages among the women for the eradication of witch hunting.
- On April 14, 2012, ABWWF again organized a mass rally along with hundreds of students and women demanding death penalty of S.S.B Jawans in Kokrajhar who raped the physically handicapped women in 2011.
- Last but not the least, ABWWF even protested selling and consumption of liquor and asked the Government to take strict action against the illegal sale of liquor.

So these were some of the initiatives taken by the ABWWF for the development of the Bodo women. Though ABWWF played a tremendous role to bring peace and harmony in society, they could not succeed to a greater extent inspite of being the oldest organization for women in the region. Some drawbacks within the organisation kept them lagging behind. Some of the drawbacks were:

- In the organization, there were no suitable leaders who could work full time and dedicate herself for the cause of women.
- Due to lack of insufficient funds they could not conduct mass awareness programmes related to women from time to time.
- The organization had fewer networks with the other successful forums of the Northeastern States. ABWWF usually do not get involved in the problems of other non-

Bodo women. They are just confined within the Bodo community.

- Lack of less publicity of achievement compared to other women's organizations in other Northeastern States like Meira Paibis and Naga Mother's Association etc.

**a. Role of BWJF( Bodo Women Justice Forum)-**

After ABWWF, Bodo Women Justice Forum (BWJF) was another important organization among the Bodo women whose main objective was to engage themselves in protecting and promoting human rights of the people. During 1980s whenever there was a conflict against the mainstream and security forces for the demand of separate Bodoland particularly when the two militants groups NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland) and BLT (Bodoland Liberation Tigers) waged a war against the Indian security agencies, the women and children were the worst sufferer. They were tortured physically and mentally. Countless instances of human rights violation including rape, murders, tortures, secret killings could be witnessed in the conflict zones of Bodo areas. Therefore to bring the awareness amongst their community regarding their rights, peace and harmony, the Bodo Women Justice Forum (BWJF) was formed in 1993 under the leadership of Anjali Daimary (the President). She also represented the Bodo tribe at the UN working group on Indigenous population (UNWGIP) in 1996 and 1997 in Geneva (Dainik Janoombhoomi, November, 25, 1998)<sup>116</sup>. The Bodo Women Justice Forum (BWJF) has also done a commendable job in taking up issues related to women by organizing issue based peace protest and march among the Bodo women..The organization played an important role in awakening consciousness among the Bodo women and safeguarded the women in the society during the Bodoland movement. But after the premature death of U.N Brahma in 1990, the Bodo women movement started declining and the voice of Bodo women in politics was

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<sup>116</sup> Article- '*Bodo Women in India writing to rouse Conscioueness*' Dainik Janoombhoomi, November, 25, 1998.

less heard including the ABWWF. Off lately with proper education, the participation of Bodo women in politics has reached a newer level, which was never imagined some decades ago. In this long struggle, the Bodo Women Justice Forum (BWJF) and Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal peoples tried to bring NDFB into peace talks with the Central Government but it was in vain.

**b. Role of BPFWW (Bodoland People's Front Women Wing)-**

Bodoland People's Women Wing was formed in 2006. It is the first women's organization which is associated with the political party in the BTAD region. Its main aim was to empower the Bodo women politically as well as socially and economically. It emphasized on active participation in the field of politics and decision making bodies in the region. In the recently concluded Assam Assembly elections of 2016, the women field workers actively engaged themselves in the election campaign, leading to a massive victory across the B.T.A.D region. Their role in mobilizing the womenfolk towards the Assembly election can never be ignored, taking into the fact of their participation in big numbers.

The first instance of women's participation in large numbers was under the leadership of the father of the Bodos, U.N Brahma. His clarion call shook the conscience of each and every Bodo women who took up the challenges before them in Great Spirit thus creating a unique history of their own. The names of heroic women like Thengphakhri, Jwhwlaojw Birgwhshri, Gambari Sikhla are a few to mention, who really played a significant role in boasting the spirit of Bodo women to fight against the social evils , political and economic subjugation in the hands of high class Assamese people. A few women from a good social and economic background got the privilege of going to school have tales to tell about their interactions with high caste Assamese

and Bengali girls in hostels. For instance during 1950s and 1960s, the tribal girls who stayed in hostels were not allowed to enter into the kitchen, could not even take bath in the same bathroom though they paid the same amount of fees (Brahma, 2012)<sup>117</sup>. So these were some of the factors which provoked the Bodo women to feel insecure and a feeling of inferiority prevailed among them, that often forced them to abandon their own culture and traditional attires. The result was disastrous as they forcibly adopted the Assamese culture without any preference for them during that period.

#### **5.8.0. Bodo women in Politics:**

Indeed it is a fact that women are the agents of change for any society, state and nation. Keeping that in mind, the participation of Bodo women in politics becomes indispensable. Their participation at the current stage is highly unsatisfactory, that calls for the participation of more women to take up the challenge. It is very unfortunate in the history of Bodos that after the tragic death of U.N. Brahma, the Bodo women took less interest in the field of politics and became more materialistic. In 2003, when the Bodos managed to secure the Bodoland Territorial Council, there was not even a single women representative in the newly formed government. Even during the Bodoland Autonomous Council (B.A.C) of 1990s, no women representative was witnessed. It was so because traditionally it was always regarded that the decision making process were the prerogative of males. Though women are highly active in socio economic activities, especially men regard women to have less knowledge in politics and poor in decision making. When compared to the other Northeast communities' women the participation of Bodo women in active politics is low especially in the elected bodies, a fact that is not impressive.

