CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Topic of Research, Review of Literature, Objectives, Methodology have been presented in this chapter
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TOPIC OF RESEARCH

According to Smith (1986), "The means of production together with the social relations of production constitute the mode of production and in its turn determine the nature of total socio-economic formation". In general sense, the family life, kinship, marriage, religion and inheritance of property etc. reflect the social norms of life of a community. In existence of a society the economic life is another main criteria. The economic life is the part and parcel of social life of a community. In fact, the economic life of a population can be studied through the occupational pattern, production and the distribution system in particular.

The socio-economic life of Boros, the dominant tribal group of North East India and Assam in particular has a great significance to be explored. It has been observed that agriculture is the primary source of economic life
of the Boros. The people are still following the traditional *dong* (canal) system to irrigate the agricultural field. According to Endle (1997), "Moreover, the people are especially skilful in the construction of irrigation canals and earthwork embankments for diverting water from river-beds into their rice-fields: and their efforts in this direction are very largely aided by their closely clannish organization. Whenever the rainfall threatens to be below the average, the village headman with his associated elders fixes on the spot whence water is to bring from the nearest river to the rice fields. *At this* spot very rude and primitive shelters of jungle grass, etc. are put up: and here all the manhood strength of the village, each man armed with hoe, dao etc. are compelled to take up their abode 'until the necessary work has been fully carried out.' Significantly, the *Ashu* and *Sali* varieties of paddy are the two major seasonal produce by the Boros.

In every phase of agricultural practices the Boros offer puja to Goddess *Mainao* and observed a number of rites and rituals namely-*Bwisagw, Khwthia farinai, Amthi, Khwthia funai, Gossa lanai, Ashu Noan janai and Magw*. The main household god is the *Bathou*. Goddess *Mainao* is the second god of the people. Endle (1997) said, "Only second to *Bathou* is
his good consort Mainao, though unlike her husband, she has no special emblem visible to the human eye. Her special functions is that of ‘Guardian of the rice-fields’ and among a purely agricultural community like that of the Kacharis, she of course is held in very high regard.”

The peoples offer puja to goddess Mainao, in the sowing of paddy, on the day of first uprooting of the seedlings, on the day of first plantation, on first harvesting and post harvesting rite.

For the present study, three sample villages have been selected namely Belguri, Ghiwnala and Murmela village of Darrang District, which falls under the jurisdiction of newly formed (10th Feb 2003) Udalguri District, Bodland Territorial Area District, Assam. Recently, in 10th February 2003 after bifurcation of old Darrang District of Assam a new district has been emerged with the nomenclature of Udalguri District of BTAD. The total population of Darrang District is 1503943, the males are 51.46% of total population and females are 48.54% of total population (Table No.1). Now the total population of newly formed Udalguri District is 818222, where the males are 51.22% of total population and females are 48.78% of total population (Table No.1).
In this context, the present study has been made to know the present day socio-economic life of the Boro people living in three selected villages of Tangla area, Udalguri district, BTAD, namely Belguri, Ghiwnala, Murmela. These villages are mainly inhabited homogenously by Boro people and somewhat isolated from other communities. Their economy is based on age-old agricultural practices. Almost all the households in the sample villages possess their own landed property in these villages and they have been living there for several generations. In every stage of agricultural operations these people have followed the rites and rituals throughout the year. Therefore these villages represent permanent settlement pattern of the traditional Boro people with perennial agricultural setting and therefore make an ideal setting for the research work of the Boros of Tangla area of Udalguri District, BTAD, Assam.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present work has been an attempt to study the social and economic life of the Boros in three villages of Tangla area Udalguri District BTAD, Assam. This study was undertaken with two objectives -
(1) To study the dependence of the Boros on agriculture in Tangla area Udalguri District, BTAD, Assam and

(2) To study the socio-economic life of the Boro is highly influenced by religious beliefs and practices.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are a number of published and unpublished research works on the social and economic life of the people. The following are the some of the works on social and economic life.

According to Endle (1911), there were two great migrations of the Boro-Kacharis. One wave came from north and entered western Assam through the valley of Tista, Sonkosh and founded their kingdom in the area. The other migration was from the northeast through Subansiri, Dibong and Dihing valley of the present day Arunachal Pradesh. The author has traced out the detail study on social and economic life of the Boro. He mentioned that the indigenous devices for preserving seeds and digging dongs and canals of the Boros are noticeable. The Boro are the first introducer of the digging dongs to irrigate in the paddy field.
Gait (1926) mentioned, “…. Having regard to their wide distribution and to the extent of country over which Bodo languages of a very uniform type are still current, it seems not improbable that at one time the major part of Assam and northeast Bengal formed a great Bodo kingdom, and that some, at least of the Mech kings mentioned in the old copper-plate inscriptions belonged to the Kachari or some closely allied tribe....”

