

## CHAPTER - I

### INTRODUCTION

The Bodos constitute the largest ethnic group among the various ethnic population of the present-day state of Assam. Racially they belong to the Mongoloid stock. The Bodos (Kacharis) may be described as the aborigines or earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley.<sup>1</sup> Rev. Sidney Endle is of the opinion that the Bodo (Kachari) race were the original autochthones of Assam.<sup>2</sup> The Bodos of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam are, therefore, called as 'sons of the soil' (bhumi Putra). They are identified in various names in different parts of the country. In Nepal and west Bengal they are known as Meches. In the western part of Assam, they identify themselves as Boro, and in other parts of Assam known as Kachari by the Assamese. In upper Assam they are known as Sonowal and Thengal Kachari. In the North Cachar hills and Cachar identified as Dimasa and Barmans respectively.

It is said that as a Mongoloid race the Bodos first settled in the Brahmaputra Valley and then slowly spread to various other places, far and wide. About the early settlement of the Bodos S.K. Chatterji writes: "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 and Dinajpur districts), they may have pushed into North Bihar also, and the Indo-Mongoloids who penetrated into North Bihar might equally have been either Bodos or 'Himalayan' tribes allied to the Newars."<sup>3</sup> Sir Edward Gait also expressed the same view that "Having regard to their wide distribution, and to the extent of country over which Bodo languages of a very uniform type are still current, it seems not improbable that at one time the major part of Assam and North-East Bengal formed a great Bodo kingdom, and that some, at least, of the Mlechchha kings mentioned in the old copper-plate inscriptions belonged to the Kachari or some closely allied tribe."<sup>4</sup>

That they did so is evidenced by the many names of place and natural topography which they are supposed to have given it. The river names of the whole Brahmaputra Valley are Bodo names, and it is demonstrable that the Bodos were the aborigines of the Valley.<sup>5</sup> "The wide extent and long duration of Bodo domination as

shown by the frequent occurrence of the prefix *di* or *ti*, the Bodo word for water, in the river names of the Brahmaputra valley and the adjoining country to the west e.g., Dibru, Dikhu, Dihing, Dihong, Dibong, Disang, Diphang, Dimla, etc. In some cases, the old name is disappearing...the Dichu river, for instance, is now better known as the Jaldhaka while in others it has already gone, as in the case of Brahmaputra, which in the early days of Ahom rule was known as the *Ti-lao*. The latter word was doubtless the origin of another old name for this river, viz, *Lohit* or *Laouhitya* (red).<sup>6</sup> The name *Ti-lao* derives from the Bodo word *Ti*=water and *lao*=long, i.e., long river. Therefore, the long river Brahmaputra is called *Ti-Lao* in Bodo. The Brahmaputra river also came to be better known in the Hindu world outside Assam as *Lauhitya*, which appear to be an Aryanisation, in Sanskrit, of the Indo-Mongoloid Old Bodo name *Luhit* which is still the name of the eastern-most branch of the river.<sup>7</sup> Because, “originally, the area of the *Luit* river appears to have been inhabited by the Bodo-speakers”.<sup>8</sup> The word *luit* for Brahmaputra used by the Assamese people in their poetry and songs as suggested by Bishnu Prasad Rabha, an eminent Assamese artist, is only a corrupt form of Bodo expression like *laoti*, *tilao* and *dilao*.<sup>9</sup> He further suggested that the river name Brahmaputra is, in fact, an Aryanised or Sanskritised form of a Bodo expression *Bhullungbuthur*, meaning a great river of bubbling waters.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, the name of the shrine of the Great Mother at Kamakhya near Guwhati, as S.K. Chatterji observes, “is in all likelihood of pre-Aryan origin. So also the place- names *Kama-rupa*, *Kamata*, *Kamila* (Camillah) seems more probable that these names are Bodo”.<sup>11</sup> Because there is an element *Kam* or *Kam* which occurs in all the names as it also occurred in the name of the most western tribe of Bodos, the *Koches* from the modern *Komc*, *Koc*, from an earlier *Kawomca* or *Kamoca*, Sanskritised as *Kamboja*.<sup>12</sup>

From the above accounts it would appear that in earlier days the Bodos were the dominant race in Assam and North east Bengal.

### **Demographical Background:**

The Bodo people are not only linguistically but also ethnically completely different from the rest of the people of present-day state of Assam. They are very conscious of their numerical strength in comparison to their ethnic groups of the region and of the fact that they inhabit a substantial portion of Assam along the foothills of

Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh where they are distinctly preponderant. This is borne out by successive census report.<sup>13</sup> But many scholars and leaders of the Bodos considers the census figure of 1971 as inaccurate. The fact is that the census Report of 1971 gives us two conflicting figures of Bodo population: one has shown “Boro-Boro Kachari” as 10,10,459 and another has given it Boro-Kachari as 6,10,459. Any way these Boros and Boro-Kacharis are grouped together as one community”.<sup>14</sup> Considering the above fact, the numbers of Bodo population definitely may be taken higher in actual figure. As per census of India, 1991, the total figure of Bodo speakers is 11, 33, 225 in the state of Assam.<sup>15</sup>

According to the Census of 1931, the Bodos (Kacharis) numbered 2,91,000 persons.<sup>16</sup> In the census of 1951, the figures of the speakers of Bodo language group are estimated at about four lakhs and fifty-six thousand, while total speakers of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages are estimated at about twelve lakhs. Of course these figures include the state of Assam, Nagaland and incomplete census of NEFA.<sup>17</sup>

### **Ethnological Background:**

The Indo-Mongoloid people are one of the living representatives of the primitive non-Aryan race of the North-Eastern India. In ancient times the North-Eastern regions were cradles of the Mongoloid culture. Their existence in the region since time immemorial can be established with the help of contemporary literature.