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<sup>117</sup> Brahma, Pratibha. 2012. '*Emerging of New Bodo Women at the Background of the Bodoland Movement*' The Times of Assam, Vol-I :Issue No. 12, June 22 (Friday).

Though, Bodo women played a crucial role in Bodoland movement in 1980s, no women could enter into politics except Pramila Rani Brahma, till date who is associated with Bodoland People's Front (BPF), a regional state party of the Bodos, and has also managed to secure a Ministerial berth in the BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party) led Government of Assam. As the Bodo society is influenced by the patriarchal system, most of the Bodo women were engaged with their household chores and hardly took serious in politics though some women bravely stood in elections independently in the past, but could not win the poll in the state. But the year 2016, depicted a new picture of Bodo women in politics. For the first time, two prominent women activists had taken up the new political challenge in the state Assembly elections. The Human right activist and the president of All Bodo Women Justice Forum, Anjali Prabha Daimari had contested as an independent candidate from 69 Udalguri constituency and the entrepreneur and editor of The Opinion (a quarterly news magazine), Pratibha Brahma has contested for Kokrajhar East constituency as a candidate of newly formed United People's Party (UPP) (Mochahari, 2016)<sup>118</sup>. Unfortunately both of them could not make through due to a host of factors, however these are really welcome signs and a good omen for the Bodo society. They can definitely be the role model for the young generation to come, especially among Bodo women. This is truly a living example of women's empowerment. It clearly depicts that male members of the Bodo society are ready to accept Bodo women as their leaders whenever the opportunity comes.

Thus the Bodoland movement was very new and premature to the Bodo women as it was for the first time they came forward to participate in the new challenge awaiting them. Though Bodo women were highly active and hardworking in their socio-economic field, it was a great challenge for the Bodo women to participate in the political arena where male dominion already existed. Throughout the movement they could gather large sections of both illiterate and literate

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<sup>118</sup> Mochahari, Monjib 2016. '*Bodo Women, Politics, Resistance*' The Password Press, March.

women from every corner of the society into the movement. Through this movement women got an opportunity to showcase their leadership quality in the politics during that period and the organization like ABWWF definitely provided the playground and set the ball in motion. There were some factors that hindered their active participation like their engagement in marriage, rearing children or busy with their domestic chores. Some women were fortunate enough to be recognized and got their respect in the society but some were not fortunate to be known. Despite all the challenges and odds in the society the Bodoland movement could actively bring consciousness among the Bodo women regarding their rights and most importantly could imbibe the perception that they can do it. Now the women activists are concentrating in the social welfare programmes in the Bodo region. They are working against social evils like illiteracy, addiction, domestic violence, human rights violations etc. Many college students participated in the movement and made mass participation of women in favour of ABSU movement. Many Bodo women activists were noted writers and intellectuals, Pramila rani Brahma, Anjali Daimary, Bina Bala Goyary are some noted writers who write in Bodo, Assamese and English.

No doubt, the women organization ABWWF had an impressive beginning but their journey was not a smooth ride. Some of the serious drawbacks kept them lagging behind. It is observed that the women groups should conduct awareness programmes on a massive scale in terms of education and social development. It is also seen that only a few women are leading active members in this type of organization which renders the organization to be tagged as underrepresented. Therefore, more and more educated women should come forward and participate in decision making process and take the challenge to solve the societal problems. Of course education is the prime requirement that needs to be addressed right from the primary

education.

The above study shows that the political economy of Bodo movement which started as a socio-cultural movement among the Bodos emerged not from a single factors but it comprised of many issues with which the movement crystallized in the last part of twentieth century. The socio-economic, cultural, linguistic, ethnic identities etc were the major forces to work behind the Bodo movement in Assam. The British rule in India changed the traditional mindset of the Bodos and developed the sense of self respect and identity consciousness of their society. It also helped the Bodos to raise the demand of separate entity along with hill tribes of the Northeast India.

## **Chapter-6**

### **Conclusion**

One way summarise that the study of Bodo society in the contemporary presents a challenge both in terms of materials and also in terms of approaches and selection of themes. A domain critic of earlier studies would point to the nature of reductionist arguments employed by facing on state categories to give a picture of Bodo society to represent Bodo society on the basis of ethnicity or region or a unilinear identity. A danger of such approaches is the partial representation that emerged from such representations. In this approach, a new understanding can emerge. Possibilities for such thematic and related items are as said in this project.

