CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

The Bodos, whose original homeland is supposed to be China and Tibet, are a branch of Tibeto-Burman Linguistic family falling within the fold of Mongolian race.

Apart from having sociological, ethnical and numerical importance in Assam, it occupies outstanding position as one of the most original inhabitants of North East India. As per physical features of original Bodo people are concerned, they are noted for strong cheekbones, slit eyes, scanty beard and must ouch, flat nose and somehow shorter than the people of North West India. Describing them as “intensely clannish being”, Rev. S. Endle observed their character, being blessed by virtues, like honesty truthfulness, straight forwardness and trustworthiness.1 Having egalitarian nature of society like other tribes, they differ in some material ways from their Hindu and Mushalman neighbours. However process of socio-cultural assimilation, intermingling of Aryan, Dravidian, Austric and other races through different ages, internal influence of life styles, progress of human civilization and the like factors, brought forth change and transformation in their physical features and mental horizons.

Interpretation of the term Bodo or Boro: It is very rare to get authentic records, sufficient monuments and historical evidence, regarding origin of the Bodo except ambiguous descriptions in epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, folk tales, and other texts like Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. A few descriptions of Ethnologists and Anthropologists, critical linguistic and historical interpretation and identification of racial affinity are only ways and means to find out origin of these Indo-Mongoloid souls.

According to G.A. Grierson, the term “Boro” or “Bodo” is first applied by Hugdson to this Tibeto-Burman Linguistic family. The exact sound of the term is represented by the spelling “Boro” or “Bodo”. “Bodo” or “Boro” is the name by which “Mech” or “Mes” and “Kochari” call themselves.2 Generally the word “Bodo” stands to mean a “Man”. In wider sense human being; but not the female member of the family. In closely allied Tripura language, “Boro” is pronounced as “Borok” which means Man and “Parak” in neighbouring Mikir (Karbi) language to mean Man, that is, a foreign man.
One section of the same stock, Garo, a Tribe called themselves “Mande” means Man; another word Arleng (Karbi) is popularly used among Karbis, which literally means Man and Hajong, the name of a Tribe, indicates a hill man; and almost the similar names of the Tribes, Gáro, Arleng (Karbi) Borok (Tripura, Tippers) Hajong represent to mean a Man. The inception of the term “Boro” may be traced from a Tibetan word "Hbrogpa” an inhabitant of steppes belongs to Mongolean race. The word “Hbrog” is used to mean a Man. The exact sound of “Hbrog” slightly differs from the words “Borok” and “Porok” of Tripura and Karbi language respectively. Later the word “Hbrog” is used as “Hbrog”, “Brog”, “Borog” and “Boro”, means Man.

Traditionally, a Bodofolk calls himself a man, to identify as a descendant of a great race and uses the word “Harsa” to a non-Bodofolk. “Harsa” means child or small race: “Hari” means race and ‘sa’ or ‘fisa’ means child or small. An aged or old Bodofolk prefers to use the words “Manshina Harsa” mean “Bodo or Non-Bodo” to distinguish a Bodo from a Non-Bodo or “Harsa”.

Most of the scholars, in finding out origin of the Bodo, admit the existence of “Bodo” as a country or as a land or as a place in ancient China or Tibet. Dr. S.K. Chatterjee and Father M. Harman ascertain that Monglean people lived in Tibet for long one thousand years. According to Rajmohan Nath, once there was a country named “Bod” and the inhabitants of this country were known as “Bodosa” Grierson called it as “Bodyut”, its inhabitants “Bodpa” and their language “Bodskad”. Aitkinson believes that there was “Bod” country in Tibet and people living there were known as “Bodpa”.

Dr. K. Brahma Observes- there were various parts of the countries --“Hor-Bod”, “Kur-Bod” etc. and in later times when “Budhism” spread into that country, the southern part inhabited by “Budhist” Lama was known as ‘Sti” (Lama) “Bod” which has now been transformed into ”Tibbet” or ”Tibet”.

Hence the word “Bod” signifies the name of place or land or a country. It is very hard to know exactly, when the human beings have formed the organized society, but it is true that human beings, for their existence, have been struggling to adjust with the nature and this let them to search for a suitable place or land for spending better lives, as per evolutionary theory exhibit the development process of human society.
As the word “Bod” belongs to Tibeto-Burman linguistic family to mean land, place or country, the name of the term “Bodo” really can be ascertained as being derived from the word “Bod”. Thus the aforesaid word “Hbrog” or “Boro” means Man, who lives in “Bod” or place or land is the child of this land or place or country: “Bod fisa” i.e. child of “Bod”, “Bodfsa” or “Bodosa”. (“Fisa” or “Sa” means child). A Kochari or Mech calls himself “Bodo-fisa”, a child of Bodo to distinguish him from “Simsa”, i.e. “Bhootea” or a “Chin-fisa” or a child of China.

This interpretation of the term “Bodo” or “Boro” people shows that it includes a large section of Mongolean race belonging to Tibeto Burman linguistic family, comprising Bodo people living in Bengal, Bihar, North-Eastern region of India and Burma, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh abroad. They are known as Bodos or Boros, Kacharis, Rabhas, Lalungs, Sonowals, Dimasas, Chutiyas, Meches, Hajongs, Deoris etc. of Bengal and North Eastern Region of India.

The Bodos Constitute one of the largest tribal communities belonging to the Tibeto Burman linguistic family. They live along with the Assamese, Koch, Rabha, Chutiya and Bengali communities. Their concentration is mostly found on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra. In earlier literature this community was referred to as Kochari. Grierson has used the word “Bodo” to refer to a linguistic group under the Tibeto Burman linguistic family and all the communities mentioned bellow were incorporated into that family. These are Borokochari, Sonowal, Kochari, Tiwa, Rabha, Dimasa and Tippera. The twentieth century literature has used the word “Bodo” and “Kochari” interchangeably and sometimes in conjunction as Bodo Kochari. But now literate members of this community use the word ‘Bodo’ to refer to their community.

