Chapter 2

About the Bodos – an introduction of the people and their society

2.1 Origin

The Bodos or the Bodo-Kacharis are the most distinctive section of the different ethnic groups settling in the North Eastern part of India particularly in the Brahmaputra valley. Rev. Sidney Endle first used the terminology ‘kachari’ in his ethnographic account on the Bodos (Endle, 1991) and later i.e. after independence they have been identified as a ‘Scheduled Tribe’ by the new constitution of India. Scholars like Grierson used the term ‘Bodo’ and ‘kachari’ to refer to this ethnic group in Assam. Grierson in 1903 identified the origin of the Bodos from the Indo-Mongolid stock belonging to the Tibeto-Burman Language family. Racially they belong to the Mongolid stock of the Indo-Mongoloids or Indo-Tibetans. According to S.K. Chatterjee, ...the Bodos, who spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal, forming a solid block in North Eastern India, were the most important Indo-Mongolid people in Eastern India, and they form one of the main bases of the present day population of these tracts. The term Indo-Mongolid, according to Chatterjee, is significant as it indicates their Indian connection in terms of cultural and racial affinity. Another scholar Matthias Hermanns used the term Indo-Tibetans to denote the Mongolid people in Northern and North Eastern India (Hermanns, 1964). According to him, “...the Mongolid features are very prominent: the strong check bones, slit eyes, a slight growth of hair on the body and scanty beard. They are shorter and more stocky than the Indians of the northeast”. This Indo-Mongolid
group had close cultural assimilation with the Negritos, the Austro-Asiatic, the Nordic and Mediterranean races of India due to their close contact as established by history of civilization. But in spite of these the Bodos have maintained a distinctive identity. To Sidney Endle ‘this ethnic group called ‘kachari’ has their racial features resembled with the Mongoloids’. According to him “the ‘kacharis’ or the ‘Bodos’ have square set faces, projecting cheek-bones, almond shaped eyes and scanty beard and moustache”. Endle further says, ” In mental and intellectual power they are undoubtedly far below their Hindu neighbours; for they possess neither the quickness of apprehension, nor the astonishing power of memory etc. characteristic of the higher castes among the Hindus” (Endle, 1991).

But historically it is established that the Bodo-Kacharis in different time have been able to capture royal power. P.C. Bhattacharya has rightly observed that the Boro people including their eastern and western branch had royal glories as we gather from the records of history. The western section of the old Boros (Kacharis) occupied the thrones of Koch-Behar, Bijni, Darrang and Beltola. An eastern branch in the name of Chutiya also established a powerful kingdom with its capital near Sadiya.... And then section of the eastern Boros maintained their kingdom with capitals at Dimapur, Maibong and Khaspur against the continuous invasion of Ahoms and neighboring powers up to the advent of British rule in Assam. This section of the Boros is known to us as Dimasa or Dimasa Kachari (Hills Kachari). Kirata ruler ruled over Northwest and Northeastern India as mentioned in the Mahabharata (Bhattacharya, 1996) S.K. Chatterjee writes that ‘according to the Mahabharata, the Kiratas were the rulers in the Himalayan region, particularly in the Eastern Himalayas’ (Chatterjee, 1976)
There are controversies about the origin of the word ‘Kirata’ but the most acceptable one as put by S.K. Chatterjee is “Bhotas or the Tibetans or other Mongoloid peoples” (Chatterjee, 1976). But it must be the term ‘Kirata’ that indicates the non-Aryan tribes living in the mountains, particularly the Himalayas and in the Northeastern areas of India who were Mongoloid in origin. They were connected with the ‘Cinas’ or the Chinese, they admitted that the Boros neither call themselves as ‘Kiratas’ nor Kacharis. Probably, the higher castes and the Aryan speakers considering them inferior to themselves used these terms. The Boros prefer to call themselves as Boro or the Bodo or Borofisa. The term Boro indicates a race or a speech community speaking the Sino-Tibetan Boro language.