Thus, in conclusion from the above chapters it has been attempted to study the historical overview, their origin i.e their place of origin, present population, social status of Bodo women with respect to their culture, religion and also their economic and political participation in the Bodo society. It is found that the Bodos are the early inhabitants and plain tribe in Assam. They cherish a very rich culture and tradition among themselves in the society. Socially the status of Bodo women is almost equal along with their male counterparts despite being a patriarchal society. The women are highly respected and even in terms of marriages, girls are allowed to choose their life partners. It is also observed that in the Bodo society many of the social evils like dowry system, child marriage, honor killing, infanticide etc are not practiced, unlike in other parts of the Indian community. Yes some serious social evils still exist among the Bodo society also. One such hotly debated issue in recent years has been the inhuman practice of witch hunting, which has received wide attention throughout the whole of BTAD region. Recently, the Assam Government along with AASU, ABSU and women organizations like ABWWF is taking



lots of painstaking effort in spreading mass awareness in order to eradicate the menace of witch hunting among the tribal people of Assam. Bodo women actively take part in all the religious and social ceremonies along with men. Religion plays an important role in their family life as well as in their community life, because they have learned and followed to live amidst different religion and culture with respect and tolerance. Though Bodos have the Bathou religion as their religion of origin, the new religion most importantly the Brahma and Christianity brought a renewed spirit in their ideas, behaviour, rituals and style of living in the society. In the early 20th century, the Bodos followed different religious cults and sects but they have never created any unhealthy environment in the society, rather they have kept themselves conscious about their own culture and identity and have successfully emerged as an integral part of Indian culture.

In the traditional society, Bodos regarded themselves different from other tribes of Assam but they are found to be in absolute sync with the common sentiments when it comes to their identity, religious beliefs and cultural practices towards the society. The changes in the religion and culture supplemented the Bodo women to enhance their status and position both socio-economically and politically. And also it is revealing that Bodo women plays an important role in the socio-economic field.

As agricultural is the main occupation of Bodos, their economy is entirely dependent on their natural resources. Bodo women are very active in all household chores and economically they are not dependent much on their spouse. They participate in all kinds of agricultural activities like sowing, planting, weeding, harvesting, etc. along with men and finally serve their family through the preparation of their traditional and delicious food items. In other words they play an active role from the field to the plate of the family. They even grow lots of leafy vegetables for their consumption and sell the excess in the market adding supplementary income to their

families. It is seen that fishing is very popular among the Bodo women. They are great food lovers especially the pork, which is consumed in every occasion. Bodo women take the lead role in maintaining the farm. Bodo women are expert weavers and very industrious and it is also an important part of the socio-cultural unity of Bodo people. Many young Bodo women are actively involved in small cottage industries and sericulture. In recent years, weaving industries have sprung up enhancing their capacity to support their family. It also serves as a platform for additional income and employment of the Bodo women in society. As a matter of fact as Bodos are mainly dependent on agriculture, they face the problem of seasonal unemployment every now and then. So the activity of weaving absorbs the large number of women work force and provides them an alternate source of income. It has helped them to be more independent and empowered them economically. But some problem persists among the women weavers; weavers being mostly women faces lot of health issues and marketing issues that needs to be addressed adequately.

Self help groups have played a significant role among the rural Bodo women in BTAD areas like Udalguri and Kokrajhar districts for the development of the society. Especially NRLM has done a tremendous job for the upliftment of Bodo women through the establishment of Self help groups among the BPL (Below Poverty Line) families. It is observed that Illiteracy among women is the main hindrance in the way of women's empowerment and development of family and society. However there has been an improvement in the women's literacy in recent years. Parents are taking lots of interest in educating and providing facilities to their children be it a boy or a girl child. And the post modernization has brought significant changes in the lives of the Bodo women because the social and economic changes have also brought a positive side in the education front. Women are now seen to be actively taking part in different Central and State

Government jobs like doctors, engineers, lecturers, banking, defence, paramilitary forces etc. and some women have even joined active politics in recent years. It is clear that the positive trend of education among the Bodo women and young generation girls is an indication of women's development that will definitely lead to an empowered Bodo society.

The delineating women in this schema would also involve looking at overlapping identities like ethnicity, territory, class etc in order to escape the dangers of partial pictures. Bodo women occupies multiple social locations and therefore cannot be generalized as a whole.

It is clear when we go back to the history of Bodoland Movement during the end of the twentieth century the political economy which was started as a socio-cultural movement did not emerge out of a single factor but comprised many issues like ethnic identity, language, cultural heritage, socio-economic problems etc. These factors in later years resulted into the demand for a separate State of Bodoland. The emergence of Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) in 1952 is another milestone in the revolution on Bodo language and literature and has since its inception worked for the welfare of the Bodo society. It served as a raised platform for uniting all the young and energetic Bodo writers in developing their language. It is also observed that they have always asserted for the establishment of separate Bodo identity within India.

From the above study we find that Bodo women actively participated in the movement but they were always subordinate to men at every step and process of the movement, more specifically ABWWF, became the most active women organization. At that time the leading members of the organization shifted their focus on women related issues without improving their participation in various decision making forums. There is no doubt the three women organizations like ABWWF, BWJF and BPFWW of BTAD region have played unparalleled role not only in raising the status of women but also in protecting the rights of Bodo women in the society. But

unfortunately, they could not find their place in the decision making process because these organizations were mostly premature in nature and only at a nascent stage. The areas of their interest were largely confined within their own community. Other problems like lack of good leadership quality and networking with other women organization of different states as well as their financial position largely restricted their activities. From the above study, it is also observed that the three women organizations played a significant role in terms of bringing social peace, harmony and serenity in the Bodo society. It is in the larger interest of all that all the Governmental and Non-Governmental organizations should work in sync in order to maintain peace and understanding among themselves and work for the best results of the society. The groups should avoid conflicts of any kind, which will only hamper the development of society. They should work independently to raise voices for heinous crimes like rape cases, sexual harassment and against corrupt practices affecting the lives of common people in the society. The programmes like food security, gender equality etc are hardly discussed. Many new problems like environmental issues have to be solved through combined effort because it is usually the womenfolk that bear the brunt of climate change. Though the movement did not succeed to a large extent, the expectations are very high from the emerging new Bodo women, because they have showcased their worth and quality in every sphere of their life. The day is not so far when Bodo women will achieve their honoured status and plays a vital role for the Bodo community as a whole. We hope these women organizations and women movement will be able to establish a society based on gender equality.