The North-Eastern India albeit Assam, in fact, are predominantly inhabited by Indo-Mongoloid people.<sup>18</sup> They are called Indo-Mongoloid because they are racially belong to Mongolian origin, whose main physical characteristic are a short head, a broad nose, a flat and comparatively hairless face, a short but muscular figure and yellow skin.<sup>19</sup> In ancient times, the north-eastern region, especially Assam and its neighbouring regions, was known as the land of *Kiratas*, i.e., the habitat of the Indo-Mongoloid people.<sup>20</sup> The Indo-Mongoloids were usually designated as *Kiratas* in the epics and the Puranic and even the *Yogini-tantra*, a work of the late medieval period (c.16th century) uses the word *Kirata* to mean the indigenous Mongoloid people of Assam.<sup>21</sup> In the *Periplus of the Erytraean Sea*, a Greek work of the first century A.D., we find mention of populations called the Kirrhadee described as “race of men with flattened nose.” They live in the hills of Assam and Burma. They are no other than the *Kiratas*. The same work suggests that their territory was extended as far as Bengal and

Orrissa.<sup>22</sup> The Kiratas were Mongoloid people.<sup>23</sup> *Kirata* was perhaps the generic name of the Mongoloid People.<sup>24</sup> Linguistically these Mongoloid people belong to the Sino-Tibetan family of languages.<sup>25</sup>

In a very ancient time there was a king, called Mahiranga Danava, in Kamarupa or Pragjyotisha. The word Danava suggests that he was a non-Aryan king. It is said that the king derived his name from a hillock named Mairong, near modern Guwahati. Mahiranga was a Sanskritised form of Mairang. The root of this term can be traced from a Boro word. This king was a Kirata and his subjects were also Kiratas. After Mahiranga, Hatakasur respectively ascended the throne. He was followed by Sambarasur respectively. They were Kirata Kings ruling over the Kirata subjects.<sup>26</sup> It is to be mentioned here that the Bodo word of husked and cleaned rice is *Mairang*. Similar name also found in the north bank of former old Kamrup district which is called *Baksa*. The meaning of *Baksa* is husked but unclean rice. This tract has now been recognized as a new district under the name of *Baksa*.

S.K. Chatterji holds the view that in Sanskrit the term *Kirata* indicated the wild non-Aryan tribes living in the mountains, particularly the Himalayas and in the North-eastern areas of India, who were mongoloid in origin.<sup>27</sup> He further observes, the name Kirata is but a Sanskritisation of some Sino-Tibetan tribal name.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the name *Kirata* appears to have come from a pejorative name given to the Bodos. Similarly, the name *Mleccha* was given for non-aryan Bodo people who did not follow Vedic religion came to be used in new senses in the Aryan language. Few more instances may be cited such as *Daitya*, *Dasyu*, *Danava*, *Asura Rakshas* etc. came to acquire some sort of stigma among Aryan-Speakers. K.L. Barua identified these Bodo people were no doubt *Kiratas* and *Mlecchas* spoken of in the Mahabharata. The Meches of Aassam still preserve traces of the opprobrious name *Mleccha* applied to their fore fathers by the early Aryans coming into Pragjyotisha.<sup>29</sup> Bhagadatta who was probably a Ksatriya king participated in the Kuruksetra war with an army, composed of *Kiratas*, *Mlecchas*, and Chinas.<sup>30</sup> Because he commanded a non-Aryan army he has often been called in the great epic *mlecchadhinatha*.<sup>31</sup> The distinguishing feature of the *Kiratas* and *Mlecchas*, as recorded by the Aryan writers, was their yellow complexion. It is stated that in the Mahabharata that the China and the Kirata troops of Bhagadatta shone like gold while Ghataka, the Mleccha king of Pragjyotisha overthrown by Naraka, is described as a

column of gold.<sup>32</sup> While determining their (Kiratas) antiquity, G. P. Sing observes, “it should be made clear at the very outset, that they were, by and large, pre-Aryan and pre-Dravidian tribes of India. The Kiratas of North-East India, no doubt, have primeval antiquity. The earliest centre of their habitation was the Brahmaputra valley. The references to the Kiratas and their king Ghatak, who were defeated in war with Naraka and to their participation in the Great Bharata war (c.3102 B. C.) along with the Cinas and other *mleccha* as troops of king Bhagadatta, the successor of Naraka and contemporary of Yudhisthira, irrefutably testify to their settlements long before c. 3102 B.C. and disprove c. 2000 B.C. or c.1000 B.C. as erroneously supposed by many.<sup>33</sup>

From an astronomical work, called *Jyotistatvam* we know that the Kiratas, those who settled in the hills and valleys of Assam were called Bodos (from Bod = Bhota), who are still included in the Kirata group.<sup>34</sup>

It is evident from the account of Mahabharata that during the time of the Mahabharata war, or even earlier the Bodos constituted the bulk population in the Assam Valley, northern and eastern Bengal and the surrounding hills. This is why, S.K. Chatterji has pointed out that the *Kirata* people of Assam, before the coming into Assam of their kinsmen the Thai or Shan Ahom tribe from North Burma in 1228, judging from the widely scattered groups of Bodo people all over the State, appear to have been of the great Tibeto-Burman tribe of the Bodos who still number nearly a million as pure Bodo speakers unassimilated among the Aryans (Assamese and Bengali) speaking people of the Assam Plains. These Bodos were in all likelihood the dominant people of the Assam valley and the adjacent hills, and had spread also over North Bengal and East Bengal.<sup>35</sup>

They spread over the Brahmaputra valley, North Bengal, North Bihar, Nepal and Bangladesh and constitute a very important group of Indo-Mongoloid people of the East. They now live in scattered hamlets along the foothills of the Himalayas in the North-East as well as in scattered areas of the Brahmaputra valley.

In course of time many of the Mongoloid Bodo people, however, have to some extent influenced by Hinduism and vice versa. This happen mainly in areas adjacent to Hindu population.

### **Ethnical Disintegration:**

Ethnical disintegration of Mongoloid Bodos perhaps began when they came in close contact with the Aryans. The epigraphic evidence shows that process of Aryan migration to Assam started in the early centuries of Christian era. The Nidhanpur copper plates of king Bhaskaravarma who renewed the copper-plate of his grand-father Mahabhutivarma, alone contain names of 205 Brahmins of the same locality. The kings made the provision for liberal settlement of the Brahmins in the country.<sup>36</sup> Most of the inscriptions prior to the thirteenth century deal with the land grants donated to the Brahmins.<sup>37</sup> Evidently by 1000 A.D., Bodo and Aryan were spoken side by side in the Assam and North Bengal plains.<sup>38</sup> The presence of the Indo-Aryan speaking people, i.e., Brahmins in the area has resulted infusing Hindu religious notions among the Mongoloid Bodos. Thus, “the steady Hinduisation of the Tibeto-Burman Bodo people during the ancient period brought about a Sanskritisation of the local pre-Aryan names of both Sino-Tibetan and Austric origin, and in bringing them in line with Brahmanical Hindu notions and religious notions current among its people. Sacred places of the pre-Hindu religious world were gradually Hinduised, with myths and legends which were being gathered in the Puranas.”<sup>39</sup>

