

CHAPTER- III

SOCIO - CULTURAL ROLE OF BODO WOMEN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Bodo society is basically a tribal society, with agriculture as the main source of livelihood of the people (Talukdar, 2012). In order to understand the socio-cultural and economic practices of the people, understanding of the word 'tribe' is important. Herbert Risley tries to project a *tribe* as a collection of families or group of families bearing a common name and claiming common descent from a mythical or historical ancestor but as a rule does not denote any specific occupation. They usually speak the same language and occupy or claim to occupy a definite tract of country and not necessarily endogamous in nature (Risley, 1991).

The Bodo society is one of the important plains tribal societies in Assam mostly concentrating in Brahmaputra valley (Basumatary D. , 2017). The social life of the Bodos is a closely compact and well organized one. They follow strict rules and regulations as per as their beliefs and taboos in their social life are concerned. They follow all these rules in their house building, maintenance of homestead, community living, team work, fishing, merry making, cultivation, social relation, village administration and others. The traditional method of social governance or polity is very much prevalent among them. The system of mutual help in time of difficulty is an important feature in their social and domestic life (Brahma B. K., 2007).

3.2 TRADITIONAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF BODOS

The social structure of the Bodo society is primarily patriarchal, with a few matriarchal characteristics which are also very much dominant among them. Children receive the surname of their father's clan (*mahari/bongso*). The father, and in his absence,

the eldest son, according to the general custom, is the head to conduct the household affairs. Finance of the family lies with him. The paternal property is inherited by the sons only and the entire ancestral property is distributed only among the male members. If a portion of property is given to the wife, the property automatically goes to the possession of her sons after her death (Brahma N. K., 2008). The daughters have no right on her father's property when there are sons. However, if there is no male child in a family, the property would be distributed among the daughters and they can enjoy the same even after their marriage.

Elements of matriarchal system are also found prevalent with the Bodos. Socially, the position of the women in the family as well as in the society is almost at par to that of the men. Women had considerable authority in certain social and domestic matters. Women played an indirect role in decision-making in a family or at the village level. The *ghwrjia* system of marriage, where the husband stays in his wife's house with his in-laws forever, indicates the matriarchal streak. In the *ghwrjia* system of marriage, the husband moves out of his family and is adopted or integrated into the wife's family. The matriarchal traces can also be seen in the fact that the maternal uncle is given a privileged position in a marriage ceremony and one separate feast is to be offered by the groom's family in his honour. Widow re-marriage is also socially acceptable (Brahma D. S., 2017).

It has been described that an important characteristic of the Bodo society is that they are free from the scourge of the caste system unlike other tribal society. They were tried to reorder their social system by removing some evil social practices (Singh & Basumatary, 2017). It has been also described that Bodos were liberal in their outlook and practice, such as in their religion, customs, food habits, dress and manners etc. in compare to other tribal community in the region.

The traditional Bodo society which came into contact with different culture and societies underwent great changes in the middle part of the 20th Century. The change at different institutional levels have been taking place from time to time and these changes are visible in the traditional institutions like religion, marriage, economy, social customs and also in the position and status of men and women, food habits, dresses and other spheres of

life (Basumatary K. R., 2017). The changes are found in the form of Sanskritization, modernization and also westernization to some extent. The prime factors of these changes are certainly the influence of assimilation of mainstream Hinduism, the spread of higher education among the Bodos and the development of science and technology. However, the upward movement in the traditional Bodo society has occurred without the loss of their basic values, norms and identity (Pegu, 2004). The Bodo culture is a part and parcel of Indo-Mongoloid culture. The Mongoloid Bodo Culture of Assam has to some extent influenced the Indic (Indo-Aryan) Assamese culture or vice-versa (Basumatary B. K., 2013).

3.3 BODO WOMEN IN SOCIO-CULTURAL SPHERES

In the socio-cultural spheres of Bodo society, women have been playing very active role and their contributions to the Bodo community is highly acknowledgeable. Bodo women have been exhibiting their talent by participating in various socio-cultural activities since the earliest times. Their participation in the social and cultural fabric can be realized from their involvement in the social rites and rituals of their society. They look after all the household activities like preparing food, weaving of cloths for family use, collecting firewood and also collect edible vegetables from nearby jungle. Moreover, their active involvement in performing social rites and rituals from child birth to till cremation of death shows inner capability of Bodo women. Their warm reception, affections and sincerity while dealing with the people in the society is really praiseworthy. They always share their experience and feelings and also exchange ideas with commitment of words while any of the members from their society is found to be in distress and tragedy (Boro A. , Women in Bodo Society, 2018).

As stated women have been playing important role in performing religious rites and rituals in Bodo society, but women are restricted entering into the *Garja Puja* (The Religious ceremony where evil Gods are expelled from the village). It is to be mentioned that without the presence of women, no religious rites, rituals and festivals can be performed, except *Garja Puja*. During *Kherai Puja* (Religious festival of Bodos) a female

priest or spiritualist called *Doudhini* played a key role. She performs different dances in propitiation of the gods and goddesses. Moreover, they are expert in weaving and most of the cloths which are required for domestic use are made from their family looms. They extract yarn from cocoons of silk worms like *Muga* and *Eri* and thereafter weave apparels for themselves (Islam, 2012). Some of the major roles of Bodo women in the socio-cultural spheres have been discussed in the following:

3.3.1 BODO WOMEN AND FAMILY LIFE

The Bodo Society is primarily structured with patriarchal characteristics with few elements of matriarchal. In their society, all the family members live together at home called *Nokor* or family. A *Nokor* or family consists of father, mother, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters etc. Father is the head of the family, who is honoured, respected and obeyed by other members of the family. All the male members of the family enjoy the inheritance rights, unless one goes out of family during the life time of his father with intention of living separately from the bonds of joint family. The eldest son of the family assumes the charge of the household on the death of father or in absence of father or guardian and discharges his responsibilities in consultation with his mother. There are existence of both joint and nuclear families among the Bodos. There is also existence that the unmarried brothers get double of the family property than the married brothers. The eldest male member or son also gets a preferential share in view of his assumption of family liability and other social responsibilities (Basumatary B. K., 2013).

Although the social structure of the Bodos is based on the patriarchal system, the place of women in the Bodo society is high. If there is no male child in a family then the property is distributed among the daughters. They can enjoy such properties even after their marriage (Brahma K. , 2015).