Domain discourses on Bodos emerged from NGOs who are obsessed with the westernised agenda that evokes white men's burden. Silences of the NGOs critic of religion as a handmaiden of such groups as articulated by the Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu is totally missing.

On the other hand their one sided critic of the state is also very unconvincing and this project only has made the Bodos as subjects of a new transitional capital in which they are the junior partners.

It is also very unfortunate that when Bodos managed to secure the Bodoland Territorial Council in 2003, not even a single woman was given any administrative or official position in the higher hierarchy. Male members dominated the whole of administrative work and politics was in the exclusive domain of males. But this time in the 2016 state Assembly elections of Assam, two prominent Bodo women activist contested for the election; unfortunately both of them could not make it through due to a host of factors, who would have been a role model for the younger generation especially among Bodo women in the field of politics. However another promising woman, Pramila Rani Brahma of the BPF (Bodoland Peoples Front) party managed to even get a ministerial berth in the state cabinet, with her earlier experience as a cabinet minister. These trends suggest that male members in the Bodo society are ready to accept women leaders when the opportunity comes, a really impressive thrust for the whole society of India. But even though the political space for women's participation in the Bodo politics has began to set in, the women's participation in decision making bodies remains highly unsatisfactory till date. As rightly said by Mahatma Gandhi that salvation of India cannot be achieved unless women are empowered; which is absolutely true even for the Bodo society. Thus, we can say that to bring social peace and development in the Bodo society, it is imperative that Bodo women also needs to be empowered economically and politically in the current scenario. It is not sufficient just to discuss the problems orally but should find a practical solution or do research studies at the grass root level and prepare the roadmap and run with urgency; the extra miles that we need to go more.

In sum, the thesis will conclude by saying that the situation of the Bodo women is enough flux on account of the large scale changes in economy and polity and also the influence of globalization. It is in this new context that one has to locate the studies and secondly account for the new patriarchal structures in Bodo society. These patriarchal structures are not of the traditional pattern but the modification of the same on account of modernity and temporary forces of globalization in the context of NGO discourse and the electoral politics with forces of militancy and ethnic assertions. The thesis would conclude by positioning that a new hybrid identity of the Bodo women is emerging as a result of the operations of the above mentioned forces. It is the need of the time to understand the context in totality using relevant categories rather than employing outmoded categories and explanations.

## **APPENDIX-I**

### **Memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord) signed in Guwahati, Assam on 20 February 1993)**

**1. Preamble:** (i) Both the Government of India and the Government of Assam have been making earnest efforts to bring about an amicable solution to the problems of the Bodos and other Plains Tribals living in the north bank of river Brahmaputra within Assam. (ii) Towards this end, the Government of India held a series of meetings with the State government as well as with leaders of All Bodo Student's Union (ABSU) and Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC). The State Government has also separately held discussions with the Bodo leaders. As a result, it has been considered necessary to set-up an administrative authority within the State of Assam under a scheme, the details of which are outlined in the succeeding paragraphs.

**2. Objective:** The objective of this scheme is to provide maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution to the Bodos for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement.

**3. (a) Name: Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) :** There shall be formed, by an Act of Assam Legislative Assembly, a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) within the State of Assam comprising contiguous geographical areas between river Sankosh and Mazbat/river Pasnoi. The land records authority of the State will scrutinize the list of villages furnished by ABSU /BP AC having 50% and more of tribal population which shall be included in the BAC. For the purpose of providing a contiguous area, even the villages having less than 50% tribal population shall be included. BAC will also include Reserve Forests as per the guidelines laid by Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, not otherwise required by the Government for manning the international border and tea gardens located completely

within the BAC contiguous area. (b) Powers: The BAC will comprise of a General Council comprising 40 members, 35 elected on the basis of adult suffrage and having a life of five years. The Government will have powers to nominate 5 members to the Council, particularly from groups which could not otherwise be represented. This Council will have powers to make bye-laws, rules and orders for application within the BAC area on the subjects enumerated in Schedule 'A'. (c) The Executive Authority of the BAC would be exercised in its Executive Body to be known as Bodoland Executive Council (BEC). The BEC will be responsible for implementation within the BAC area of the laws on subjects enumerated in Schedule 'A'. (d) The General Council and the BEC will hold office during the pleasure of the Governor of Assam. Consultation with the State Law Department of Government of Assam would be necessary if the Governor proposed to dissolve either the General Council or the BEC before the 2 expiry of its term in accordance with the provisions of law. The executive authority of the BEC will be exercised by the party enjoying a simple majority in the General Council. On completion of elections, the Governor would invite the leader of the majority party to constitute the BEC.

