CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Education has a special role to play. It is not only a basic input for economic development, but it also provides inner strength to the community to face new situations in terms of equality. It is widely recognised that the spread of education,—formal, informal or non-formal, plays a vital role in the socio-economic and cultural modernisation of the country in general, and social mobility of the weaker sections in particular. All will agree that equalisation of educational opportunities would pave the way for all spheres of life. Therefore, since independence, it has become the national endeavour to spread education among the masses. Education not only imparts skills such as general literacy and specific vocational skills, but it also makes different groups of people and individuals to identify with various cultural, social and political symbols.

The importance of general education in terms of literacy is recognised irrespective of the type of society and its socio-economic and
political basis. The problem, however, arises as to the type of special, vocational and other skills that need to be developed in a given community. Obviously, the level and type of such skills depend on the level of development of society. The tribal communities which remained deprived and ignorant for a long time, require not only general literacy but also other skills which equip them to face courageously the challenges of life, and experience the exogenous forces of modernisation. W.V. Grigson, who had first-hand experience of the problem of the tribals, pleads for the need of a kind of education to be introduced among the tribals which would restore confidence in them. To put in his own words, "We have to restore and foster the aboriginal's self-respect by protecting him from loss of land, bond service, debt and oppression, to shield him from malaria, yaws and other sickness, to teach him agriculture and an economic organisation suited to his habitat and mentality and to educate him not merely to retain and value his own tribal culture but also to take and hold his due place in the economic, political and cultural life of modern India."

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In pursuance of the directives of the Constitution of India and the special provisions made therein for the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes, the Government of India has been implementing special programmes for the socio-economic development of the scheduled tribes. The broad objectives of these programmes have been to develop these traditional tribes in the path of modernity so as to enable them to secure for themselves an equitable and rightful place in the national system. Along with the educational programmes, the Government of India has also been pursuing a policy of slow modernisation of the tribal people which implies literacy, urbanisation, high participation in the national activities.

The importance of education for the upliftment of a community or of a country can not be overemphasized. A country can not march forward to prosperity unless all sections of her people are equally advanced in the field of education. Therefore, in the interest of all-round national development, it is essential that the backward communities such as the Bodo-Kachari tribe should receive special attention in the matter of education. Article 46 of our Constitution provides that the State shall promote
with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

The Bodo-Kacharis as one of the traditional tribes of Assam, who form a clear majority (6,10,459 persons according to 1971 Census) among different tribes of Assam, need special attention for education. It is a matter of great regret that being the original inhabitants of Assam, they remained educationally backward for ages. According to 1971 Census, the number of total Bodo-Kachari literate and educated persons throughout the State of Assam is 1,25,177, and the percentage of literacy among them is 20.51 only.

I became familiar with some Bodo-Kachari people at Mangaldai from my childhood, who used to come to my father as client on legal matters. Sometimes, I listened very attentively to their conversation with my father. They also talked to me in broken Assamese. Being curious, I asked my father about them. My father, who was a practising lawyer at Mangaldai, gave a nice description about the Bodo-Kachari people. And gradually, my curiosity to know
more and more about them increased. I took up my research subject as "Educational Development of the Bodo-Kacharis in the Mangaldai Sub-Division" which has been subsequently modified into "A Study of the Educational Development of the Bodo Tribe During the Post Independence Period with Particular Reference to the Northern Region of Assam." I have studied and collected data regarding educational development and backwardness of the Bodo-Kacharis of the entire northern bank of the Brahmaputra Valley. Moreover, I have concentrated on the study of the educational development of the Bodo-Kacharis in the Mangaldai Sub-Division. In other words, my study covers the development of education and socio-economic conditions of the Bodo-Kacharis generally, but it concentrates on the aforesaid aspects of the Bodo-Kacharis living in the northern side of the Mangaldai Sub-Division in the District of Darrang in as much as they are considered most underdeveloped and backward in this respect.

The Bodo-Kacharis are the major section of the plain tribes of Assam. Their way of living and culture are quite different from that of the other tribes of the State. In spite of having distinct literature, language, and culture of their own, it is
noticed that there has not been much impact of the modern age on the education and socio-economic conditions of the tribe. They are still backward in the field of education. It has been found that before independence, literacy among the Bodo-Kacharis was extremely poor. Being the ruling tribe at one time, the Bodo-Kacharis remained known to the mass as the backward tribe in the society. They are still living in all sorts of backwardness. After independence, their progress in the field of education is not satisfactory though the Government has extended all possible help and assistance for their development. The tribal development programmes have been modified and carried out in various phases and forms. The Bodo language has been introduced as the medium of instruction up to the Secondary School level, and special educational facilities have been provided in the form of establishment of Primary and High Schools, free boarding and lodging facilities, scholarships, free studentships, free supply of books and writing materials, etc. It has been realised that education alone can not achieve the social and economic rehabilitation of this tribe unless they are prepared and trained for various jobs in various departments connected with the reconstruction of tribal areas.
I have made extensive tour in different places of the northern bank of the Brahmaputra valley where there is heavy concentration of Bodo-Kachari population. I got myself acquainted with the modes of living, habits, customs, manners, etc., of the people of this tribe during my visits to those places. I also interviewed some prominent Bodo-Kachari persons to know their attitude towards education. In the villages, the Bodo-Kacharis are maintaining a primitive way of living. They are even not aware of the progressive methods of living. They keep themselves busy in cultivation and domestic work in day time. In the evening, the grown-ups are busy in amusement and village merrymaking, and indulge in drinking rice beer (zo), a favourite drink for them made at home, after the day's work. They are so simple by nature that they do not understand nor do they realise the need and importance of education for their children. The causes for such backwardness are more or less the same throughout the northern region of Assam.

I have planned to analyse the causal factors relating to the spread of education and also to study the consequences of the various attempts to spread education among the Bodo-Kacharis. Field-work and survey techniques were used for collection of data.
The primary data were collected from the head of the Bodo family in the selected villages and towns, from the Bodo students, teachers working in the schools in the tribal areas with the help of interviews, questionnaire and case study methods. Secondary data were collected from various official agencies, reports, etc.

The thesis contains nine Chapters. The first Chapter opens with the Introduction. The Chapter II deals with the methodology which I followed in studying the problem.

In Chapter III, I have tried to give an account of the historical background, origin and spread of the Bodo-Kachari people.

Chapter IV is devoted to the socio-cultural and domestic life of the Bodo-Kacharis which influenced their educational development. Some photographs depicting their socio-cultural and domestic life have also been given.

Chapter V is devoted to the educational development of the Bodo-Kacharis in Assam before the independence.
Chapter VI deals with the educational development of the Bodo-Kacharis after independence. In this Chapter, I have discussed about the educational development of the northern region of the Brahmaputra valley comprising Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Lakhimpur Districts, Constitutional safeguards, financial assistance during the Plan periods.

Chapter VII attempts at a special study in the educational facilities and differential growth of literacy among the Bodo-Kacharis in the Mangaldai Sub-division. In this Chapter, the main problems of backwardness in the field of education in this Sub-division are discussed.

Chapter VIII deals with the Bodo language and its implementation as medium of instruction in the Schools.

Chapter IX concludes with the summary of my findings and remedial measures suggested for the development of education among the Bodo-Kacharis.