

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In order to explain the course of change that happens in nature, one frequently takes recourse to the theory of evolution. To study and understand biological changes in species over the millennia and also the way they adapt to a changing environment is exceptionally interesting. The study of man's biological evolution provides very important contribution to the understanding of history of human civilization. But in order to decipher the past, it is important to understand the human efforts to use the environment to his own advantage along with how, why and when of the changes he has created on it.<sup>1</sup>

Human existence is closely linked to nature, with man living in constant interchange with the natural world; but the interchange is always mediated through society and history which is the record of continuous transformation of human nature.

The shift of importance in the continuous transformation of human nature can be explained through understanding human history. Engels remarks,

*“.....that mankind must first of all eat, drink, learn to live in any climate, have shelter and clothing to protect against cold and damp, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc. The production of the immediate material means of subsistence and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given era form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art and even the ideas on religion of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which they must therefore be explained, instead of vice versa, as had up till now been the case”.*<sup>2</sup>

Man is embedded in nature. He interacts with nature and has also the ability to bring about relative changes in nature, and this interaction is primarily through the medium of labour and the ability to produce his material needs. Man is conditioned by himself and human action is responsible for historical development. Therefore it becomes necessary to examine the material conditions of human existence and the part played by men therein, to understand the historical process. And it becomes necessary to trace the beginnings of labour to the making of tools and implements. Some of the earliest tools and implements used by man in the process of historical advancement are fishing tools and hunting implements, which must have brought about basic change in the nature of food intake, with increase in percentage of fish and meat consuming of human beings. Eventually, as increasing in domestication of animals, use of fire and the practice of cooking took place mankind learnt to eat anything edible and adapt to different climatic conditions and environments, which played important role in development of historical process by leading to the growth of different cultures.<sup>3</sup>

The physical item that helps to achieve a goal or perform a job can be defined as a tool.<sup>4</sup> The use of tools was an important step in the evolution of mankind. Successfully using a tool requires not only understanding the relationship between the tool and the goal, but also the ability to locate a tool which is appropriate for the task. Tools helps human being to accomplish tasks that human bodies could not and the knowledge of constructing, obtaining and using tools is technology. Tool making served permanent needs of these earliest men.<sup>5</sup>

“No production, no history” goes a famous statement. The tools when used have contributed to the growth of human culture and civilization. And the process of production has always been contributed by the use of technology.<sup>6</sup>

The availability of technology certainly shapes the society, as it contributes to rising of institutions and normally breaks the traditional normative of the group. According to Leroi-Gourhan, technology directly interacts with the society, shapes it and provides it with a sustenance base.<sup>7</sup> Leroi-Gourhan further says technology involves not just tools and the manual skills used by them, but also the place of all these in society.<sup>8</sup> Technology involves tools, their utilization and also the social action involved in their utilization. Technology is an important element of culture and it is shared and

transmitted within a group,<sup>9</sup> it is the basic to human nature, which interacts deeply with human society to produce an impact on the directions and pace of social evolution. Technology as a tool of analysis can be very helpful in unraveling the basis of human thoughts and flowing ideas.<sup>10</sup>

W. Brian Arthur gave three definitions of technology; the first one is very basic one, which says technology is a means to fulfill a human process, the second one, says technology is an assemblage of practices and components and the third one, says technology is the entire collection of devices and engineering practices available to a culture.<sup>11</sup>

According to *The New Penguin Encyclopedia*, Technology is “the use of tools, machines, materials, technique and sources of power to make work easier and more production”.<sup>12</sup>

In order to study and understand the tools and technology used by any civilization, it is important to go through the different stages of human evolutions. The archaeological record over different parts of the world has given us the following sequence-

Prehistory tells us the story of human evolution, both physical and cultural. The man is defined as a tool-making animal by the pre-historians and the story of human evolution began from the time when man-like creatures accidentally or intentionally converted naturally fragmented stones or pebbles into artifacts. From then on our early ancestor by and large used tools and weapons prepared by stone for nearly two million years. And other than stone, they might have used wood and bone, but could not preserve these, as these are perishable. The making of fine tools and weapons of stone, bone and antler which could survive in the favourable climate of Europe became possible with the emergence of *Homo sapiens*, the species of modern man emergence in about 40,000 years B.C. These tools and weapons lasted till about 10,000 B.C, which mark the end of the Old Stone Age. Then came a period, when man made tiny stone-tools called microliths appeared, which had to be hafted or placed as teeth in bone or wood handle to produce a sickle and other weapons like, arrow-heads and harpoons. Again man took to manufacturing large ground or polished stone tools at the edge,

which mark the beginning of Neolithic or the New Stone Age. Mesolithic is the period of transition between the Paleolithic and the Neolithic Age and all the three ages cover a period of two million years, with the first one being the longest in duration (2,000,000-10,000 years). In Europe it is further divided into three sub periods- Early, Middle and Late or Upper with corresponding climate phases and changes in the flora and fauna, which in the rest of the world and particularly in India are not so well marked though changes in the form, technique and sometimes even in the material used for making the tool or weapons are seen.<sup>13</sup>

During the Paleolithic (Old Stone Age), the people lived in nomadic communities, and used tools and implements made out of stone, along with pieces of wood and bone,<sup>14</sup> for the purpose of hunting, cutting etc. L. S. B. Leakey remarks, “The making of weapons and implements of stone, bone and wood doubtless goes back to the time when man first became man. One of the most widely accepted descriptive phrases to designate man as he is ‘the tool-maker’. Gradually, as man evolved as more and more tool-maker, he used other materials such as horn, antler and ivory to a lesser extent, though objects made of stone because of its durability survived in greater numbers. From the earliest period to about 3000 B.C., stone working techniques was confined to various methods of chipping and flaking, and simplest hammer stone technique of flaking being the first one to be employed which involved holding in the hand a water-worn pebble of suitable size and shape for knocking off flakes from another stone to shape it roughly into form. The techniques for working stone in making implements and tools, and later in making domestic utensils, evolved slowly which helped in achieving the purposes for which they were designed. And with limited knowledge of wood working and bone working techniques, it would be safe to say that these techniques were confined to cutting, chopping, adzing, scraping, and sawing.<sup>15</sup> The people in this age were roughly dressed by animal skin, bark or leave to protect themselves from weather and were populated throughout India except the fertile plains of the Indus, Ganga and Yamuna rivers; they had no knowledge of cultivation and building house. Gradually the people of this age began to control fire and domesticate animals.<sup>16</sup>

H. K. Barpujari writes the earliest mention of Paleolithic culture of Assam is mentioned in the *Prehistory and protohistory of Eastern India* (1960) by A. H. Dani. A

stone tool which he classified as Acheulean (stone tool of distinctive oval and pear-shaped) hand axe is now preserved in the Pitt-River Museum, Oxford. The Paleolithic assemblage of the Garo hills can be classified into- (a) hand axe, cleavers and choppers, (b) flake tools and (c) blade tools. The Paleolithic assemblage of Arunachal Pradesh are choppers, proto-hand axes, ovates, cleavers, side-scrapers, points, flakes and cores made of gneisses, quartzite, limestone and schists, which are common rock types of the area. The Paleolithic materials of Manipur are flake and blade tools and bone tools. Microoliths discovered in Rongram valley of the Garo hills are blades, scrapers, points, arrowheads and broad-edged trapezes and possibly lunates, suggesting that the microliths people were hunters and food-gatherers.<sup>17</sup>

The gradual ending of the hunting and food gathering stage is called Mesolithic Age; and this age is marked by the important practice of domesticating of animals. Both the people from Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods practiced in paintings and the evidence of rock paintings from the later period are found in sites like Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh), Azamgarh (Uttar Pradesh), Pratapgarh (Uttar Pradesh) and Mirzapur (Uttar Pradesh), from which reliable information about their social, economic and other activities of the people can be gathered. The sense of stability among the people of this period, ecological and material conditions resulted in shaping the religious beliefs of the people.

