

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The term 'society' derived from the Latin word '*societas*' designates persons belonging to a specific group. In anthropology, the term society is used to refer to a group of people. Society is to guide and control the behaviours of men by creating and recreating an organization.¹ All the living species have their own unique characteristics and usually the human beings are no exception from it. Most importantly the intrinsic nature of cognitive skills of human beings made them different from the other species.² Generally, with the unprecedented characteristics the social evolution had been newly processed by the underlying natural selection of entire process. Thus, without any teleology the social evolution is also an open ended process by natural selection.³

Historically during the three ruling dynasties of Kamarupa namely Varman dynasty (4th-7th Century A.D.), Salastambha dynasty (7th-10th Century A.D.) and Pala dynasty (10th-12th Century A.D.) social life of Assam or Assamese culture in Assam evolved. But with the advent of the Ahoms in 1228 A.D. in Assam and during the long six hundred years of its rule; the scenery of socio-culture, language and political condition of Assam got a new shape. During the medieval period, the population of

Assam comprised of the non-Aryans belonging to the various Indo-Mongoloid tribes of Tibeto-Burman linguistic family such as Bodo-Kacharis, the Garos, the Rabhas, the Chutiyas, the Koches and the other hill tribes of the Mongoloid stock. The Aryan speaking population of Assam was far lesser than the Tibeto-Burman speaking groups. Yet, they could influence almost the entire Brahmaputra valley with the help of their powerful speech and assimilative culture. The gradual Hinduisation of the Tibeto-Burman people was started in the ancient period through the process of Sanskritisation of the local pre-Aryan names and places. Despite of the assimilative power of Hinduism and Sanskritisation, the newly emerging Assamese culture and languages could not affect largely the languages of tribal population; in fact, they spoke their own dialects as well as they had a firm faith on their traditional customs and rites in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁴

Due to various factors of social evolution in the medieval period the society in Assam evolved in various phases. The acceptance of the Hinduism by kings or chiefs of different dynasties and their support to the Brahmins encouraged the Hindu preachers to spread the Hindu religion and culture in every nook and corner of the Assam through the activities of the Brahmins on the limelight of the Hindu religion. By receiving patronage from the kings and nobles they succeeded in bringing the indigenous people under the fold of Hinduism. Thus, the influence of Hindu religious beliefs, practices and rituals were found in the social and domestic domain of the newly converted people. However, this is also an undeniable fact that despite conversion to the Hindu fold for their convenience but still they preserved the traditional practices within them.⁵

One of the most contributory factors to the social life of people of Assam was the emergence of neo-Vaisnavite movement and its impact on the masses by regulating religious dogmas in the society. This movement was initiated by Sankardeva in the early part of the 16th century as a sort of protest against the Brahmanical sectarian and priests who acted as mediator among common people during religious functions. The new religion was based on the monotheism and was simple in practice. The neo-Vaisnavite movement brought the new cultural renaissance in the Assamese society by engineering in the field of literature, music, dance and drama.⁶

The belief of Saiva and Sakta worship was also predominant in the Brahmaputra valley. Saivism appeared to be earliest religious faith since the ancient period in Assam. It was granted royal patronage by the three great ruling dynasties before the thirteenth century. Saivism flourished because the primitive *kirata* was much akin to it in their cult of worship. According to Kalika-Purana, the belief of Saktism in the form of Mother-Goddess Kamakhya was predominantly popular in the ancient Kamarupa kingdom. Kamarupa was one of the four centers of *Tantricism* of mother goddess. Numerous temples found erected in the name of Saiva and Sakti over the Brahmaputra valley exhibit spread of Hindu culture in Assam till today.⁷

The concept of an economy is an area of the economic system which includes production, consumption, distribution or trade of limited goods and services in a certain region or country. In other words, economy may be defined as the value of transaction between two economic agents in a certain region in respect of the products and services. The economic agents may be individuals, organizations, or states and transactions arise when both the parties agree to the value or price of the transacted goods. Earlier the theory of economic activity was delimited by the natural resources, labour and the capital. Hence, it disregards the value of technology and creativity, which especially produces intellectual property. However, in the present scenario the study of economy may include in the field of multidisciplinary social science of economics such as sociology (economic sociology), geography (economic geography), history (economic history), anthropology (economic anthropology) and other related disciplines which contributes to economic.⁸

The traditional Indian economy was characterized by what we would call today an 'appropriate technology' geared to small-scale production in family units of peasants and artisans. Land and labour as factors of production were abundant, and therefore the third factor capital is substituted for the other factors whenever they are scarce, was not required.⁹

The economic domain was considered to be the subsistence of the material wealth of societies such as production, distribution and consumption of goods for a long period of time. Literally, economic domain exemplifies the whole operation whereby its members obtain, distribute and consume the material means of fulfilling their individual

and collective needs, and thus an economic system is the combination of three structures, those of production, distribution and consumption. However, an economic system may include food gathering, hunting, agriculture and craft work etc. Historically many societies have evolved from a simple gathering economy to the transformed nature of economy.¹⁰

Colonialism in Assam

Towards the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the Ahom monarchy was staggering under the impact of a series of war and conflicts. The call of crisis was comprehensive.¹¹ After acquiring the Diwani of Bengal in 1765, the British East India Company had the opportunity to contact directly with the kingdoms of Assam, Manipur, Cachar and Jaintia as well as with the tribal communities of adjoining hills. Initially, these regions of sparse population and the low revenue-yielding potential did not attract the attention of British annexationist. Therefore, these territories remained as an undisturbed till the Burmese invasion (1817-24).¹²