**Geographical Profile:**

**Nomenclature:**

It is popularly believed that once the present Kokrajhar town was covered by a thickly forest where a few Bodo people were living there. A special kind of fibre jungle called ‘Khunkhra’ was abundant in that place. Local people joyously extracted golden coloured tread from these jungles for their household use. That place was called by them “Khungkrajhar”: “Jhar” means abundant jungles. Later it was corruptedly used as “Khunkhra”, “Khunkrajhar”, “Kukrajhar” and Kokrajhar, by the outsiders like Bengal and other Non-Bodo people, “Gourang”, a river, flowing near this town symbolizes the corruption of its name from the word ‘Gorong’ means ‘Deep’ to “Gourang”. Dr. K. Brahma explains its derivation from
a jungle called ‘khangkhla’ where it was found in abundant there and traditionally used for ‘Bathoupuja’ by Bodos and it later came to be used as "Khangkhlavajhar", "Kaklajhar" and Kokrajhar.

Historical Background:
As the geographical location of present Kokrajhar District indicates its position most of its northern part is surrounded by the bordering area of Bhutan. Historical records show many advents and hostilities broke out between kings like Biswasingha, Parixit of Koch dynasty, rule of Chutiya, Bhuyan and others in different ages, and later by the British for more than two hundred years. Bhooteas advent extended upto Bilashipara, Sidli, Bijni, Kokrajhar, Ghurla, Bhoterkanda and even they occupied Cochbehar in 1772 which resulted a treaty with British in 1774. Goalpara District was first created in 1822 separating from Rongpur.

British called the trading areas or centres of Bhooteas as “Doors”. Out of eighteen doors, five doors Bijni, Sidli, Sirang, Ripu and Guma were separated and a district was created naming it as “Eastern Doors” with its headquarter at Dotma in 1664 and later it was added to Goalpara district in 1866. Two district fund centres were established in the two Sub-Divisions of Goalpara and Dhubri in 1892 and local boards were formed in 1882.

Kokrajhar district was a Northern part of Dhubri Sub-Division of original Goalpara district. It came into existence as Sub-Division in 1957 covering the area of 4717 sq. Km. of the original Goalpara district having 10,305 sq. Km. according to Assam survey and 10380sq. Km. according to survey of India. Thus it covered 45’78% of the total district.

Later in 1983 (1st July) the entire Sub-Division was declared as Kokrajhar district. It was recognized like many other districts in the state of Assam and the area of district was reduced to 3538 sq. km. thus covering entire circle area of Gossaigaon including Bhowraguri plus Dotma, Kokrajhar and part of the Sidli circle area and later 20 villages covering about 40.22 Km. were delimited to Kokrajhar circle under Kokrajhar district from Chapar circle of Dhubri district. Thus the present estimated area under Kokrajhar district is 3538 sq. km. This area is yet to be finalised by the survey of India. Location of Kokrajhar district lies roughly between 89.64’ E to 90’38’ E Longitude and 26.20’ N to 26.53’ N Latitude.
Topography:
The district is situated in the North Western part of Assam. It is bounded by Bhutan in the North and Dhubri district in the South, Bongaigaon district lies in the east and the state of West Bengal in the West. The topography and physical feature of the district is such that entire northern part is full of green forest with upper strip and gradually high plains on lower plains in the lower strip towards the South. Topographically the district can be divided into two parts: the Northern part that is foot hills of Bhutan is known as ‘Eastern doors’ and full of forests, till presently and the southern part is alluvial and plain level.

The important rivers falling under the present Kokrajhar district are Aye Champabati, Gaurang, Saralbhanga, Hell, Modati and Sankosh. Moreover there are some small rivulets like Kanibhur, Tarang, Samuka, Laska etc. are great potential for irrigational purposes. The important rivers are originated from Bhutan Hills of Himalaya Mountain.

Demography:
The total population of present Kokrajhar district as per census of 2001 is 9,05,764 of which 3,04,985 belongs to the scheduled tribes and 31167 scheduled castes community thus representing 33.67 percent and 3.44 percent by scheduled tribes and scheduled caste respectively.

As per the district wise comparative population statistics of Assam the estimated growth rate of population in the district over the decade between 1991-2001 is 12 percent compassed to 76.75 percent over the two decades of 1971-1991 while the growth rate of Assam is 53.26 percent over two decades of 1971-1991 and 18.92 percent during the decade of 1991-2001. As per the census report 2001 and projected on the basis of population figure persons spoken in different languages in the district are as follow:-
Assamese – 1,91,140, Bodos – 3,64,481, Bengali – 1,81,239, Santhali – 93,966, Rabhas – 12,273, Mundas – 4,198, Garos – 500 and Hindi speaking and others – 46,692. The census of 2001 shows the person of different religions in the district as follows: Hindu – 5,94,168 (65.60%), Muslim (20.36%) Christian – 1,24,270 (13.72%) Sikh – 133 (0.02%), Budhist – 1,574 (0.17%) Jain – 639 (0.07%), other religion and persuasion - 112 (0.01%) and religion non-stated - 427 (0.05%).

During 1991 the highest concentration of ST population is in the Kokrajhar Development Block numbering 1,03,328 while that of SC in Gossaigaon Devevelopment Block and the population in that block is 5,726.
The highest density of population in the district lies in Dotma Development Block which is 532 per sq. km. while the lowest density of population prevails in Gossaigaon development Block which is 129 per sq. Km.

**Literacy:**

The average literacy percentage in the district as per 1991 census is 30.13 compared to 43.20% of the state. Which increased the percentage in Kokrajhar Sub-Division is slightly better than that of Gossaigaon Sub-Division which represent 32.52% and 26.63% respectively. The literacy rate in respect of Male is 20.72% and that of female 12.47.

The average literacy percentage in the district as per the census of 2001 is 51.63 percent compared to 63.25 percent of the state. As per the census of 2001 the percentage of the ST and SC population of Assam is 62.52 percent and 66.78 percent respectively while the literacy rate of ST population is 57.49 percent and that of SC population is 63.29 percent in the District. The literacy rate of ST population for male and female is 67.12 percent and 47.72 percent while SC population represents 73.72 percent and 51.80 percent for male and female respectively.