**4. Finances:** (i) (a): The finances for the BAC will be earmarked under a separate subhead within the State budget, in keeping with the guidelines lay down by the Government of India from time to time. The government of Assam would have no powers to divert this earmarked allocation to other heads/areas except in exigencies when there is unavoidable overall Budget cut. (b) The provisions made in 4 (i) (a) regarding allocation of funds should be in line with the spirit of the Constitution (seventy second) and (seventy third) amendment. (ii) The BAC would also receive grant-in-aid from time to time within the principles and policies enunciated by the Government of India. (iii) The General Council will have powers to raise finances from levies/fees/taxes etc., on subjects mentioned in Schedule 'A' subject to Constitutional amendment



mentioned above. (iv) The finances for the BAC will be managed exclusively by its General Council and the statement of its annual audited accounts will be laid on the table of the State Assembly.

**5. Powers of appointments:** The Bodoland Executive Committee would have powers to appoint Class III and Class IV staff within its jurisdiction for implementation of schemes connected with the subjects enumerated in Schedule 'A'.

**6. Reservation of Seats:** The Election Commission of India will be requested by the BAC to consider seat reservation and delimitation of constituencies, both Lok Sabha and State Assembly, within the BAC area to the extent permitted by the Constitution and the law.

**7. Special provisions for the BAC area:** The General Council shall be consulted and its views shall be given due regard before any law made on the following subjects, is implemented in the BAC area: i) the religious or social practice of the Bodos; ii) the Bodo customary laws and procedures; and iii) the ownership and transfer of land within the BAC area.

**8. Special status for the Bodoland Autonomous Council:** The BAC shall, within the laws of the land, take steps to protect the demographic complexion of the areas falling within its jurisdiction.

**9. Special Courts:** 3 Action will be taken in consultation with the Guwahati High Court to set up within BAC area Special Courts as specified below to try suits and cases between parties all of whom belong to Scheduled Tribe or Tribes in accordance with the tribal customary law and procedure, if any.

(a) Village Courts

(b) Subordinate District Customary Law Courts within a civil Sub Divisional Territory, and

(c) District Customary Law Court.

**10. Appointment in the Central Bodies:** The claims of the Bodos shall be considered for appointment to the North Eastern Council.

**11. Official Language:** The General Council can lay down policy with regard to use of Bodo language as medium of official correspondence within the BAC area. However, while corresponding with offices outside the BAC area, correspondence will have to be in bilingual form in accordance with the Article 345 of the Constitution and the provision of law in this behalf.

**12. Changes in Geographical Boundary:** The geographical area of the Bodoland Autonomous Council as agreed upon can be changed with the mutual consent of the BAC and the Government of Assam.

**13. Revision of List of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes:** The scheduling and de-scheduling of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes residing within the Bodo areas will be done as per the Commission appointed by the Government of India under the Constitution.

**14. Trade and Commerce:** The General Council will have powers to regulate trade and commerce within its jurisdiction in accordance with the existing law. For this purpose, it can issue permits and licenses to individuals within the BAC area. The Government of Assam and the Union Government while considering allotment of permits to people residing within the BAC area will give preference to the Bodos.

**15. Employment opportunities:** The BAC will have powers to reserve jobs for Scheduled Tribes within its jurisdiction. However, exercise of such powers shall be in accordance with the existing constitutional and legal provisions.

**16. Civil and Police Services:** (i) The Government of Assam may from time to time post officers of the rank of Class II and above to posts within the BAC in accordance with the

exigencies. While making these postings due regard will be given to, views of BAC about officers being so posted. 4 (ii) The officers posted to the BAC area will be accountable to the BAC for their performance and the assessment of their work recorded by the BEC authorities, will be incorporated to their ACRs by the State Government. (iii) The Central Government, while making recruitments from the State of Assam to the Army, Para- military forces and police units, will hold special recruitment drives within the BAC area.

**17. Appointment of Interim Bodoland Executive Council:** The Government of Assam will take steps for the formation of an Interim Bodoland Executive Council for the BAC from amongst the leaders of the present Bodoland movement who are signatories to this settlement, during the transition period, i.e. prior to the holding of election. Such Interim Council would be formed before a prescribed date mutually agreed between the Central and State Governments.

**18. Relief and Rehabilitation:** (i) ABSU - BPAC leaders will take immediate steps to bring over ground and deposit with the District authorities all arms, ammunition and explosives in the possession of their own supporters and will cooperate with the administration in bringing over ground all Bodo militants along with their arms and ammunition etc. within one month of the formation of the Interim BEC. In order to ensure the smooth return to civil life of the cadre and to assist in the quick restoration of peace and normalcy, such surrenders made voluntarily will not attract prosecution. (ii) The Government of Assam will consider sympathetically the withdrawal of all cases against persons connected with the Bodoland Movement excluding those relating to heinous crimes. (iii) The Government of India will initiate steps for review of action against the Bodo employees of Government of India and subordinate offices as well as in respect of Central Government Undertakings. Similar action would be taken by the Government of

Assam. (iv) The Government of Assam will initiate immediate steps for suitable rehabilitation of the Bodo militants coming over ground as a result of this settlement. Similarly, the Government will organize ex-gratia payments as per rules to next of the kin's killed during the Bodo agitation.