Here is another disagreement about the term Boro and Bodo. R.M. Nath (Nath, 1978) is of the opinion that the community members came from the ‘Bad’ country or Tibet in Central Asia and hence the use of nomenclature ‘Bodo’ is appropriate. But scholars like R.N. Musahary (1986) and B. Daimary (1984) are of the view that some European scholars due to some unknown reasons or lack of adequate information used the term ‘Bodo’ in stead of ‘Boro’. Grieson, (1903) on the other hand, used the word ‘Bara’ or ‘Boro’ and he even criticized Brian Hodgson for using the word ‘Bodo’. The Linguistic Survey of India however makes it clear that the term Bodo is applied in the sense of a generic name. Thus the use of the term ‘Bodo’ is justified as it is used in the generic sense to the Sino-Tibetan languages. In the words of authors like K. Brahma the ‘Bodos’ are a race of Mongolian people who are believed to be the native of a country north of the Himalayas and west of China (Brahma, 1992). This land is known as ‘Bod’, which means homeland. But this connotation of the term Bod and Boro or Bodo is only a matter of speculation. Again S.K.
Chatterjee used the term ‘Kirata’ to refer to this community (Chatterjee, 1976). Bhaben Narzi, the eminent Bodo scholar preferred to use the term ‘Boro’ in all his writings. (Narzi, 1985). R.N.Mosahary justifies his view on the basis of the ‘Boro’ saying Viz. “Boro hary geder hary” which means “Boro people great people” (Mosahary, 1993). In the later period the term ‘Boro’ was in use in the publications of Boro literature like Bibar (1924-25), Jenthaka (1925) and Olumber (1935). Kanakeswar Narzary justified the use of the term ‘Bodo’ that this will be a common word for the Bodo speaking fraction as well as Assamese and Bengali speaking fraction of the Bodos towards making it a master race in near future (Narzary, 1993). However, the establishment of Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1952 and All Bodo Students Union in 1967 clearly brought the use of ‘Bodo’ as a popular term.

About the origin of the Bodos, the scholars and researchers have made their best possible efforts to locate the point of origin of this ethnic group. According to Sidney Endle the origin of the Kachari race is still very largely a matter of conjecture and inference, in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history (Endle, 1991). He arrived at the conclusion on the basis of their general appearance and features when he opined that the Boros approximate very closely to the Mongolian type and this would seem to point to Tibet and China as the original home of the race. S.K. Chatterjee writes: “The area of characterization for the primitive Sino Tibetan speech appears to have been North Western China between the head waters of the Huang Ho and the Yang tsze kiang river. From this origin, like other Tibeto-Burman groups, the Boros may have opted for the route to the Northern or the North Eastern part of India” (Chatterjee, 1976). He further writes that “North Western China is the original homeland of the Mongoloid tribes and as such the
Boros are from North Western China between the headwaters of Hoang Ho and the Yangtsze Kiang. Once they settled, they became known as Kiratas which include the Himalayan tribes, the Bodos, Nagas, Kuki-Chins, the Ahoms, the Indian Tibetans, the Khasis and the earlier tribes in the Tibeto Burman branch. The Boros, the most significant group of the Indo-Mongoloid people settled in the North and North Eastern India and spread over the entire Brahmaputra valley, North Bengal and parts of East Bengal. Judging from the wide range of extension of their language, the Bodos appear first to have settled over the entire Brahmaputra valley and extended west into West Bengal (in Kochbehar, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts) they may have pushed into North Bihar also" (Chatterjee, 1976). So far the Bodos in the Brahmaputra valley are concerned, their settlement is in some scattered pockets in almost all the districts of the valley. The concentration of Bodo population in the Brahmaputra valley is however not in the same scale in all the areas and their population concentration is normally found high in the foothills of the Bhutan range. At present Bodos are found in the following areas in Assam with variations of population concentration.

North and Eastern parts of Dhubri district, the whole of Kokrajhar district and parts of Goalpara and Bongaigaon district, Northern parts of Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup district, Northern parts of Darrang and Sonitpur district, Northern parts of Lakhimpur district and parts of Dhemaji district, Dudhnoi and Dhupdhara areas in the Goalpara district, Boko-Chaygaon and Rani areas and South Guwahati, Sonapur, Khetri areas in the Southern part of Kamrup district, Jagiroad Morigaon areas in Morigaon district and Rupahi Dhing areas in Nagaon district, Southern most parts of Sibsagar district, Howraghat-Langhin areas of Karbi Anglong district and North Eastern part of Dibrugarh district.
The present Bodo population in the state is 52,49,937. (Approx. figure as prepared by ABSU HQ, Kokrajhar). As the present work has a link with the 'Bodoland Movement' which ultimately resulted in the creation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), a separate homeland for the Bodos within the state of Assam in the design of District Council (under 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India), the population figure pertaining to the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) has been given below. As per Bodoland Territory Council (BTC) secretariat source, total Bodo population in the BTAD is as under:

Table 2.1 District wise population within the BTAD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Districts</th>
<th>District Headquarter</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kokrajhar</td>
<td>Kokrajhar</td>
<td>5,28,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chirang</td>
<td>Kajalgaon</td>
<td>1,69,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bagsa</td>
<td>Masalpur</td>
<td>3,38,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udalguri</td>
<td>Udalguri</td>
<td>3,17,412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Population</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>13,54,627</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: BTC Secretariat, Kokrajhar*

Traditionally, in earlier times Bodo settlements were scattered villages not very adjacent to the non-Bodo settlement so that they could maintain their natural ethnic life style. Of course, now the situation has changed where Bodo and non-Bodo settlement are very closely located. The British administrators referred the Bodos as tribe and in post independence period the Central Government has identified them as Scheduled Tribe. The Bodos are divided into a number of social 'sub-groups' or clans like Swargiary, Borgoyary,
Mosahary, Narzary, Khakhlory, and Basumatary etc. According to Taren Boro, it is believed that the clans were created in a convention to save the customs and belief of the Bodos (Boro, 1992).