**Agriculture:**

Agriculture is the principal source of income and livelihood for the people of Kokrajhar district. Although the productivity of different crops have increased substantially in the district in comparison to past few decades by increasing double of triple cropping the economic condition of poor rural people are still remaining the same more of less or even worse. Causes of stagnation in development of agriculture sector are analyzed as follows:

(1) Limited per capita land holding.
(2) Rural pauperization.
(3) Obsolete mode of cultivation.
(4) Under utilisation of vast agriculture work force.
(4) Repudiation of method of agricultural production.

There are around 1.03 lakh hectors of cultivable land in the district as per 1989-90 statistical report in the revenue area. Besides taking into consideration of the present deforestation of the district, large area of forest reserved has been cultivated legally or illegally and therefore if at least 40% of the total forest area is
considered as cultivable area, the agricultural field will increase by about 0.096 lakh hector.

Forestry:
The total reserved forests in Kokrajhar district as per government record is 1808.21 sq. Km. including 253.65 sq. km. of Aie valley Division which now falls under Gossaigaon district except that of Runikata range thus accounting for roughly 38.33% of the total geographical area till 1990. As per the statistical account forest revenue in 1995 was Rs. 233.06 lakhs and total forest expenditure was Rs. 284.66 lakhs target of social forestry was 0.381 (in .000 Hector) which achieved cent percent and seedling planted was Nos. 952.50 (in .000 Hector).

It is a matter of concern that during the last few years destruction of most valuable trees like Shal, Sishu, Gamari, Chap etc. are going on unabated. Illegal encroachment on forest land, destruction of valuable trees, has caused not only ecological imbalance and loss of natural resources but also it has become a serious threat to socio-economic peaceful existence to different communities living there. That calls for proper check and effective system of administration and social cooperation.

Society and Culture:
The Bodos, of Assam have patrilineal and patrilocal social structure. These characteristics are visible in the institutions of family, marriage, kinship tie, inheritance of property and other social and familial affairs. They are referred as a tribe by the British administration and missionaries and later it is designated as scheduled tribe by incorporating in the provision of the constitution after independence. Bodo society is basically patriarchal with a few elements of matriarchal characteristics. As per the Bodo customary law of inheritance of property goes to the son, but there is not a hard and fast custom that the female child can not get paternal property. The society is characterized by the element of equalitarianism where both man and woman are given equal status in the society, rather than property and official designation.

There is no caste system in Bodo society. It is no doubt true that even in earlier times except in the case of occupational caste, there was practically no water tight compartment amongst the agricultural groups. There was therefore, no rigid bar for the agriculturist communities like the Bodos and their cognates viz Rabha, Lalung, Chutiya, Moran against their ascent on the ladder of caste.
The basic unit of the social institution of the Bodos is “Nokhor” or family. A Nokhor is composed of blood related individual members like father, mother, brothers, sons and daughters constituting a social system and permeated by idealism of love, affection and kinship tie. According to P.N. Luthra, rooted in universal needs and urges, the family is shaped by religion and morality and by the intervention of state in human affairs. Bodos mostly live in nuclear family but extended family also exists in their society. The larger unit of social structure is “Noshing” or neighbour. It is composed of a few families within surrounding of Nokhor with a common bond of mutual aid and understanding. It is expected that all “Nokhor” within the surrounding must create condition for living in peace and harmony where every individual is shaped and nourished by this environment. The whole aspect of the Bodos social system relating to religion, custom, habit, practice, economic culture etc. are manifested in their traditional village life. In a traditional Bodo village religion and morality is a collective tract which enforces among the members certain standard norms of behaviour. So, the traditional village administration is a vibrant institution for administering justice in the field of social, economic religion, and other affairs of day to day life. 

Tribal Society has its own body of norms, customs, taboos, tradition, values and moral standards which regulate relationship among the individuals and society. These are certain conditions for maintaining solidarity in the society. Bodo customs are generally rigid and inflexible, but these are strong force as a means of social control in the society. These customary laws are not written down but have been practiced orally since time immemorial. Further these are modified time to time suitably as per the needs of the time. Traditional Bodo customary law is based on ethics and morality concerning with two actions of the individual “good and bad”. These customary laws were applied for administering judgment on harmful acts done by the individual known as ‘Baad’ and it was compulsorily to be followed by purification through the traditional ‘Bathou’ religion. These are customary laws of bad consisted of five viz ‘Ogorbaod’ Daokhiba, Khoulobodbad, phongslot bad and lackharbad. Although the application of such customary law has been changed by the interference of state laws, influence of Hinduisation or Sanskritisation and other similar factors. Still there are certain areas like settlement of minor disputes, violation of law of chastity, inheritance of property, marriage system etc. which are dealt with village council (gamini affat) or Bodo Samaj Affat for administering justice. Recently central (ad hoc) Committee of Bodo Samaj Affat is taking an effort to bring forth uniformity among the customary laws of the Bodos existing in different places and taking steps for its codification.
Bodo economy is self-sufficient unit. Earlier they created such a condition that they might get almost all the necessities within their surrounding. Agriculture is the mainstay of the village economy in case of all the plains tribes of Assam including Bodos. More than 90% of the Bodo population depends on agriculture. Besides the main crop paddy for the staple food, other varieties of crops like mustard seed, cotton, sesame sugarcane and other seasonal fruits like arecanut, banana, jackfruit, mango etc. are cultivated by them. But repeated cultivation has decreased the fertility of land and it resulted yielding 50% less of production than earlier. Use of fertilizer or H.Y.V. crops and modern techniques of cultivation is still rare among them. Moreover, lack of necessary infrastructure and facilities, such as irrigation system, embankment, protection from land erosion, roads power and other factors are the causes of deteriorating agrarian economy of the Bodos. Division of land holding is also one of such causes. The ills which were plaguing the Bodos most are loss of land due to land alienation, having indebtedness, poverty and usury of money lenders.

Besides agriculture, Bodo women have a natural propensity for animal husbandry, particularly rearing pigs and fowl. But these were not used for commercial purposes. Bodo women are expert in rearing “endi Emphw” (Eri worm) and finding out threads from cocoons for weaving different kinds of cloths.

Bodo women also weave various types of cotton cloths on their handloom both for their own use and for the market. Now a days Bodo women have caught the attention of outside markets and hence new wave of employment has opened up for them.