Nag (1958) describes important aspects of the social and economic life of the Baigas of Madhya Pradesh in the districts of Mandila, Bilaspur, Balaghat, Drug and Jabalpur.

In the book ‘Early History of Kamrupa’, Baruah (1966) states that, after the arrival of the Indian soil, hordes of later Mongolian poured through the northeast corner. The Kacharis, Kochs, Rabhas, Mechis, Mikirs, Lalungs, Garos, Nagas, Kukis and the Chutiyas are the present day representatives of these Mongolians or the Indo-Mongoloid and the tribe speaking Bodo (Boro) languages seem to have occupied the plains of Assam for a long time. They were described to be the Kiratas in the Mahabharata and other Hindu scriptures like Kalika Puran and Yoginitantra.
Grierson (1967) in his book *The Linguistic survey of India* describes the Bodos or the Bodo-Kacharis as a member of the Bodo sub-section under the Assam-Burma group of Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family.

Chatterjee (1974) calls the Boros are Indo-Mongoloid in his book *Kirata Jana Kirti*.

Ali (1974) in a project, *A study on the Myong Electric lift irrigation project in Nowgong district of Assam* mentioned, “the farmers could undertake a full scale rice cultivation with the help of irrigation in the Ahu season. The irrigation had induced replacement of some of the minor *rabi* crops by the *Ahu* rice crop. The area was chronologically flood affected and the *Sali* rice crop suffered from flood damages. With irrigation the farmers could grow rice in the flood free season.”

Saikia and Bora (1975) describes that small farmers had taken to early *Ahu rice cultivation* with lift irrigation and improved their economic condition.
Kar (1981) has studied the effects of Tea Industry on the Tribal life, that is the economic life of the Savaras of Mancotta.

Sharma (1983) states that, whatever may be the origin of the Boro, it is widely accepted that they brought into northeast India the technique of food production by plant cultivation and domestication of animals. They are considered as the first rice cultivators and the first introducer of the art of rearing silkworm as well as spinning and weaving of silk cloth.

According to Bordoloi, Sharma Thakur and Saikia (1987), “The Boro Kacharis of Assam is a branch of the Great Bodo Group of the Indo Mongoloid family falling within the Assam Burmese Linguistic section. Their identity is not uniform as an ethnic group. In Bengal and in lower ranges of the Himalayas coming within the territory of Nepal, they are known as Mechès. In upper Assam they are identified as Sonowal and Thengal Kacharis, while in the western Assam they are more popularly known as Boro Kacharis. In the Southern districts of North Cachar and Cachar they are designated as Dimasha and Barmans respectively.”
Narzi (1966) has studied the socio-cultural life of the Boros and has vividly described their total life style. The author has also discussed about the fairs and festivals in their various stages of life.

The study of Bora (1976) describes various aspects of land utilization in Assam.

Phukan (1990) in his book *Agricultural Development in Assam* describes the agricultural development in Assam since 1950 to 1985. The author mentioned that the type of soil, climate, rainfall and host of other natural factors determine the nature and extent of crop production. Further the author mention about the land resource and land use pattern of Assam.

Bordoloi (1991) traced out that the livelihood pattern of the Boros is characterized by preponderance of agricultural occupation. In fact it is a way of life. They practice both *Ashu* and *Sali* paddy and very much prone to the adoption of improved techniques in production process. Their indigenous devices for preserving seeds and digging *dongs* are widely acclaimed.
Brahma Chaudhury (1993) wrote that land is one of the most important factors of production in agrarian economy. Next comes labor. There is potential labor force in Boro social system. In this respect co-operation plays a major role. In Boro society each family has to subscribe labour on particular dates selected by the village community for constructing or repairing their irrigation canals for flowing water to paddy fields. Here they also apply their experience on waterbed for lifting water to the paddy fields.

Roy (1995) has discussed about the political situations of the Boro from the beginning of the Boro revolution. He recorded the union and reunion of the political group to submit their right to the Government.

Boro (1995) has recorded the religious practices of the Boro. The author has systematically discussed the way of beliefs and practices of the Boro. The author has recorded the prayers along with the way of performing of the *puja*.

Brahma (1995), has been described the social and religious beliefs and practices among the Boro. The author has discussed total way of life and
beliefs and practices in their every phases of life, and also recorded the beliefs and practices related to the agricultural practices of the Boro.