As a result, there was fusion of culture and blood, and through the passes of time of the centuries this great Bodo race broke up into a number of segments, in different geographical regions of Assam, and they can only be linked with the common language. According to J. D. Anderson, no one who has heard members of the five branches of the Bodo race speak their respective languages can fail to recognise that they belong to the same linguistic group.<sup>40</sup> The Bodos thus appear under different names in different places and ages after their fragmentation. Rev. S. Endle has classed these segments under the following ethnic group of Assam within the fold of the great Bodo (Kachary) race: Rabha, Mech, Dhimal, Koch, Solanimiyas, Mahaliyas, Phulgurias, Saranias, Dimasa, Hojais, Lalungs, Garos, Hajongs. “To these”, says Mr. Endle, “may be added one or two smaller communities, e.g., the Morans and the Chutiyas in Upper Assam, whose language, not altogether extinct as yet though apparently dying out rapidly, would seemed to prove them to be closely akin to the Kachary (Bada) race.”<sup>41</sup>

## **Racial Name:**

The Bodos are known under different names in different places and ages throughout the north-eastern corner of the Indian sub-continent. Bodo or Bara (better pronounced as Boro) is the name by which the Mech or Mes and the Kacharis called themselves.<sup>42</sup> G.A. Grierson maintains that the people who speak the language Bara, Bodo, or Plains Kachari call themselves 'Bara' or 'Bara-Fisa', i.e., sons of the Baras. This word 'Bara' has been identified by the first English enquirers with their nationality, and is usually written 'Bodo'. They do not apply the name 'Kachari' to themselves.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, their own name for the race is Boro or Bodo (the o has the sound of the English o in hot).<sup>44</sup> The origin of the name may be dealt with as given below:

### **(A) Kacharis:**

The first historical name of the Kacharis as Mr. Edward Gait observes, of which I am aware is found in the annals of the Ahom who debouched from the Patkoi in 1228 A.D.<sup>45</sup> It is said that the name Kachari originated in the fact that, some 200 years ago, the Raja of Hill Tipperah, when giving his daughter in marriage to the Raja of Maibang in the present North Cachar, gave her as dowry the Surma Valley in what is now known as the district of Cachar. The inhabitants of North Cachar were the Dima-sa, whom the Assamese called Kacharis. In process of time this name was extended to their Bara kinsmen, who occupied the plains of Assam and North Bengal.<sup>46</sup> Edward Gait, however, traces a Limbu legend from Herbert Risley's "Tribes and Castes of Bengal" which narrates the origin of the name 'Kachari'. The legend relates that 'Kachar' was an early home of the "Mech", and the name "Mech" is given by the Nepalese who settled to the tract at the foot of the hills between the Brahmaputra and Kosi rivers. Therefore, the people who live in Assam may well have been called Khacharis or Kacharis.<sup>47</sup> R.M. Nath is of the opinion that when the wave of Aryan culture spread into Assam, some of the Bodos maintained aloofness whereas others had free intermixture of blood with various races that swept over the country. At last, the Bodo chiefs of independent mentality were gradually driven out to the belts bordering on the hills in the East and they were generally called the Border-landers or the *Kakharis* or the *Kacharis*.<sup>48</sup> The view expressed by S.K. Chatterji has its proximity with the above statement. He maintained that the Bodos got their name *Kachari* from the district of Kachar forming

in part the Surma Valley and including the range of hills which make up the watershed between the Brahmaputra and the Surma Valleys and the meaning of *Kachar* is 'border lands' which derived from Sanskrit word *Kaksa-vata* > *Kachada* > *Kachar*.<sup>49</sup> However, this view is quite improbable as they have settled there long before by this name.

It is evident that Kachari or Bodo sovereignty was exercised in Assam in different ages, in different names and in different places. The kingdom of Cachar, of which Tamradhwaj Narayan was the ruler in the reign of Swargodeo Rudra Singha, and Govinda Chandra at the time of the British occupation, is only one of the numerous states brought to existence by the political genius of the Kachari people. But, because 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 the arduous task of state-building; whereas in fact the 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 we have a number of Kachari villages, and the Kacharis speaks the Assamese language with their Assamese neighbours, the Kachari or Bodo language with their clans' folk. Kacharis appear under different names in the districts of Northern and Eastern Bengal, and a strain of Kachari blood may be traced and detected in quarters which have passed off as pure 'Aryan'.<sup>50</sup> The bonds of union among the Kacharis whether living in Cachar or outside that district are community of blood and language as well as of religious rites and customs.

Besides the community of language and customs, two other bonds of union can be traced amongst the Kacharis of yore. This was why, as S. K. Bhuyan has pointed out, the Kachairi kingdom with its capital at Dimapur, Maibang or Khaspur, was looked upon by the scattered Kacharis as the lingering symbol of their racial unity; and wherever they lived they maintain some sort of allegiance to the Kachari monarch and paid tribute to him.<sup>51</sup> Dr. Buchanan Hamilton mentions the existence of the custom of every Kachari family contributing a few rupees annually to the ruler of Cachar, though not as a tax, as a pecuniary token of their racial identity. He wrote in 1808, The Kacharis derived their name usually given to them from the name of their territory Cachar; for my people say that the proper name of the people is Boro. Although long



separated from their prince, and scattered through the dominions of more powerful sovereigns, they still retain their loyalty, and every year contribute to give them support. Each family, wherever settled, gives from one to five rupees, which are collected by persons regularly deputed from Cachar.<sup>52</sup> Buchanan Hamilton found 200 such families in the District of Rungpoor, which comprised in those days a long portion of modern Goalpara.<sup>53</sup>

The origin of the term 'Kachari' is, thus, very difficult to trace and the scholars have expressed divergent views. They have made some guess-works only in regard to the origin of the term 'Kachari'. In fact, those of the Bodos who live in and to the east of the district of Kamrup are called Kacharis, pronounced as *kosari* by the Hindus.<sup>54</sup> In the words of P.C. Bhattacharya, Kachari is nothing but the Assamese name for Boro.<sup>55</sup> In all probability the term 'Kachari' is given by the outsiders.