The British from the very beginning were interested in expanding their trades and territories towards eastern part of India. The golden opportunity came when the rebellion of Moamariyas created such a crisis for the Ahom monarchy that it was finally compelled to seek the aid of the British East India Company against its people.¹³ In 1792, Ahom king Gaurinath Singha sought help from the company under his power obligation. Lord Cornwallis, the then Governor-General without any delay decided to send an expedition under Captain Thomas Welsh to Assam. Sooner or later, it opened an opportunity for the company to interfere and usher their power in disguise of savour. After securing an easy access to Assam they signed an initial trade agreement with its government in February 1793 and by way of subjugating the enemies of the king reinstated the political, cultural and economic conditions as well as the position of the king.¹⁴

The Moamariya rebels were mainly considered responsible for the dismissal of Ahom king Gaurinath Singha. The rising opponents of the king mainly hailed from Kamrup, Darrang and Nagaon where they took full advantage of the chaotic situation created by them. The Moamariya rebels represented a socio-religious sect of the same

name. It started off as a popular social movement but the arrogance of the ruling class gave it an odd twist. The situation became worse when the leading priests of the sect suffered humiliation at the instance of the king. It burnt deep into the hearts of their followers and they threw a challenge to the king. The monarchy was not equipped to face their desperate attack. Thus, the social movement was transformed into political consequence.¹⁵ On his arrival, captain Welsh correctly guessed that a carrot-and-stick approach would be more rewarding than a policy of hot war. The rebels of the king were gradually brought under control and Gaurinath Singha's position was restored and consolidated. For that success, he was rewarded a lot by the king and became the adviser of the king.¹⁶

Succession of Lord Cornwallis, the then Governor General by Sir John Shore (1793-98), reverted to the policy of non-intervention and consequently in 1794 the troops under Welsh in Assam were recalled to Bengal. After the departure of Welsh, anarchy and chaos again restarted in the region.¹⁷ There were claims and counter claims of princes and pretenders, court intrigues, insurrections giving tempting calls to the audacious neighbours and distant enemies. Under such circumstances Badan Chandra Barphukan an iniquitous viceroy posted in Guwahati implored the East India Company to intervene in his favour which they refused. He immediately rushed to the king of Burma who agreed to send his troops in support of him.¹⁸ In early 1817, the Burmese appeared in Upper Assam and after crushing the opposition they installed Raja Chandra Kanta and the Barphukan in full power. In return they carried huge indemnity including an Ahom princess as present to the harem of the Burmese king. This political settlement did not last long. Due to the political turmoil the Barphukan was assassinated and Chandra Kanta was mutilated and deposed from the throne. In place of him, Purandhar was raised as the Raja to the throne. On hearing that, the Burmese monarch became furious and he hurriedly like a mighty rushing wind hastened to send huge forces under Ala Mingi in February 1819. Purandar tried to resist them but has to flee to Gauhati and thence took refuge in the company's territory. The Burmese then reinstated Chandra Kanta on the throne. But Chandra Kanta after realizing the Burmese to be dangerous allies who were now determined to rule over Assam, in disgust he too entered into Bengal. Thus, Assam passed under the control of the Burmese though they enthroned Jogeswar Singha, a puppet prince.¹⁹

The Burmese domination in Assam from 1819 to 1824 has been elaborated by various writers as by calling 'Burmese Rule in Assam'. It was the days of cruel and atrocities. The Burmese were also known as the *Maans*. They have left behind lore, *Manor Din*, the days of the *Maans*, a symbol for any experience of planned brutality. In short, the inhabitants of Assam found themselves with no cause to live and die for. They felt that under such situation society can neither defend self interest nor counteract self-destruction.²⁰ The easy success of the Burmese in the Brahmaputra valley inspired them to expand towards Cachar in the south. Cachar was also reeling under similar crisis. Politically, it was under the three Manipuri usurpers and the king Govinda Chandra sought shelter in Sylhet. To regain his throne he sought assistance from the East India Company. Under such situation, the British also realized that geographically the position of Cachar was most important for them. Towards the end of 1823, when the Burmese forces spread out in Cachar, the British resisted at the root of their campaign. Thus, the battle at Badarpur between British and Burmese sealed the fate of latter intervention in Cachar. The company now restored Raja Govindra Chandra to the throne and successively in March 1824 concluded a treaty with the East India Company whereby the territory of Cachar was kept under the protection of the company.²¹ By the treaty Govindra Chandra agreed to acknowledge the allegiance by paying a tribute of Rs. 10000 per annum to the British government.²²

The British East India Company after influencing their power in Cachar and Jayantia turned their eye towards the Burmese. Usually Colonel Richard, the then British commander established his headquarter at Koliabor but due to adverse climatic condition they were compelled to return to Gauhati. The Burmese thereupon reoccupied Koliabor and in revenge they committed merciless atrocities on the inhabitants. Out of rage they mercilessly flayed alive some, burnt some in oil, and drove in the crowds, into the village *Namghar* or prayer houses, which they set on fire.²³ Out of fear thousands of people fled into the hills and jungles where large number of people died of disease or starvation, very few number of people managed to escape to the plains of Surma valley. The fierce and brutal activities of the Burmese were still fresh in the memory of inhabitants who reclaimed it as *Manar Upadrab* or 'oppression of the Burmese'.²⁴ H.K. Barpujari remarked that it was impossible to estimate the number of persons who were compelled to flee, killed or were deported to Burma. There was wholesale depopulation,

industries collapsed, agriculture neglected and trade activities not in a position to standstill.²⁵

In the midst of peril and chaotic situation, the British emerged as the ‘deliverer’ of the people of Assam. Thereafter not surprisingly with the warmth eagerness and joy the people of Assam offered their full cooperation to the British to crush the Burmese.²⁶ Finally prolonged wars between the Burmese and the British soldiers followed. The British succeeded to crush the Burmese completely and the king of Ava was reluctantly compelled to sue for peace and treaty. A historic treaty of Yandaboo was concluded on the 24th February, 1826.²⁷ According to the terms of treaty, the Burmese renounced his claim upon the principality of Assam and its dependencies and the neighbouring states of Cachar, Jayantia and Manipur.²⁸ Since then Assam formed a part of the Company’s territory. Historically speaking, from that period incidentally Assam became a part of political India. It helped to crystallize her emotional bond with India. Geography shaped her sense of direction and culture confirmed her spiritual identity. Company’s territory meant company’s administration. They had their own priorities.²⁹