In the traditional society, the status of mother, daughter-in-law and daughter varies from person to person. An expert in domestic affairs is regarded as a good mother or a good daughter or a good daughter in law etc. They also enjoy honourable status in their family or society. In fact, they also enjoy equal freedom with man in performing their functions. The

Boro women have been playing very significant role in the family, socio-economic life and also in religious function. Though the overall condition of Boro women till the beginning of this century was not worth mentioning, yet from the time of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma a gradual change has been taking place as a result of the reformation movement led by him and their condition must have been better than that of high caste Hindu women in some parts of India (Brahma S. , Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition: A Historical Perspective, 2006).

3.3.2 BODO WOMEN AND INHERITANCE OF PROPERTY

In the Bodo society the inheritance is from the male side and all the male members of a family enjoy the right on their paternal property. So long the father alive, he is regarded as the sole owner of his property and one can claim the same. It is only after death of the father that the paternal property can be divided among the sons. This may not arise if the father would distribute his property before his death and so willed them. On the event of the dissolution of the joint family, the unmarried brothers, if any, gets double the share of the family property than the married brothers. On the other hand, the eldest son gets a preferential share in view of his assumption of family liabilities and other social responsibilities. In a joint family the belongings of women are counted as personal property, while the family debt is dischargeable from the income of the family. The daughters, especially if married, can claim nothing. However, in absence of any male child the practice of the distribution of the paternal property among the daughters is also prevalent and they can enjoy such properties even after their marriage (Sarmah S. K., 2017).

The female members are given the rights of pigs, Fowls etc. of the family. They can sell them without prior permission of their guardians. It is also observed that even the father is to pay to his daughters for a pig or a cock owned by them. If there is a single female child in the family where there is no male child, then the entire property is owned by her after the death of the father. In such a case the bridegroom is kept in the house of the bride after marriage. This is an accepted system of marriage in the Bodo society and is called *Garjia*

Lakhinai in Bodo. After her death, the property is inherited by her sons, and not by the daughters (Brahma K. , 2015).

3.3.3 BODO WOMEN IN DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

The Bodo women use to wear their traditional dress *dokhana* or *dokhna*, both plain (*Dokhna- thinthai*) and ornamented (*Dokhna-ashar*), a home spinning product woven by women themselves. They are expert in weaving. They wrap *dokhana* around their body, leaving only the shoulder exposed, from chest down to ankles, and tighten knots one below the armpit and other in the waistline. The Bodo women do not use any other body cover, except a scarf called *alowán*. The Bodo women of Kamrup, Darrang and Nagaon districts use *Mekhela* and *Sari* (Sarmah S. K., 2017).

The *dokhana* has borders in both sides and it is designed with geometrical or floral or sometimes stripes running along its entire length. To cover the exposed portion of body they use smaller piece of cloth known as *sadwr*. *Sadwr* is also hand-woven fabric in variety of colour with geometrical and floral designs (Basumatary B. G., 1994). The length and breadth of the fabric is two metre by a half metre. The use of blouse and petticoat was not known in ancient time

The Bodo man wears hand-woven fabric called *gamsa*, by which they cover them from the waist down to the knees which is woven by the Bodo women. The Bodo male also use shirts, also known as *gosla*. But the use of turban or *phalli khaokanai* was not common to all. Bodo people wrap *eri* or *endi* shawl during the winter session to protect themselves from cold which is also woven by women. In the olden days the Bodos used a kind a foot wear made of wood with jute lace known as *kwrwm* or *poitha* (Brahma B. K., 2012).

But now with the development of modern industries different varieties of machines made dresses have become plenty in the market, they can be obtained without pain and at a cheap rate in no time. As such even the villagers now wear machine product shirts, pants, trouser, dhoti etc. The well to do or educated family wears western as well as Indian dresses

like long pants, coat, suit, necktie, jeans, shoes, dhoti or Panjabi shirts etc. (Basumatary B. K., 2013).

The Bodo women of Kokrajhar district exclusively wear *dokhana*, though *mekhala* is also worn in other parts of Assam or outside. The use of blouse and petticoat has become common nowadays. Now they wear *skirts*, *jeans*, *shalwar kamis*, and sometimes churidars while they are on outings.

The women mainly use the ornaments of gold and silver. They are very fond of ornaments like bracelets, necklace, earring, finger ring etc. Though, nose ring was worn by Boro women, they have now almost given up the use of it. The ornaments have occupied a very important place in Assamese and Boro society. In the time of crisis they take loan from the *mahajans* (rich man) keeping the ornaments as security bond. Failure to give ornaments to a new bride in the marriage is looked as sign of extreme poverty by the Boros. The ornaments are considered not only luxurious article for women, but also a help in the days of crisis (Brahma S. , Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition: A Historical Perspective, 2006).

3.3.4 MARRIAGE CEREMONY AND BODO WOMEN

Marriage is being regarded as an important part of the social life of the people. Marriage is called *Haba* by the Bodos. Literally *ha* would mean soil and *ba* would denote to bear something on the back. In this sense, *Haba* would indicate the taking and sharing of responsibility by the couple in the society. By observing the marriage ceremony, the society bestows new responsibility for the coming generation. Marriage can take place only when the girl or boy reaches certain age. For the boy marriageable age is between 20 to 25 years of age and for the female from 15 to 20 years (Sarmah S. K., 2017).

Traditionally the Bodos have as many as six types of marriages system. These are- (i) *Swngnanwi Lainai Haba* (arranged marriage), (ii) *Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba* (service marriage), (iii) *Kharsonnai Haba* (Self offered marriage), (iv) *Dongkha Habnai Haba*

(widow re-marriage), (v) *Bwnanwi Langnai Haba* (forceful marriage) and (vi) *Dwnkhar Langnai Haba* (elopement marriage)

- (i) *Swngnanwi Lainai Haba* (arranged marriage): This type of marriage is most commonly accepted social marriage system among the Bodos. In this marriage parents of the bridegroom selected the bride through consent and finalized for marriage. This form of marriage is cheerfully celebrated in the society. However, in the present day bride price is no longer compulsory.
- (ii) *Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba* (marriage by service): This type marriage is rarely seen in the present time. In this marriage, a member or a person of the community who works in the family for long time is asked to be the bridegroom with his consent, if that family has sons or male members. Accordingly he becomes a member of the family and this is called a marriage by service (Goswami, *The Bodos: Culture and Society*, 2012).
- (iii) *Kharsonnai Haba* (Self offered marriage):
In this system of marriage, before the settlement of marriage between the parents of bride and bridegroom family, the bride enters into the house of bridegroom or sometimes mutual understanding between bride and bridegroom. This system of marriage is not regular kind of marriage, as consent from bride's family is not taken much consideration.
- (iv) *Dongkha Habnai Haba* (widow re-marriage): This type of marriage is also rarely seen in the present time though the society approved this marriage. In this marriage, if a man lives in a widow's house for long time then the society, after solemnizing their marriage with some social rules and hence recognizes them as husband and wife.