#### **(B) Mech or Mes:**

The Bodos found in the Goalpara district of Assam and the Terai areas of the Himalayan starting from 'Bhutan Duars' in the east and the Konki river in the west are known as Mech or Meche or Mes. The origin of the name *Mech* is much shrouded. According to G.A. Grierson that the Bodo folk who live to the west of the Kamrup district are called Mech by their Hindu neighbours. This word is probably a corruption of the Sanskrit *Mlechchha* which means foreigner or strangers.<sup>56</sup> S. Endle also held the same view that the name *Mech* is almost certainly a corruption of the Sanskrit word *mleccha*, i.e., an outcast from the Brahmin point of view, a non-observer of caste regulations.<sup>57</sup> There is another interpretation about the origin of the term *Mech* by Dr. K.K. Brahma. He stated that the Bodos call themselves Mech because they settled in the banks of the river Mechi. P.C. Bhattacharya traces a Lepcha and Rai tradition, according to which, the Meches's are the descendants of one named Mechel,<sup>58</sup> one of the three brothers born of the same parents named Purango and Simnia of Nepal,<sup>59</sup> and the descendants of Mechel came to be known as the Meches. S. Endle has rightly stated that the people known as Mech (Mes) are undoubtedly a branch of the western Baras (Boros) of Darrang.<sup>60</sup>

#### **(C) Bodos:**

The word Bodo probably originates from 'Borok' which means 'Man' in Tipperah language which is obviously a branch of the Bodo speech.<sup>61</sup> It has been

suggested that the name is an identification of a nationality or the natives of the country. It is a usual among the Bodos that a stranger in first hand meeting always asked by a question, “*Nwng manshi na harsha?* i.e., Are you belong to Bodo i.e., man or non-Bodo?”. The question is generally asked to know his or her identity of race or nationality. It is found that instead of *Bodo*, *manshi* (man) is used. This definitely signifies that the term *Bodo* or *Boro* is a synonym of *manshi* or man, used as an identity of nationality or sometimes race. And the term *Bodo* is, perhaps, derived as a name of nationality of *Bod* country. Because the meaning of “*Bod* is ‘native’ or original place.”<sup>62</sup>

In view of their preponderance of Mongolian affinity, it is said that the Bodos inhabited in a country north of Himalayas and west of China. This country was known as the *Bod*. Besides, there existed several parts of country known as *Hor-Bod*, *Kur-Bod*, etc.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the natives of *Bod* country are known as the *Bod-ficha* or *Bodo-ficha* or *Bodocha* (*Bodo* means country and *ficha* or *cha* means children, hence the children of the *Bod* country. In course of time the term *Bodocha* came to be known as simply *Boddo*>*Bodo*>*Boro*.

R. M. Nath connects the origin of the name of Bodo with that of Lord Buddha. He maintains that when Buddhism was spread into *Bod* countries, especially the Southern part, inhabited by the Buddhist Lamas, was known as *Bsti* (Lamas), *Bod* and later on it transformed into *Bsti-Bod* > *Tibod* > *Tibet*.<sup>64</sup> *Bod* may be an old word referring to Tibet as the ‘native or original place’, and it has ever since been the name by which Tibetans know their own country.<sup>65</sup> But to connect the term *Bod* with *Bodo* is only as guesswork as ‘the spread of Buddhism in Tibet began about 640 A.D.’<sup>66</sup>

The origin of the term *Bado* may also be traced from the rule of the Kushana dynasty that belongs to Yueh-chi tribe, the Mongolian people. Chinese sources informed that there was migration of the Yueh-chi tribes from the China to India. The Mongoloid origin theory is primarily based on the Chinese accounts which refer to a certain tribe known as Yueh-chi, its westward movements and finally its conquest of the territory called *Tahia*, formerly under the occupation of the Sakas, and the division of this tribe into five principalities of which the Kushanas became the dominating one.<sup>67</sup> Chang-Kien, the Chinese Ambassador, has left an account of the migration of the Yueh-chito the south west.<sup>68</sup> Hiuen-Tsang, the Chinese traveler, has also given us some information about Kaniska. Kaniska was not only greatest monarch of the Kushanas but

also one of the greatest kings of ancient India. Kaniska struck gold coins, some with device of standing Buddha with word *Boddo* in Greek inscribed in one side.<sup>69</sup> This term *Boddo* is distinctly inscribed in Roman script. It is pointed out that the conquests of the Kushanas opened up the path of commerce between China, the Roman Empire and India. Roman gold began to pour into India as India enjoyed a favourable balance of trade. Indian silks, spices and gems were too much in demand in the Roman Empire.<sup>70</sup> In the context of the silk trade, it would be significant to mention that “*The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Greek work on the navigation and on the trade by sea between India and Egypt and the Roman world, gives indication of business done by *Kirata* or Mongoloid tribesmen of various groups linking up India with Tibet and China; and this volume of trade was being carried on between North-Eastern India and South-Western China for centuries.<sup>71</sup> The *Periplus* refers to both raw and manufactured silk trade.<sup>72</sup> The Greek name of Chinese people is *Seres*, i.e., Silk people.<sup>73</sup> The dealer in silk was called the *Seres* or the *Scyrites*. The word *Scyritae*, *Cirrhadae*, and *Kirata* appears to have had originally referred to dealers in silk.<sup>74</sup> The view of R.M. Nath is that the *Kirata*, is a general term referring to the people of the Mongolian origin and it refers specially to the Bodos.<sup>75</sup> The Bodo word *Si* means cloth and the word *Kirata* (Mongoloid) in Sanskrit is traced to the word *Si* and its extensions.<sup>76</sup>

G. A. Grierson has clearly mentioned that the word ‘Bara’ is usually written ‘Bodo’ as their nationality.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the term ‘Bodo’ adopted by Brian Hodgson is an English translation of the word Boro.<sup>78</sup> According to L.A. Waddel, “Boro is simply the Assamese form of the Indian word for ‘great’.<sup>79</sup> Similar view is also expressed by Rahini Kumar Brahma. According to him the Bodos who have been described as the earliest known indigenous inhabitants of Assam and had built up powerful political and administrative units’ vestiges of which have lingered till this day, have been considered a ‘great race’ by the many outsiders. It is because of this reason that they are called *Boro* meaning ‘great’ by others and hence the term ‘Boro’.<sup>80</sup> The name of Boro, however, found its common use very in Assam, particularly in the erstwhile Goalpara district.

Thus the names such as Bara, Boro, Bodo, Kachari, Kosari, Boro-Kacharis, Plain-Kacharis, Mech, by whatever names is used to call them are the same Bodo community.