2.2 The traditional life style

The Bodos have the tradition of patriarchy where male head of the family is the owner of all movable and immovable property of the family. But female members are never kept under excessive male domination. To Endle, “.........The Kachari husband usually treats his wife with distinct respect and regards to her as an equal and a companion to an extent which can hardly be said to be the rule among many of the Indian people. Kachari women, both in early life and as matrons, enjoy a large measure of freedom” (Endle, 1991). In their family life they follow certain traditions regarding house building and maintaining homestead. About the family farming, poultry, piggery, cows and goats are most common. Of course, the Brahma sect does not rear pig. An altar of ‘Bathou’ with a ‘Siju’ (Euphorbia splendens) plant in the eastern side of the courtyard is found in every household. Bodos are the worshipers of Bathou as specific religious tradition but with the passing of time a reasonable section of the Bodos has been converted to either Christianity or other sect of Hindu religion. Again, under the influence of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, a fraction of the Bodo society has adopted the Brahma Dharma as their way of life. The Brahmans are comparatively a socially refined group of people. They do not use pork or rice beer even for religious purposes. They are also socio-educationally advanced. Of course, Bodos
converted to Christianity has also attained advancement in terms of socio-cultural and educational life in the society.

The Bodos have a rich cultural heritage. Scholars of cultural history are of the view that Indo Mongoloid Bodo culture has a big influence on the Aryan culture (Bhuyan, 1951). These cultural traits are related with house building, worshiping, celebration of different seasonal festivals, weaving activities, food habit, birth & death rituals, celebration of marriage system, fishing practice and agriculture and its allied activities and even marry-making in ordinary day to day life. Of course, some of the cultural traits appear to have been either extinct or changed with the changing time. Musanlangnai, Bagarumba, Kherai etc. are some of the very popular dance trait of the Bodos. Weaving is also a greater part of Bodo culture. They are fond of bright colors. In earlier times the women used to produce their entire family requirement using the looms at home. The Bodos prefer non-vegetarian food. Rice is their principal food. They have the habit of drinking rice-beer. In all religious and social celebration rice-beer is offered with due respect. Apart from the male, the Bodo women also go for group fishing.

In a traditional Bodo family agriculture and allied farming are the main economic activities where man and woman are equally associated. There is no distinct division of labor in a Bodo family. But ownership of the family property always rests with the senior most male member of the family. Generally, they have a lower literacy rate.
2.3 The women in a traditional Bodo family

The status of Bodo women is in some ways better than that of other women. Sidney Endle writes," The Kachari husband usually treats his wife with distinct respect and regards her as an equal and a companion to an extent which can hardly be said to be the rule among many of the Indian people"(Endle,1991). Bodo women work shoulder to shoulder with men and have a higher status in the family than many caste Hindu women do. Violence and oppression against women in a traditional Bodo family is hardly seen. In their traditional agro based family economy all the members carry out their assigned job and share the productions. Traditionally the Bodos, as a tribal community, prefer to remains aloof from the non-Bodos, maintaining their own ethnic cultural identity. Of course, now they are also residing in close vicinity with the non-tribal settlement, as because the land becomes scare or the increasing socio-economic interdependence in the society comprising of people from different communities etc. The Bodos are traditionally patriarchal and patrilineal. The women are very active and hardworking. Apart from their normal household works, they are actively involved in the agricultural activities of the family. They are expert weaver and use to produce all most all the clothes required for family use. Fishing is another important activity of the Bodo women. Traditionally, a Bodo girl becomes a helping hand of her mother by the age of 9-10 years in domestic activities like cooking, weaving, and poultry farming and particularly in looking after the younger ones. Even they are engaged in agricultural activities of the family. The Bodo women go to the local hats (market) to sell their family products and purchase items of family necessity out of the proceeds. Women’s
education level in the traditional Bodo society is very low. Inheritance of property by women in the Bodo society is not seen, as law of inheritance of property is patrilineal.