- (v) *Bwnanwi Langnai Haba* (forceful marriage): In this marriage, the bride is forcefully taken away from her parent's house and the marriage takes place accordingly. This marriage is similar to paisasa marriage of Aryans. This type of marriage is irregular and not approved by the society. The present society has abandoned this type of marriage which is a crime in the eyes of law.
- (vi) *Dwnkhar Langnai Haba* (elopement marriage): This type of marriage seldom takes place which is not socially approved by the Bodo society. This system of marriage is also similar to the Aryan Gandarva system. In this marriage both boy and girl run away from their place to other distant place and marital life where understanding between bride and groom is enough in this marriage (Brahma P. , 2017).

In the traditional system of marriage in Bodo society, two young girls and two women are appointed as *Bwirathi* (female attendants). Their presence is very much part and parcel in the marriage. The *Bwirathi* were also called 'Barjhw' in earlier times and no widower or widow is permitted to perform as 'Bwirathi'. There is also another important person who is called *Barlangpha* a male principle who accompany by the *Bwirathi* during marriage ceremony. He used to wear different wonderful items and things around his neck. He used to play flute by hanging a garland made of old 'papaya' fruits around his neck and makes some jokes. He leads the marriage procession and also dance with the *Bwirathi*. By playing flute with both hands, he used to dance like a wave of cool breeze in the marriage procession. From this responsibility and act of entertaining, he is known as *Barlangpha* and this is the combination of two words *Bar* means air and *langpha* means dancing like the wave. Except advising and guiding the bride in her activities during marriage, the women or married *Bwirathi* do not have much responsibility, but the two girls or young *Bwirathi* are used for amusement or entertainment. They have to bear all the jokes and laughter mad to them during marriage. Moreover, the role of *Bwirathi* during the marriage is to distribute areca nut to the people and grace the occasion with warm hospitality and

also to decorate the bride with their traditional costume and attire (Boro A. , Women in Bodo Society, 2018).

The two *Bwirathi* used to remain at the front position while leading the procession towards the groom's house from the place where the bride's party rested till they are formally received along with villagers during the time of reception of bride. They have to hold a *Sandri* (Sieve) upon which a circular space is created by folding the banana flaps and also putting a lit *Alari gasa* (earthen lamp) inside it which is kept covered by bamboo fan (*gisib*). They move the fan or *gisib* to give air to the bride while welcoming her in groom's house. During the procession, people used to shout all together '*Hinjao gwdanni jwi, Jwi hinjao gwdani jwi*' that means glory, glory to new bride. Accordingly, while reception part is over, the bride's party is placed into the *Noma No* (main house) and made them to sit leisurely till the arrival of the time of marriage ceremony. The bride's party is served with *Dwi* (water), *Saha-Muri* (tea with fried rice) and *Goi-pathwi* (betel with leaf) till the time of ceremony and the viewers take chance to make jokes with the *Bwirathi* during that time (Brahma, Singh, & Brahma, Marriage System of the Bodos and Associated Rites and Rituals, 2017) .

3.3.5 BODO WOMEN IN BIRTH AND NAMING CEREMONY

In the Bodo society it is generally observed that the Bodo parents prefer to get a male child rather than a female. As the society is patriarchal one, they believe it necessary to have a male child to inherit their property and for the continuation of their family. At the time of child birth the Bodos follow some traditional customs. The elderly woman of the village performs the duties of midwifery. After the child is born the umbilical cord is cut with sharp edged bamboo splinter, keeping it on a shuttle used by weavers, and cotton or a muga silk thread tied around it. The cord is cut by a woman whose hand is believed to be 'bitter', so that the cut wound will dry soon (Sarmah S. K., 2017). It is also believed that the cord which is cut by a woman whose hand is believed to be 'sweet' one will not dry soon. No widow or widower is allowed to cut the cord. It is believed that the child may not have a long life if the cord is cut by widow or widower. The after-birth is usually buried

anywhere or at the front of the main house (*nomano*, in Bodo). Then the mother of the baby bathes the child with tepid water (*dwi dungbrud*). If the mother is not able to bathe the baby, she simply starts and then one of the women present bathes the baby. Then the baby is sprinkled with holy water (*dwi gwthar*), mixed with some 'dub grass' (*dubri hagra*), a few holy basil leaves and a ring of gold. While sprinkling holy water the woman who performs this rite utters:

“Oi gotho ? nwngba gwdw mamwn, bangal na jungal, Garo na Gangar, Harsha na Nepal mwn? Dinwiniprai nwng Boro jabai”

English rendering: “Whoever you were, whether you were a Muslim, a Garo, a Bhuttia or a non Bodo (*Harsha*) or a Nepali, you have become a Bodo from today.” (Brahma K. , A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos: With special reference to the Bodos of Kokrajhar District, 2015).

Women’s role in this rite is really phenomenal. In the remote Bodo villages where such medical and health care facilities is not available, in such circumstances Bodo women helps every mother through this traditional practices at the time of child birth.

3.3.6 DIVORCE AND WOMEN

Divorce is permitted by the Boro society in certain cases. But there must be valid ground to satisfy the society. Divorce or separation is very rare among the Boros. If both husband and wife desire to get divorce, they have to appear before the ‘*Boro Samaj*’ for settlement. Divorce is carried out by a symbolic act of tearing a betel leaf into two halves. This is called *Pathwi lai bisinai* in Bodo. If, a man divorces his wife without any justified reason he has to pay compensation and to give financial support for her livelihood until he gets a proper means of living. Generally divorce takes place when both husband and wife express their willingness to be separated from each other. And if, divorced occur due to unfaithfulness of the wife, the husband is entitled to recover the amount of money he spent for the marriage from the parents of the bride (Brahma S. , Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition, 2006). It is to be mentioned that when a women involved in

extra marital affairs then it also leads to separation, but when a man involved in such affairs mostly it leads to second or third marriage, as the polygamy is also socially sanctioned but it has been seen rarely in the present days. The people of present generation and specially the women have started protesting against the practice of polygamy in the Bodo society (Devi P. , Social and Religious Institutions of Bodos, 2004).