The expulsion and victory over the Burmese and the permanent settlement of the British in Assam in 1826 brought about far reaching changes in the socio-political atmospheres of Assam. By introducing various social reform measures and by avoiding cruel practices of the past regime, they tried to gain the confidence of the Assamese people.³⁰ The people of Assam also very eagerly welcomed the British for rescuing them from the clutches of the Burmese. The period from 1826 to 1856 marked an important epoch in the history of Assam. This period marked the end of glorious and independent rule of Ahom kingdom for about six hundred years in the Brahmaputra valley, further, it indicated the new era of foreign domination with radical changes in Assam.³¹

Colonial penetration into North East India brought about a qualitative structural transformation in the region. As in the rest of India, here also British policies generated new currents which brought about dramatic socio-economic changes. The economic autonomy of the villages was eroded. The local economy was restructured and the control of the colonial government on the land and resources was solidly entrenched. Various forces of imposition such as monetized economy, assessment of land revenue

and *ryotwary* settlement, house tax in the hill areas, creation of bureaucracy, innovations of transport and communication, introduction of western education, missionary activities and industrialization, all combined to transform the region.³²

Historical Background of the Bodos

The Mongoloids in India belong to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Indo-Chinese group and their representatives of the present day are the Kacharis, Koches, Rabhas, Meches, Lalungs, Garos, Nagas and Chutias and many of the communities of North-East India having same kind of features. Of these, the tribes speaking the Bodo (Boro) languages seem to have occupied the plains of Assam for a very long period. The Bodo people were no doubt the Kiratas and Mlechhas of the Mahabharata. During the time of Mahabharata or earlier, the Bodo tribes constituted the bulk of the population of Assam valley, northern and eastern Bengal and the surrounding intervening hills.³³

According to tradition, the earliest mentioned king of Kamarupa belonged to the non-Aryan tribe such as Danavas and Asuras. Traditions assign Mahirang Danab as the earliest king who was succeeded by Hatakasur, SambarAsur and RatnaAsur. After them, there was a chief named Ghatak, the ruler of the Kiratas who was said to have been a powerful race, much addicted to meat and strong drinks.³⁴ In the opinion of Sir Edward Gait, the Kacharis are described as the “aborigines, or earliest known inhabitants, of the Brahmaputra valley. They are identical with the people called Mech in Goalpara and North Bengal. In the Brahmaputra valley the Kacharis call themselves Bodo or Bodofisa (sons of the Bodo). In the North Kachar Hills they call themselves Dimasa, a corruption of Dimafisa or sons of the great river. They were known to Ahoms as Timisa clearly a corruption of Dimasa, so that this name must have been in use when they were still in the Dhansiri valley”.³⁵ In upper Assam, they are identified as Sonowal and Thengal Kachari, while in the western Assam they are more popularly known as Boro or Boro-Kachari. The generic name of ‘Bodo’ was first given by Hodgson to this group of languages. The Mech or the Kacharis call themselves as Bodo or Boro.³⁶ Endle in his book *The Kacharis* opined that in Assam proper the Hindus call them Kacharis, in Bengal they are known as Meches. However, their original name for their race is Boro or Bodo.³⁷

No doubt the name Cachar was attached to the specific kingdom of that name, after which the district is called at the present time, the superficial observer is led to suppose that the habitat of the Kacharis is Cachar, and that is only in Cachar that the Kacharis experimented with the grueling task of state building. Kacharis are scattered all over the Brahmaputra Valley in addition to the so called district of Cachar, and even beyond their limits. In every district of the Brahmaputra Valley there are number of Kachari villages, and the Kacharis speak the Assamese language with their Assamese neighbours, and the Kachari or Bodo language with their clan folk. In addition to the Kacharis proper both Amalendu Guha³⁸ and Endle has classed the following tribes of Assam within the fold of great Bodo race, Rabha, Mech, Dhimal, Koch, Mahaliyas, Saraniyas, Dimasa, Hojais, Lalungs, Tiprah, Garos and Hajongs.³⁹

There is a scanty written record of Kachari rule. According to Fisher, the Kacharis of North Cachar believe that they once ruled in Kamarupa and their royal family traced its decent from Rajas of that country, of the line of Ha-tsung-tsa. The only trustworthy information regarding their past history is contained in the Buranjis which deal primarily with the history of the Ahoms. The details which they contain are, however, almost entirely confined to a narrative of the wars which were waged between the two nations. In the thirteenth century it would seem that the Kachari kingdom extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra from the Dikhu to the Kallang, or beyond, and included also the valley of Dhansiri and the tract which now forms the North Cachar sub- division. For a hundred years that river appeared to have formed the boundary between the Ahoms and the Kacharis, and no hostilities between them are recorded till 1490.⁴⁰

When the Ahoms entered Assam they confronted tough resistance from the Kacharis, the then one of the strongest powers in the Brahmaputra valley. Their capital was located at Dimapur on the banks of the Dhansiri River and one time they were in possession of the western part of Sibsagar, and the greater part of the Nowgong district.⁴¹ The extent and expansion of the Bodo population was determined by the pressure put upon them by the powerful neighbours and rivals such as the Ahoms. When the Ahoms invaded the Kachari kingdom and defeated them, Kacharis were forced to flee to the hills and settled at Maibong where they established their capital. In

the battles that followed later the Kacharis were defeated and went down to Kashpur and established their capital.⁴²