In the religious life of the community, the women have specific role. While celebrating various religious festivals for the well-being and prosperity of community life, many god and goddesses are worshipped. They believe in five traditional gods, Viz. Atlong (god of earth), Agrang (god of water), Khoila (god of air), Sanjaborle (god of fire or light), and Rajkumbre (god of sky) (Devi, 2004). According to R.N. Mosahary for the Bodos Bathou Borai or Bathou Raja is the Supreme Lord and the creator of all who is worshipped during Bathou Puja. Women have the specific role of performing religious rituals in dance form like Kherai dance. In addition to that, women, particularly girls, use to share in many other social dance forms like Baisagu Domahi, and Haba Janai along with the boys with their traditional instruments like Khum, Sifung, Jotha, Sherja, Gogona etc. (Mosahary, 1985).

In the traditional Bodo society arrange marriage is the standard practice, although other types of marriages are also not unseen. In a negotiated marriage the girls have little say in the selection of boys. In Bodo society separation is permissible and polygyny has also the social sanction. They observe certain rituals with the birth of a baby. Male child has no added preference over the female child and both are equally preferred.

The Bodos believe in rebirth. They perform certain rituals before cremation of the deceased. Of course, all these traditions of the Bodo society have undergone changes with the passage of time. With the advancement of education, a modernized life style has come
in the social life replacing various traditional social culture and practices by the modernized one, particularly, amongst the younger generation. This has brought in a rapid changing trend in the overall social life of the community.

2.4 Issues and Organization of the Bodos

Historically, it is evident that the Bodos had to protest against different state authorities at different point of time (Choudhury, 2004). They protested against the monarchial repression of the *Ahom* Kings, the great *Moamaria* rebellion of the eighteenth century. Then, the nineteenth century garden laborers' strike, Dhubri Match Box Company strike in 1928-36, Digboi Oil Company strike in 1939 etc. are other examples of their protest movement. Then, in modern period they had to fight for reorganization of their language, ethnic identity and, of course in the very recent times, for a homeland of their own. In this process, different issues like script issue, medium of instruction issue or the homeland issue have been cropped up in the Bodo society and accordingly different institutions like Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and All Bodo Women’s Welfare Federation (ABWWF) etc. have come into being with the Bodo society. Some other prominent developments are the emergence of certain religious institutions and practices like Christian missionary and the Brahma cult of Bodo religion which played a significant role in the social reformation process amongst the Bodo community. Christian Bodos and the Brahma fraction of the Bodos are significantly advanced in the socio-cultural life of the Bodos.
2.5 Christian Missionaries

Christian missionaries were allowed to work in North East India after the passage of the Charter Act in 1813. After that the Lutheran missionaries in 1843, the Roman Catholic missionaries in 1928, the Scottish Presbyterian Church in 1960 and in 1968, the Australian Baptist Missionary Society came to N.E.India. (Mosahary, 1986; Sangma, 1987; Mosahary 1996). Christianity began to preach in different tribal pockets at different times. The first missionary activity was started in the Bodo dominated areas of erstwhile Darrang district covering the small village pockets of Paneri, Harisingha, and Udalguri etc. Later, it was extended towards Tezpur. It was Roman Catholic mission. Then in the southern bank of Brahmaputra towards erstwhile Goalpara side the Lutheran mission started its work. Eventually, a substantial number of Bodo population adopted Christianity. Thereafter, the Baptist and Catholic mission became popular amongst the different parts of the state. Actually, evangelization, show the zeal of the missionaries to work for this backward and downtrodden tribal community. They not only built up church for prayer but also provided relief to the poor, schools for education, hospitals for treatment at the remotest areas. All these missionaries adopted mission for social reformation and in this process they initiated the spreading of education as the first step. They believed that, first the society must be educationally enlightened so as to understand the need of social reformation. Therefore, the presence of missionaries in any particular Bodo dominated area is felt with the presence of a missionary school first. Nevertheless, they are playing a very positive role in the transformation of the Bodo society.
2.6 The Brahma Religion

Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma first initiated the Brahma movement amongst the Bodos by the first decade of twentieth century (Mukherjee and Mukherjee 1982). He was born in 1860 at Kajalgaon village under erstwhile Dhubri district. In order to reform the Bodo society, he embraced Brahma religion as propagated by Swami Sibanarayan Paramahamsa in 1905. Since then he preached Brahma religion amongst the Bodos till his death in 1938. Gurudev was not only a religious preacher, but he was an active social worker and social reformer. For the political and social rights of the Bodos, he submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in January 1929. He was popularly known as 'Mahatma Gandhi of the Bodos' as he closely resembled Mahatma Gandhi and his thinking towards social reformation was akin to Gandhiji's.