The next stage of development is Neolithic Age. The beginning of this age in world context is dated to 9000 B.C. In South Asia it is dated to around 7000 B.C, in north India it is dated as old as 5000 B.C, in south India 2500 B.C. and in eastern India as late as 1000 B.C. The people of this age used polished stone as tools and implements, and stone axes of this period were found in large number in hilly areas of India. Their dependence only on stone tools and implements enabled them to cultivate only some important crops like rice, wheat and barley, along with domestication of animals. Due to the use of metal a major development took place towards the end of the Neolithic period.<sup>18</sup>

The evidence of the Neolithic cultures of Assam is limited, and it can be divided into two groups- (a) The surface fine ground and polished stone tools and (b) the excavated stone tools, pottery and miscellaneous objects, such as charcoal, grinding

stones, whetstones, stone rubber, millers, pestles, waste flakes and pieces of bones. According to A. H. Dani, largest collection of neoliths comes from Sonitpur, Goalpara, Kamrup, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam.<sup>19</sup>

The first widely used metal was copper and based on stone and copper implements, the archaeologist have discovered several chalcolithic culture. This culture was of a rural communities, found in different parts of India in Ahar, Gilund and Balathal in Rajashtan, Kayatha and Eran in western Madhya Pradesh, Jorwe, Nevasa, Dimabad, Chandoli, Songaon, Inamgaon, Prakesh and Nasik in western Maharastra, Narhan in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Pandu Rajar Dhibi and Mahishdal in west Bengal and also in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. More than forty hordes of copper objects like rings, celts, hatchets, swords, harpoons, spearhead and anthropomorphs have been found in a wide area ranging from West Bengal and Orissa in the east of Haryana and Gujarat in the west, Andhra Pradesh in the south, Uttar Pradesh in the north and Gungeria in Madhya Pradesh. The people of this period were expert in copper smiths, stone works, manufacturing cloth, making beads of semi-precious stones, pottery making, ivory carving, lime making and terracotta making. They domesticated animals for eating, draughting and cultivation.<sup>20</sup>

The glimpse of the Copper Age of Assam is not full-fledged as the rest of India and South-east Asia, for there is no data excavation at present.<sup>21</sup>

In the Bronze Age, though people continued making stone tools, they began to alloy copper with tin, giving birth to bronze. The Bronze Age is an age of exploration as tin was not widespread;<sup>22</sup> they probably brought it from Afghanistan and from Hazaribag in Bihar and copper was brought from Rajasthan and perhaps from Baluchistan. They used various tools like flat axes, knives, spearheads, arrowheads etc. and knowledge of gold was known to them, as beads, pendants, armlets, needles etc. made of gold were mentioned by the authors of Harappan civilization, though silver was also commonly used. Besides metal works, the art of weaving, spinning, pottery making, manufacturing brick, making boat, sculpting, making bullock-carts, weights and measurements were known to them.<sup>23</sup>

There is no evidence of Bronze Age of Assam, while evidences of Bronze Age culture have been found in Bengal and in South-east Asia bordering Assam and the only possible explanation is that in Brahmaputra Valley the early metal age sites is yet to be discovered.<sup>24</sup>

The present age is the Iron Age archaeologically, and iron replaced bronze, and made it possible to produce tools which were stronger, lighter and cheaper. This made agriculture a worldwide possibility, as iron ores were much more wide spread than copper and tin. The use of iron made it possible to clear forest areas and to plough in heavier soils providing more farmland and agricultural productions to support the growing population.<sup>25</sup> The bitter connotation of the 'Iron Age' is that though it is cheap metal was used widely for the purpose of agriculture, it resulted in dividing the society into the majority of the population who worked hard and few others who are freed from necessity to work and live at the expense of the working class. The coming of regular agriculture and the use of cattle manure for fertilizing land rapidly exhausted by older tribal slash- and- burn cultivation; brought in permanent occupation of a field, resulting in private property in land.<sup>26</sup>

Though there is no evidence of Iron Age in Assam, like Copper-Bronze Age. Iron and its associates- the painted grey ware and the black-and-red ware might have reached in Brahmaputra Valley in about 800-500 B.C., and this notion has to be confirmed through excavations.<sup>27</sup> Because of the absence of copper and bronze in Assam, though the Dravidians in Assam had to bear the Mongolian drive coming in through the north east and though initially the Mongolian who were themselves most likely a Neolithic people were victorious but eventually they were defeated by the Dravidians, who recovered their supremacy as the ruling race because of the used of copper and bronze weapons.<sup>28</sup>

Assam is rich in Megalithic culture; it is prehistoric and still continues among the tribal communities of this region. The Megaliths are made of huge slabs of granite which were hewn by fire-setting method and the technical skill involved in hewing, transporting and erecting these gigantic *menhirs* confirms to the high level of culture of the megalithic builder of Assam.<sup>29</sup>

There are excellent works drawing linkages between tools, technological inputs and historical evolution all through history, as well as in regard to India, but they have not significantly included much regional variations in their works. Therefore, in generalizing about the all India situation may not be regarded equally true with regard to the north east India, though with different geography, race and culture of this region also influenced technological innovations, as well as mode of production.

The works on tools and technology, relating to Assam have ignored the modes of production and technological change as concomitants of change in the evolution of the Ahom state.<sup>30</sup>

According to Amarendra Kumar Thakur, technological inquiries in India have remained restricted to the macro level with studies mainly been conducted on the 'mainland' of India and its dominant issues. The enquiries into the technological aspects based on rural and agrarian, technologies of the 'periphery' and technologies of the marginal and the tribal areas have been always neglected. The study of Indian technology can be divided into three major shades- The first one provided by the majority of European travelers, as well as British officials and scholars, who named to everything that was found in India as 'black and bleak.' The second opinion has been quite enthusiastic about India's pre-colonial periodic scientific credentials and potential. Technological advances in the ancient period have been also located. And the third set of opinion treads vigilantly by offering balanced comments by highlighting the misleading notions of both of these sides.

Unlike the opinions of the colonial writers, the eminent historian Irfan Habib does not accept pre-colonial technology as primitive and mentions a wider study of social limits that according to him prevented either an endogenous development of industrial technology as compared to that of modern European technology itself and best describing it as 'proto-science and technology'.

The success of the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the political superiority attained by Europe resulted in absence of studies on the technology of the tribal people of India. The 'queer and exotic' were the title given to the tribal people of India by the Europeans and they never encouraged their officials to take up serious study of the life



and culture of the tribal people. After the Independence of India, the researchers did not take up seriously on tribal technology and its social implications because the researchers were influenced by the early colonial ethnographers in their concepts, techniques, theories, methods of study and subjects.

The tribes of India as the subjects of researches, the studies on tools and technology have always been neglected be it the northeastern region of India or at an all India level. Northeast India, due to its location at the tri-junction of south, southeast and east Asia and its existence as connecting linkage with mainland India, delivers rich cultural heritage for the study of tools and technology. The hills and plains of the eight states forms northeast India which have been occupied by different people and provides ample scope for the scholars for studying tools and technology of this area, which is not very popular as a subject of study,<sup>31</sup> though Dr. Amarendra Kumar Thakur's works associating with the study of technology of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and Northeast in general is worth mentioning.

To study tools and technology, its socio-cultural significance is one of the latest and innovative methods in the field of social science, forming a major object of scientific inquiry. With regards to the Bodos, yeomen service has been rendered by many authors, but no researcher has taken up the traditional tools and technology of the Bodos for study, which without any doubt played one of an important roles in building Bodo history. In order to reconstruct the history of the Bodos, therefore it becomes necessary to examine these traditional tools and technology, along with their socio-cultural values and impact of modernity on these traditional tools and technology along with social, cultural, religious, political and economic history of the Bodos.

The Bodos make and use different types of tools and implements for the purposes of their livelihood, for defense, hunting, agriculture, fishing, domestic use, for social and cultural purposes, house making and for building communication networks. The traditional tools and technology of the Bodos reflect their creativity.<sup>32</sup> Bodos are self-dependent in nature and they have the knowledge of constructing, obtaining and using tools.

Bamboo and cane grow abundantly almost everywhere in Assam, and like in any other communities of Assam, they occupy a very important place in the material culture of the Bodos in Assam. The making of bamboo and cane products by the Bodos can be termed as 'pure handicrafts' where even elementary mechanical devices are not used, and with its products having wide range of uses are commonly found in every household. The traditional tools and technology used by the Bodos for defense, hunting, agriculture, fishing, domestic purposes, social and cultural purposes, house making and building communication networks clearly shows that they are very skillful with developed mindset.

## **LAND AND THE PEOPLE OF THE AREA OF THE STUDY**

This research work is mainly based on the traditional tools and technology used by the Bodos of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, with special reference to the Bodos of Kokrajhar district as it is predominantly inhabited by the Bodos. The Boro-Kachari, one of the earliest settlers of Assam, is numerically the largest tribal groups in North-East India.<sup>33</sup>

The Brahmaputra Valley constitutes the major portion of the state of Assam. The Brahmaputra Valley though it is the eastern extension of the Great Plains of India, it is a natural demarcated region within the griddle formed by the Eastern Himalayas, Patkai and Naga Hills and the Garo – Khasi- Jaintia and Mikir Hills. In the North, it is surrounded by Bhutan and in the East by Arunachal Pradesh, in the South by Nagaland, Meghalaya and Karbi Anglong (district of Assam) and in the West by West Bengal and Bangladesh. This region lies roughly between 25° 44' N to 27° 55' N parallels of latitude and from 89° 41' E to 96° 02' E meridians of longitude. From the East to West the Valley stretches for about 720 kilometers in length and its width varies from 130 kilometers in the western and central parts to about 80 kilometers in the eastern extremity. The total area of the Brahmaputra Valley is 56,194 square kilometers.<sup>34</sup> The major Bodo inhabitant areas of the Brahmaputra valley are Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri, Sonitpur, Dhemaji, Kamrup Rural and Goalpara districts.