According to Endle, the Kacharis who have been described as the original autochthones of Assam⁴³ had built up political and administrative units which have lingered till this day.⁴⁴ Captain Fisher, the first superintendent of Cachar, who took great pains in ascertaining the early history of the Kacharis, was of opinion that this tribe gradually acquired an empire over Assam, Sylhet, Mymensingh and the valleys to the east of the Brahmaputra, their original seat being at Kamrup and that their rule ultimately embraced everything from Kamrup down to the sea. They built brick cities and it is supposed that the Tipperah Raja was a younger son of the house, the original empire being divided into a northern and southern part. The Kachari king developed an aristocracy around him.⁴⁵

Kachari or Bodo exercised their sovereignty in Assam in different ages with divergent names in various places. While the kingdom of Cachar was ruled by Tamradhwaj Narayan at that time Swargadeo Rudra Singha was reigning as the Ahom king. Later Kachari ruler Govinda Chandra at the time of British occupation was only one of the numerous states brought into existence by the political genius of the Kachari people.⁴⁶

The Kacharis have left ineradicable traces of their civilization in different parts of Assam. The ruins of Dimapur and the rock-cut temple at Maibong bear testimony to their attainments in sculpture, architecture and engineering. The names of Assam rivers with the prefix *Di* point to the fact that the Kacharis had lived almost in every place in the Brahmaputra valley. The Kacharis had at one time advanced as far as Kaliabar. The great Assamese reformer Sankar Deva had to leave his ancestral home at Bardowa owing to the pressure of the Kacharis. After the expulsion of the Kacharis the area between Raha and Kaliabar was found depopulated.⁴⁷ Their first king from whom the Kachari Rajas claimed their descent was Sasempha a variant of Ha-tsung-tsa. According to another legend the earliest Kachari king was one Birahas, who abdicated in favour of Bicharpati-pha. Prior to the establishment of the Kachari capital at Dimapur their capital existed either at Sonapur, Banpur or Laksmindrapur.⁴⁸

Bodo Settled Areas

Suniti Kumar Chatterji remarks that Bodos spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal, forming a solid bloc in North-Eastern India.⁴⁹ They formed the main base of the present day population of these tracts. Judging from the wide range of extension of their language, the Bodos appear first to have settled over the entire Brahmaputra valley, and extended west into North Bengal (in Koch Bihar, Rangpur in present Bangladesh and Dinajpur districts). They also scattered in the southern end part of the Brahmaputra and occupied the present Garo Hills, where the Garos form a bloc of Bodo speech. Further south of the Garo Hills they spread to northern Mymensingh (present Bangladesh) where the semi-Bengalised Haijong tribe is of Bodo origin. From Nowgong district in Assam their area of occupation extended to Cachar district, Sylhet in Bangladesh and further to the south in Tripura state, where there is still a Bodo-speaking bloc. Further from Tripura they spread into Comilla and possibly to Naokhali districts, thus occupying the mouths of the Ganges by the eastern sea. With the exception of the isolated Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the whole of Assam and North and East Bengal was the country of the great Bodo people. But, at the present moment due to cultural assimilation the Kirata Bodos have merged into the Bengali and Assamese speaking masses, Hindus as well as Musalmans.⁵⁰ Some of the Bodos have converted to the other religions. However, many of them still maintain their identity retaining their age old tradition. The Bodos have their own culture, language and religion. The religion has played a dominant role in changing their social pattern and status of economy, mode of living and way of thinking through the ages.

Area of Study and its Geographical Background

As the work is on the 'Society and Economy of the Bodos during Colonial period', it mainly attempted to focus on the Bodo inhabited areas of Goalpara district and other parts of Bodo populated areas of Assam during colonial period. For the study, the Goalpara district means the erstwhile Goalpara district i.e. the present Dhuburi, Goalpara and Kokrajhar districts. The district of Goalpara was bounded on the north by Bhutan, on the east by Kamrup, on the south by the Garo Hills and on the west by the

Bengal districts of Jalpaiguri and district of Rangpur (present Bangladesh). It lies between 25°, 28' and 26° 54'N and 89°, 42' and 91°, 6'E and covered an area of 3,954 square miles.⁵¹

The greater part of Goalpara consisted of vast plain, the lower portion of which was intersected by the Brahmaputra. The Eastern Duars, at the foot of the Bhutan Hills, was a country of grassy common sand and dark forests. Rice was grown on fields that were irrigated from the hill streams, where the Bodo or Meches village inhabitants of the tract were to be seen. The principal river of Goalpara district, like in other districts in the Assam Valley was the Brahmaputra, which flowed along the boundary of the district for a distance of 85 miles. The Manas was the largest of the rivers which joined the Brahmaputra in the Goalpara district. In the West of the Manas, the Brahmaputra is joined by the Champamati. The Saralbhangra, which in the downstream is known as Gaurang also flowed through Goalpara district. The greater Sankosh was another major river, which formed the boundary between the Ripu Duar and the Jalpaiguri district of Bengal. The soil of the plains was composed of sand and clay in varying proportions ranging from pure sand near the Brahmaputra to clay stiff which was quite unfit for cultivation. In the Duars, the soil was mostly light and gravelly. The hills were of gneissic origin and contained large rocks which made a good building stone.⁵²

The history of the district as an administrative unit can be readily traced only from the time of its annexation by the British. Prior to this, it is doubtful whether at any period of the past the whole of the area now forming the district of Goalpara was a separate polity under its own rule. The district underwent several changes in the jurisdiction under the British. Initially the area covered by the jurisdiction of the three *thanas* of Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari formed part of the permanently settled district of Rangpur in Bengal.⁵³ After the annexation of Assam by the British in 1826, Goalpara was annexed to the Assam valley Division and its administration was placed in the hands of the commissioner and the Judicial Commissioner of Assam.⁵⁴ By the Provisions of a Government notification on 3rd December, 1866, Goalpara was again separated from the province of Assam and placed under the Commissioner of Koch Bihar division in all matters.⁵⁵