The *Boro Samajni Pandulipi* (social codes of the Boros), in its recently modified social laws of Kokrajhar district, sanctions divorce on the following grounds:

1. When, one of them is suffering from incurable diseases like leprosy etc. and the home affairs become unmanageable.
2. If one become mad or one of them does not have sex potency.
3. If a husband is cruel or always tortures his wife without any reason.
4. If, either of the husband or wife is proved to be a man or woman of bad character like- thief, dacoit, prostitute, etc.
5. If, the husband and wife are uncompromising or they always quarrel and deceive each other or they have no mutual faith etc.

In all these cases the *Boro samaj* has the right to pass the verdict supporting divorce and inflicting punishment (Brahma S. , Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition: A Historical Perspective, 2006).

3.3.7 DEATH CEREMONY AND WOMEN

Just after the confirmation of death, the death body is taken out from the house and kept in the middle of the courtyard. The place where the dead body is to be kept is cleaned with cowdung mixed with water. The dead body is then washed with water and a new cloth *gamcha* is tied on the body. The hair is combed after applying hair oil. In the case of female a new *dakhna* (a female dress) is tied on the body. The near and dear ones offer rice and some favourite foods for the dead person with water before taking the dead body to the cremation ground. In the performance of some major and minor rites in connection with dead body the role of a *dauri* or *ojha* is important. The dead body is then placed on a *seren*

or *sangra*, a kind of trellis made of a raw bamboo. The projecting bamboo poles that rest on the shoulders of the pole bearers are called *bathi*. The pole bearers are called *Gwthwi bangra*. Generally, the sons and the relatives carry the dead body. Then the funeral procession with the dead takes place towards the cremation ground. The procession is led by the *dauri* or *ojha*. On the way, from the house of a dead person to the cremation ground the *dauri* or *ojha* leaves back small pieces of yarn. It is believe that the soul of the dead can go to the cremation ground from the house following the yarn. This custom is followed by the Deoris, Rabhas and Mising also. At least one male member of each family of the village is bound to go to the cremation ground with the dead body. The women and children are not allowed to participate in the procession (Brahma K. , A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos: With special reference to the Bodos of Kokrajhar District, 2015).

The Bodos practices both the burial and the cremation method for the disposal of their dead. It was held that in the earlier times the people would bury their dead but at a later stage they preferred to cremate. It is difficult to substantiate as to how this transition took place and at what period of time. There is every possibility that they might have been influenced by Hinduism, when they came into contact with the latter. Interestingly in the rural areas the people would practice the method of leaving the dead body in the open field to be devoured by vultures, jackals and other animals. In this case the belief of the people is such that this kind of disposal of the dead would purge the person concerned of all sins that was committed in his or her lifetime and the soul would attain salvation. The Bodos believe in the transmigration of the soul. Another, practice that was not common with other tribes was the placing of a piece of red thread on the mouth of the deceased. This according to them will make the person to have red lips in the next birth (Devi P. , 2004).

On the tenth day of the deceased the first phase of the funeral rites begins, which is termed as *Dasa* or *Dahar*. The final *Saradu* or *Shraddha* ceremony is held either on the 12th day or on the 13th day. The people perform the *Saradu* ceremony with prayer before the altar of the *Bathou*. The villagers and the relatives of the dead person are entertained with

rice, meat and rice-bear as part of the *Saradu* ceremony (Brahma B. K., Boroni Subung Harimu, 2009).

Traditionally, in this rite, female members of deceased family whether she may be wife or daughter or relatives they are not allowed to the graveyard at the time of burial or cremation.

3.3.8 BODO WOMEN IN RELIGION AND FESTIVALS

The Bodos constitute an integral part in the mainstream population of Assam. They have their own language and literature, culture, religious beliefs, customs and traditions and they have their own fairs and festivals. Since ancient time, religion has been playing a very dominant role in shaping the socio-cultural life of the Bodo people. The social institutions of the Bodos are interwoven and interrelated with their religious beliefs. In the traditional agrarian society, every sphere of life of a Bodo man and woman is guided by rites and rituals of their religious practices. Durkheim, therefore, defined religion as composed of 'beliefs' and 'rites' – beliefs about sacred things and rites addressed to them. Mere beliefs do not constitute religion; it is rites which makes religion a living force. Durkheim's social theory of religion focuses on the social life at those points at which it is felt most intensely. When applied it to the Bodo society, it is found that religion has played a very important role in the formulation of their social pattern and status, economy, mode of living and way of thinking (Sarmah S. K., 2017).

The traditional religion of the Boros is known as *Bathou Dhohorom* or *Bathou Dharma*. In Bodo, the word *Dhohorom* has a deep meaning. *Dho* means firm, *ho* means binding, *ro* means safe, and *m* means beings or human beings. Thus, in Bodo, *dharma* means principles that keep the human beings safe with firm bindings which incorporate rites, rituals, social norms, ethics and philosophy of the Boros (Brahma S. , Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition: A Historical Perspective, 2006). Sidney Endle describes that the religion of the Kachari race (Bodo) is distinctly of the type commonly known as 'animistic' and its underlying principle is characteristically one of fear or dread (Endle, 1997).

But Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya and Mangalshing Hajowari has given different opinion regarding the *Bathou* religion. Bhattacharya expresses that *Bathou* (*ba* means five and *thou* means depth) the Supreme God of Boros and its worship is related to origin and creation. The Supreme God is also known as *Sibrai* (Siva in Hindu). He, with the help of his wife *Sibrui*, created the Universe, and the first man Monsinsin. But Monsinsin was celibate for life, so *Sibrai* and his wife *Sibrui* created man *Darimuba* and women *Singrimuba* for the propagation of mankind and the *Sijou* tree (*Euphorbia splendens*) was created as an emblem of Supreme God at the altar.

Mangalshing Hajowari describes that the Boros worship *Sibrai* or *Siva* in different names, such as *Bathou Brai*, *Bura Bathou*, *Song Raja*, *Khuria* or *Khoriya Brai* and *Mahadeo* and his wife *Sibrui* or *Parbati* is worshipped with the names- *Mainao*, *Lakhi*, *Songburoy* and *Burli Buray* etc. According to *Bathou* religion Siva or *Sibrai* is not a deity, but He is above of all deities. He is the Supreme God, almighty and creator of all beings. Every existence is his creation and he nourishes them all but sometimes he is in furious mood to cause destruction. So the Boros worship him for the prosperity of mankind (Brahma S. , Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition: A Historical Perspective, 2006).