Kokrajhar district is an administrative district situated in the western most part of Assam. This district is located on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra and it lies roughly between 89.46 % E to 90.38 % E longitudes and 21.17 % N to 26.54 % N latitudes.

Kokrajhar was originally a part of undivided Goalpara district. In 1957, under the administration of Bimala Prasad Chaliha, who was the Chief Minister of Assam, three divisions were created one of which was Kokrajhar and it was given full-fledged district status on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1983. In the north, Kokrajhar district is bounded by Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, Goalpara and Dhubri district on the south, Bongaigaon district to the east and Jalpaiguri and Alipour Daur district of West Bengal on the west.

According to the Census of 2011, Kokrajhar had population of 8887, 142 of which male population was 452,905 and female population was 434,237.

The average literacy rate according to 2011 Census is 65.22%; with male literacy rate of 71.89% and female literacy rate was 58.27%.

And according to District Census Handbook Kokrajhar district, 2011, Govt. of Assam, out of total population of 887,142 persons the total number of ST and SC are 278,665 and 29,570 respectively.<sup>35</sup>

The soil of the Kokrajhar district is fertile and alluvia. The District had also largest concentration of forest in the state, especially the northern part but because of illegal traders in the recent years, many valuable trees have been cut down.<sup>36</sup> The district is situated in a humid sub-tropical climate, which is characteristic of the lower Brahmaputra Valley of Assam and the rainfall is high and temperature is humid,<sup>37</sup> with maximum rainfall in a year is 3330 mm and minimum rainfall in a year is 1305 mm with average rainfall of about 2405 mm.<sup>38</sup> According to District Census Handbook, 2011, the actual total rainfall during the year 2011 was 2674.6 mm against the average rainfall of the state which was 1566.6 mm. The month of highest rainfall was in July in 2011, with rainfall of 812.0 mm against the state rainfall of 382.0 mm. The climate is hot and humid in summer and strong spell of cold in winters.

Agriculture is the chief occupation of the people of this district and 80% of the villagers are engaged in agriculture either in cultivation or as agricultural labours. Soft and sandy climate, humid atmosphere and abundant rain accelerated the growth of agricultural production. This district produces paddy in the winter, autumn and summer seasons and variety of cereals. In winter, the district produces paddy to the tune of 18,219 tones, in autumn, 12,248 tones and in summer 2,950 tones during 1998-99, according to District Census Handbook 2011, Part XII-A, Kokrajhar.<sup>39</sup>

J. D. Anderson observed, “The river names of the whole Brahmaputra Valley are Bodo names, and it is demonstrable that the Bodos were the aborigines of the valley”.<sup>40</sup>

Here an attempt is made to discuss about the Bodo speaking people of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, with special reference to Kokrajhar district of Assam by the term Bodo in the study and the term Bodo used in the study does not cover other Bodo speaking groups.

## **THE BODOS**

The term Bodos means ‘man’.<sup>41</sup> The Bodos are an ethnic and linguistic community, settling in Assam<sup>42</sup> and its neighboring India states like Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Tripura, etc.<sup>43</sup> According to Sir Edward Gait, the Bodos can be regarded as the aboriginal of Brahmaputra Valley, as well as one of the earliest inhabitants of these valley.<sup>44</sup> It is regarded that they were very powerful and they established powerful kingdoms not only throughout the North-East region of India but also in Moran district of Nepal and Rangpur district of Bangladesh. During the pre-historic period, they were known as *Kiratas* and were also called in many names like *Danava*, *Asur*, *Pichas*, etc.<sup>45</sup> and they were the people who lived during the epic age of Ramayana and Mahabharata in the eastern region of India. The Bodos are the people with short head, broad nose, flat face, narrow eyes and mongoloid fold is present in eye, short and muscular body with yellow skin and less body hair.<sup>46</sup>

The Bodos are the earliest inhabitants to settle in the Brahmaputra valley belonging to Indo-Mongoloid stock and they constitute a very important section among all other tribes settling in the Brahmaputra Valley.<sup>47</sup>

Suniti Kumer Chatterji in *Kirata Jana Kriti* mentions that the Bodos were the most important Indo-Mongoloid people in eastern India and they spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley and North Bengal, forming a solid block in North-Eastern India and are one of the main bases of the population of these areas at present.<sup>48</sup>

Rev. Sidney Endle in his *The Kacharis* mentions that the origin of the Kachari race even today is a matter of great conjecture and inference, in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history. And he adds more that in feature and general appearance they are very close to the Mongolian type with Tibet and China as their original home.<sup>49</sup>

According to Suniti Kumer Chatterji, the original home of the Mongoloid tribes is north-western China between the head waters of the Hoang Ho and the Yang Tszé Kiang Rivers, which can also be regarded as the original home of the Bodos, as the Bodos are a race of Mongolian people.<sup>50</sup>

Rev. S. Endle was the first one to classify the Bodos as Kacharis. According to 19<sup>th</sup> century classification, the Bodos represents one of the largest of the 18 ethnic sub-groups within the Kachari group. The term Bodo is derived from the term *Bod* which means Tibet and the Bodos are said to have reached the Brahmaputra valley via Tibet and they started settling in eastern Himalayan range including the whole of Assam, Tripura, North Bengal and some parts of Bangladesh.

According to 1818 census, there were 18 groups within the Kachari classification, such as (1) Bodo, (2) Chutiya, (3) Dhimal, (4) Dimasa, (5) Garo, (6) Hajong, (7) Hojai, (8) Lalung, (9) Madani, (10) Mahalia, (11) Mech, (12) Matak, (13) Moran, (14) Phulgaria, (15) Rabha, (16) Saraniya, (17) Solaimiya and (18) Tipra.<sup>51</sup>

Aryans and Dravidians cannot be solely given the credit for the foundation of the Indian Culture but also the Bodos along with Negritos, Austriacs, the Mongoloids,

the Kiratas and other non-Aryan tribes played important roles in the gradual evolution of the composite culture of India.

The making of the nation is contributed by each section of a large population in the same manner as each flower helps to make a garden.<sup>52</sup>

According to the ancient records *Kirata* is a name of a race of the people living on the Himalayan borders and in Assam. In Mahabharata and in some other old books as *Yogini Tantra* and *Kalika Purana*, the Bodos have been described as ‘*Kiratas*’.<sup>53</sup> According to the *Vajasenaya Samhita* and *Atharva-Veda*, “the *Kiratas* are the people residing in caves.” The *Kalika Purana* describes the *Kiratas* as people of short structure, golden colour, shaved head, and rough skin and addicted to meat and drink. It mentions about Ghotoka, who was a *Kirata* Chief, who ruled over the present Assam in about 2200 B.C., when Assam was invaded by Narakasura.<sup>54</sup> The Greek navigator who authored the *Periplus* mentions about meeting the flat nose Kirrhadaes and other tribal races before reaching the Gangetic delta. The ‘*Cilata*’, name of the country mentioned in the Nagarjuna Kunda inscription dated 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. and the ‘*Scyrites* or *Syritess*’ mentioned by Greek writer Pilius are the *Kiratas*, who had great influence over ancient Assam.

The name *Kirata* was mentioned for the first time in the *Yajurveda* (*Sukla Yajurveda*, *Vajasaneyi Samhita*, XXX, 16; also *Krsna Yajurveda*, *Taittiriya Brahmana*, III, 4, 12, 1). In connection with the *Purusa-medha* or ‘Man-offering sacrifice’, where a list of all kinds of human beings and animals symbolically or figuratively offered to the gods as sacrifice is given and the following passage can be found:

*Guhabhyah kiratam; sanubhyo jambhaka; parvatebhyah kimpurusam.*

(Pre-translation)

‘*A Kirata, for the caves; a jambhaka (long-toothed man?) for the slopes; a kimpurusa (an ugly man, a wild man, an ape?) for the mountains*’:

(Translation by R. T. Griffith.)