### **Origin:**

Of the origin of the Bodos we have no information of historical value. There is diversity of opinion regarding the pre-Assam habitats of the Bodos. As regards to the original habitat of the people of Mongoloid race including Bodo, S.K. Chatterji writes that the area of the characterization for the primitive Sino-Tibetan speech appears to have been North-Western China between the head-waters of the Huang-Ho and the Yang-tsze Kiang rivers.<sup>81</sup>

According to Rev. S. Endle, the origin of Kachari race is still very largely a matter of conjecture and inference, in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history. However, on the basis of Mongolian affinities of the Kacharis, he pointed out to Tibet and China as the original home of the race.<sup>82</sup>

R.M. Nath is of the view that the first batch of the Bodos who migrated to Assam came from a place situated at the confluence of two rivers namely, Dila-Ubra (big water) and Changibra (small water), due to that area being disturbed and converted into a desert by an earthquake. This was very likely a part of the present Gobi Desert lying at the confluence of the modern Khasgar-daria and Yarkand-daria.<sup>83</sup> It indicates that the early inhabitants of the Bodos are in the area lying between the two rivers Dila-Ubra (big water) and Changibra (small water).

As regards the original home of the Bodos, M. M. Brahma is of the opinion that Siberia to be the original land in view of the fact that the Bodos are worshipper of Shiva, and that they were called Shibari, and it is likely that Siberia or Shibarica comes from the word 'Shibari'.<sup>84</sup> To this may be added that the traditional religion worshipped by the Bodos is 'Bathou', and their supreme deity is called 'Sibrai'; and it is believed that 'Sibrai' is later Sanskritised into Siva.

Whatever be the original home of the Bodos, it has now been established fact that they are the original autochthones of Assam and they had exercised sovereign rule in Assam in different ages, in different names and in different places.

## Migration:

The history of the arrival of the various Mongoloid groups speaking dialects of the Sino-Tibetan speech family into India is not known. Different scholars have made different guess-work in regard to their migration.

The Indo-Mongoloid people, as Dr. T.C. Sharma observed, are believed to have entered into India through the mountain passes in the North-East from the Mongolian world in the eastern Tibet and south-western China possibly in the New Stone Age about 4000 B.C.<sup>85</sup>

He further pointed out that different branches of the great Sino-Tibetan speaking people which had their original homes near the headwaters of the Yang-tsze Kiang and the Huang-Ho rivers pushed on towards the south and the west during the Late Neolithic period when there developed a population expansion in south-west China as a sequel to the introduction of food producing technology in human society. Large group of people equipped with the knowledge of food-producing technology from this region in China began to infiltrate into Northeast India through the mountain passes over the Eastern Himalayas and the Patkai ranges. In India, they came to be known as Bodos (Bod, being referred to Tibet).<sup>86</sup>

It is possible that there were at least two great migrations from the north and the north-east into the rich valley of the Brahmaputra, i.e., one entering North-east Bengal and Western Assam through the valley of the Tista, Dharia, Sankosh and founding there what was formerly the powerful Kamarupa; and the other making its way through the Subansiri, Dibong and Dihong valleys into Assam.<sup>87</sup>

About the migration of the Bodos S.K. Chatterji said in these words that different branches of the great Sino-Tibetan speaking people which had their *nidus* near the head-waters of the Yang-tsze-Kiang and the Hoang-Ho rivers, to the West of China, pushed South and West, probably from 2000 B.C. onwards, and tribes of these infiltrated into India mostly along the western course of the Brahmaputra. The great Bodo tribe would appear to have been established over the valley of the Brahmaputra fairly early, and to have extended into North and East Bengal and into North Bihar.<sup>88</sup>

After migration to Assam they have spread far and wide to the northern regions of Bengal and Bihar, to Tripura whereas the Tipra they founded the state, to Sylhet and

Mymensing in East Bengal, and might have spread further to Comilla and Noakali, where the language of the people gives decisive evidence that they are of the Bodo stock.

### **Physical Appearance:**

Bodos are characteristically Mongoloid in appearance. Their short stature and yellow complexion may be taken as proving their Mongolian origin. In face and figure, they show a distinct approximation to what is known as the Mongoloid type.<sup>89</sup> Fr. M. Hermanns has given a brief outline of the physical characters of the Bodos. As in the case with the Meche (Mech) so also with the Kachary (Bodo), the Mongoloid feature is very prominent: the strong cheek bones, slit eyes, a slight growth of hair in the body and scant beard. They are shorter and stockier than the Indians of the North-East.<sup>90</sup> These observations in broader terms hold good still now but some deviations in the physical features of the Bodos have of late been noticed under the impact of socio-cultural assimilation as well as marital alliances.

In physique, the men and women are as a rule medium-statured and they are strongly built, stout and bold, and make a good sepoy<sup>91</sup> and healthy. Being a stout, they are athletic people.<sup>92</sup> In this way they are well fitted for all forms of outdoor (field and factory) labour that require strength rather than skill, and may very reasonably be regarded as the “navies” of Assam.<sup>93</sup>

### **General Characteristics:**

The Bodos are naturally peace-loving people. They are well-bodied and well-behaved class of people.<sup>94</sup> They are very simple in their manners and habits. Necessity or revenge seems to be the common causes of their offences against the criminal law.<sup>95</sup> Crime is not prevalent among them, and they appear to be a naturally quiet and social disposition.<sup>96</sup>

In the words of Rev. S. Endle, among them are to be found many simple virtues of great price, i.e., honesty, truthfulness, straight forwardness and a general trustworthiness deserving of all honour.<sup>97</sup> Rev. S. Endle was simply surprised to learn the fact of a Kachary (Bodo) who confessed his crime without least hesitation even knowing that he might be awarded capital punishment. Endle has described in his book ‘The Kacharis’ that a Kachary of Sekhar Mouza of Mangaldai was brought before magistrate on a charge (man slaughter) involving a heavy penalty, when he without

hesitation admitted his guilt, though the evidence against him was of the slightest, or at least utterly insignificant to secure a conviction.<sup>98</sup> From this fact one can easily infer truthfulness and frankness of the Bodos. Among the Bodos the relation of the sexes are on the whole of a very sound and wholesome character, for the young people are as a rule chaste before marriage and true to their marriage vows in after-life. To quote W.W. Hunter, “The Bodos are far from being destitute of good qualities. They are much more honest and trustworthy than the Hindu peasantry of Bengal, and also less quarrel some; chastity is esteemed a virtue, and crime is comparatively rare”.<sup>99</sup>

Among other social and mental features of the character there are two which are prominent to the Bodos: (i) he is an intensely clannish being. A fine imposed on one member of a village community is sometimes paid by the whole body of villagers together; (ii) they have a certain strength of will, what their friends might call firmness, and their enemies might term obstinacy, if they once make up their minds, and if they have once for all resolved to adopt and act upon, they will act it en-masse.