Naturalism and Animism are part of cultural life, belief and practice of the tribes in India. Every object of the nature, plants, animals, trees, rivers, ponds, lakes, stones and mountains are considered all sacred by them. This nature worship is a form of such belief and still tribals love to live in their natural abodes, comprising hills and forest. Riverbank and forest shores and practice their traditional culture, ritual and customs. Such characteristic of naturalism reflects in their traditional institution of Bathou Region. The Bodos use to plant ‘Sijou’ tree on the North East corner of their main inner courtyard to worship “Abonglaori”, the Supreme God. As per Bodo mythology ‘Bathou’, the Supreme God created ‘Sijou’ the first plant which stands as an emblem of God at the Alter. A Bodofolk is originally guided by the
Bathou tradition concerning to whole life cycle or day to day life and this prominence of 'Bathou' stand as custom, ritual, ethics and philosophy of the Bodos.

Originally the propitiation and worship of Bathou is made by scarifies of foul, pigs, goats and offering 'Jou' or rice beer. Although now-a-days practice of propitiation has been discarded by some of them replacing these by flowers fruits etc. Still most of them follow the primitive system of worship. The tetelmistic clannish division of the Bodo society also depicts the manifestation on the belief and faith of their nature. They use the suffix “Ari” or “Hari” to identify their clan or various social group like Narzary, Daimary, Boisomuthiary, Moshahari, Sworgiary, etc. which are symbolic representation of belief on the object of nature.

Most of the British officials and Missionaries called the Bodos ‘Animist’. Rev S. Endle termed them as animist. Aitkinson called the natives of Himalayan region including Bodos and other tribes belonging to pagan faith. W.W. Hunter writes:- "Their religious belief consists in the worship of two divine beings: one is the author of Good, and the other the author of Evil. As usual among nearly all hill tribes, their religious rites consist chiefly of the propitiation of evil spirit by means of sacrifice of fowls. The Kocharis have not scruple on the matter of diet; they eat any animal food and are particularly partial to fork.” According to him only flesh which they do not partake is that of cow, a prejudice imbibed from contact with Hindus.

Most of the Bodos feel humiliated for terming them as ‘Animist’ which they think that it is loosely used to mean a degraded race. It is believed that Indian philosophy is based on spirituality while the western philosophy is destined to objectivity and scientific reasoning. From this Indian philosophical viewpoint, it is to be believed that each and every particle or object of the nature or universe is pervaded by the presence of divine and so nothing of the universe is inanimate in its spirit. Generally this term was used to distinguish Indian natives from Hindu and Mushalman neighbour.

Albeit describing them as degraded race, Britishers admired them for having good qualities like common decision of action and co-operation in their day to day life. They also visualized the Bodo society where chastity lies as esteem virtue and having them very less criminal attitude.
The Indo-mongoloid Bodos have their own culture and heritage which has been contributing to the culture of the nation. Some scholars believe that Bodos are the first agricultural nomads to have entered this part of globe who first introduced the irrigation system, earthwork, embankment and to teach autochthonous groups of this region, how to domicile with the plants. It was again they who introduced another very important thing which later was reckoned as the pride of Assam. That is the art of silk culture, right from rearing of silk worm to weaving such tribal culture, tradition and heritage, arts and crafts, dance and music are intrinsic value and contribution in mainstream’s culture. Dwelling amidst hills, forest, coastal areas and deserts, tribals over the centuries, have gained precious and vast experience in combating environmental hardships and leading sustainable livelihood. Their wisdom is reflected in their water harvesting techniques, indigenously developed, agricultural practices and irrigation system construction of cane bridges in hills, adaptation to desert life utilisation of forest species like herbs and plants for medicinal purposes meteorological assessment etc. This invaluable knowledge need to be properly documented and preserved to prevent it from getting lost as the result of modernization and passage of time.

The Bodo culture is a part and parcel of the mongoloid culture. This subject is vast and enormous. The mongoloid Bodo culture in Assam has influenced to some extent the Indio-Assamese culture and vice versa. Even when the Aryans have been able to expand their own linguistic, religious, cultural and political network through the whole of south Asia, through their great missionaries and merchants, even then the Bodos of the Mongolian stock of Assam have been able to not only to keep their identities almost unpolluted, but also to influence the Aryans - their philosophies and religious belief, their habits, culture and language to significant extent. But even the element of Sanskritisation or Hinduisation is predominant in the Bodo culture since the early time. Most of the Bodos have been proselytized to Hinduism while a large section of them have embraced the Christianity. During the census of 1991 total population of Christianity in Kokrajhar district was accounted for 9.82 percent as against 13.72 percent of the census of 2001 showing an increase of 4 percent of Christianity. Besides having a large number of Bodo people have embraced the Sonaton Dharma of Hindu cult. In such a process ‘Bathou’ traditional religion has fragmented into many sections of Hindu cult like Bathou Siva Dhurma, Rupamani Bathou, Jangkhrao Bathou etc. where a number of Hindu deities like Siva, Parbati, Durga, Laxmi, Swaraswati, Ganesh etc. retain prominent, in propitiation. As a result of such conversion, attitude, habit, lifestyle and other sphere of socio-cultural aspects have been transformed as per their religion. Even today many new religious activities have made their appearance among the Bodos,
while a good number of them have tried to revive the traditional Bathou worship. An educated section of Bodos has accepted ‘Brahma Dharma’ while the others have gone to strange group. As a result of the impact of various sectarian and religious forces of the Bodo people are likely to face new social dimension in near future.

Most of the enlightened Bodo people think that in such a process the value of tradition may lose in the long run and it may result into the extinction of traditional culture. To them religion is a means for reform of the society and preservation of discipline in life. Here a question of dominant culture over the weaker section lies. Within this trend of acculturation, some sections of the Bodos have completely submerged with the dominant culture loosing their own identity through the process of complete assimilation. Assimilation is a process of interpenetration in which group acquires the memories, sentiments and attitudes of other groups and in this way incorporated in common cultural life. So the assimilation does not mean a change which lead to the complete submersion of one group with the other. This is a parasitic affect to the traditional culture of Bodo and other tribes prevalent in our socio-political environment.