The Bodos worship *Bathou Brai*, the Supreme God, along with other gods and goddesses. In Bodo *Ba* means five (*pancha*) and *thou* means deep or profound principles or philosophy (*tatva*). Hence, *Bathou* means the five deep spiritual entities (Endle, The Kacharies, 2012). These are *pancha-bhoot* (five elements of creation), *pancha-son* (five types of meditation), *pancha-bakya* (five hymns), *pancha-sheel* (five characters) and *pancha-dhani* (five tunes). The *Bathou Brai* is the custodian of the five basic elements of creation (*pancha-bhoot*) – *Ha*, *Doi*, *Bar Or* and *Nokhrang* (earth, water, air, fire and sky) with which body of living being is formed.

Idol-worship is not practiced in *Bathou* religion. The people believe in the invisible i.e., the *nirakar* or the form of Supreme Being which is shapeless and formless. But at the same time the divine power and qualities of Supreme Being is being reflected through the

five basic entities. In this context the Supreme Being is visible or *sakar* and is regarded as omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent and almighty. God to them is being referred to as the Generator or *Rang-rasi*, the Operator or *Gwhw-rasi* and the Destructor or *Mwitha-haji* of the Universe. In their worship the word I or *Aham*, believed to be *Sanskrit* form, is being uttered to realize the presence of the Supreme God everywhere and in every form. Bodos worship the *sijou* plant (Euphorbia Splenden) as the symbol of the Supreme God. In Bodo language *Si* means soul and *Jou* means supreme. Thus, *Sijou* represents the Supreme Soul (*param atma*) or the Supreme God (Sarmah S. K., 2017).

As *Ba* means five and *thou* means deep, therefore '*Bathou*' means 'the five deep spiritual entities. 'Five' is considered as the special numerical in the traditional Bodo religion. In this regard, a Bodo verse is like this:

“Thaigirni bikhongya khongba,

Sijouni siria siriba,

Siphungni gudunga dungba,

Bathouni bandua banduba,

Boro bwraini raoa phongba”

In translation, *Owi fruit* (*Dillenis indica*) has five ridges, the *Siphung* (the long bamboo flute) of the Bodos has five holes, the *Bathou* has five knots (of bamboo strips) and the *Boro Borai* (the Bodo elder) has five moral preaching. Again, the Bodos have five principles on which their social customs are based. These are: *Agarbad*, *Phongslodbad*, *Daokibad*, *Khoulwbwdbad* and *Khaoalibad*.

It is said that in ancient times the Bodos have five main gods, viz, *Ailong* (the god of earth), *Agrang* (the god of water), *Khoila* (the god of air), *Sanja Borli* (the goddesses of light) and *Rajkhungri* (the goddesses of sky). Thus the *Bathou* religion and its philosophy are based on five principles, which upheld the whole fabrics, social customs, economic institution, beliefs and rites of the Bodo society (Basumatary B. K., 2013).

It is to be mentioned that Bodos performs many religious festivals throughout a year where female attendance is very important. In every family who worship *Bathou* religion, women are mainly performed the lightening of earthen lamp in the altar of Bathou. Their role in the *Bathou* religion can not be ignored.

3.3.9 KHERAI FESTIVAL AND WOMEN'S ROLE

The Bodos believed that *Kherai Puja* is their greatest religious festival. Since the time immemorial, they also believed that it is a symbol of hope and desire that has been prevailing among them in their society. The main objective of performing *Kherai Puja* is to bring welfare and peace in both public and private lives. Some individual or family performed *Kherai Puja* for the welfare of the private life. On the other *Kherai Puja* is performed collectively by the villagers once or twice in a year for the welfare of the villagers as a whole. Sometimes *Kherai Puja* is also performed for the good harvest of crops other than welfare of both private and public lives, as Bodo community generally dependent on agriculture. So, they performed *Kherai Puja* before and after cultivation and propitiate different Gods and Goddesses for their good production in cultivation (Basumatary B. K., 2013).

It is still difficult to establish the origin of the *Kherai*, though some legends and folklores of Boro-Kacharis gave some evidence about the *Kherai* in the olden days, as there was an old man named *Jaraphagla* and he had seven married sons. *Jaraphagla* loved very much to his youngest daughter-in-law among the others. But, the youngest daughter-in-law felt it to be sort of different kindness over her and could not tolerate father-in-law's such attitude towards her. So, one day she fled away from her house. *Jaraphagla* tirelessly searched for her in all areas and directions but he could not trace her. So, finally he arranged a *Kherai Puja* (*Kher* means to flee and *ai* means goddess) to find his daughter-in-law and hence from those days onwards the performing *Kherai Puja* is believed to be existed. During the performing of *Kherai Puja*, the songs and dances that played with it was aimed at exposition the vices and the outrageous behavior of the old man. There is a belief in the *Bathou* worshipers that the word *Kherai* is a mixture of two words or sounds

Khe and *Rai* which means puja or chanting before the chief God *Bathou*. In Bodo-Kachari, *Bathou Bwrai* is also known as *Kharia Borai* which means the latent old man. Hence, it is believed that the Bodos performed *Kherai Puja* in the name of '*Kharia Borai*' who is endowed with all qualities. In *Kherai Puja* a Euphorbia tree (cactus) surrounded by a small bamboo boundary is offered flowers, fruits, some grains and others in the name of *Bwrai Bathou*. During the *Kherai puja* different leaves along with *tulsi* leaves are dipped in a small pot with holy water and it has been kept nearby the altar place. The coconut peel burnt in a small holder (*Dhuna*) along with incense sticks is also kept on burning in the time of performing the Puja and arousing a nice fragrance (Boro B. R., *Kherai: The religious festival of the Bodos*, 2017) . The *Doudini* (female priest) plays the main role by performing shamanistic dance through whom oblation are offered to the gods and goddesses with the help of *Oza* (oracle man) during the *Kherai Puja*. She speaks prophecies and advice the villagers to live in virtuous and righteous path in their lives. The *Kherai Puja* is performed for the whole night where all the villagers take part along with people from the neighbouring villages in the festive religious occasion (Gait, 1994).

The *Kherai* puja is of four different types: (i) *Darshan Kherai* (ii) *Umrao Kherai* (iii) *Phalo Kherai* and *Nowaoni Kherai* (family Kherai).