**19. Share in collection of excise duty on tea:** The Government of Assam will deposit in the BAC Fund revenue collected from the tea gardens falling within the BAC area.

**20. Protection of rights of non-tribal's:** The Government of Assam and the BAC will jointly ensure that all rights and interests of the non-tribal's as on date living in BAC area in matters pertaining to land as well as their language are protected.

**21. Ad-hoc Central grant for launching the BAC:** After the signing of this settlement and ad-hoc Budget on reasonable basis will be prepared by Interim BEC and discussed with the State and Central Governments for necessary financial support.

5 Sd/- S.K.Bwiswamutary President, ABSU Sd/ - Rabi Ram Brahma General Secretary, ABSU Sd/ - Subhash Basumatari Chairman, BPAC Sd/- K.S. RAO Add. Chief Secretary to the Government of

## APPENDIX-II

### Memorandum of Settlement on Bodo Territorial Council (BTC), 2003.



*On February 10, 2003, the Assam government, the Union government and the Bodo Liberation Tigers signed the Memorandum of Settlement on Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), in New Delhi. The jurisdiction of the BTC shall extend over 3082 villages and the BTC has been given legislative powers over 40 subjects. The accord provides for an Executive Council comprising of a maximum of 12 Executive Members, including a Chief and a Deputy Chief, with adequate representation to the non-tribal population.*

*Presented below is the full text of the accord:*

**1.** The Government of India and the Government of Assam have been making concerted efforts to fulfil the aspirations of the Bodo people relating to their cultural identity, language, education and economic development. Towards this end, a series of talks were held between Government of India, Government of Assam and Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) since March, 2000. As a result, it is agreed to create a self-governing body for the Bodo Areas in the State of Assam as follows:

**2. Objectives:**

The objectives of the agreement are: to create an Autonomous self governing body to be known as Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) within the State of Assam and to provide constitutional protection under Sixth Schedule to the said Autonomous Body; to fulfill economic, educational and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land-rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos; and speed up the infrastructure development in BTC area.

**3. Area:**

3.1. The area of proposed BTC shall comprise all the 3082 villages and areas to be so notified by the State Government. The above mentioned villages and areas shall be divided into 4 contiguous districts after reorganization of the existing districts of Assam within a period of 6 months of the signing of the agreement on the lines of the proposal given by BLT subject to clearance of the Delimitation Commission.

3.2 A committee comprising one representative each from Governments of India & Assam and BLT will decide by consensus on the inclusion of additional villages and areas in the BTC from out of 95 villages and areas on the basis of the criteria of tribal population being not less than

50%, contiguity or any other agreed relevant criteria within a period of three months of signing of this MoS.

#### **4. Status of Bodoland Territorial Council:**

The provision of the Sixth schedule and other relevant Articles of the Constitution of India will apply to BTC, mutatis mutandis in terms of this agreement. The safeguards/modifications for the non-tribals in BTC area, inter-alia, will include the following:

4.1. Provision of para1 (2) of Sixth Schedule regarding Autonomous Regions will not be applicable to BTC.

4.2. A provision will be made in para 2(1) of the Sixth Schedule for increasing the number of members for BTC up to 46 out of which 30 will be reserved for Scheduled Tribes, 5 for non-tribal communities, 5 open for all communities and 6 to be nominated by Governor of Assam from the unrepresented communities for BTC area of which at least two should be women. Nominated members will have the same rights and privileges as other members, including voting rights. Election from the 40 constituencies of BTC shall be on the basis of adult franchise. The term of the elected members of BTC shall be for 5 years.

4.3. Safeguards for the settlement rights, transfer and inheritance of property etc. of non-tribals will be suitably incorporated in Para 3 of the Sixth Schedule. Any such law as may be made by the BTC in this regard will not, in particular:

(a) Extinguish the rights and privileges enjoyed by an citizen of India in respect of their land at the commencement of BTC, and

(b) Bar any citizen from acquiring land either by way of inheritance, allotment, settlement or by way of transfer if such citizens were eligible for such bonafide acquisition of land within the BTC area.

4.4. Provision will be added in Para 6 of Sixth Schedule that in BTC area, language and medium of instruction in educational institutions will not be changed without approval of the State Government.

4.5. Provision of para 8 of Sixth Schedule regarding power to assess and collect land revenue and impose taxes shall be applicable to BTC.

4.6. Para 10 of the Sixth Schedule will not be applicable to BTC area.

4.7. Provision of Article 332(6) of the Constitution will be so modified that the existing status of representation of BTC area in the State Assembly is kept intact. After the creation of BTC, the Parliamentary & Assembly Constituencies shall be delimited by the Delimitation Commission in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

4.8. In the event, Panchayati Raj system ceases to be in force in the council area, the powers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in such matters shall be vested with the Council.

The Amendments to the Sixth Schedule shall include provisions in such a manner that non-tribals are not disadvantaged in relation to the rights enjoyed by them at the commencement of BTC and their rights and privileges including land rights are fully protected.



## **5. Power and Functions:**

5.1. The Council shall have legislative powers in respect to subjects transferred to it as enumerated below. All laws made under this paragraph shall be submitted forthwith to the Governor and until assented to by him, shall have no effect. The BTC shall have executive, administrative and financial powers in respect of subjects transferred to it.