Devi (1998) in her book Social and Religious Institutions of Bodos describe, “Bathou is the most important God. He is never represented in idol form, but is well in evidence through his living symbol, the siju plant (Euphorbia splendens), which is often to be seen in the Kachari homestead surrounded by a circular fence of split bamboo. In this book author further mentioned that the second important deity is the Mainao and the Mainao is the “Guardian of the rice fields” or “the protectress of the paddy fields”.

A jointly written paper by Boro and Kakati (2002) Role of Deodhoni in Marai puja among the Boro has shown that the Marai puja is performed by the Boros for the well being of the household and the whole community.

Brahma (2003) has explained in his book Religion and Dances of the Bodos (II ed) that the way of daily social life of the Boros is reflected in
Raijw Janai dance. The author reflects the division of labour in the social life as well as in economic activities through this traditional dance form.

A book jointly written by Kakati and Boro (2006) Textile designs of the Boros also systematically describes their various designs on cloths. The designs reflect their social and cultural life.

JUSTIFICATION

There are a number of studies on socio-economic life of the Boros, published by various authors, but no researcher has taken up the socio-economic life of the Boros of Tangla area of Udalguri District. This area has certain unique features of their own, therefore this researcher intends to do research and find out the special features and uniqueness of the Boro community. As this researcher is a member of the same community, which is undertaken for study, it will give a deeper insight to the subject. The social life of the Boro people and particularly their economic activities are surrounded by various religious beliefs and practices. There are many important aspects of their community life of the Boros. Throughout the year these people are busy with their agricultural activities as well as rituals connected with agriculture. All other activities of their
family life, social life, village community life, their participation in construction and maintenance of the dong system, religious activities etc. reflect the communal life of the Boro people. The researcher, as a member of this community has tried to give a true picture of the area. This type of study is valuable for the different workers and investigators, planners for future developmental work. This researcher considers various important questions and their practical solutions and such a study will enrich our knowledge and help in better understanding of the problems of these people. As the researcher intends to study the socio-economic life of the Boros, the present study will cover the socio-economic life of the community as found in the present time. It will be also useful in future for other researchers and developmental workers, planners etc. to do further research and for doing developmental works for this community as a whole.

**METHODOLOGY**

The present study is the outcome of fieldwork, done in three Boro villages namely: Belguri, Ghiwnala and Murmela inhabited by Boro peoples only.
As far as present study is concerned data have been collected by intensive ethnographic study of three Boro villages. In Tangla area there are about fifty-three villages as per investigation of All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) office Tangla in 2001, which have a substantial Boro population. Some of these villages are inhabited by Boros only. For the purpose of present study, the need was to select typical Boro villages. The selection of the village was, however, not at random. Certain factors were taken into account before the fieldwork. The first principle was to choose a village, which should be ethnically homogeneous; the village lived by the Boro people only. The next criterion for the study was that the villagers still practicing the age-old social and cultural norms in their day-to-day life.

Keeping in view the above mentioned two important criteria the present investigator selected three Boro villages namely Belguri with 63 households and population 363, Ghiwnala with 65 households and 417 population and Murmela 122 households and 739 population as on 2001. These three village falls under Udalguri District, BTAD, Assam. Data on socio-cultural and economic aspects of life of the Boro have been gathered from these villages, and for this purpose the present investigator
visited each household of the three villages, i.e., Belguri, Ghiwnala and Murmela.

The data primarily based on field data collected from three study villages by the researcher. Secondary sources like census reports, statistical handbook, information and logic available in literature have also been used in relevant places.

**METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

In order to produce and analyze the problem of the study in true perspective as many as five methods have been used in data collection. These are-

1. Survey schedule method
2. Observation method – both non-participant and participant
3. Interview method
4. Case study method
5. Genealogical method
Survey schedule method was used to collect basic data of household in three villages. Informations regarding agriculture and the rites and rituals connected to the agriculture were collected through observations (direct and participant) method, interview method and case study methods.

The researcher then drew genealogical tables because genealogical knowledge plays an important role among people who can often trace back several generations and identifies a large number of collaterals by names. Through this method, the present investigator could gather information about their marital relationships, kinship system, kinship terminology as well as their ancestors and descendents.

FIELD WORK

The author initiated fieldwork for detailed investigation in the year 2001. Extensive fieldwork was carried out during the year 2002 and 2003. For the observation on various agricultural operations as well as the fairs and festivals observed through the year of agriculture cycle short-term fieldwork was also carried out in the year 2004 and 2005.
DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected both from secondary and primary sources have been analysed and presented by using simple statistical techniques like frequencies and percentages. Genealogical tables, maps and photographs have been used for presenting reality in simplified form.