The districts consisted of three sub-divisions viz., Dhubri with a population of 8,51,045, Kokrajhar with 7,10,066 souls and Goalpara with 6,63,992. Kokrajhar, the largest sub-division covered roughly half the area of the district but supported less than one third of the district's population. In other words, more than one thirds of the people of the district were concentrated in roughly half of its area. As a result, Dhuburi sub-division with a density of 310 persons per square kilometers was more than twice as thickly populated as Kokrajhar sub-division whose density was 151 only and Goalpara sub-division with a density of 233 was midway between the two. However, that a large portion of Kokrajhar sub-division was with vast reserved forests which extended along the northern boundary of the district where the population was very sparse.⁵⁶ According to the Census of 1872, the total population of the permanently settled tract of the Goalpara District consisted of 210,134 males, and 197,580 females; total 407,714 with average density of the population 159 per square mile. Goalpara, as being the frontier District of Assam often included within the political limits of Bengal, naturally presents mixed ethnological features. The aboriginal tribe's number consists 97,732 or 23.99 percent amongst them Rabhas, Mechs, Cacharis and Garos. Both Mech and Garos of Assam appeared to be absolutely confined to Goalpara District.⁵⁷ According to the census of 1891 and 1901, the total population of Goalpara consisted 452,773 and 462,052 respectively. This indicates population increased by 2 percent during the decade. The increase of the population in the decade was due to natural growth. The mean density of population as per census of 1872 was 98; 1881 was 113; 1891 was 114 and 1901 was 117 as per square mile respectively.⁵⁸

The Kacharis were scattered all over Goalpara as well as throughout Assam and some parts of Eastern side of Bengal. They were doubtless an offshoot from the original great Kachari (greater Bodo race) race. The Deputy Commissioner considers that the Cacharis of Goalpara were originally immigrants from the Cachar kingdom. They left their homes during times of internal trouble, or at the time of Ahom and Koch invasions.⁵⁹

Kacharis used bamboo and thatched in making their living houses. They prepared hills, forests or jungle tracts as their place of residence. They were generally non vegetarian and therefore included the flesh of pig and fowl as food articles in their

menu. They were also fond of spirituous intoxicating liquor drink of their own preparing. The bull, cow and ox were domesticated by them and regarded as such with reverence. In the way of their old traditional religious believes they regularly made sacrifices of pigs, fowls, pigeons etc. to appease the gods and goddesses. In addition to their own language they understood and spoke the neighbouring languages mainly Assamese and Bengali.⁶⁰ At present the area of Bodo speaking people in Assam stretches from Dhubri in the west to Sadiya in the east. A small number of Bodo people are there in Tripura and Nagaland.⁶¹ Kachari women equally enjoyed respectable status with the men in every respect of social activities. As they were agricultural people, agriculture was their backbone of economic source.⁶²

Utility of the Study

The social and economic condition of the Bodos of colonial period was quite different in comparison to the pre-colonial period. This period witnessed socio-economic transformation or reformation in various fields like religion, literature, politics and economics. The birth of Gurudev Kalicharan Mech who later adopted Brahma as surname brought changes in socio-economic and political life of the Bodos by preaching Brahma Dharma among the Bodos. This paved the way to carry out the social revolution among the Bodos, which was a movement for total change of outlook in all fields.

The Colonial establishment in this region changed the demographic pattern of Assam. Labourers were brought from outside Assam to work in the industries like tea, coal, oil and others. Besides, immigration from East Bengal followed. No sooner there was an alarming population rise which adversely affected the rural economy. Incidence of tensions between the indigenous and the immigrants became a phenomenon. The immigration led to alienate the indigenous people's land, where especially the Bodo people became the victim. Agriculture was the backbone for the sustenance of life of the Bodos. To prevent the rural tensions the government took an administrative measure known as *Line System* in 1916 and implemented it in 1920.⁶³ The colonial pursuit of British in this region changed the total economic prospects. The trade and commerce got high impetus in the colonial period. Again due to pouring of industrial products in the

region the indigenous industries deteriorated. This again changed the economy of the Bodos from bad to worse. In this respect a systematic research has not been done. Therefore, an attempt has been made on the subject with a title ‘Society and Economy of the Bodos during Colonial Period’.

Methodology

The methodology of the research work is historical and is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary source includes archival sources, public diaries, monographs, records of reports left by the British or colonial writers etc. The secondary sources have also been utilized whenever necessary. Government gazetteers and Census records have also been utilized as sources. The unpublished research theses relating to the subject directly or indirectly have also been examined as sources of information. Visits to different libraries and archives have also been undertaken. Facts and events have been analyzed by way of cross examination and great care has been taken not to distort facts.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the immigration and demographic changes in the colonial period.
2. To have a comparative study on education and literary development between the Bodos and the Garos of the same linguistic family during the colonial period.
3. To study the change and continuity of the Bodo society during the colonial period.
4. To study the economy of the Bodos in the colonial period.

Review of the Literature

For the present research work the following works of the different scholars have been carefully studied to bring the final shape of the present thesis.

In the beginning for review of literature the book entitled *A History of Assam* written by Sir Edward Gait, published by EBH Publishers (India), Guwahati, reprinted, 2013 with its first edition in 1905 can be traced about the history of Bodo race and their

dynasty. According to him the greater Bodo race comprises not only the people known today as the Bodo but also communities like the Kachari, Mech, Garo, Dimasa, Tippera, Lalung, Rabha and Chutiyas.