**Historical Background:**

The early history of Bodo is obscure. Rev. S. Endle describes the origin of the Bodo as “a matter of conjecture and inference due to absence of authentic history. Sir Edward Gait writes:

For several hundred years, previously some scattered fact may be gleaned from a few ancient inscription and from the observation of a Chinese traveler. Before that nothing definite is known, and our only information consists of some dubious and fragmentary reference in the “Mahabharata” and in the “Puranas” and “Tantras” and other similar records.

In the opinion of B.K. Barua, the earliest inhabitant of Assam were Kirata, Chinas and other primitive tribes commonly designated as ‘Mlechhas’ and ‘Asuras’... The Mahabharat mentions about Kirata known as Danava or Asuras who are the dwellers of Himalayan Boarders. The Atharva Veda and Samhita describe the Kirata as a race of people who were the settlers of the caves. Most of the classical Aryan writers have also mentioned the “Kirata” or ‘Malechcha’ and identified Indo-mongoloid Bodos with the ‘Kirata’. The classical writers from Greece, Periplus and Ptolemy mentions about ‘Kirhadae’ in North East India whom most of the scholars supposed to be Kirata. Belonging to the Mongelean race.
Anthropologists have identified Kirata with the Bodos who resemble with the tribes of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and North East India.

Historical evidence shows that once upon a time the Bodos established a strong kingdom and their people extended up to the river Sonkosh to the West and Sadia in the East and up to Manipur to the South except the Khashi and Jayantia hill (Meghalaya). They built strong kingdoms under the various tribal names like Chutiya, Kachari, Koch etc. Their names of capitals, rivers and other places within the kingdoms purely indicates the Bodo words like Dimapur, Maibong, Dhunsiri, Dikrong, Dibru, Diputa, Dihong etc. The western section of the old Bodo (Kocharis) occupied the thrones of Kochbehar, Bijni, Darrang and Beltola. An eastern branch, in the name of Chutiya also established a powerful kingdom with two capitals near Sodiya.

The Chutiyas were engaged in a prolonged struggle with the Ahoms, a section of the great Shan (Tai or Thai) people who entered Assam in 1228 A.D. with Sukapha as the first king. The Ahom subdued Moran, Borahis and other branches of the Bodo people, another section of the eastern Bodos maintained their kingdoms with capital at Dimapur, Maibong, Khaspur against the continuous invasion of Ahoms. This section of the Boro is known to us now as Dimasa or Dimasa Kochari (but Kochari). The last king of the Kachari was Gobinda Chandra who was assassinated in 1930.

The Bodo rule ended in 1932 A.D. only when British East India Company annexed the Bodo Kingdom of Kachar through the British annexation policy of Doctrine of Lapse. Late Tularam Sanapati was allowed autonomous rule over North Cachar bounded on the South by Mahur River and Naga hills, on the west by the Doyang, on the east by the Dhansiri on the north by Yumana and Doyang. For this he was to pay a tribute of four pairs of elephant tusks annually, receiving a monthly pension of Rs. 50. Tularam died in October 1850. His sons Nokulram and Brajanath held the country for two years more when the former was killed in the Naga hills, when he lead an expedition to avenge an attack on his village of Semkor. In 1854 the tract was resumed by the British Govt. the surviving members of Tularam’s family receiving pensions resumed the tract.

During the 20th century Bodos have undergone many changes in respect to various spheres of life. These changes have been taking in different institutional levels from time to time which are visible in traditional institutions like religion, marriage, economy, social custom, status of men and women, food habit, dresses...
and other spheres of life. Various factors like process of Sanskritisation, trend of modernization spread of education, development of science and technology, to some extent westernization etc. are responsible for the growth of knowledge and transformation of society into progress. Within the wind of change in modern world and civilization, in courses of time Bodo society came into cultural contact with different cultures and society which brought forth tremendous change in their life. During the pre-independent period welfare activities of Christian Missionaries like establishment of healthcare centre, educational institution and their works on Bodo language and literature also threw a new light and development in their society. In early decades of 20th century socio-religious reform movement of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma opened the eye of the society to move upward and they could realize the condition and drawbacks of their downtrodden society. Due to his effort prohibition was imposed on corrupt practices like high bride price, brewing and consumption of 'Jou' or rice beer at home and in other festivals and ceremonies, dragging and stealing of girls for marriage etc. prevailed in that time. His preaching of 'Brahma' religion restrained the Bodos from conversion to other fold. The greatest contribution of Brahma movement was in the field of education. His noble venture for reforming the society and effort to modernize it by spreading education had a far reaching consequence in the progress of Bodo community. As a result of his noble effort a new generation became educated and it gave birth to Bodo Chatra Sonmilon in 1919 (Students' organisation) under which aspirant youths carried out various social and literacy activities for awakening the society. In the long run this trend of social consciousness brought forth political consciousness to them and they took strong initiation for searching their identity and political right.

Political consciousness of the Bodos sprang up during the early part of twentieth century with the Brahma movement of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. This political consciousness led them to search for self-identity. Identity consciousness or identity assertion among different ethnic groups in Assam is nothing new. Many such cases may even be traced much before the days of Indian statutory commission (Simon Commission) in 1930. It is a fact that the Hillman always reported higher degree of consciousness than their counterparts in the plains but that does not mean that plainsmen of Mongoloid origin lacked identity consciousness.

Kalicharan Gurudev was strongly imbied with the spirit of searching for Bodo identity, which was going to be extinct in that time. He could materialise this spirit by drawing the sentiment of the downtrodden tribal communities for the same
cause and consequently it worked for uniting all the tribal Communities for fulfilling their aspiration under the politico-administrative arrangement of that time. For the revival of Bodo identity he got the permission of writing ‘Brahma’ title for the Bodo community from the then Deputy Commissioner and the Census Commissioner of erstwhile Goalpara district in the year 1911. Later, he submitted a memorandum with his tribal counterpart to Simon Commission in 1929 which included some important demands for safeguarding tribal interest like separate electorate for Bodo community including all the tribals of Assam, reservation of one seats for the Bodo community in the State Legislative Assembly, separate categorization for the Bodos in census report, creation of separate Bodo regiment, creation of second chamber in the local board, restriction on the transfer of Goalpara district to Bengal etc. Although most of those demands were not conceded, it pave the way for highlighting their various grievances and problems to the Govt. or administration and consequently it strengthened the tribals of Assam for taking future course of action in political arena.