During the first week of the month of '*Kati*' or '*Kartik*' (September-October month) the *Darshan Kherai* is performed by the Bodos. This *Kherai Puja* is performed in honouring the *Mainao* who is identified with *Lakshmi* (Lakkhi) or the goddess of wealth and welfare. So, this *Kherai* is called the *Lakkhi Kherai* which is also known as the *Sali Kherai*. This ceremony clearly shows the association of winter crops or *Sali* in the traditional Bodo society. During the end of the '*Amthi Sua*' (the unclean period), the *Umrao Kherai* is performed for the welfare of the villagers as well as of the crops. This *Kherai Puja* held in the starting of the summer season which is also known as *Ashu Kherai*, as it is being related with the *Ashu* or summer season crops. The *Phalo Kherai* is performed especially on the day of *maghi purnima* or the full moon night of the month of *Megha* or *Magh* (an Assamese month). As, this *Kherai* is performed during the full moon night of the month for it is also known as the *Danshrang* (means bright night) *Kherai* among the Bodos.

The *Nowaoni Kherai* (family/domestic *Kherai*) is performed by a family for which it is called 'Nowaoni *Kherai*' or the family *Kherai*, as 'No' means 'house' or 'a family', so it is being performed in this way. This kind of *Kherai Puja* is performed by a family to drive out the evils and to ensure welfare and peace in the family at all times (Boro B. R., *Kherai: The religious festival of the Bodos*, 2017).

3.3.9.1 ROLE OF DOUDINI DURING KHERAI PUJA

A *Douri* (priest) and *Doudini* (female priest) performs most of the essential rites of the *Kherai Puja* with the help of *Oza* (Oracle man or Medicine man). The *Kherai Puja* continues for consecutive three days and nights. Earlier *Kherai Puja* continued for seven long days and nights. The *Kherai dance* was performed to please the *Bathou Bwrai* and other God and Goddesses. *Doudini* performs all the essential rites with the help of *Oza* and a *githal* or *gidal* (helper to *Oza*). Besides, two drums (*Kham*) beaters, two players of the bamboo flutes (*Siphung*) and two players of *Jotha* (cymbals) are essential to help the *Doudini* to perform the *Kherai Puja*. The first role of the *Doudini* is called *Doudini Anshransi* or *Alongikhangnai* (Brahma K. , *A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos: With special reference to the Bodos of Kokrajhar District*, 2015).

The *Doudini* a somewhat peculiar in looking, with vermilion-stained forehead, disheveled hair, wearing a long petticoat, dances up and down, to and fro with long sword (*tungri*) and a shield (*dahal*) to the tune of music of *Kham* (Elongated drum) and *Jota* (Cymbals). The *Doudini* demonstrates three stages of activities at the time of performing *Kherai Puja*. Firstly, by the formula of the *Oza* (Oracle man) she becomes subject to charm and started activity of exorcist and this is called *Alongikhangnai* (the first activity of the exorcist). In the second stage she falls into the trance while in the third stage she possesses the nature of spiritual being and thereafter she able to tell the tales of the Gods and Goddesses in their voices. She can also tell the fortune of the people, after the dance is over. She narrates success or failure of the crop production, duties and responsibilities of

the people and good and bad events of the villagers as a precautionary measure in near future (Devi, 1992).

Hence, it can be understood that *Doudini* plays most important role in performing the *Kherai* worship. As, by chanting of the mantra (incantation) of the *Oza* she gets charmed and falls into a trance and converts into a spiritual being like the deities. During the *Kherai Puja* she is the key dancer and moves round the *Bathou* followed by the devotees and sprinkle holy water and dances. The *Kherai* dance is mainly accompaniment of the beating and playing of *Kham* (drum), flute and cymbals, as the *Doudini* demonstrates different stages of dances to propitiate the God and Goddesses. Through these dances, she imitates the nature of Gods and Goddesses. She performed as many as eighteen kinds of dances like- *Bathou gidingnai*, *Muphur Gelenai*, *Nao Bwnai*, *Khamao Bharkwnai*, *Daothwi lwngnai*, *Mocha Khaori Mochanai*, *Maozi Mengbrang gelenai*, *Chotraoli*, *Khopri Chiprai*, *Khoizoma Phonai*, *Gandola Bonnai*, *Chagolao Bonai* etc. These dance forms have sprung from the *Kherai* worship which is really significant and hence these dances are known as *Kherai* dance. These dances are signified deep religious significance and philosophical values where the *Doudini* or a women priest has a great role to play without whom *Kherai Puja* can not perform (Boro B. R., *Kherai: The religious festival of Bodos* , 2017).

3.3.10 GARJA FESTIVAL AND BODO WOMEN

The *Garja* Puja is another important religious ceremony of the Bodos. The real or proper meaning of the word '*Garja*' is not yet found clearly. Some like to give the meaning of the word *Garja* as God. But, the Gods are called in Bodo '*Modai*' or '*Eswr*'. Again, some Bodo scholars define the meaning of the word as a way of making one free from danger. In the words of Bhaben Narzi, *Garja* means *niskriti*, in *Assamese* (Narzi, 2001). The *Garja* word itself bears the meaning of expulsion or discharging anything and during the *Garja* puja, where some evil gods are expelled or discharged from the area of a village. This system of *Garja* Puja, where the evil gods are expelled is called *bhasani* or *bhasainai* (floating away in the river or a stream). It is also to be noted that all the harmful gods and goddesses are not expelled publicly. Generally, the harmful gods and goddesses who create

diseases are expelled from a certain village or area by performing the *Garja* puja. It may be mentioned that among the non-Bodo neighbouring Hindu people a similar *Puja* is performed and it is called by them the *Dinga Puja* (Brahma K. , 2015).

In the *Garja* Puja generally women are not allowed to enter in the *Garjasali* (altar place of *Garja* Puja). Only male person are performed the *Garja* Puja with help of *Oza* (medicine man or oracle man). In this Puja woman does have any role to perform. Hence, in this context, it can be said that there is a existence of strong male dominance in religious ceremonies as well in the society.

3.3.11 BODO WOMEN DURING BWISAGU FESTIVAL

Bwisagu can be regarded as one of the popular seasonal festival of the Bodo people. It refers the beginning of a New Year. It is the most important occasion of marry-making in the social life of Bodo community which is celebrated in the month of *Baisakh* (mid April). It is also known as ‘Bihu’ in Assamese. This festival is welcomed by each and every Bodo community as it is a spring time festival of the New Year. ‘*Bwisagu*’ a conjunction of two formations ‘*Bwswrni Agu*’, meaning beginning of the year or New Year. This festival is celebrated for seven days beginning from the day of *sanskranti* of *Chaitra* month which is also the last day of the passing year (Basumatary B. K., 2013).