Brahma religion has a big contribution in spreading education and social reformation in the Bodo society. The followers of this religion established educational institutions, technical training center like weaving and carpentry training center, started cooperative movement for community development and proposed for reformation in the ongoing religious systems practiced in the society. He advocated prohibition of bride price, early and forceful marriage of girl child, spreading of women's education and complete restriction in consumption of liquor by the Bodo people etc. The Brahmas do not take meat or rice beer as a religious compulsion. In his lifetime, he organized the first 'Mahasanmelon' in 1925 where a resolution for social reformation was adopted and in the second 'Mahasanmelon' resolution was adopted and sent a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara.
to retain the district within Assam. In 1929, the 'Mahasanmelon' submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission demanding political rights for the Bodo people (Saikia, 1982). The followers of Brahma religion publish their writing in 'Bibar' regularly. Actually during his time the Bodo society was under a chaotic state of religious confusion where people had adopted different religions like Ek-Sarania Nam Dharma, Christianity or even Islam. This religious programme of the Brahma dharma launched by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was a means to stop this conversion process (Brahma 1992). Considering the Bodo situation with the other parts of India it can be rightly compared with the other religious movement like Brahma Samaj in Bengal, Prarthana Samaj in Bombay or the Arya Samaj in Uttar Pradesh (Chaudhury, 2004). The teachings of the Brahma dharma, as established by Gurudev, helped that fraction of Bodos who adopted it as their religious faith in eradicating illiteracy and coming out of the prevailing socio-cultural stigmas. For example, Rupnath Brahma who became the first minister among the Bodos was an educated Brahma. Sitanath Brahma Choudhury was the first Bodo graduate and became the first M.P. in 1952 was another Brahma. Thus, the trend of higher education was growing among the Bodos mainly through the Brahmas (Sing, 1982).

2.7 Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS)

Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) is perhaps one of the most prominent institution that is looking after all the issues evolved in the Bodo society from time to time. The beginning of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, according to R.N. Mosahary, was in 1950 when a handful of elite Bodo Government officers started the Bodo Literary Club at Dhubri (Mosahary, 1993). In 1952,
an All India Conference of the Bodo leaders was organized at Basugaon in Kokrajhar
district on 15th and 16th November 1952 under the chairmanship of Dharanidhar
Basumatary, the noted social worker and parliamentarian. In this conference Bodo Sahitya
Sabha was born in 1952. The first President and the Secretary of the Sabha were Joybhadra
Hajjer and Sonaram Thousen respectively. At the Basugaon session of the BSS, the
educated Bodo people and leaders of the community took a strong decision for preservation
and promotion of Bodo language and this gave birth to the Bodo Sahitya Sabha. The main
aim of the Sabha was preservation and promotion of the Bodo language and culture and, it
also emphasized the need for preservation of the ethnic identity of the community
(Mosahary, 1996). The question of preservation of ethnic identity of the Bodo people and
the role of language in educating the people was discussed in the meetings of the BSS. In
1961, BSS first demanded reorganization of Bodo language as medium of instruction in
primary education in Bodo areas and after a long period of agitation programmes, the Govt.
of Assam accepted Sabha’s demand and introduced Bodo language as medium of
instruction on 31st March 1968. At this juncture, the demand of BSS was strongly
supported by the Bodo students. With the spontaneous support from the students, the BSS
carried out some agitation programmes like procession and protest meetings etc. in
Guwahati and Kokrajhar, so as to convince the state government of Assam.

After the language implementation issue, another long phase of movement was organized
under the aegis of BSS on the script issue of the Bodos, which came to an end in 1993. The
script movement was a long movement which first started in 1952. In its first phase
‘Roman’, 'Assamese' and ‘Bengali’ languages were adopted for the development of Bodo
language and literature. In 1969 the opinion of the educationists and intellectuals were sought about the use of Roman script in Bodo textbook. As per recommendation of the Roman Script Sub-Committee and Bodo Text Book Sub-Committee, the BSS took a resolution to that effect and decided to pursue the state government for Roman script. But the state government refused to accept this when a delegation met the Chief Minister for his approval. On the other hand, the BSS resolved to implement ‘Roman’ script at its Salbari session of 1973. The ‘Roman’ script was declared as the script for the Bodos at the Khelmari Session of the BSS. But because of the reluctance on the part of the state government to implement ‘Roman’ script, a phase of movement started in all parts of the state during September-November, 1974. Ultimately, the matter was forwarded to the Central Government, which offered the ‘Devanagari’ script, and also this was accepted by the BSS in 1975. But a fraction of the Bodos rejected this offer and still this controversy is on. Upendranath Brahma once again raised the issue in his memorandum to the Governor in 1987 and in 1993 again they implemented the ‘Roman’ script. However, the effort of the BSS has made it possible to establish Bodo language in Devanagari script as a modern Indian language up to the university level.