Subjects to be entrusted to BTC by Assam Government

1. Small, Cottage and Rural Industry;
2. Animal Husbandry & Veterinary;
3. Forest;
4. Agriculture;
5. PWD;
6. Sericulture;
7. Education (Primary Education, Higher Secondary Including vocational training, Adult Education, College Education (General);
8. Cultural Affairs;
9. Soil Conservation;
10. Co-operation;
11. Fisheries;
12. Panchayat and Rural Development;
13. Handloom and Textile;
14. Health & Family Welfare;

15. Public Health Engineering;
16. Irrigation;
17. Social Welfare;
18. Flood Control;
19. Sports & Youth Welfare;
20. Weights and Measures;
21. Library Services;
22. Museum & Archaeology;
23. Urban Development – Town and Country Planning;
24. Tribal Research Institute;
25. Land & Revenue;
26. Publicity/Public Relations;
27. Printing & Stationery;
28. Tourism;
29. Transport;
30. Planning and Development;
31. Municipal Corporation, Improvement Trust, District Boards and other local authorities;
32. Welfare of Plan Tribes and Backward Classes;
33. Markets and fairs;
34. Lotteries, Theatres, Dramatic performance and cinema;
35. Statistics;
36. Food and Civil supply;

37. Intoxicating liquors, opium and derivatives etc.;

38. Labour and employment;

39. Relief and Rehabilitation;

40. Registration of Births and Deaths.

5.2. There shall be an Executive Council comprising of not more than 12 Executive Members, one of whom shall be the Chief and another one the Deputy Chief of the said Executive Council. There shall be adequate representation for the non-tribal members in the Executive Council. The Chief and the Deputy Chief of the Council shall have the status equivalent to the Cabinet Minister and the other Executive Members equivalent to the Minister of the State of Assam for protocol purposes in BTC area.

5.3. The BTC shall have the full control over the officers and staff connected with the delegated subjects working in the BTC area and shall be competent to transfer officers and staff within the BTC area. ACRs of these officers shall also be written by the appropriated BTC authority.

5.4. BTC shall also be competent to make appointments for all posts under its control in accordance with the rules of appointment followed by the Government of Assam. However, the posts, where recruitment is made on the recommendation of APSC, shall not be covered under this provision. The Council may constitute a Selection Board for appointments to be made by it and may also make rules, with the approval of the Governor of Assam to regulate appointments and to ensure adequate representation for all communities living in the Council area.

5.5. No posts shall be created by BTC without concurrence of the Government of Assam and it shall also abide by the decision of the Government of Assam in respect of abolition of/temporarily keeping vacant any post.

5.6. Development functions and bodies within the competence of BTC shall be transferred to BTC. In respect of DRDA, concurrence of Government of India will be obtained.

5.7. The offices of the Dy. Commissioner and Superintendent of Police will be outside the superintendence and control of BTC.

5.8. The State Government would provide an amount, to be decided every year on population ratio basis, as grants-in-aid in two equal installments to the BTC for executing development works. The proportionate share for the BTC shall be calculated on the basis of the plan funds available after setting aside the funds required for earmarked sectors and the salary. This amount may be reduced proportionately if the state plan allocation is reduced or there is plan cut due to resource problem. In addition, the Council will be paid a suitable amount of plan funds and non-plan funds to cover the office expenses and the salaries of the staff working under their control. The BTC shall disburse the salaries of the staff under their control and would ensure strict economy in the matter.

5.9. BTC authority shall prepare a plan with the amounts likely to be available for development works, both under State share and Central share, covering any or all the activities of the departments under their control. The Council shall have full discretion in selecting the activities and choosing the amount for the investment under the same in any year covering all groups of people in a fair and equitable manner. This plan will be a sub set of the State plan and would be treated as its integral part. Once the plan of the State, including BTC plan, gets the approval of the Planning Commission the BTC authority will start execution of their plan in the BTC area. Modifications, if any, made by the Planning Commission in the BTC proposal, shall be binding on the BTC authority. The State Government shall not divert the funds allocated to the BTC to

other heads and also ensure its timely release. BTC may have Planning Department to prepare the plans for BTC area to be submitted to Planning Commission through the Government of Assam.

5.10. The executive functions of the BTC shall be exercised through its Principal Secretary who shall be an officer of the rank not below of Commissioner/Secretary to Government of Assam. The sanctioning powers of the Government of Assam shall be vested with the Principal Secretary of BTC and sanctioning powers of head(s) of the Department(s) including for technical sanction shall be conferred on the senior most officer of that Department preferably not below the rank of Additional Director, who may be designated as Director of BTC for that department. The Principal Secretary and other officers shall exercise their powers under the overall guidance and supervision of BTC.

## **6. Law and Order:**

To strengthen the Police Administration, Government of Assam shall appoint an IGP for 4 districts of BTC and the jurisdiction of the DIG Kokrajhar shall also be modified to cover these 4 districts.

## **7. Revision of list of ST:**

Consequent to the inclusion of BTC area into the Sixth Schedule, the list of ST for the State of Assam shall be so modified so as to ensure that the tribal status of Bodos and other tribals living outside the BTC are does not get affected adversely.

## **8. Grant of ST status of Bodo Kacharis of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills districts:**

The Government of India agrees to consider sympathetically the inclusion of the Bodo Kacharis living in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills Autonomous Council area in the ST (Hill) List of State of Assam.