The Bodos as a rule are an industrious, their chief occupation being rice cultivation. The people are in prosperous circumstances, as a general rule. They are very independent, and decline to work as coolies or day labourers on other castes.

“The Bodos are generally good imitators”, observes W.W. Hunter, “and anything that is new they try to copy. This is partly owing to the fact that caste restrictions are not as strict as they are in other parts of Bengal. Ties of relationships are highly regarded, and appear to be very binding among them; even distant relatives are acknowledged to have the right of the shelter of a home in case of want or necessity”.<sup>100</sup>

The Bodos are of migratory habits, and seldom stay at one place or cultivate the same soil for more than two or three years; but this can hardly be wondered at, when they have so much virgin soil at their disposal. They prefer cultivating clearings in the forest when available.<sup>101</sup> Being a purely agricultural people, they move to a fresh area as soon as the cultivated land lost its fertility. They are entrenched chewer of *goi* (betel-nut) and *pathwi* (betel leaf) with slight quantity of *sunwi* (lime), all men, women and children. For unlettered villagers, it is usual that distances in the interior being often measured by the number of betel-nuts that are chewed on a journey. Whoever visit to their house they will be cheerfully entertained with betel-nuts and leaves in the first hand. They are habitual in consuming large quantity of their national beverage called

*zou* or *zumai* and spirit distilled known as *abgari* or *fithika*, both prepared from rice. It can hardly be said to be a beverage in daily use. But they are certainly not habitual drunkards. Every woman knows how to brew rice beer. This is used not only as beverage, but also for ceremonial purposes, especially at weddings, funerals and festivals like *Bwisagu*, and *Domasi* etc. Might be of their inordinate fond of *omabedor*, i.e., pork, they had inflicted to tame pig in every household of the villages. Almost the householders of the villages are having pig-sty either by the side of the bamboo groves or under the orchards of the betel-nut. Spinning industry and weaving is household industry of the Bodos and every woman is expected to excel in the finer art of handloom craftsman. There is hardly any family in the village with no looms. In fact, it is a folk art of the Bodos. One significant character of the Bodos is the culture of the Silk-worm known as *endi* and the manufacture of the *endi* cloth which is their chief industries. The actual work of rearing the silk-worm and weaving the cloth is always carried out by the women. These are the traits which are found usually in the people of the Bodos.

### **Distribution of Bodo Settlement:**

The Bodos who live in scattered hamlets spread in entire North-Eastern region of India. Their existence also felt outside India though very small in area including Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. But Assam, a State of India, is the main centre of their habitats. The area of their present settlement in Assam extends from the Dhubri and Kokrajhar in the West to Sadiya in the East. This area is not in contiguous nature rather in some scattered pockets of the state. Their occupation found mainly in the north and south belt of the Brahmaputra Valley.

In the northern belt it extends to the following areas

- (a) In the district of Dhubri north and south parts, the entire undivided districts of Kokrajhar and some parts of Goalpara and Bongaigaon district.
- (b) Parts of Northern area of Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup district.
- (c) Parts of Northern area of North Lakhimpur and Dhemaji.

The above area covers about 10 (ten) lakhs Bodo speaking population with a density of about 100 persons per square mile or per square kms.<sup>102</sup>

In the southern belt it contains the following areas:

- (a) In the areas of Dudhnoi and Dhupdhara of Goalpara district.



- (b) In the areas of Boko and Chaygaon, South Guwahati, Sonapur, and Khetri in the Southern parts of Kamrup districts.
- (c) Jagirod-Morigaon areas in the Morigaon district and Rupahi-Dhing areas in the Nogaon district.
- (d) Southern most part of Sibsagar district.
- (e) North-eastern part of Dibrugarh district, and
- (f) Howrahghat- Langhin areas of Karbi Anglong district.

Besides, Bodo habitats are found in the outskirts of the neighbouring state of Assam and these are enumerated below:

- (a) Tikrikilla area of Garo Hills in the state of Meghalaya;
- (b) Dimapur area in the Nagaland State, and
- (c) Northern part of Jalpaiguri district in the state of Bengal.

### **Language and Development of Literature:**

The antiquity of the Bodo language goes back as to the history of the migration of the Mongoloid from Western China speaking forms of Sino-Tibetan speech from their original abode from prehistoric times. The linguistic evidence shows that when the Bodos, a section of the Tibeto-Burman peoples came to Assam in prehistoric times and formed a great Bodo kingdom over the major part of Assam and North-East Bengal, “Bodo languages of a very uniform type were still current”.<sup>103</sup> In fact, the existence of Bodo language may be traced from the most of the river names in eastern Assam which are of Bodo origin. It is a fact that Assam as Pragjyotisa and Kamarupa had become definitely a part of Hindu India by the early centuries of the Christian era, “although the masses of its people were probably still Bodo speaking”.<sup>104</sup> Thus it is evident that the Bodos have retained their language unaffected by outside influence in different ages and in different circumstances.