In the meantime Bodo Chatra Sanmiloni formed in 1919 took up issues of general improvement for language, culture and educational facilities of the Bodos and the burning political and economic problems too. Besides this students’ organization like Kochari Youth Association, Goalpara District Bodo Association soon formed to voice grievances on matters not strictly falling under students activities.

Political aspiration of the Bodos become more strengthened with the formation of a common platform for the tribal in Assam with the name and style “Tribal League” in 1933. This league demanded separate electorate system for the tribal and consequently the Govt. conceded five reserved seats for the tribes in Assembly. Tribal League dealt with serious tribal problems of land alienation, immigration etc. and made the electoral alliances with Shaddula Ministry in 1940 when Shadullah Ministry agreed upon line system for the protection of tribal land. Later in line of the assurances given by the Congress Govt. for the protection of tribal people and tribal land it merged with the Congress Govt. in 1946.

The merger of tribal leaders (Tribal League) with the congress party boosted the popularity and political strength of the congress, but on the other hand the tribal leaders lost their own issues and sank in the wave of other national issues.

During the period of early decades of 20th century there were certain problems of the tribals in Assam, which had already crept into them, even without their knowledge and those hazards were thwarting their condition from bad to worse.
Most serious problem of that time was land alienation due to immigration, started to pour into the tribal areas from the beginning of the 20th century. This flow of immigration influx reflected in the census report of Assam conducted during the year of 1911, 1921 and 1931. The gravity of the situation was fully visualized by M.C. Mulan, Superintendent of census report of 1931 who described it as follows: “I have already remarked that by 1921 the first army corps of the invaders had conquered Goalpara, the second army corps which followed them in the year 1921-31 has consolidated their position in that district and has also completed the conquest of Nowgaon. The Barpeta Sub-Division of Kamrup has also fallen to their attack and Darrang is being invaded. Sibsagar has so far escaped completely but the few thousand Mymensinghias in North Lakhimpur are on outpost which may during the next decade prove to be a valuable base of major operation.”

This report of the census highlights the gravity of the situation, which inflicted serious socio-economic problems of the tribals of Assam. As Bengali by religion or ethnically is more nearer to the tribes, most of them could avail the chance for acquisition of land by purchase, or by giving loan or transfer or settled down permanently within the loose statutory of land law under British administration.

Later the British policy of colonization, feeding the industry or engagement as labourers in tea garden, Grow more food policy, pave the way to entry a large number of immigration into the soil of Assam. This matter was brought to notice by Tribal League during the time of Saddulla Ministry and even to the Bordoloi Ministry which is remaining continuing issue even today.

The initiative for protection of tribal land was first started in 1921 by introducing line system. But this could not serve the purpose as it was only meant to serve the British interest. As a result, the problem of land alienation remained continuing and unabated which is disastrous consequence in the present day.

After independence formation of new constitution, with its ideals of democracy equality, liberty, secularism and political right gave a new inspiration to all its citizens and Bodo people also started to strive for uplifting their society, culture, language and literature, in conformity with other communities. As a result the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, one of the Bodo premier organization (literary) came into existence with the noble effort of taking all necessary steps for all round development of Bodo language, literature, culture and other related affairs. Bodo Sahitya Sabha had launched a series of agitational programmes for the upliftment of Bodo language and literature. The first major step that Bodo Sahitya Sabha took
was its movement demanding introduction of Bodo language as a medium of instruction and as a result of its untiring effort the Assam Govt. introduced Bodo language as a medium of instruction in schools of Assam in successive stages of elementary level in 1963, secondary level in 1968 and as M.I.L in 1977. Bodo language is recognized as M.I.L by Dibrugarh University, N.E.H.U. and Gauhati University has opened Bodo Department in P.G. studies starting from 1996. From 2006 the Bodo major subject has also been introduced in Kokrajhar College. Bodo is recognized as the associate official language in 1985 and included in the 8th scheduled of the Indian constitution in 2006.

After the independence it was expected that modernization, technological intervention, communication and bureaucratization would bring forth cultural homogenisation in India. But the experience proved that it is no more adequate to achieve the desired goal. The monolithic attitude have created more divisions of the people like linguistic minority, religious minority in the peripheral ethnic group causing different situation in maintaining equilibrium into national mainstream. India is a multilingual and multicultural state where diverse caste, creed, colour and different ethnic groups live representing cultural plurality. In the process of socio-cultural homogenization the value and quality judgment on so-called “little tradition” is ignored and the prior emphasis on the value and culture of dominant communities are given in the mainstream culture. That is detrimental to the principle of composite culture and common heritage. Moreover national policies pursued as per however, does not encourage any such process. The constitution of course provides for a mechanism for gaining confidence of the hitherto neglected smaller nationalities and to restore their self-respect, and the government technocratic and paternalistic programmes are often cited as its concern for those so-called ‘little tradition’. These programmes are imposed upon so-called beneficiaries without their consent or participation. They greatly ignore the sentiment of tribal of North East who value their traditions and love their lands. They ignore their traditional and preference for their right to internal self-determination.

North Eastern Region has a separate entity being somewhat distance from the heartland of India and having demographical pattern of diverse ethnic groups of aborigine tribes having own culture, language and tradition. This region is characterized by socio-political instability and economic backwardness, which is contravention to the process of development of the nation. It is constantly threatened with escalation of tensions and conflicts involving the local and regional parameters and dimensions. It has experienced various problems of continuous inflow of migrants raising serious problems of socio-economic and political
aspiration of the people, land alienation, unemployment, poverty, lack of infrastructure facilities and so on. Living within such situation of ethnic groups of aborigine tribes, the Bodos have also been striving for political aspiration for safeguarding their socio-economic status and identity within the politico-administrative arrangement of the present time.