A *Kirata* girl (*Kairatika*) is mentioned in the *Atharvaveda* (X, 4, 14) who digs for an herbal remedy on the ridges of the mountains:

*Kairatika kumarika saka khanate bhesajam:*

*Hiranyayibhir abhribhir girinam upa sanusu*

(Pre-translation)

*'The young maid of Kirata race, a little damsel, digs the drug;*

*Digs it with shovels wrought of gold on the high ridges of the hills'.*

(Translation by R. T. Griffith.)

Regarding *Kirata* it is mentioned in *vedic index* by Macdonell and Keith that *Kirata* is a name given to people living in the caves of mountains, as it is found in the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* (also *Taittiriya Brahmana*), and they mentioned of a *Kirata* girl (*Kairatika*), who digs a remedy on the ridges of the mountains. Later the people called *Kiratas* were located in Eastern Nepal, but the name seems to have been applied to any hill folk, no doubt aborigines, though the *Manava Dharma-Sastra* regards them as degraded Ksatriyas origin, there is always in implication that they were, to some extent at least, advanced in civilization or military organization, and as such could not be dismissed as utter barbarians.<sup>55</sup>

The *Kiratas* were the silk dealers, as dealer in silk was called the seres or the scyrites. The silk was originally a product of China and it was catered by merchants of Turkestan through Tibetan intermediaries to India and Assam. The traders in ancient times assembled in Assam through various routes from different parts of Tibet, Central Asia and China to trade mostly in silk and were generally called Seres-Cirrahadoi (Serek-cloth wala in modern sense) Syrites-Cirata-Kirata.

*Kirata* is a general term referring to the people of Mongolian origin, especially to the Bodos,<sup>56</sup> who brought the art of silk weaving from China to India and to Assam in ancient times and Assam ever since has been associated with the production of the best quality and varieties of silk- *pat*, *muga* and *endi*.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, Assam has been famous for her silk since time immemorial.

## MIGRATION

There are divergent opinions among the scholars regarding the migration of the Bodos into India.<sup>58</sup> As the Bodos are regarded to be the descendants of the Mongoloid family and in due course of time they have migrated towards different parts of the world<sup>59</sup> from Central Asia, which is the mainland of the Mongoloid people. According to most of the scholars the Bodos migration into India can be dated as early as 5000 B.C.<sup>60</sup>

The Mongoloid people had occupied the southern tracts of the Himalayas and the whole of North Eastern India, North Bihar contiguous to Nepal and to the North of the Ganges, the greater part of Bengal and Assam including the areas through which the Ganges passed into sea when the Mahabharata and the Ramayana were taking shape between 500 BC to 400 AD, particularly in pre-Christian centuries. The Mongoloid people were specially connected to Eastern Nepal and the Lauhitya or the Brahmaputra valleys.<sup>61</sup>

According to Mahabharata, the Bodos called the River Brahmaputra '*Tilao*' which means 'the long or Great River' or 'Bullungbuthur'. '*Ti*' or '*Di*' means water and '*lao*' means long in Bodo language<sup>62</sup> and all the names of the local rivers start with '*ti*' or '*di*', like Dihang, Dibang, Dikrang, Disang, Dibru, Digaru, Digboi, Dikhau Dimu, etc. because the Bodos lived there.<sup>63</sup>

Satyendra Nath Mondal said that the Bodos migration into India that, they migrated into India through the Patkoi Hills which lies between India and Burma and eventually spread into the whole of modern Assam, North Bengal and some parts of East Bengal.<sup>64</sup>

Rev. S. Endle in his book *The Kacharis* mentioned that the Bodos migrated to the Brahmaputra valley from Tibet and China,<sup>65</sup> which were their homeland, initially for commercial purpose to trade in Chinese silk cloth, Chinese bamboo flutes, etc.<sup>66</sup> Eventually they stayed in the banks of the Brahmaputra River and some small states were built there by them. And since the Mongolians lived in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains and in the Brahmaputra River, they were known as 'Kachari'<sup>67</sup> meaning foothills of Himalayas.<sup>68</sup>



The Bodos who spread over the Kachar regions came to be known as Kachari and they were the earliest settlers of the Brahmaputra valley and the Kacharis settling in the Brahmaputra valley are known Bodo and in the North Kachar hills, they are known as Dimasa.<sup>69</sup> The term Kachari is derived from *Kassar*, which means the foothills of the Himalayas. The Bodos settled in the foothills of the eastern Himalayan range covering the whole of Assam, Tripura, North Bengal and some parts of Bangladesh after they are said to have reached the Brahmaputra valley through Tibet.<sup>70</sup>

The Bodos who migrated in the whole of modern Assam along the bank of river Brahmaputra are known as Boros (Bodos).<sup>71</sup> In different parts of Assam, the Bodos are known in different names like Boro, Garo, Dimasa, Koch-Rajbanshi, Hajong, Chutia, Sonowal, Deori, Moran, Motok, Barman, Thengal, Sarania, Modashi, etc. but it is regarded that all of them belong to the same Bodo ethnic group belonging to great Indo-Mongoloid stock.<sup>72</sup>

The Bodos also migrated in the west and settled in Alipurduar district of West Bengal and Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Goalpara districts of Assam and they migrated and settled in the districts of Barpeta, Nalbari, and Kamrup. The Bodos who migrated in the east call themselves as *Chutia*, *Moran*, and *Borahis* and the Bodos outside the Brahmaputra Valley living in Tripura are known as *Tippera* or *Barman* and those who living in Garo hills are known as *Garo*, *Hajong*, etc.

According to the Anthropologists they all come under the Indo-Mongoloid group and they are mentioned as *Kiratas* in the *Vedas*.<sup>73</sup> The word *Kiratas* was first used by the Greek writers Nonnos (5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) and Pliny as *Cirradioi* race and *Scyrites* or *Syrites* tribe respectively referring to the same people who are described as *Kirata* in the Indian records, who were traders from different parts of China, Tibet and Central Asia and flocked to Assam through various routes to trade mostly in silk. Therefore, the word *Kirata* is a general term referring to the people of the Mongolian origin, especially to the Bodos.<sup>74</sup>

During the time of Mahabharata, it is said that the Bodo tribes constituted the vast population of Assam Valley, Northern and Eastern Bengal and surrounding hills.<sup>75</sup> And the Mahabharata tells that the Bodos were a part of the battle Kurukshetra and they

were at that time known as *Kiratas*, who were the ancestors of the Bodos and there were 'Mech or Bodo communities' settling in the Teesta and Karatowa valleys (western borders of ancient Kamrup) who were popularly known as 'Mech' for settling in Mechi river valleys. According to Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumder, 'Mech or Bodo communities of this region even converted to Islam and became Muslims'.<sup>76</sup>

## HABITAT AND IDENTITY

According to many well-known authors like Endle, Gait and Chatterji the Bodos are regarded to be the original inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley,<sup>77</sup> covering the whole of modern Assam, North Bengal and some parts of Bangladesh till twelfth century A.D. and eventually they migrated to western part of Brahmaputra Valley, North Cachar Hills and plains of Cachar in the sixteenth century A.D.<sup>78</sup>

Raj Mohan Nath in his *The Background of Assamese Culture* mentions that the inhabitants of various parts of the *Bod* (Tibet) country were known as *Boddo-Ficha* or *Bodo-cha* (*Ficha-cha*-children) or the children of the *Bod* country and were known simply as the *Boddo*- the *Bodo*.<sup>79</sup>

According to the Linguistic Survey of India, B.H. Hodgson was the first one to use the generic term 'Bodo' to indicate the different branches of the Bodo language group.<sup>80</sup> G.A. Grierson established that the generic term 'Bodo' was first applied to these languages.<sup>81</sup>

Bodos inhabitant areas are Alipurduar district of West Bengal and Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksha, Udalguri, Goalpara, Sonitpur, Dhemaji, Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup districts of Assam and they are known as Boro- Kachari. And the Bodos living outside the Brahmaputra Valley such as in North Cachar is known as Dimasa Kachari, in Tripura is known as Tippera or Barman, and in Garo Hills are known as Garo, Hajong, etc

They are all called as *Kiratas* in the Vedas belonging to one group known as Indo-Mongoloid group<sup>82</sup>.

## FAMILY, SOCIETY AND POLITY

Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya says that there are few elements of matriarchal characteristics in the Boro social structure, though it is primarily patriarchal.<sup>83</sup> Father is the head of the family.<sup>84</sup> But the female members of the family are also given due respect which is reflected in Rev. Sidney Endle's, *The Kacharis*. The Kachari woman as a wife and a mother occupy a respectable position and she enjoy a huge amount of freedom in both her early life and as matrons.<sup>85</sup>

Closely compact and well organized is a characteristic of the Bodo social life. Strict rules and regulations are followed in their social life as well as in their house building and maintaining of homestead. The Bodos give importance to community living, team work, fishing, merry-making, etc.