The genesis of the Bodo language, thus, may be traced to “the Mongoloid speaking dialects of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan speech family”.<sup>105</sup> According to S.K. Chatterji it is also a speech of Bodo-Naga group.<sup>106</sup> J.D. Anderson has rightly stated that Bodo (Kachari) is still a monosyllabic agglutinative language. Their picturesque agglutinative verb is plainly a survival of days when the language was a monosyllabic as Chinese.<sup>107</sup>

Robert Shaper's classification on the Sino-Tibetan Languages has pointed out that *Boro (Bodo)* belongs to the Western branch of Barish section under Baric Division of the Sino-Tibetan Family.<sup>108</sup> However, P. C. Bhattacharya, who studied on Bodo language has not agreed with the view expressed by Shaper on the ground that unless the different languages and dialects spoken around the Boro (Bodo) are analysed systematically and precisely, the definite place of Boro (Bodo) within the Sino-Tibetan family cannot be assigned.<sup>109</sup>

S.K. Chatterji has classified the Bodo language as a sub-section of Bodo-Naga section under the Assam-Burma Group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan (or Tibeto- Chines) speech Family.<sup>110</sup>

P.C. Bhattacharya has pointed out that 'the Bodo (Boro) language of Assam has at least four clear cut dialectal areas with sufficient number of dialectal variations; these may be called north-western, south-western, north-central and southern dialect areas with phonological, morphological and glossarial differences'.<sup>111</sup> According to Rev. S. Endle, the mother tongue of the Bodo would seem to fairly obvious that the language in its original form is strictly an agglutinative one. But a gradual process of deglutination has for some time been going on, no doubt originating through intercourse with neighbours speaking languages of quite another type, e.g., Assamese, Bengali.<sup>112</sup> As regards the Bodo language Montgomery Martin has observed, "The nature of their (Bodo) language may be seen in the vocabulary. It is never written".<sup>113</sup> It is true that Bodo language is very rich in vocabulary and is noted for its phonological peculiarity.<sup>114</sup> The Bodo speech areas of Assam, at present, extend intermittently from the western border of erstwhile Goalpara district to Sadiya in the east. Besides Assam, the Bodo speech area also includes Tripura, the Garo Hills of Meghalaya and certain other parts of Northeast India.<sup>115</sup> The numbers of Bodo speakers can be gleaned from the census account given under the sub-heading of 'Demographic Background' of this chapter.

The Bodo language is said to have no inherited scripts of its own. They do not have any trace of books or any inscriptions in this language. There was a strong movement after the independence of India among the Bodos of Brahmaputra valley to establish their language as a language of literature and culture, and of instruction in schools and colleges. As a result, in 18<sup>th</sup> May of 1963, Bodo language has been

introduced first as a medium of instruction in the primary schools with Assamese script in the Bodo predominant area of Kokrajhar sub-division of erstwhile Goalpara district. Of course, Assamese script has been replaced with Devanagri script with effect from April, 1975. Subsequently, Bodo language is introduced as a medium of instruction in higher classes in the successive stages as follows:

- i. At elementary stage on 18<sup>th</sup> May in 1963.
- ii. At lower secondary stage or Middle level in September 1968.
- iii. At the high school stage in 1972.
- iv. At Pre- University (P.U.) level it was recognised as Modern Indian Language (M.I.L.) in 1977 under Gauhati University.
- v. In the course of Bachelor of Arts (B.A), Bodo language was recognised as MIL by Gauhati University in 1978, North Eastern Hill University in 1980 and Dibrugarh University in 1994.
- vi. In the course of Master of Arts (M.A.) under Gauhati University Bodo language was introduced in January 1996.

Besides these, Bodo language has been declared as an associate official language of Assam in Bodo substantial area by an Ordinance issued on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1984. In the succeeding year, it has been recognized as official languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution on 22<sup>nd</sup> December in 2003.

The traditional Bodo literature is rich in folk songs, folk-tales or ballads, witchcraft, prayers, rituals, proverbs, etc. The themes and meaning of Bodo folklore reveal their mode of life and their attitude towards nature. Their traditional folk-songs depict profound thoughts and imaginations and have beautiful rhymes. The rhyming metres of Bodo verses and songs have always appealed to readers and listeners.<sup>116</sup> The corn fields, the river banks, the lawns and the meadows are echoed by the pleasant songs of the Bodo girls.

A new era opened in written Bodo literature with the advent of the British in Assam in the nineteenth century. The germination of Bodo literature started when the Christian missionaries undertook investigations and explorations into various aspects of the language, customs and traditions of the Bodos. The birth of Bodo literature was a necessity - a historical, social, political and cultural necessity.<sup>117</sup>

According to M. R. Lahary, there was no evidence of existence of Bodo literature prior to the works of Missionaries and European writers.<sup>118</sup> There is no doubt that missionary were the pioneers of Bodo language and literature. Though they were more interested in the Bodo language and its speakers they laid base for the Bodo literature.<sup>119</sup> According to Madhu Boro, Missionaries discovered the Boro writing system and gave form of writing this language in modified and simplified Roman scripts.<sup>120</sup> It was they who studied and prepared the outlines of the Bodo grammar and started publications of Bodo Text Books (primers) in that language to acquaint the Bodos with the message of Christianity and doctrines through their own language. Of the works of Missionaries, the book of Rev. Sidney Endle, ‘*An Outline Grammar of the Kachary (Bara) Language*’ that appeared in 1884 is marked as a significant development of Bodo language and literature. So, he is regarded as the pioneer of Bodo literature. However, the earliest work on Bodo language was laid by B.H. Hodgson who wrote *Essays on the Kocch, Bodo, and Dhimal Tribes*, Calcutta, 1847, which is reprinted in Vol. I of *Miscellaneous Essays Relating to Indian Subjects*, London, 1880. Besides other works it dwelt on Bodo language, culture and religion. It was he who first used the term ‘Bodo’ and since then the ‘Bodo’ got currency to mean the Bodo language and its speakers. Therefore, it can be, safely said that it was Hodgson, not Endle who prepared the base for the Bodo language and literature.<sup>121</sup> Another most important and valuable literary works of the Missionaries is the publication of Mr. J. D. Anderson’s ‘*A Collection of Kachari Folk-tales and Rhymes*’ appeared in 1895.

A sense of awakening had dawned upon the Bodos with the rapid spread of modern education. The Bodo elites started to discover their rich resources and materials for the Bodo literature in the form of sagas, romances, folk tales, folk songs, legends, customs, and sayings.