Boroni Fisa O Ayen was the first socio-religious book published in the history of Bodo literature. It was for the first time under the banner of *Habraghat Boro Sanmilani* composed by Ganga Charan Kachari, Naropati Chandra Kachaari, Harich Chandra Kachari and Madaram Kachari and published in book form in 1915. The book was republished by Words and Words, Kokrajhar in 2015. In those days the book played as the medium of social awakening among the Bodo people.

K.L. Barua's *Early History of Kamarupa (from the earliest times to the end of the sixteenth century)*, first published in 1933 and later published by LBS Publication, Guwahati in 2008, traces the history of Assam chronologically from the pre-historic period to the ruling dynasties of the historic period and till sixteenth century towards the end of Koch kingdom. From his work, relating to the origin of the Bodos can be traced in the Brahmaputra valley.

The book entitled *An Account of Assam* which was first compiled by Francis Hamilton in 1807-1814 and edited by S.K. Bhuyan that was first published by Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies Assam, Guwahati, 1940; is the concise account of Assam. This work provides informative account which not only deals with history, topography and antiquity but also throws light on socio-cultural-economic life of the people of Assam.

Early British Relations with Assam by S.K. Bhuyan and published by EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2013 and with its first edition in 1949 deals with the comprehensive records of the British administration in Assam. It is also valuable to trace the various policies adopted by different British administrators.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji's *Kirata Jana Kriti* which was first published in 1951 and later by The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2007, describes about the origin of the Bodos and their race of heredity. He also discusses about the elements of Indo-Mongoloid cultural heritage.

The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to The Twelfth Century A.D. by Pratab Chandra Choudhury, published by Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, 1987, the first edition of which was in 1959 is very constructive and a valuable source for tracing the genesis and historical kingdom of Assam. This book is very authentic and informative from which one may draw the background of education, literature, social and economic scenario of Assam. His work also deals with ancient administration of Kamarupa kingdom.

P.C. Goswami's *Economic Development of Assam*, published by Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, 1963, highlights the economic woes of Assam during the colonial period. It also describes about the demographic transition of Assam brought about by immigration during colonial period.

Linguistic Survey of India Vol-III, Part-II, of G.A. Grierson, reprinted in 1967 is also a valuable account which gives in-depth knowledge on the linguistic origin and structure of Bodo language alongside their cognate linguistic groups.

The book entitled *A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language* written by Promod Chandra Bhattacharya, was first published in 1977 and later published by University Publication Department, Gauhati University, 2007, deals with the descriptive analysis of Bodo language. His work can be considered pioneering in the constructing the structural language of the Bodo.

H.K. Barpujari's *Assam in the Days of the Company (1826-1858)*, published by Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, 1980 throws light on the history of British occupation of Assam from the period after the Treaty of Yandaboo which was concluded between the East India Company and the Burmese ruler. His work portrays different British administrative policies and consolidations by efficient administrators on the decay of Ahom monarchy. It also focuses on the process of missionary's evangelical as well as emancipation through western educational activities in Assam.

Tribal Economy of the North- Eastern region an edited volume by T. Mathew and published by Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1980, is a collective contributions by various scholars which was presented at a seminar on Tribal Economy held at

NEHU. It attempts to discuss on various economic related issues and problems of the North-Eastern region and looks for a feasible solution for them.

The book entitled *Demographic Trends in Assam, 1921-71* written by Dr. Tushar Kanti Choudhury and published by B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1982 deals with the changing pattern of demography of Assam which occurred due to the rapid growth of immigration in Assam. This work also discusses about the displacement and settlement of the people during different periods of time.

The book *The American Missionaries and North-East India (1836-1900 A.D.)* by H.K. Barpujari, published by Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1986, focuses on the activities of the Christian missionaries in North-East India from the first quarter of 19th century till the beginning of 20th century.

The book entitled *Literature and Society in Assam* written by Tilotoma Misra, published by Omsons Publications, Guwahati: New Delhi, 1987 portrays the historical trends of Assamese literature and renaissance in the 19th and early 20th century Assam, in the lights of intellectual movement. This work also attempts to display pictures of Assamese society of those periods.

The Tribes of Assam Part-I a jointly edited book by B.N. Bordoloi, G.C. Sharma Thakur and M.C. Saikia and published by Tribal Research Institute, Assam, in 1987 comprehensively deals with various tribes' socio-economic ethnography and cultural prospects belonging to them. The book has been followed by series of the books under the same title in Part-II and Part-III volumes in 1988 and 1991 respectively.

Satyendra Nath Sharma's book entitled *A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam (1200-1800 A.D.)* published by Bina Library, Guwahati, 2001 and first edited in 1989 provides comprehensive information on medieval period of Assam from 1200 A.D. to 1800 A.D. His work also delves at length on the rise and fall of several ruling kingdoms in Assam for the period of six hundred years. The work mainly focuses on the social, economic and cultural history of Assam of medieval period. From his work the history of ethnic composition of Assam including the Bodo tribe can be drawn.

The origin of ethnic identity and social tension during the British administration from 1905 to 1947 has been precisely described in the work *Social History of Assam* by M.L. Bose, published by Concept Publishing house Company, New Delhi in 1989. This work also provides information regarding the demographic pattern of Assam in the British period.

Dr. K. Brahma's book *Aspects of Social Customs of the Bodos*, first published in 1989 and later published by Bina Library, Guwahati in 2008, has widely elaborated on the study of the various aspects of the Bodo society relating to their traditional customs, believes and practices relating to agriculture and religious rites and rituals.

The book entitled *Muslims in Assam Politics* written by Makhanlal Kar and published by Omsons Publications, Delhi in 1990 discusses about the issues on the immigration in Assam and related political issues in Assam. It also discusses about various administrative policies adopted by the government to resolve the prevailing issues.

Social and Economic Change in Assam: Middle Class Hegemony by Manorama Sharma, published by Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1990, narrates the trends and changing pattern of social and economic life of people of Assam. This work also traces the emergence of middle class hegemony in the society.