During the festival the young boys and girls would go to people’s houses and move from door to door singing and dancing the *Bagurumba* dance and collecting alms. They would also play their traditional musical instruments like the *Siphung*, the *Jotha*, and the *Kham*, along with other musical instruments. Children would be welcomed and barren couples would consider this particular visit as a blessing for them (Brahma N. K., 2008). According to “Among the Darrang Kacharis, this festival lasts for seven days, during which little or no work is done, the whole period being given up to merry-making, dancing, feasting etc. As is the practice among their Hindu neighbours, on the opening day all cattle are taken to the nearest river or tank, and there formally bathed, and afterwards sprinkled with a preparation compounded of rice beer (*zu*), tomatoes and turmeric. The horns are smeared with oil, and occasionally oil, ashes and pounded rice-flour are applied in patches

to the bodies of the cattle. This duty discharged, the people abandon themselves to sheer merriment, the younger folks especially giving themselves up to dancing and singing etc.” (Endle, The Kacharis , 1997)

Traditionally there is a belief among the Bodo people that no such quarrel should take place during *Bwisagu* festival. Moreover, they believe that during those days or in *Bwisagu* who indulged in quarrel would take birth as cows or dogs in the next life. So, during the time of *Bwisagu* festival, they tried to avoid any sort of quarrel among them. On the day *Sanskranti* i.e. the last day of the *Chaitra* month of the Assamese, the Bodo people who live in the villages of the nearby jungle areas use to go to deep forest or jungle for community hunting. The bitter taste vegetables collected from the forest are consumed by them in the evening. The collected vegetables of different tastes from the forest is prepared with meats or pork which is also known as ‘*Gwkha-Gwkhwi Zanai*’ (eating of bitter and sour taste) and sometimes young girls and boys of the villages also goes to climb hills during that day (Basumatary B. C., 2016). The cattle are taken to the neighbouring river or water to take bathe and wash. On that day the pieces of gourd, brinjal are hang on the neck of the cattle and the boys also strike the animals with springs of stick that made from natural plants (Brahma B. K., 2009).

In the earlier days, the rest of days of *Bwisagu* were set aside for specific purposes. For instance, the third day of *Bwisagu* was set apart for feeding the dogs, the fourth day the swine, the fifth day the fowls and the sixth day the ducks and other birds. The seventh day is the last day of *Bwisagu* and set aside for visiting and receiving the relatives and friends, exchanging gifts with beloved ones, seeking apologies from the elders for acts of omission and commission during the year (Basumatary B. K., 2013).

Bodo women during the time of *Bwisagu* celebration dances *Bagurumba dance* also dances with traditional musical instruments like *Kham* (elongated drum), *Sifung* (bamboo flute with five holes), *Jotha* (cymbal), *Sherja* (violin of four string) and *Gongona* (Jews harp) (Das, 2012). They offered *Aronai* (small Scarf) to their near dear ones as a love of respect in welcoming the New Year. Their role in *Bwisagu* festival is indivisible.

3.3.12 BODO WOMEN DURING DOMASHI FESTIVAL

The next popular seasonal festival of the Bodos is *Domashi* or *Domahi*, the harvest festival. This festival is also known as *Bhagali bihu* in Assamese. The characteristics of this festival are to enjoy with different types of foods, like *cake or pitha*, *laroo (ladoo)* and *sithao* and other items of pulses to entertain the friends and relatives with different foods and drinks and also to enjoy singing and dancing. The elders of the village would offer sacrifices of fowls to *Bathou Bwrai*. This celebration continues for seven days. The male members of the family bind cords around the fruits bearing trees of the house. The Bodos believe that the fruits bearing trees would bear more and more fruits if the trees are tied with cords of straw during *Domashi* (Brahma K. , A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos: With special reference to the Bodos of Kokrajhar District, 2015).

A special feature of the *Domashi* festival is the construction of *Bilagur* or *Belaghur* by the young boys particularly the cowherds, with dried banana leaves and green bamboo. They would collect food grains and other things from the villagers, spend the night in the *bhelaghar* amidst much merriment and would have their dinner by midnight. With the break of dawn and after taking their baths, the *bhelaghar* would be set on fire with much dancing and singing, accompanied by the recitation of hymns and prayers for the well being of their cattle and the prosperity of the village (Boro A. , 2010).

The conclusion of the *Domashi* festival would also indicate the completion of the terms of contract between the cowherds (also other servants engaged in cultivation and maid servants) and their masters. With this the cowherds would retreat to their respective places or return on their being re-employed or else would look for new employers (Brahma B. K., 2007).

In this festival generally women were prepared different types of food items like *cake or pitha*, *laroo (ladoo)* and *sithao* and other items of pulses. They also enjoyed by singing and dancing during the festival. Bodo women during *Domashi* enjoyed with folk music which are also enjoyed by the male.

3.3.13 BODO WOMEN DURING KATRI GASA SAONAI

The *Katri-gasa saonai* is another seasonal festival of Bodos. This festival is observed on the last day of the month of Ahin. The Bodos call this festival as *Katri gasa saonai*. It is also called *Kangali Bihu* in Assamese which means the *Bihu* of the crisis, for the villagers who have nothing to eat during this festival. This festival is observed by the Bodos very simply, by burning *gasa* or the earthen lamp in the paddy field as well as at the altar of the *Bathou*, at the cowshed (*goli*) and at the granary (Bakri) in the evening of the last day of *Ahin* or Aswin (Assamese month). The married women and unmarried girls of the Bodo families go to the paddy field with *sewari* a long bamboo stick used in weaving, polished it with mustard oil and touch the paddy plants with the stick (*sewari*). By doing like this the Bodos believe that the paddy plants would bear large scale of paddy (Brahma K. , A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos: With special reference to the Bodos of Kokrajhar District, 2015).

In this festival role of women is very significant as this *Katri-gasa saonai* can not be performed by the male, as women of the Bodo families only goes to the paddy field to perform the *Katri gasa saonai*. It is believe that paddy plants would bear large number of paddy if it done by the women.