The present tribal politics is not only based on demanding greater autonomy but it also include the secessionist demands revealing riot only democratic politics but also a violent politics including different terrorist activities. The emerging ethnic assertion of varied tribes of Assam have different dimensions of politics such as sometimes demand for greater autonomy within the provision of 6th schedule of the constitution, sometimes demands for creation of separate state within the Indian union or sovereign state. Transformation of tribal politics into violent and secessionist politics had not only paused a challenge to the unity and integrity among different communities of the state but also had made the situation somewhat irreconcilable for establishment of peace in Assam. Such trend of various dimensions of politics is visible at present time.

The genesis of the Bodo demands for separate autonomy basically sprang up from socio-economy and socio-cultural aspiration which later, competed them to turn towards political direction due to various causes. Most of the Bodo problems which could be solved in its initial stage were kept with negligence which created a sense of deprivation, frustration and negligence among the people, and this experience push them towards the political direction i.e: demand for separate state or separate autonomy as a last resort for fulfillment of their legitimate demand and genuine grievances. The recent Bodoland movement, Karbi Dimasa Autonomy movement etc. are direct reflection of such long standing problems of the tribal people for which they were compelled to take course of political direction or motivation.

There are certain problems of the tribals of Assam, deeply rooted, even prior to the independence which are irreconcilable task for the Government in present time. Among such serious problems land alienation and influx of immigrants into the tribal areas are standing as the most complicated issue affecting socio-economic life of the people. Although various measures have been undertaken or plans and policies are adopted by the Government it has not been able to exert a fruitful result till to-day. After the failure of Line system provision of the Chapter X for the protection of the lands of the tribal people of Assam was incorporated in 1947 into the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act of 1886 under which tribal belts and
blocks were created. This amended Act was again amended in 1964 for the protection of tribal land by providing restriction on usage, contract, transfer, exchange, lease, agreement and settlement of any land in any area or areas within the jurisdiction of tribal belts and blocks. But even the Government became almost failure in protecting the tribal land. Agricultural is the backbone of tribal economy in Assam. As a result of land alienation tribals had to suffer from serious economic crisis, resulting more and more poverty, indebtedness and so on. At present such problems are becoming more complex in socio-political and socio-cultural life of the Bodos. The whole situation is arising due to several factors such as:

(a) The deep rooted feeling of negligence, deprivation, exploitation and the sense of insecurity.

(b) Most problems relate to land, language and labour employment issues.

(c) Push and pull of youths by the political parties to gain power.

(d) Poor analysis and evaluation of Govt. policies in the context of pre-determined objectives.

(e) Dysfunction of the institutions like family, educational institutions, political parties, administrative department.

(f) Lethargic pace of the administrative process to stop emerging problems moving towards more complicated situation.

A new dimension of political arena of the Bodos emerged with the formation of a political party of the plains tribals nomenclated as Plains Tribal Council of Assam (P.T.C.A.) on 20th Feb, 1967 and All Bodo Students' Union on 15th February 67 just after the Government's announcement of the policy of the Reorganization of Assam on the federal basis. Since then the Bodos had been demanding separate political autonomy under the banner of respective political parties like P.T.C.A., UTNLF, UBNLF and lastly All Bodo Students' Union.

P.T.C.A submitted memorandum to the President of India for the first time on 2nd May 1967 at New Delhi demanding autonomous region nomenclated as 'Udayachal' comprising plains tribals areas of northern tract of erstwhile Goalpara, Kamrup Darrang and Sibsagar Districts including tribal belts and blocks of these areas. P.T.C.A. and A.B.S.U. jointly boycotted the Parliamentary election in 1968 in support of the demand for the creation of separate administrative unit. During this moment Bodo Sahitya Sabha had been launching agitational programmes for introduction of Roman Script for Bodo medium in schools and it
also witnessed declaration of President's rule from 1975 to 1977. The P.T.C.A leaders made an alliance with the Janata Party and decided to join the Coalition Ministry headed by Golap Borbora after winning the general election of 1977. On 4th April 1997, the P.T.C.A. retreated from the demand of union territory to autonomous region and it resulted to split of the party and a new political party entitled Progressive P.T.C.A. was formed in 1979. P.T.C.A. (P) submitted its memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on 8th July 1980 demanding a separate administrative unit nomenclated as 'Mishing Bodoland'. However the P.T.C.A. continued to exist.

Meanwhile A.B.S.U. tried to unite the two political parties by holding a convention from 17th to 19th April/1984, at Harishinga in erstwhile Darrang District. Consequently a new political party was formed with it the name and style 'United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front' on 19th April, 1984, under the Chairmanship of Sri Binay Kungur Basumatary. U.T.N.L.F. submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi in May 1984 and in July 1985 respectively demanding separate administrative unit for the Tribals. Later it also split into two groups United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front and United Bodo Nationalist Liberation Front. U.B.N.L.F. also submitted memorandum to the then Union Minister Buta Singh on 16th April 1988, demanding a separate homeland with Union Territory status in the North bank of the Brahmaputra River. The U.B.N.L.F. met the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on 7th June 1989 demanding creation of separate administrative unit for the tribals of Assam.

When no political party was willing to resolve the differences to form a united front to achieve the desired goal A.B.S.U. made a decision to spearhead the movement for separate state of Bodoland, along with the Bodo People Action Committee, a revolutionary wing. Besides the demand for a separate state of Bodoland A.B.S.U. also included two major political demands:

(a) Creation of the district council in tribal compact areas of the southern part of Goalpara and Kamrup district (erstwhile) with the nomenclature of Nilachal under article 244 (2).
(b) Creation of regional council for non-Karbi tribes in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council.

The movement persisted for seven years and passed through many stages and phases, beginning on March 2nd, 1987 with a declaration of mass movement.
The Bodo movement transformed into a violent movement, causing the situation more deteriorating. In the meantime several rounds of talk were held among central Govt., state Govt. and A.B.S.U. – B.P.A.C. led movement leaders. Consequently Chandrasekhar Government appointed an expert committee in 1990 with Dr. Bhupinder Singh I.A.S. as Chairman, Dr. S.K. Singh, I.A.S. and Gokhle as a member to go into the question as to what extent legislative, financial and political powers could be extended to the Bodos in response to the demand of separate administrative unit. The committee submitted its report on 31st March 1992, which was rejected by the Bodo leaders. The A.B.S.U. and B.P.A.C. held several rounds of talk with the state Govt. but no solution was found as the Bodo leaders insisted on the inclusion of hundred of villages within the proposed administrative unit.