The polity of the Bodos is primitive and democratic in nature. Every member of the society can take part in the social council or gram panchayat or village council led by the *Gaonburah* (village headman) along with his assistant the *Halmazi* (courier or errands) and division of labour on the basis of *Mahari* (clan) is visible.<sup>86</sup>

## RELIGION

'*Bathou*' or the religion based on 'the philosophy of five' or 'the principle of five' is the traditional religion of the Bodos.<sup>87</sup> They worship *Bathou Brai* and other gods and goddesses in their religious functions and festivals known as *Kherai* (for the welfare of the villagers) and *Garja* (for the purifying of the village community). There is a *Bathou* altar in every Bodo household, where one can see a *Siju* plant (euphorbia splendens).<sup>88</sup> According to P. C. Bhattacharya, Bodos are not animist, they are worshippers of *Bathou*, the supreme God and they believe in ghosts and spirits also.<sup>89</sup>

In the typical Kachari village as far as the rule neither idol nor place of worship is to be created; but they believe in mind and imagination, earth, air and sky and a vast number of invisible spiritual beings, whom they called as '*Modai*', who possesses powers and faculties far greater than those of man, and almost invariably inclined to use these powers for evil and malevolent, rather than benevolent, purposes.<sup>90</sup>

But today a sizeable section of the Bodos have converted themselves into many other religion of the world like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam etc.

## CULTURE

The Bodos have rich cultural heritage and their culture is part and parcel of the Indo-Mongoloid or *Kirata* culture.

Out of the thirteen outstanding characteristics of Mongoloid culture as enumerated by W.C. Smith, Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya mentioned five modified characteristics of the Bodos which are common to other Mongoloid (*Kirata*) people; such as-

- (i) Habit of betel chewing
- (ii) Aversion to milk as an article of diet
- (iii) Presence of simple loom for weaving cloth
- (iv) Presence of a large type of shield used in war and
- (v) Often changing residence in isolated regions with crude (primitive) form of agriculture. Moreover, they have fine music, dances and musical instruments,<sup>91</sup> though some of these cultural characteristics at present appear to be extinct.

The main house of the Bodos is built on the northern side of the homestead, stretching from the west to the east with three divisions with the provision of a door facing to the south. The easternmost portion of the main house is meant for cooking and worship. There is the altar of *Bathou*, the Supreme God with the *siju* (euphorbia splendens) tree in the courtyard parallel to the easternmost portion of the main house. Various ceremonies and festivals in relation to birth, marriage, death and agriculture are observed by the Bodos. During spring time, the Bodos celebrate *baisagu* by taking part in community singing, dancing and consuming rice-beer accompanied with feasts.<sup>92</sup> The Bodos celebrate various seasonal and agricultural festivals like, *domasi* (harvest festival), *khathi gasa* (seasonal festival), *amthisua* (unclean period), and *khotia phunai* (sowing of seeds), *Khothia Phunai* (uprooting the seedling), *Mai gainai* (Planting

paddy), *Mainao lainai* (Bringing Mainao from paddy field to the house), *nangal jankhra* (eating ceremony after rice plantation), *engkham godan janai* (new rich eating ceremony), respectively.<sup>93</sup> The religious festivals of the Bodos are *Kherai* and *Garja puja*. The *Kherai* (a ritualistic dance) is the greatest religious festival of the Bodos and it is celebrated for the well-being of the people, with accompaniment of the musical instruments like *kham* (drum), *siphung* (flute) and *jotha* (cambyal).

It is said that the Bodo-Kacharis to a great extent contributed in the cultural and ethnic configuration of the Assam valley, by retaining to their cultural traditions to a great extent, by being inspired by the legends of their past history, by their practicing of wet cultivation for a long period and, by knowledge for their traditional skill in cultivating paddy by irrigation and sericulture of *endi* and *muga* of Assam.<sup>94</sup>

## LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Language helps in the reconstruction of history and civilization of a society.

Language is a medium of expression and to a certain extent it plays an important role in the development of a race and it helps in identifying a particular group of people. Language helps in understanding a society totally including its characteristics, features, culture, habits, customs, traditions, etc. and it also helps in reconstruction of economy, political, social, religion history, etc. Language is a source of migration, settlement, distribution, relation, assimilation of a group of people and their socio-cultural relation with other groups.<sup>95</sup>

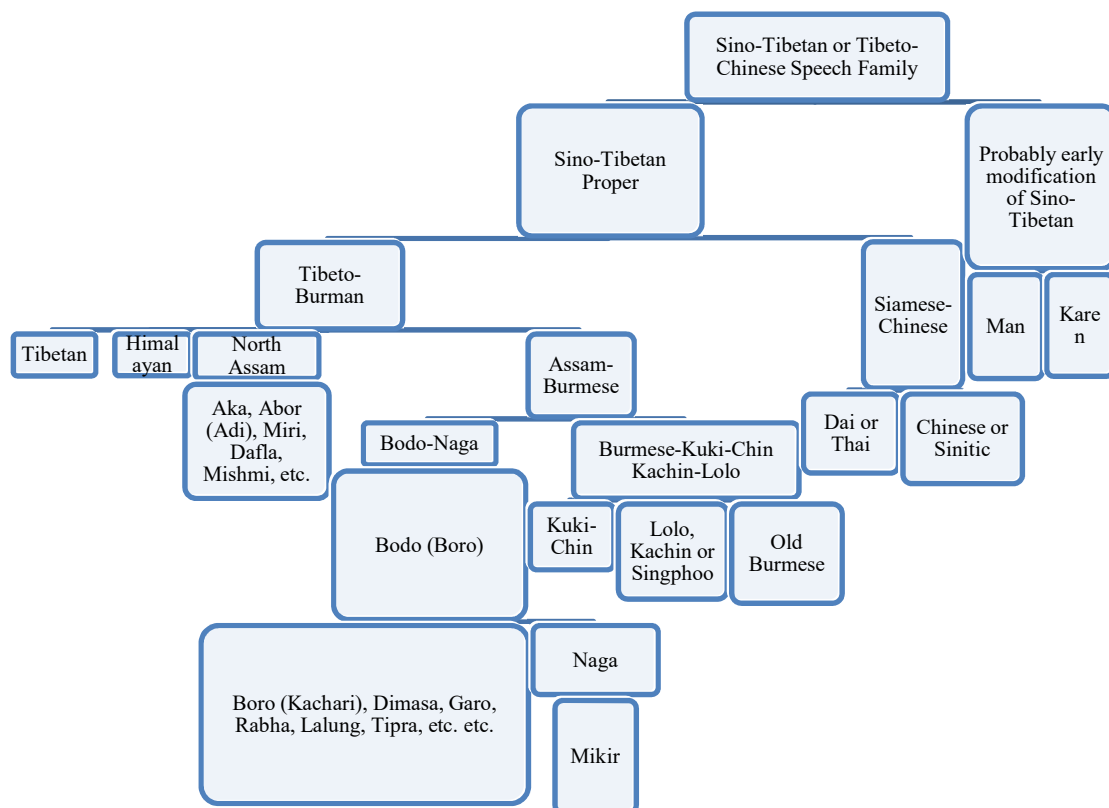
According to Dr. Anil Boro, since time immemorial the Bodo language is preserved by the Bodos in the teeth of all obstacles and impediments.<sup>96</sup> Bodo language is one of the oldest languages of India and in the northern and eastern frontiers of Bengal, it is regarded that the Bodo speakers existed long before the coming of the Aryan language in Bengal. This opinion is further supported by the Bengali scholars like Dr. R.C. Majumder and Gopal Halder.<sup>97</sup>

At the present day the remnants of Bodo speech is visible in most parts of Assam, both in North and South of Brahmaputra and as far as West as North Bengal, as

well as in Tripura in East Bengal, which shows that the Tibeto-Burman (Bodo) speakers largely inhabited Assam along with a few upper class and Brahman and other settlers from Bengal and Bihar some thousand or twelve hundred years ago.<sup>98</sup>

The Bodo language belongs to Sino-Tibetan family of languages. According to the famous linguist scholar of India Dr. S.K. Chatterjee, the Sino-Tibetan family of languages has been linguistically classified into two branches- (1) Tibeto-Burman and (2) Siamese-Chinese.<sup>99</sup> Dr. S.K. Chatterjee, the famous linguistic scholar of India and the linguist scholar of Assam, Dr. Banikanta Kakoti mentioned that the Bodo language comes under the first category, because the Bodo speech is sub-sectioned under the Assam Burmese group which is included under Tibeto-Burman language.<sup>100</sup> And this group of language has the largest representation in the region, and it is composed of the Bodo, Naga and Kuki-Chin languages. The Bodo group includes the languages-dialects of the Bodo, Mechi, Garo, Tripuri, Dimasa, Koch and Rabha.<sup>101</sup>

A tabular representation of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages:-



(Source- Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya, *A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language*, Department of Publication, Gauhati University, 1977, p.8)

The Bodo speaking areas are Tripura, Meghalaya and other parts of North-East India, but the Bodo speaking people are dominantly settled in Assam.<sup>102</sup> They are spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley from its easternmost corner to the westernmost corner, and beyond. The various communities included in this group are- (i) the Bodos and the Bodo Kacharis, (ii) the Rabhas, (iii) the Lalungs, (iv) the Sonowals and (v) the Chutiyas, and in the social structure among all these communities, there is lots of similarity.<sup>103</sup>

The Bodo language of Assam is divided into four clear cut dialectal areas with sufficient number of dialectal variations; namely north-western, south-western, north-central and southern dialect areas with phonology, morphological and glossarial differences.<sup>104</sup>

P.C. Battacharya mentioned that Bodo belongs to a large linguistic group of *Kachari* tribes, relating to Tiwa (Lalung), Rabha, Hajong and Koch Languages.