3.4 BODO WOMEN IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Bodo women have been playing a pivotal role in the field of economic activities since the time immemorial. It is undeniable fact that all the economic activities lies in the hands of woman. Bodo women have been involving in different activities like household, agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry etc. Every woman in Bodo family maintains that the collection vegetable items, edible foods from the kitchen garden or forest, cooking and also collection of firewood etc. are as their duties (Narzary, 2016). Plantation of paddy in the paddy field is the prime duty of women folk since the existence of civilized society. Bodo women helped their male counterpart in cultivation, harvesting also storing food grains and others. Drying of paddy and husking of dried up paddy are also performed by

the Bodo women. Some of the economic role of Bodo women has been discussed in the following:

i. Life Stock Farming:

Bodo women also provide additional support to the economic condition of the family. Rearing of pigs, cattles and poultry are the common domesticated livestock bred in almost every family of Bodo community. Mostly these animals are looked after by the women of a family. Earlier rearing of pigs and poultry farming by the Bodo women were meant for only to use as food items during religious ceremonies, familial ceremony like marriage and for the seasonal festivals like *Bwisagu* (Bihu) and *Magw Domachi* (Magh Bihu), etc and these were rarely mean for commercial purposes. But, with the changing time and period, women folk who were used to stay at home for household tasks have started venturing out to involve in the commercial activities to help their family economic and mostly domesticated animals are now sold for commercial purposes (Basumatary & Pathak, Empowerment of Bodo Women: A Theoretical Perspective, 2017). The Bodo women help their family economy by selling poultry, pigs and eggs in the market and also generate individual income.

ii. Weaving and Sericulture:

Weaving and Sericulture both are an integral part of Bodo women in the community. Traditionally, Bodo women have their own folk activities like weaving of cloths in the looms. They learn techniques and idea of weaving of clothes from their elders. They weave their traditional dresses and cloths from their handlooms. There is a belief in the Bodo society that it will become difficult for a girl to get marry to a good family if she who does not know the art of weaving as she lacks traditional skills. So, knowing the art of weaving is must for them. The traditional hand woven cloths are like '*dokhona*', '*aronai*', '*gamcha*', '*endi chadar*', '*muga chadar*', '*seema chadar*' (bed-sheet) etc. which are made for family use as well as for commercial purposes. The *endi ji* or *eri* cloth woven by Bodo women is popular and useful during winter seasons. The cocoons of *eri* silkworm spun into yarn for weaving of *eri* cloths by the Bodo women (Goswami, The Bodos: Culture and

Society, 2012). Moreover, for their livelihood the *Eri* silkworm and their cocoons are also sold by some in the market. The different hand woven cloths are sold in the market for considerable price. Some Women Entrepreneurs and Self Help Groups have now established weaving centers as well as small scale industries with the emergence of technology and technology know-how in Kokrajhar district for venturing out commercial purposes. Women who were engaged in the weaving industries have now gradually empowered for income generation with the commercialization of woven products and demand of the products in the market and resulted economic development in the family as well as in the society.

iii. Production of rice beer and distilled liquor:

Traditionally Bodo community prepared rice beer and distilled liquor which is part of their social and cultural life. Preparing and consuming rice beer is considered as normal phenomena in a traditional Bodo society. The rice beer is prepared by a mixture of different natural plants along with rice and this preparation is usually made by the Bodo women in the Bodo family. Earlier preparation of rice beer was meant for social and religious functions, reception of guests, worshiping of God and also it was used as medicine for urinary problems and others. Gradually, preparations of rice beer and distilled liquor have been shifted from family consumption to commercial purpose. In the Bodo family, women are earning money by selling rice beer, liquor and run their family life and also they are becoming self dependent in economic aspects. Moreover, the widow women are also adopting selling of rice beer and distilled liquor to become economically self dependent and also to run their family life (Basumatary & Pathak, 2017). But, it is to be mentioned that in the Bodo society the preparation of rice beer and its sale are also opposed by some enlightened section of people. However, marginalized section of Bodo women are depending on this profession to run their family and also for income generation.

iv. Participation in commercial and small business activities:

In the present time, the traditional style of livelihood of Bodo women has changed gradually and they do not depend solely on their male counterpart rather they have also

participating in male activities too for their livelihood. They are now involving in the commercial and business activities in their daily life, as in the mind and capacity of every woman in the present society the economic awareness and self dependency has been emerged. Other than weaving of cloths, Bodo women also largely engaged in different business activities like selling vegetables, small shops and other (Boro A. , Women in Bodo Society, 2018). It has seen that without letting it affect their normal household chores, Bodo women are venturing out from their homes and selling vegetables in the market. It to be mentioned that women's economic dependency factor has been reduced gradually with the changing attitude from traditional economic activities towards developed professional attitude. They are now coming forward necessarily to participate in every economic aspects of their daily life and also gradually strengthening their economic role in the society as well as their domestic economy.

v. Participation in Self Help Group (SHG):

SHG or Self Help Group is a well known concept and it is a tool for making women economically self dependent and way of involving in economic activities. Bodo women mostly from rural areas form their Self Help Groups normally with 15-20 members and in the name of Self Help Groups they get some governmental schemes for work in the field of weaving, poultry farming, piggery, etc. With the help of SHG, they are also able to give small amount of loan to the needy women also to others from their common fund with minimal interest rate by the way of mutual support. Through the Self Help Group, counseling on capacity building, skill training and others are also given to women to some extent (Brahma & Devan, 2017). At present many Bodo women have now economically becoming self independent and they have also contributed in the family economy. Self Help Groups have brought considerable changes in the field of economic aspects where most of the Bodo women are now involving in small scale business activities in Kokrajhar district. Thus, SHG have helped Bodo women to take part in the decision making process of the society by empowering them to be equal with men.

3.5 CONCLUSION

After having thorough discussion, it may be concluded that Bodo women have been playing important role in the ensuring the Bodo society a sound society as equal to that of male counterpart. It has already mentioned that though the Bodo society is patriarchal in nature but their status is equal to male. Their participation in socio-cultural affairs shows that they also enjoy high status in the society. It is to be mentioned that women were not kept under any oppression and suppression of male member. The Bodo customs and social traditions empowered equal freedom for girls as well as to the women in the society. Since the time immemorial Bodo women have been seen taking active role in the socio-economic and religious life of the society. They performed different duties at different point of time like as a guardian, as mother, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law at a time. They shared equal freedom with male counterpart in the daily works of life. Their contribution in the field of economy can not be neglected. The Bodo women are hard-working and conscientious. In the study of Kokrajhar district the Bodo women have occupied an important position in every aspect of religious life in the Bodo society. They are being regarded as the source of wealth of the house.

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