The BSS is not functioning as political forum, but it has big contribution in the overall development of the Bodo society. It is always working as a strong pressure group to highlight the social issues in favor of the Bodos. The BSS is proved to be a strong unifying platform for the Bodos during this long course of movement for adopting Bodo language as a medium of instruction and adoption of script for the Bodo language. It is making considerable contribution in publishing Bodo literary works in all fields like folk story,
short story, drama, songs and poetry. These have great bearings on the life and traditional culture of the Bodo people. “Although the Bodos have almost no written records of the traditional cultural issues and events of social life, they have many legends, folktales and folklores handed orally from generations to generations in spite of their long history of wars and natural adversities in traditional social life. This has preserved their distinct identity of language, cultural norms and social tradition” (Boro, 2003).

2.8 Plains Tribal Council of Assam

On 27th February 1967, Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) was formed in a meeting under the chairmanship of Padmashree Modaram Brahma. Samar Brahma Choudhury, the eminent Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) leader, was nominated as the first President of PTCA. Members of All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) took the initiative to form this organization so that another platform comes into existence to highlight problems of the Bodos. Accordingly, PTCA highlighted the issues of land and language problem of this tribal community and for protection of tribal interest, demanded a separate autonomous region to be known as Udyachal. They demarcated the northern side of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts in the Brahmaputra valley along with all tribal blocks of the state within Udyachal. This was a major plank for the homeland movement for the Bodos. In 1973 the demand for an autonomous region was upgraded to a union territory. In 1979 PTCA splits into two and the PTCA (P) was formed. Both the groups continued with the same demand but PTCA (P) dropped the terminology ‘Udayachal’ and
preferred the word 'Mishing Bodoland'. PTCA (P) submitted its last memorandum to the Center in 1983 and in 1984, it was dissolved to constitute the United Tribal Nationalist Front (UTNLF) (Datta, 1993). The UTNLF also raised the same demand for a separate union territory for the Bodos. Thus, within almost two decades the issue of a separate homeland was raised through different forums. Indirectly, it had created awareness among the Bodo people that, to keep their ethnic identity and culture intact, a separate homeland for them is a genuine necessity. Also this period is marked by the initiation of a demand for autonomy for the tribal people, may be in an unspecified form. This was very helpful in getting momentum of the 'just concluded' Bodoland movement.

2.9 The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU)

All Bodo Students Union was established on 27th February 1967 where Baneswar Basumatary and Kanakeswar Narzary were the founder President and the Secretary respectively. ABSU stands for better mutual understanding amongst the Bodo people. Their motto is UNITY, SURVIVAL, PROSPERITY. The main aims and objectives of the ABSU are to safeguard and develop the socio-economic condition, culture, civilization, tradition, language and literature of the greater Bodo nationality but maintaining political neutrality. Since inception, ABSU has done sincere efforts in matters of imparting education, developing Bodo language and literature, maintaining the ethnic identity, bringing about social reforms, improving the indigenous Bodo economy, achieving justice and constitutional rights for the Bodos from the state authority. And if they are denied or
ignored, they will not refrain from entering into a struggle for political self-determination with the framework of the Indian Constitution. (Hazarika, 1998).

Since 1967, ABSU has been actively supporting the demand of a separate state as raised by the PTCA and it ran to the highest level in the heart of the Bodo youth till 1973. Then it was the Roman script movement during 1974-75. In this movement the ABSU played a very supportive role with the Bodo Sahitya Sabha for the implementation of a script for the Bodos and for development of Bodo language and literature. The recently concluded ‘Bodoland Movement’, which has ultimately given the Bodos an autonomous area under the constitution of India, is also spearheaded by ABSU. Presently, ABSU leadership is pursuing the issue of incorporation of the writings of Bodo writers in the Degree course syllabus of the Gauhati University, popularizing the ‘young entrepreneur motivation programme’ among the Bodo youth throughout the state and many other community development schemes. But, it has been observed that, in spite of mass involvement of girls in all the ABSU led movement programmes, there is no female leadership in the core committee of ABSU or any other committee at significant level. Had it been so, women’s empowerment process would have been able to get a faster momentum amongst the community.