According to P.C. Battacharya and Robin Burling, Bodo and Garo belonged to a familiar ancestral language and are separated from each other only two thousand years ago and based on “glotto-chronical or lexico-statistic”, it can be said that Bodo and Dimasa are separated from each other only one thousand years ago. So, we can say Dimasa is closer to Bodo than Garo, as observed by Premalata Devi.<sup>105</sup>

There are some similarities regarding vocabulary, phonology, morphology and syntax of Bodo language with other languages of the Bodo group. According to Rev. S. Endle as mentioned by Dr. Anil Boro, Bodo language is “agglutinative as distinct from the inflexional family of languages”.<sup>106</sup>

According to 1961 census, the number of Bodo speaking people was 1,228,450 million in India.<sup>107</sup> In Assam, the Bodo speaking areas extends widely from western border of Goalpara district to the eastern boundary of Dibrugarh district.

The Bodo literature though largely consists of oral literature such as folk songs, folk tales, ballads, proverbs, etc. but when it comes to written literature; it started only as the result of Brahma movement among the Boro-Kacharis.<sup>108</sup> In ancient ages the Bodos for the purpose of writing made use of the Roman script and Assamese script.

According to some scholars, the Bodo language had its own script called Deodhai. In 1952, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the vanguard of Bodo language and literature, was founded at Basugaon (Kokrajhar district), consisting of representative of Assam, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Nepal.<sup>109</sup> As the result of socio-political awakening among the Bodos, in 1963, the languages became the medium of instruction in the schools in the Bodo dominated areas of Assam and it has been recognized as the associate language in the state of Assam<sup>110</sup> and eventually at Kokrajhar, Boro medium instruction was introduced in the secondary schools. At present, Bodos adopted the Devanagari script for the Bodo language which became effective from 1975 and ever since Bodo language has been accepted as an official language by an ordinance issued on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1984.<sup>111</sup> The Bodo language has been included in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule to the Constitution of India at the 92<sup>nd</sup> amendment of the Constitution of India in 2003.

Until recently the Bodos did not have written literature. Rev. S. Endle's, *The Kacharis* is the well-known monograph on the Bodos and a "Grammar" of the Bodo language was also compiled by him in 1884. But the purely Bodo literature came into writing in the twentieth century with the publication of the *Bibar*, the first Bodo magazine in 1924. At present the number of authors and publications are increasing in Bodo language<sup>112</sup> with the spread of education and increase in the number of Bodo readers. According to Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya, Bodo published literature; mainly comprise books based on poems, stories, prayers and songs as well as journals and magazines and also good number of unpublished novels, dramas, etc."<sup>113</sup>

It is said that the mode of life of the Bodos and their attitude towards nature is revealed by the themes and beauties of Bodo literature. The rhyming metres of Boro verse and songs always appeal to the reader's ear and heart<sup>114</sup> and it is mentioned that, their language is a fairly rich and has a great base with roots compounded together, to express the most complex idea in a single 'portmanteau' word.<sup>115</sup>

## **OCCUPATION AND ECONOMY**

The Bodo community like any other tribal communities of the Indian subcontinent has taken up quite a few occupations<sup>116</sup> but agricultural remains to be the



primary source of their livelihood.<sup>117</sup> In ancient times since there was plenty of dumping land at their hands, they used to practice ‘*jhum*’ (shifting cultivation) and mono-cropping’. But eventually they took to ‘settled agriculture’.<sup>118</sup> The Bodos reside near rivers and they cultivate varieties of paddy and cash crops including *ahu* (paddy), *maisali* (paddy), *patw* (jute), *besor begor* (mustard seeds),<sup>119</sup> *kunn* (cotton), areca-nuts, *patwi* (betel leaves), *til* (sesame), *oua* (bamboo), etc. and varieties of fruits and vegetables are grown by them. At some of the places cultivation of *gom* (wheat) is taking a very important place these days.<sup>120</sup>

Besides agriculture the Bodo tribal community is into tea plantation, pig and poultry farming and silkworm rearing. The Bodos are excellent at bamboo works and weaving is another important occupation of the Bodos.<sup>121</sup>

The Bodos being agriculturist, land is one of the most important possessions among them.<sup>122</sup> The Bodos practice other economic activities to enhance their income as well as like cattle breeding. They used animals dung to increase the fertility of the soil and for the purposes of ploughing, transportation and food cattles are used.

They are excellent hunters and it was considered as a means to add to the income of the family.<sup>123</sup>

The Boro-Kacharis, especially from Kokrajhar and North Kamrup areas took up areca-nut cultivation for commercial purpose and the Boro-Kacharis from Goreswar (North-Kamrup) took up the cultivation of *dhundia* (coriander) for commercial sale to increase their economy.<sup>124</sup>

During ancient and medieval times, they were into border trade with the hill tribes on the north. The several passes in the foothills which opened up to Indian plain are called ‘*Dooars* or Gateways’. There are several gateways passing to the northern foothills, such as at Alipurduar in West Bengal, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Udalguri and Sonitpur districts of Assam. And the Bodos exported items like rice, cotton-yarn, silk-yarn, dried fish, etc. to Tibet and China and they imported gold dust, Chinese silk, rubber, etc. from them.

The Bodos also entered into Business with a section of traders from Barpeta, called 'Barpetiahs' in mustard and other local grains, but the Bodo cultivators being mostly illiterate and unfamiliar to paperwork had to face heavy loss. They also faced heavy loss in trading local forest products.

During the British period, the condition of the Bodo peasants underwent a great change; the British economic policy ruined the indigenous textile industries of the Bodos and destroyed their ancient cottage industries. But with the spread of education, they eventually started holding government jobs along with agriculture to maintain their economic status.<sup>125</sup>

## FOOD HABITS

The Bodos are non-vegetarian in nature and their staple cereal food of the Bodos is rice. Along with rice their meals consist of vegetables, creepers and edible roots from the neighboring forests. Some of the vegetables used by the Bodos are *mawai* (bamboo shoot), *mwita*, *phochla* (spathe of a banana plant), *dhundia* (coriander), *phattw bilai* (jute leaves), *mwikhun* (Mushroom), *tharai* (a plant having thread in the stalk belonging to banana species), *kharokkhandhay bibar* (flower of a branchless tree bearing long flat fruits), *muga fithai*, *banluthoppa* (round chilli), *lapha* (a malva verticallata, a garden vegetable), *lai* (a brassica, a garden vegetable belonging to the mustard family), *narjwi* (dry jute leaf), etc.<sup>126</sup> They are fond of wild vegetables, such as *sibru* (a kind of thorny plants), *doushrem* (a kind of small creeper), *laphasaikho* (a plant of sour taste), *jaglauri* (wild herb), *ganga mala* (a small plant), *raidwng* (cane plant), *burithokon* (a small plant), *anthaibajab* (a small aromatic plant), *khungkha* (a bitter taste plant), etc. and many a times they used them for medicinal purpose also, especially in remote villages<sup>127</sup> till today such as *debaulubedor* (herb), *chinchrikhalai* (herb), *tulsi* (basil), *khaila* (a wild creeper bearing bitter fruits), *khuntainara* (Solanum indicus, a plant with prickly bitter fruit), *saldaokhumwi* (A medicinal fern), *muga*, *dabdub*, *mwchamegeon* (wild herb), *kharwi* (leached ash water, alkali), *indigwja* (wild herb), *khansisha* (wild herb), *dotra* (wild herb), *manimuni* (wild herb), *jatrasi* (wild herb), *sijou* (euphorbia splendens), *akondo*, *neem* (medicinal tree with bitter leaves), etc.<sup>128</sup>