## **9. Development of Bodo Language:**

9.1. The Government of India agrees to consider favourably the inclusion of Bodo Language in Devnagri Script in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

9.2. Bodo language shall be the official language of BTC subject to the condition that Assamese and English shall also continue to be used for official purpose.

## **10. Additional Development Package for BTC:**

10.1. The State Government, within the limitation of financial and other constraints, may offer or allow the Council to offer, possible and sustainable additional incentives for attracting private investment in the Council area and would also support projects for external funding.

10.2. In order to accelerate the development of the region and to meet the aspirations of the people, the Government of India will provide financial assistance of Rs 100 crores per annum for 5 years for projects to develop the socio-economic infrastructure in BTC areas over and above the normal plan assistance to the State of Assam. The size of the Corpus will be reviewed after a period of 5 years. Suitable mechanism will be built in the system to ensure that the funds are transferred to BTC in time and at regular intervals. An illustrative list of projects which may be considered to be taken up in BTC given below:

**List of projects:**

1. To establish a centre for development and research of Bodo language; 2. Upgradation of existing educational infrastructure by way of renovation/addition of buildings, providing modern facilities for teaching such as computers, science laboratories etc. from primary level to college level in BTC area; 3. A cultural complex to be established at Kokrajhar to promote and develop Bodo tradition and cultural heritage; 4. To establish a super-speciality hospital with all modern facilities at Kokrajhar Government Hospitals shall be established in all district, sub-divisional and block headquarter; 5. To establish sports complexes in all the district headquarters; 6. Food processing plants and cold storage facilities at Kokrajhar, Kajolgaon, Udalguri and Tamulpur; 7. Construction of a bridge over river Aai to connect Koilamoila, Amguri etc. with the rest of the district; 8. To build a Bodoland Bhawan in Delhi; 9. To set up integrated agro-processing park and textile-cum-apparel park; 10. Revitalisation of Kokilabari Agricultural Farm; 11. To develop adequate infrastructure to promote Manas sanctuary as an international tourist spot; 12. To complete Champa, Suklai and Dhansiri irrigation projects; 13. To construct a highway on the Indo-Bhutan border from Jamduar to Bhairabkunda to connect remote places located adjacent to the border; 14. To set up model dairy, fishery, horticulture and poultry farms/training centres at different places in all the 4 districts to encourage youth for self-employment; 15. To enhance the existing facilities in veterinary hospitals in BTC area.

10.3. Government of India will provide necessary one time financial assistance required for development of administrative infrastructure in the newly created district headquarters, sub-divisional headquarters and block headquarters, besides the BTC Secretariat Complex at Kokrajhar.

## **11. Centrally funded University:**

11.1. A centrally funded Central Institute of Technology (CIT) will be set up to impart education in various technological/vocational disciplines such as Information Technology, Bio-Technology, Food Processing, Rural Industries, Business Management, etc.

11.2. The CIT will be subsequently upgraded to a Centrally funded State University with technical and non-technical disciplines to be run by the BTC.

## **12. Relief & Rehabilitation:**

12.1. The BLT would join the national mainstream and shun the path of violence in the interest of peace and development. After the formation of the interim council of BTC, BLT will dissolve itself as an organisation and surrender with arms within a week of swearing-in of the interim council. The State Government would provide full support to relief and rehabilitation of the members of BLT who would surrender with arms in this process in accordance with the existing policy of the State. Financial support in such cases, however shall be limited to be provisions of the scheme prepared and funded by the Government of India. Withdrawal of cases against such persons and those related to overground Bodo movement since 1987 shall be considered according to the existing policy of the State of Assam.

12.2. The Government of India will initiate steps for review of action against the Bodo employees of Government of India and subordinate officers as well as in respect of Central Government Undertakings. Similar action would be taken by the Government of Assam.

12.3. Bodo youth will be considered for recruitment in Police, Army and Paramilitary forces to



increase their representation in these forces.

### **13. Special Rehabilitation Programme for the people affected by ethnic disturbances:**

The Special Rehabilitation Programme (SRP) for the people affected by ethnic disturbances in Assam, who are at present living at relief camps in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon etc. shall be completed by the Government of Assam with active support of BTC. Necessary funds for their rehabilitation shall be provided by the Government of India and lands which are free from all encumbrances required for such rehabilitation shall be made available by the BTC.

### **14. Interim Council:**

Immediately after signing of the agreement, Interim Executive Council for BTC shall be formed by Governor of Assam from amongst the leaders of the present Bodo movement, including the signatories to this settlement, and shall include adequate representation to the non-tribal communities in BTC area. The Interim Council shall not continue for a period beyond 6 months during which period election to the Council shall be held. Government of Assam shall dissolve the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) and repeal the BAC Act.

15. Government of Assam will consider inclusion of all tribals including Bodos in RHAC/MAC/LAC in consultation with leaders of these Councils.

16. The Implementation of the provision of the Memorandum of Settlement shall be periodically reviewed by a Committee comprising representatives of Government of India, Government of Assam and BTC.

Signed on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2003 at New Delhi in the presence of Shri L.K. Advani, Hon'ble

Deputy Prime Minister of India and Shri Tarum Gogoi, Chief Minister of Assam.

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