Thereafter, the ABSU leadership, on different occasions, submitted memorandums to the Central leadership for a separate homeland either at Delhi or sometimes during the visits of the Central leadership to the state. But the most important one that has brought the ABSU to the forefront to the national level politics is the ‘Bodoland Movement’. Under The
leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma, an ABSU delegation presented a memorandum to the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, on 22nd January, 1987, for creation of a separate state for the Bodos with the status of Union Territory covering the Bodo dominated areas of the Brahmaputra valley. They also presented a similar memorandum to the Union Home Minister on 24th January and to the President of India on 30th January of the same year. Already, they had submitted two separate representations to the Governor and the Chief Minister of Assam with a 92-point Charter of Demands. On 2nd March, 1987 the ABSU leadership called for a mass meeting at Kokrajhar where ABSU president Upendra Nath Brahma declared that it was going to demand a union territory for the Bodos in Assam within the Bodo dominated areas of the Brahmaputra valley. After this, the movement got its momentum under the leadership of ABSU and with the wholehearted participation of all sections of people of the Bodo community. The educationists, lawyer, government officials, the intelligencia and the organizations like BSS, All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF), all supported this mass movement. Though initially it took off in a peaceful way by holding protest rally in different places and submitting memorandum to the District Commissioners and Sub-Divisional Officers, at the later stage, to pressurize the government, some extreme steps were also taken. By the time, the Movement passed into the second phase when a revolutionary wing was formed to destabilize the government machinery in the interest of their demand. Starting from Dharna, Gharao and road blockade during the course of the movement, a fraction of the protesters destroyed government properties like office buildings, vehicles and even road and rail bridges. Bodo volunteer force was constituted to undertake the underground activities to pressurize the state authority. The school and college going girls were also
involved in the movement who served as messenger and worked as nurse for the wounded cadres of the Bodo volunteer force. These girls were working under the strict supervision of the All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF). Even they organized village meeting to make the common people aware about the issue. Non-Bodo people were, in some cases, forcefully evacuated from the Bodo dominated areas. There were group clashes amongst the Bodos and non-Bodos. Actually, when the movement became a mass movement, the people were emotionally involved in it, and as a result, a lot of unwanted things happened. The long-standing Bodo non-Bodo relationship in the state got strained. Thus the ABSU leadership continued the movement till February 20, 1993 with the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement between the Center, the State govt. and the ABSU-BPAC in Guwahati. Thereafter also the ‘homeland movement’ continued but not under the direct control of ABSU. Protesting against the non-fulfillment of the 1993 accord, ABSU revived the statehood movement and adopted a resolution demanding repeal of the accord. Thereafter the movement was continued by a section of surrendered Bodo volunteer Viz. Bodoland Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) under the leadership of Prem Singh Brahma. However, the role-played by the ABSU in the ‘Bodoland Movement’ and the success finally they achieved is definitely a part of glorious history of the tribal communities in India if not the world.

2.10 The Bodoland Movement

As all efforts from the time of PTCA could not bring them the homeland, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) took up the homeland issue in 1986-87. ABSU president,
Upendranath Brahma, took the first initiative. In a very organized manner he gathered opinion for the creation of a homeland for the Bodos. Bodo Sahitya Sabha, PTCA and all the intellectuals, civil servants, politicians and other dignitaries of the community, also supported it. According to Upendranath Brahma – “The problem of the Bodos and the demand and movement of the Bodos and other downtrodden plains tribal of Assam are nothing but a nationality issue” (ABSU, 1987). To make the people aware of the aims and objectives of the movement, two books were published Kokrajhar Central Committee of ABSU - “Divide Assam Fifty-Fifty” (1987) and “Why Separate State” (1987). To justify their demand for a separate homeland, the Bodo movement leadership raised the issues of exploitation, unemployment, socio-economic and political injustice, preservation of ethnic culture of the community etc. In the ABSU’s memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, they specifically expressed their dissatisfaction over the ‘Assamisation policy’ of the Assam Government. The anti-tribal attitude, repressive behavior and exploitation by the non-tribal were raised. Under ABSU’s leadership, school and college going students joined the mass movement for a separate homeland for the Bodos. The movement was most intense during March 1987 to February 1993 which can be considered as the first phase of the Movement. But when the Assam Accord of 1993 could not live up to the expectation of the Movement leadership, the second phase of the Movement started. This time also the ABSU was in the leadership but with the mass participation of the community members and underground activities by the revolutionary wing of the ABSU, this phase of the Movement was marked with series of activities of violence throughout the state wherein the political situation of the state became fluid and an atmosphere of mutual distrust among the Bodo and non Bodo component of the people prevailed in the state. Under this situation of socio-political
unrest, the law and order situation of the state deteriorated to an extreme position. Ultimately, at the initiative of the Central Government, Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was formed in December 2003. During this long period many unwanted incidents occurred, particularly in the context of a longstanding Bodo and non-Bodo cordial relationship in the valley.