The seven years old Bodo agitation came to a hasty end with the signing of memorandum of settlement between the Govt. of Assam and the Bodo leaders on 31st March 1993. It gave birth to the creation of Bodoland Autonomous Council comprising contiguous geographical areas between the Sankos river and Pasighat river. Mazbat which roughly make the western and eastern boundaries on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river. The benchmark for the inclusion of areas in the B.A.C was that the Bodos should constitute 50% or more of a village’s population. However, the villages with lesser Bodo population have also been included to ensure territorial contiguity.

After the signing of Bodoland accord S.K. Bwiswamuthiary was appointed as the chief of the interim council by the Governor’s notification dated on 30th June 1993. He quit the council in protest that state’s notification was unilateral act and betrayed the Bodo cause. He claimed that inclusion of 515 more villages within the B.A.C. area was verbally assured by the Govt. but the state Govt. contended that inclusion of those villages would be against the interest of the non-tribals living within the area. Later on 27th Dec. 1993 interim B.E.C. was reconstituted with its chief Prem Sing Brahma who also quit it and again, when Asom Gana Parishad returned to the power, the Govt. of Assam reconstituted the interim council with the nomination of Kankeswar Narzary as the chief of B.E.C. in June 1996.

This fact reveals that this politico-administrative arrangement for self rule could not satisfy the aspiration of the Bodo people due to the indifferent attitude of the political parties and lack of sincerity and goodwill of the Government. This instable situation in the political scenario of B.A.C. shows that no sincere effort to resolve the Bodoland accord was made by the government. Even neither boundary of the B.A.C. was demarcated nor the election was held. As a result the Bodos...
resumed agitation for better political autonomy for the fulfillment of their various aspirations.

Consequently A.B.S.U. denounced the Bodo accord of 1993 and rejected B.A.C. by submitting a memorandum to the then Prime Minister of India, P.V Narasimha Rao on 19th March 1996 and decided to resume the movement for separate state of Bodoland again.\textsuperscript{4} When the Prime Minister of India declared to create three new states in India on 15\textsuperscript{th} August 1996 A.B.S.U. got a new impetus to undertake agitational programme for separate state with a new strategy. On 26\textsuperscript{th} May 1998 a tripartite talk was held between central, state Govt. and A.B.S.U. B.P.A.C. leaders to resolve the Bodo issue but no any concrete result came out of it.

In the meantime a breakaway group of the Bodo Volunteers’ Force formed the Bodo Liberation Tigers in 1996. In conformity with the status of autonomy demanded by A.B.S.U., the B.L.T. adopted a policy of creating a separate state within the union of India. Since then B.L.T. resorted to arm struggle for the creation of separate state for the Bodos. There was suspicion on B.L.T. cadres for resorting to violent activities, such as blasting explosive in railway bridges, highways and public places creating the law and order problem in the state. This moment also witnessed fratricidal killing between suspected another underground outfit, with the B.L.T. But the B.L.T. continued to be dominant of the moment.\textsuperscript{42}

Meanwhile A.B.S.U. took initiative for negotiation of B.L.T. with the Central Govt. to find out a solution of the Bodoland issue. Several rounds of talk were held between the Central Govt. and B.L.T. and later it resulted into signing of Memorandum of Settlement on 10\textsuperscript{th} February, 2003 for the creation of a autonomous self governing body, with the nomenclature of “Bodoland Territorial Administrative Area”, under the provision of 6\textsuperscript{th} scheduled of the constitution of India.\textsuperscript{43}

Creation of Bodoland Territorial Council is a landmark achievement in the political history of the Bodos and their heritage. But it has a long way to go in ushering a sea change in its socio-cultural and politic-economic affairs within the jurisdiction of administrative area (covering four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baska and Udalguri). After the formation of B.A.C. it was expected that Bodo problems would be solved at least to some extent and peace and normalcy would come again in the strife torn areas. But due to the loophole and non-fulfillment of its provision, the Bodos have to pass through the slippery path even at the cost of valuable lives which consequently gave birth to B.T.A.D. The whole period of autonomy
movement up to B.A.C. accord and again another phase of movement up to signing of a new accord of B.T.C. is a new dimension in the political arena of the Bodos. One can not be sure that such event may not occur in the history of tribal politics of Assam in near future, where many more tribes are striving for greater autonomy under the provision of the sixth scheduled of the constitution.

After the B.T.C. accord a new political party, B.P.P.F. (Bodoland People’s Progressive Front) has been formed and the Executive Council of B.T.C. was also formed after holding its election. B.P.P.F. has formed coalition Government with the Congress Party headed by the Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi and two Cabinet Ministers and one State Minister are inducted in the ministry from this new party. It is a great opportunity to the B.P.P.F. and the leaders of B.T.C. to serve the people and its countrymen having politico-administrative power both in the council and State Government as well.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:
The objective of the study is mainly confined to the most Bodo populated district of Kokrajhar, Assam, where cultural and biological contact with non-Bodos and elements of traditional, social and political institutions are predominantly existing till to day. Further, efforts have been made to include reliable information and observations of other Bodo concentrated areas of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and other districts of Assam. As most of the tribal life, in and around the Brahmaputra valley are more or less identical in nature and interrelated, it has to deal with related Bodo problems and constraints as regards to socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political aspects within the state of Assam and with that of other states in the North East India. Besides to make a comparative study it has to deal with the Bodos of West Bengal, Bihar and other states of India and Nepal in abroad.

Although the study is based on the Bodo based organizations or institutions, it covers the historical background, change and development of the Bodo people. As such it brings into limelight both the pre-independence and post-independence periods in the context of social dynamic, subsistence and aspirations of the people.

At present contribution on Bodo literary works, articles monographs, written books of English or Assamese on the Bodo are available. Even no empirical and scientific study on socio-political institutions of the Bodo society has been adequate so far my study is an attempt to investigate the basic reality and wisdom
of such social and political institutions as a part and parcel of composite culture of our nation.
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