The Bodos are fond of eating meat and fish and their greatest delicacies are *oma bidor* (pork) and *na gwrán* (dried fish). *Oma bidor* (pork) is most favourite among the Bodos and is commonly served in ceremonies and functions such as marriage, funerals, festivals like ‘*Bwisagw*’, ‘*Domashi*’, etc.<sup>129</sup> Besides *oma bidor* they eat almost all kinds of flesh such as *barma bidor* (goat meat), *emphou* (castor worm), *samu* (snail), *daou bidor* (chicken meat), *hangsw bidor* (duck meat), *phareo bidor* (pigeon meat), *mwi bidor* (deer meat), *khusung bidor* (turtle meat), *sesa bidor* (hare meat), etc. The fish forms a special delicacy in the Bodo menu. They dry both meat and fish in the sunlight or on the fire, which are known as ‘*bidor gwrán*’ and ‘*na gwrán*’ respectively. The Bodos dry small fish on the fire or in the sunlight, and prepares *napham* (fermented fish) from it, after applying little bit of arum and grind them and store it in a tube made of bamboo or *oua hashung* and cover the mouth of the tube with the leaves of plantain or *talir bilai*. And it can be preserved for at least two to three years.<sup>130</sup> The Bodos are also very fond of *onla khari*, curry prepared from grinded rice and it is usually prepared with chicken meat and *oua mewaii* (bamboo shoot).<sup>131</sup>

The Bodos prepares cuisine which is multifarious, with its own aroma and flavor. They are expert in preparing *phetta* (steamed rice cake), a kind of bread made of powdered *mwidarkhwama* (borni rice), *kharwi* (leached ash water, alkali), *sobai ongkri* (black lentil curry), *onla ongkri* (powdered rice curry), *narjwi ongkri* (dried leaf of jute plant), etc.

The Bodos who were very orthodox did not ever touch milk, by doing so they believed that the calf is not deprived of its natural support. But with the passing of time, this believe is also passing away.<sup>132</sup>

At present, we can see a great modification in the food habits of the Bodos as the result of communicating with the neighboring communities. Today the Bodo food habits have become luxurious and now they like to drink milk, eat curd, butter, ghee, sweets, etc. which they did not prefer in the past, as mentioned by Edward Gait, “It is not their custom to eat ghee so that if any article even flavor of ghee they will not eat it”. Bodos like the Assamese or Bengalis cook varieties of curry, fry vegetables, fish, meat using mustard oil, salt, spices like onion, chili, ginger, garlic, *jira*, etc. And like the Aryans, the Bodos also at present prepare *puri*, *luci*, *pakari*, etc.

As the drinking *jou* (liquor/alcohol) is a must in the traditional social gathering or religious function of the Bodos, they have cultivated the habit of drinking *jou*.<sup>133</sup> ‘*Jou bidoi*’ (local rice beer) and *maibra jou* (liquor-made from fermented borni rice) are the popular beverages of the Bodos and these are taken mainly during festivals like *baisagu* (New Year) and *domasi*, (harvest festival) besides it is also offered to the chief God the ‘*Bathouborai*’ as well as other minor deities and taken during marriages, funerals, and at the time of harvest. *Jumai* (rice beer) are of two types (a) *gishi* (wet) and (b) *goran* (dry), the first one is made from fermented rice and the second one is produced by distillation.<sup>134</sup>

The Bodos are fond of smoking. Men and women both elders and young smoke in the villages. The smokers of remote villagers used a kind of wooden or earthen pipe called *hangkha*. It is made of two parts and the top part is called *silim* (an earthen small smoking vessel). The *puski* which is a pipe with wider upper side and narrower bellow is used for smoking tobacco, but at present *bidis* and cigarettes are used for smoking.<sup>135</sup>

## DRESSES AND ORNAMENTS

The spinning and weaving even today is an important part of every Bodo family. The Bodo women are experts in weaving and they weave most of the clothes for both male and female.<sup>136</sup> The dresses of the Bodos are unsophisticated quality ways and rich in colors. The Bodos are well verse with the art of dyeing, which are usually prepared from the leaves or roots of trees.<sup>137</sup> The traditional attires of the Bodo-Kacharis reflect the fondness for rich colors, the yellow is their favorite.

The dresses of the male folk consist of ‘*gamchas*’ (loin cloth), basically woven at home, which they wrap around their loins and hangs down to the knees. And to protect themselves from cold, they wrap their body with a wrapper called ‘*mwdwmni gamcha*’, especially made of cotton or *endi*. The Bodo male also wear a ‘*banian*’ a kind of coat made of cotton or *endi*, though at present such dresses are hardly used. And another popular cloth used by the Bodo male, which are widely used even today is an ‘*aronai*’, (traditional scarf) which they wear around the neck and around the head. All

the dresses of the Bodo-Kacharis for both male and female are woven or spun at home.<sup>138</sup>

The traditional dress of Bodo women is called *dokhna* and it is a long piece of cloth, worn by Bodo women around their chest, below their arms and it falls till their toes. There are both simple and ornamented *dokhna*, known as '*salmatha*' and '*dokhna thawsai*' respectively, where the latter are used in marriage ceremonies, which are rich in colors like yellow, oranges, red and blues.<sup>139</sup>

The Bodo womenfolk in olden days wore only *dokhna* with a scarf called '*alowwan*', but now a days the Bodo women wear blouse and a shoulder scarf known as '*pasra*' or '*chadar*' or '*jwmgra*' along with '*dokhna*'.<sup>140</sup> '*Mekhala*' and '*sari*' are also worn by the Bodo womenfolk living in Kamrup, Udalguri and Nowgong districts and '*sari*' is also worn by the Bodo women of the West Bengal state.<sup>141</sup>

The '*aronai*' refers to a narrow traditional scarf worn by men around the neck to protect themselves from cold wind. It is one meter in length with various designs in it. During ancient times it was used for defensive purpose. The Bodo Kacharis wrapped it tightly around their waist, diagonally across their chest before going to the battlefield. The Bodo women wear the '*aronai*' during the performance of '*kherai*' dance. It is also used for the purpose of welcoming eminent guests in public gatherings.<sup>142</sup>

The presence of weaving looms is one of the most common features of a typical Bodo household. The Bodos regard weaving as a way of life and every female member knows the art of weaving, they can weave '*dokhna*' (traditional dress of women), '*aronai*' (traditional scarf), '*sima*' (bed cover), '*indisi*' (warm cloth made of castor), '*gamcha*' (traditional dress of men), '*pasra*' (a shoulder scarf) or '*chadar*' (a shoulder scarf) or '*jwmgra*' (a shoulder scarf), '*janji khagra phali*' (wide belt made of cloth), etc. and domestic weaving is regarded as cottage industries of the Bodo Kacharis.<sup>143</sup>

Some of the designs which are woven on ornamental *dokhna* are *daothu godo* (design of dove's neck), *phareo megon* (design of pigeon's eyes), *pahar agor* (hills scenery), *mwidar agan* (elephant foot prints design), etc. '*Thaokri*' (spindle) is used for the purpose of spinning of the yarn, '*sorkhis*' (reeling machines) are used for *endi* and *muga* yarning and '*eshan* or *ishan-shali*' is the name for the pit-loom. The art of dyeing

yarn were done locally in olden days and natural ingredients like vegetables were used as dyes.<sup>144</sup>

The Bodos both male and female are very much into music and dancing. The Bodo women dancers dress themselves in *dokhna* (traditional women dress), *aronai* (traditional scarf), *rege-regan* (colourful scarf of the Bodos), *janji khanai fali* (wide belt made of cloth) and blouse, which are hand-woven and embroidered by the Bodo women themselves. In *Kherai dokhna* rhomboidal embroidery is made in big size and it was seen mostly in Kamrup district and in Kokrajhar district. Rhomboidal embroidery is smaller in size and vertically set up.

The Bodo male dancer dresses themselves in *Gamcha* (Bodo loin cloth), Shirt (made of Bodo cloth), *Aronai* (traditional scarf) and turban (made of Bodo cloth). For the purpose of *Kherai* dance, the dancers wear turban and shirt in red colour. All the male dresses are also hand-woven beautifully.<sup>145</sup>

The Bodo women wear few and simple ornaments made of silver and gold. The traditional ornaments of the Bodos used as necklace are the *charakati*, *chandrahar* (heavy necklace of five layers), *bisahar*, *thanka-siri*, *jibou-zin-siri* (necklace made of silver oval for the back side of the neck from which snake like two chains hangs into two sides of another plain silver oval plate following at the connection of the chest and the abdomen)<sup>146</sup> and *jinjri* (neck chain made of gold).