The book entitled *The Historical Development of Boro Language* written by Madhu Ram Baro, which was first published in 1990 and later by N.L. Publication, Panbajar, Guwahati in 2007 traces about the historical development of Bodo language. This book also discusses about the influence of Bodo language on Assamese words especially in the connotation of names of places, hills, personal relationships, everyday activities etc.

Amalendu Guha's *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity, Economy* and published by Centre for studies in social sciences, Calcutta, 1991 discusses about the early colonial penetration and their administrative establishment in Assam. This work also throws light on the society, polity and economy of the contemporary people of Assam.

Boro Thunlaini Jarimin (History of Boro language) written by Monoranjan Lahary, first published in 1991 and later by Onsumoi Library, Kokrajhar in 2008 elaborates that Bodo language is also very important source of study from the literary point of view. This book describes about the genesis of literary development among the Bodos.

Victor Hugo Sword's book *Baptist in Assam: A Century of Missionary Service*, published by Spectrum Publication, Guwahati in 1992, describes the attitude of the missionary activities in Assam for spreading their evangelical among the people of Assam. This work also provides information regarding the early task of missionaries through the establishment of missionary schools and institutes with the view of educating the people.

The book entitled *The Kacharis* (Bodo) written by S. Endle, published by Low Price Publications and reprinted in 1997 deals with the history of origin of Kacharis and their settlement. Social and domestic life, laws and custom, religion, folklore etc. of the Kacharis are authentically presented in his work. His contribution and work among the Kachari is regarded as the masterpiece. Endle lived in Assam and served as missionary from 1864-1905.

The Bodo Children of Bhulumbutter an edited volume by Thomas Pullopilli and Jacob Aukal, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati in 1997 is a collection of essays of various scholars which provides information on religion of the Bodos, the spread of the Christianity and different customs and marriage system of the Bodos.

Rupnarayan Mwshahary's Bodo book *Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma (Life History)*, first published in 1997 and later by N.L. Publication, Kokrajhar in 2015, provides information regarding the early life of Gurudev Kalicharan and his socio-economic-political and religious reformation movement among the Bodos.

Premlata Devi's *The Social and Religious Institutions of Bodos*, published by Geophil Publishing House, Guwahati, 1998 describes about the accounts of ethics, gods and the pattern of Bodo religion belief and practices. Her work mentions about the role

of Bodo women in the Bodo society and also depicts some of the matriarchal characteristics in the patriarchal society of Bodos.

Dr. Kameswar Brahma has also contributed another works on the same line of his earlier work i.e. *A Study in Cultural heritage of the Boros*, which was first published in 1998 and later published by Bina Library, Guwahati in 2009, has made a comprehensive assessment on the food habits, dress and ornaments, social structure, marriage and family life, seasonal and agricultural festivals of the Bodos etc which has been very productive for the present study.

Priyam Goswami's book entitled *Assam in the Nineteenth Century, Industrialization and Colonial Penetration*, published by Spectrum publication Guwahati, 1999 deals with the British establishment's administration in Assam and their industrialization. It also discusses various economic issues and activities.

The book entitled *Social and Economic History of Assam (1853-1921)* written by Rajen Saikia and published by Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2000 narrates the genesis of British administration in Assam. He also describes about the rise of middle class in the Assamese society and which resulted in economic transformation of Assam. His work also mentions the development of communication system both road way and railway in the colonial period.

Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma: His life and deeds written by Manik Kr. Brahma, published by N.L. Publications, Kokrajhar in 2001 and *Journey towards Enlightenment: Gurudev and the Bodo Society* written by Bidyasagar Narzary & Malabika Mitra, published by Good Books Distributors Publisher, Guwahati:Kolkata in 2004 are useful and make an assessment on the contribution of Kalicharan on the Bodo society. These books mainly focus on the social reform works initiated by Kalicharan Brahma. They stress that when Kalicharan Brahma started the reform movement among the Bodos in those period, evil practices had engulfed the Bodo society.

In the same line relating to the Bodos socio-religious and political life of the Bodos the work *Bodos (Kacharis) at a Glance* by Srimati Bijaya Laxmi Brohmo Choudhury, published by S.N. Brohmo Choudhuri, Bongaigaon, 2002 traces the social

mobility of the Bodos. This work also highlights the emergence of elite groups and their contribution in the field of literature and socio-political awakening movement among the Bodos.

H.K. Barpujari's edited book entitled *The Comprehensive History of Assam Vol-IV*, published by Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 2004 describes the end of the Ahom monarchy and establishment of British sovereignty in Assam. This volume narrates the successive stages from 1826-1919 in the extension of British dominion both in plain and hill areas of Assam.

Sucheta Sen Choudhury's work *The Bodo Movement and Women Participation*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 2004 discusses about the participation of the Bodo women in the Bodo movement and their role played in different social and economic activities of the society. Her work also deals with the role of women in social awakening through the Brahma dharma reformation movement among the Bodos.

Dr. Anil Boro's book entitled *The Flute and the Harp (Essays on Bodo Literature and culture)*, published by Good Books Distributors Publishers, Koklkata in 2004 mainly focuses on the literature and culture of the Bodos.

Sekhar Brahma's book *Religion of the Bodos and their Socio-Cultural Transition*, published by DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2011, which was initially published in 2006 elaborates on the process of religious movement like Brahma Dharma and Christianity in the early twentieth century, trends on social mobility, ethnic crisis etc.

The book entitled *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol-I* edited by H.K. Barpujari and published by Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 2007 deals with the history of ancient Assam from the pre-historic to historic period. It also comprehensively elaborates on the scenarios as existing in social, religion, economic, political, education and literature of ancient Assam.