During ABSU movement, both violent and non-violent approaches were adopted. As non-violent measures, mass rallies, processions, protest rallies, hunger strikes, road blockade etc were observed openly where all section of Bodo population actively participated. At a later part of the agitation phase ABSU constituted volunteer force to conduct armed struggle. Its main aim was to force the administrative authority to accept their demand. Prem Singh Brahma was the leader of the Bodo Volunteers Force-the first Bodo militant organization formed in Kokrajhar district in 1987 after the then ABSU president Upendranath Brahma launched the Bodoland Movement in March 2, 1987. The way of operation of the volunteer force was underground and the main target was the govt. security force, govt. establishments like buildings and bridges, communication systems etc. ABSU volunteer force even trained Bodo women, at least for self-protection. They were trained as nurse so that they could serve the underground volunteer force member in the event of any accident occurred during operation. They were also used as messenger. According to Dr. Anil Boro, the ‘Bodo Movement’ is the movement of the middle class (Boro, 1994). Most of the movement leaders and activists were from educated families representing school and college teachers, govt. officials, lawyers, artists, doctors etc. AATWWF is the first women
organization in the movement and most of them were educated women from teaching profession.

In course of the ABSU movement, Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC), the people’s wing of ABSU was formed so as to propagate the message to the common people about the movement and to gather spontaneous support in its favor. The BPAC was formed in November 1988 with Kareendra Basumatary and Sansuma Khungur Bwismuthiary as the Chairman and the Chief Convener respectively. It had its organization at the village level.

2.11 Role of Bodo Women in the Bodoland movement

Prior to ABSU’s homeland movement, there was participation of women in all the struggling issues of the community against the state authority, whether it was on script issue or language, autonomy or any other way. But it was not in mass scale. Only a few enlighten educated women actively participated in agitation programmes.

Women’s involvement was first significantly observed in the movement for implementation of Roman script launched in 1974 (Chaudhuri, 2004). At ABSU’s initiative, the All Assam Tribal Women’s Welfare Federation (AATWWF) was formed on 14th July 1986, which was later renamed as All Bodo Women’s Welfare Federation (ABWWF) in 1993. While Pramila Rani Brahma was the Chairperson, another social activist, Malati Rani Narzary was the convener and founder secretary of AATWWF. “AATWWF was constituted taking women members from all the tribal groups in the state of Assam to serve as a common
platform for all round development of women. It was designed to bring them social justice, educational and cultural advancement, and above all, emancipation from all social evils so long they are subjected to,” says Kanan Basumatary, an active member of the ABWWF. Its aim was to highlight the Socio-ethnic issues of the N. E. Indian tribes, but during the initial years it worked for the ABSU movement only. As all the members of the organization belonged to Bodo community, and ultimately it was renamed as All Bodo Women’s Welfare Federation (ABWWF) in 1993. As mentioned earlier, in the ABSU had women volunteer force during the Bodoland Movement but this was not acceptable to AATWWF as this might be harmful for the future life of the unmarried girl (Chaudhury, 2004). However, as the movement becomes mass movement, ABWWF worked with close coordination with ABSU leadership. On different occasions during the movement period, the members of this organization rescued the ABSU volunteer force from the army personal and resisted the arrest of ABSU activists by police. It had its committees at the village level even. They organized the people to get them involved in the movement. Wherever there was a meeting organized by the ABSU in connection with the movement, the ABWWF member also used to address it to explain the role of women in it and to organize themselves as a strong force towards social enlistment. They encouraged the women folk to come out and share the public life, to raise their voice against all social injustice. One significant aspect was that most of the Central Committee members were elderly lady who used to address the gathering and the junior members of different units who were mostly school/college girl, engaged themselves in taking care of other things like providing food and refreshment, bringing out the women for the meeting etc. ABWWF played a significant role against atrocities by armed forces during the movement period. They protested against
such incidents and on different occasions achieved success. The Bhumka rape case of 1988 is a glaring example of this. On a number of occasions the ABWWF members had been able to secure release of innocent Bodo people from police custody.” In fact, the ABWWF was successful towards mass participation in ABSU movement, particularly of the women.

Once the movement was over and the Bodos had achieved their goal in attaining a separate homeland for them, ABWWF is working for the development of Bodo women. According to Kanan Basumatary, Chairperson, ABWWF, Kokrajhar district, “the main activities of the organization was to create awareness amongst the women of the community about health care, family planning, education of the children, evils of drinking habit in family and society, adverse effect of polygamy in the society, adaptation of economic avenues for eradication of poverty and ultimately to provide a better status to the Bodo women”. In the post Bodoland Movement period, this women’s organization is actively working for a social change. Although, it is a non-political forum, it has been able to influence the policy-making bodies at all levels. Equally, it is playing a significant role in social resurgence process in the Bodo society, particularly amongst the women.

In the process of Bodoland Movement women’s participation was encouraging, and they played a very significant role in mobilizing the mass people for the cause. The women folk came out of the private domain and vowed to work collectively at the public domain for the cause of community issues and thus developed a sense of empowerment for them.