The Bodo women use different kinds of earrings like *doula* (earring, usually made of gold, flat like disc on which precious stones are set)<sup>147</sup> *makhri*, *inti*, *khera* or *kheru*, *japkhiring*, *boula* (upper ear earring) and *puti*.<sup>148</sup>

For nose the Bodo women used ornaments like, *nolo* (Nose- ring), *bulki* (nose-pendent) and *nakphul* (ring like put on the nasal septum or small flower put on nose in the left side through a hole made earlier).

They used both bangles and bracelets like *muthi ashan* (bracelet about 1.5 to 2.5 in breadth and usually made of silver), *mutha* (broad silver bangle about 2 1/2 wide), *ashan suri* (small bangle), and for arms they wore *bajoo*.

The Bodo female dancers wear *doula* (earring made of gold), *muthi achan* (a kind of bracelet, usually made of silver), *nakphul* (nose ornament of gold), *jinjiri* (necklace made of gold) and *hw* (a kind of beaded sting).<sup>149</sup>

But with the passing of time, the use of traditional ornaments of the Bodo-Kachari women are vanishing and these old ornaments are now found mostly in museums, as only few women favor to wear these ornaments at present.<sup>150</sup>

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The proposed research work aims to study-

- a) The Traditional Tools of the Bodos.
- b) The Traditional Technology of the Bodos.
- c) The Impact of Modernity on the Traditional Tools and Technology of the Bodos.

## **SCOPE OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

The main aim for choosing this topic is to study the traditional tools of the Bodos, which is a topic largely ignored. No comprehensive and systematic study on this subject has been made so far. This proposed study hope to highlight the traditional tools of the Bodos, the traditional technology of the Bodos and also to highlight the impact of modernity on traditional tools and technology of the Bodos, as it will help in understanding the Bodo culture and more this study will help in documenting and interpreting Bodo traditional tools and technology which are mostly at the verge of extinction.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research is based on historical and interdisciplinary methods. It involves use of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources have been based on

gazetteers, district reports, district census, accounts, memorandum, surveys, various oral sources, interviews, direct observations, and visits to museums, libraries, temples and archives. The field works has been based mainly among the aboriginals of the Bodo villages and also the contemporary people.

The Museums which were visited were Assam State Museum (Guwahati, Assam), Don Bosco Museum (Mawlai, Meghalaya), Ethnographic Museum (Khanapara, Guwahati, Assam), Kokrajhar District Museum (Kokrajhar, Assam) and Rajbari Museum (Cooch Behar, West Bengal).

The Libraries visited include the District Library (Guwahati, Assam), Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development (Guwahati, Assam), Krishna Kanta Handique Library (Gauhati University, Assam), Library of Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes (Guwahati, Assam), NEHU Central Library (Shillong, Meghalaya), NEHU Campus Library, (Tura, Meghalaya), Manoranjan Lahari Central Library (Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, Assam), Central Library (Central Institute of Technology, Kokrajhar, Assam), Kokrajhar District Library (Kokrajhar, Assam), Bodofa House Library of ABSU (Kokrajhar, Assam) and Bijini Collage Library (Bijni, Assam).

Temples visited were Gossaigaon Bathou Mandir (Gossaigaon, Assam) and Jainari Bathou Mandir (Simbargaon, Assam). Besides Assam State Archive (Guwahati, Assam) Aai Weaving Industry (Tengapara, Kokrajhar, Assam), Sijou Weaving Center (Syamgaon, Kokrajhar, Assam), Collective Mulberry Garden (Beswargaon, Kokrajhar, Assam), Directorate of Sericulture, BTC (Adabari, Kokrajhar, Assam), Basic Muga Seed Farm, BTC (Adabari, Kokrajhar, Assam) and Indi Lou (Dimalgaon, Kokrajhar, Assam) were also visited.

As many as 55 numbers of people were interviewed. Villages which were visited in Kokrajhar district are Simbergaon, Tipkai, Nysabari, Bhumka, Dotma, Boragari, Guabari, Duligaon, Sukanjora, Ramoni Ashram, Dulagaon, Tinali, Amguri, Titaguri, Narabari, Gossaigaon, Kachugaon, Barkangbil, Jainari, Ramfalbil, Tulsibil, Bajugaon, Surendrapur, Jiaguri, Malaguri, Panbari, Chitila and Beswargaon. The other villages were Chapaguri (Chirang District); Tamulpur (Baksa District); Jhakragaon, Ambagaon



and Paschim Patala-Dimakuchi (Udalguri District), Paschim Satali (Alipour Daur District, West Bengal) and Dudhnoi (Goalpara District).

The secondary sources have been based on all relevant published and unpublished works, monograph, journals, magazines, proceedings, seminar papers, articles, souvenirs, thesis and all other relevant reference books.

## **CHAPTERIZATION**

### **Chapter I: Introduction**

The first chapter deals with the introduction of the tools and technology, land and the people of the area of study, the Bodos, their migration, habitat and identity, their family, society and polity, their religion, culture, language and literature, their occupation and economy, their food habits, dresses and ornaments. This chapter provides the objectives of the study, scope of the present work and the method applied.

### **Chapter II: Review of Literature**

The second chapter highlights the literatures that are reviewed.

### **Chapter III: Traditional Tools of the Bodos**

The third chapter highlights defensive tools, hunting tools, agricultural tools, fishing tools, tools used for domestic, social and cultural purposes, house making tools and tools used for building communication networks.

### **Chapter IV: Traditional Technology of the Bodos**

This chapter throws lights on the technologies (know-how) used by the Bodos for defense, trapping, hunting, agriculture, fishing, social and cultural life, in alcohol preparation, in sericulture, in weaving, in spinning and in dyeing, in performing religious rituals, in playing indigenous games and recreations, in celebrating traditional festivals, in performing traditional rites and rituals and in house making.

## Chapter V: Impact of Modernity on Traditional Tools and Technology of the Bodos

The fifth chapter deals with the impact of modernity on traditional tools and technology of the Bodos like impact on defensive tools and technology, on hunting tools and technology, agricultural tools and technology, fishing tools and technology, domestic tools and technology, social and cultural tools and technology, house making tools and technology and tools and technology in building communication networks.

## Chapter VI: Conclusion

This chapter provides the observations and findings of the thesis.

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- <sup>133</sup> Sekhar Brahma, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.



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- <sup>134</sup> Dr. M.C Arunkumar, Dr. Shukhdeba Sharma Hanjabam, Pebam Nganthoiba Mangang, Jennifer Kipgen, Pukhrambam Kiranbala, *op. cit*, pp. 344-345.
- <sup>135</sup> Dr. Kameswar Brahma, 2010, *op. cit*, p. 17-20.
- <sup>136</sup> Sekhar Brahma, *op. cit*, p. 33.
- <sup>137</sup> Dr. Kameswar Brahma, 2009, *op. cit*, p. 23.
- <sup>138</sup> *Danai Lunai....the weaving dreams of Bodos*, Directorate of Handloom & Textiles, BTC, Kokrajhar, 2009, pp. 23-25.
- <sup>139</sup> Dr. Kameswar Brahma, 2010, *op. cit*, p. 20.
- <sup>140</sup> Shickna John Wary, "Dokhna", *Sushraoti- The Saraswati*, Souvenir, Bodo Sahitya Sabha and The Delhi Bodo Association, Guwahati, November, 2000, p. 86.
- <sup>141</sup> Dr. Kameswar Brahma, 2010, *op. cit*, p. 20.
- <sup>142</sup> *Danai Lunai....the weaving dreams of Bodos*, *op. cit*, pp. 30-37.
- <sup>143</sup> Srimati Bijaya Laxmi Brahma Chaudhury, *op. cit*, p. 7.
- <sup>144</sup> Dr. Kameswar Brahma, 2010, *op. cit*, pp. 20-21.
- <sup>145</sup> Dr. Liladhar Brahma, *op. cit*, p. 43.
- <sup>146</sup> Dr. Kameswar Brahma, 2010, *op. cit*, p. 21.
- <sup>147</sup> Dr. Liladhar Brahma, *op. cit*, pp. 45-46.
- <sup>148</sup> Dr. Kameswar Brahma, 2010, *op. cit*, p. 21.
- <sup>149</sup> Dr. Liladhar Brahma, *op. cit*, pp. 45-46.
- <sup>150</sup> B. N. Bordoloi, G. C. Sarma Thakur, M. C. Saikia, *op. cit*, p. 22.