Priyam Goswami's edited book entitled *Changing Patterns of Economy and Society (19th and 20th Century North east India)*, published by Department of History, Gauhati University in 2007 is a compiled volume on various factors which have molded

socio-economic transformation in the 19th and 20th century North East India. That book includes collection of seminar papers presented by different scholars at the seminar on *Changing Patterns of Economy and their Impact on Society in North East India during the 19th and 20th Centuries* organized by Department of History, Gauhati University.

Riju Kumar Brahma's book entitled *Boro Thunlani Jarimin Arw Thunlai Bijirnai (A Short history & criticism of Bodo Literature)*, published by Onsumoi Library, Kokrajhar, 2007 is a essays on criticism on Bodo literature. This has also been helpful for the present study.

The Book *Thunlai arw Thunlai Bijirnai* written by Anil Kumar Brahma in Bodo language, published by N.L. Publication, Kokrajhar, 2011 with its first publication in 2008 is collection of essays based on literary criticism on the development of Bodos literature.

The book entitled *Status of Women in India* by Kasim Ali Ahmed, published by EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2010 contains wide information regarding the existence and status of women in India as well as in Assam from the earliest period to the present through the various phase of historical development. This work also discussed the status of women living under different culture and religions.

Rupnath Brahma a life sketch on Rupnath Brahma written by Subungcha Mwshahary, published by Sahitya Academy, Kolkata, 2010 highlights about Brahma's contribution as a laureate literary creator and as a politician by participating in the politics of Assam.

M.M. Das's work on *Peasant Agriculture in Assam*, published by EBH publishers in 2012 gives information about the climate, drainage, population structure and economy of Assam. It also highlights about use of land, crop combination, and intensity of cropping and agricultural efficiency. It also dealt with socio economic structure of farming and productivity and quality of rural life of Assam.

Boro Kocharini Somaj arw Harimu a translation of the book *Boro Kocharir Somaj aru Songskriti* written by Bhaben Narzi and translated by Harinarayan Kakhrary and Gobinda Basumatary, published by Chirang Publication Board, Kajalgaon in 2014

is very authentic and comprehensively deals with social anthropology of the Bodo people. This book is narrative of the genesis of the Bodo people and their existence, their socio-cultural and economic scenario from the earliest period to the present.

The book entitled *The Saga of the Bodos* written by Hira Charan Narjinari and published by author self copyright in 2014 highlights the history of dynastic kingdom and the linguistic and political movements of the Bodos.

In the same line, relating to the Bodo language and literature many literary works have been carried out by various writers which is used as secondary supplement in the present study. Those works are *Thunlai arw Gohena (Treatise on Literature, Rhetoric and Prosody)* written by Manoranjan Lahary and published by Onsumoi Library, Kokrajhar, 2007, *Thunlai arw Sansrhi* written by Brajendra Kumar Brahma and published by Onsumoi Library, Kokrajhar, 2010 with its first edition in 2008, *Rao arw Raokanti* in Bodo written by Anil Brahma and published by MRB Publishers, Guwahati, 2014 and *Gwdan Boro Thunlai (Adunik Boro Sahitya)* written by Dr. Anil Boro and translated by Utrisar Kungur Basumatary in Bodo language and published by Onsumoi Library, Kokrajhar, 2016. These works have been done in Bodo language which has helped in the present study by the way of analyzing and cross examination of Bodo language and literature.

The book entitled *History of Education among the Bodos* written by Dr. Satyendra Kr. Sarmah, published by N.L. Publications, Guwahati, 2017 elaborates on the growth and development of education among the Bodos. His work also depicts about the socio-cultural scenery of the Bodos and the process of education after the establishment of British rule in Assam.

Besides the above mentioned secondary sources, other literary review of secondary works including journals, mouthpieces, and the articles have also been incorporated and details of which are included in the bibliography of the present thesis. In the writing of this thesis related primarily source materials have also been utilized.

The review of literature for this work has been carried out through the study of works carried out by different writers at different periods of time. These works,

however, depicts a mark of absence of any attempt to study particularly on society and economy of the Bodos as no serious research works have been done yet regarding the society and economy of the Bodos during colonial period. Therefore, there is a wide scope to study in this field.

Chapterisation

The present work, *Society and Economy of the Bodos during Colonial Period* has been organized into the following Chapters:

- Chapter I: Introduction
- Chapter II: Immigration and Demographic changes
- Chapter III: Development of Education and Literature: Bodo-Garo Comparative Approach
- Chapter IV: Bodo Society: Change and Continuity
- Chapter V: Economy of the Bodos in the Colonial period
- Chapter VI: Conclusion

The Chapter I, entitled as 'Introduction' deals with the conceptual idea of the present study and its significance. This chapter also highlights on the initial intervention and establishment of the British administration in Assam, historical background of the Bodos and settlement of the Bodos with erstwhile Goalpara district as the background.

The Chapter II, entitled as 'Immigration and Demographic Changes' highlights the process of immigrations highly encouraged by the British for various purposes and its impact on the changing pattern of demography in the undivided Goalpara district.

Chapter III, entitled as 'Development of Education and Literature: Bodo-Garo Comparative Approach' highlights the comparative development of education and literature between the Bodos and the Garos during the colonial period.

The Chapter IV, entitled as 'Bodo Society: Change and Continuity' throws light on the Bodo society in the colonial period and focuses on the trends of social organization and socio-economic reformation movement among the Bodos in the

colonial period. This chapter also pays attention on the changes and continuity in the traditional society.

The Chapter V, entitled as ‘Economy of the Bodos in the Colonial period’ is on the economy of the Bodos in the colonial period. Herein various economic activities of the Bodos during the colonial period have also been critically examined and analyzed on the basis of the available sources.

Chapter VI, entitled ‘Conclusion’, with which the thesis ends discusses and highlights on the final findings and presents a summary of the present study.

Endnotes

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