On waking, however, they got a Messiah, named Kalicharan Brahma. He was the pioneer of the socio-religious movement of the Bodo. He initiated many social reforms as well as a literary movement. It was mainly through his efforts that the Boro (Bodo) written language took the shape of a standard language, mainly modeled on the Boro language as spoken in Kokrajhar area.<sup>122</sup> Many Bodo elites, thinkers, students and volunteers came under the influence of the great personality of Kalicharan Gurudeva. Signs of Bodo revival appeared in many aspects of the Bodos. The new Bodo literary

movement became a phenomenon. Bodo Literary Club came into existence. The book under the title *Boroni Phisa O Ayen* appeared to be the first printed Bodo treatise in their language ever published by them. It is a work of codified customary laws of Bodos appeared in 1915. But the real incentive came with the publication of the first Bodo magazine *Bibar* in 1924 edited by Satish Chandra Basumatary. Madaram Brahma in collaboration with Rupnath Brahma published Bodo anthology *Khonthai Methai* (1923). He wrote his masterpiece *Boroni Gudi Sibsa Aro Aroj* in 1926. Kalicharan Brahma brought out *Boro Ayen* in 1934 which contains codified social laws of Bodos for the followers of Brahma religion of the Bodo community. Rupnath Brahma wrote mystic poems & essays. Dwardendra Basumatary wrote down Bodo dramas and produced and also directed Jatra parties. Pramad Chandra Brahma used to write both poems & essays and compiled first Bodo dictionary. Ananda Chandra Mushahary had established a new trend in Bodo prose. Iswan Mushahary brought Bodo romantic poetry to bloom. All of them wrote Bodo in Assamese script and since then the Bodo language adopted Assamese script as its own scripts albeit with some modifications in forms and pronunciation of the vowels and the consonants.

Being inspired by the predecessors and instilled by nationalistic urge the present day writers such as M. M. Brahma (Folklore), Jagadish Ch. Brahma (poem), Samar Brahma Choudhury (poem), Brajendra Kr. Brahma (modern poetry), Mongal Sing Hajoary (drama & essays), Kamal Kumar Brahma (poems, grammar and cinema scripts), Nil Kamal Brahma (short story & cinema scripts), Chita Ranjan Mashahary (novel), Urna Brahma (poetry), Heramba Narzary (short story), Manaranjan Lahary (literature), Maniram Mushahary (literature), Dimbeswar Narzary (biography), Chandra Mohan Brahma (medical topics), Smt. Rani Helen Wary (poetry), Smt. Indira Boro (lyrics) and many other leading writers in Bodo languages contributed to the growth of Bodo literature.

It may be mentioned here that the main sources of Bodo literature are mostly indigenous. It has hardly borrowed any legendary or mythological episodes of the old Indian scriptures unlike the literary work in other regional languages.

### **Review of Literature:**

The study is an attempt to present a comprehensive view of socio-economic and cultural life of the Bodos who settled in the scattered villages of Assam. The historical

study of the Indian village was started in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Few works of them have been discussed here. The pioneering work of W. W. Hunter on rural life *The Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868), complains of the lack of local or rural history in India,<sup>123</sup> however, it dwells mainly about rural administration and description of the life of the Santals. H. S Maine's *Village Communities in the East and West*, a collection of a series of six lectures delivered at Oxford, discusses on the land and constituent parts of the village, but it lacks the contents of the North-East village.<sup>124</sup> Baden-Powell's *The Indian Village Community* (1896), deals primarily with the modern state of affairs, collecting materials from the revenue settlement records and district manuals,<sup>125</sup> but his statement are not relevant to Assam. *India's Villages*, published in 1955, was a collection of essays written by different scholars, edited by M.N. Srinivas, 'cover the country between Himachal Pradesh in the north Tanjore in the south, Rajasthan in the west and West Bengal in the east. There are, however, conspicuous gaps, e.g., Andhra, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Bihar including Assam.'<sup>126</sup> All these works are concerned only with the aspects of Indian village life; however, the village life of Assam was ignored. Thus not a single work noted above attempts to delineate the Assam village as it existed at that time.

W.W. Hunter's work '*A Statistical Account of Assam*' published in 1879 into two volumes form the only attempt at a systematic Account of Assam. The extensive work was accomplished by Hunter and his thoroughness can be gauged from the fact that after collecting materials from the District Officers, personally visiting some of these districts, and compiling the draft accounts he solicited careful revision 'on the spot' thereby bringing "to each district account the local knowledge and experience of two separate sets of District Officers-'namely' those who revised them in 1875-77".<sup>127</sup> Again, beside their academic and historical value the volumes are very helpful in making a comparative study of Assam as it was then and as it is today. This work will provide useful data to a great extent for our purpose.

Of the works of Assam, Sir E.A. Gait's '*History of Assam*' no doubt the first political history of Assam, has touched on few points about the Bodos on the basis of few literary sources.<sup>128</sup> His account is very sketchy, but it contains some relevant information about the early settlement of the Bodos and their brief political history.

In the work of B. K. Barua *A Cultural history of Assam (Early period)*, Vol. I., published in 1951, as also in S. Rajguru's *Medieval Assamese Society (1228-182)*, printed in 1988, Bodo social life receives only casual treatment. The former focused the cultural history of the country from early period to the coming of the Ahoms in the thirteenth century,<sup>129</sup> while the later depicted different aspects of the social life of the Assamese people of the medieval period.<sup>130</sup> Similarly S. N. Sarma's book *A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam (1200-1800 A.D.)* of 1989, has tried to reconstruct only Assamese Socio-economic and cultural life of medieval Assam.<sup>131</sup>

G. A. Grierson's work, *Linguistic Survey of India* of 1903, has slightly touched on the name of races and their language. He has provided valuable data in this regard for our purpose.<sup>132</sup>

Suniti Kumar Chatterji's work *Kirata-Jana-Krti*, released in 1951, was the study of Kiratas or Indo-Mongoloids of north-eastern as the Tibeto-Burman family and Sino-Tibetan speaking people.<sup>133</sup> However, few points highlighted by him on the Bodos are worthy of credence. It may be of some value for gathering information of the early Bodo settlement and expansion in north-East India. His other works *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India* (1955), has also made references to the Kirata Bodos migration to Assam and extension to other parts.<sup>134</sup> This works also find very useful for our purposes.

In spite of the availability of indigenous materials in respect of the Bodo rural life, no attempt has so far been made in a systematic way to unfold socio-economic and cultural life of the Bodos. The first scholar to take serious notice of Bodo village life was that of Brian Houghton Hodgson. Nevertheless his work "*Essays of the Kocch, Bodo, and Dhimal Tribes.*", *Calcutta, 1847*, reproduced in his *Miscellaneous Essays Relating to Indian Subjects, Vol.I.*, published in 1880, London, is only a fragmentary study, confined "chiefly with those still found in all their primitive unsophistication on the banks of the Mechi river".<sup>135</sup> As a pioneer in the field of Bodo historical ethnology, he has thrown some light of 'the status, creed, and customs of the Bodos',<sup>136</sup> but the information available are scattered and hence failed to provide a detailed account of the subject concerned.

Rev. S. Endle's book *The Kacharis*, published in 1911, is primarily, a monograph treating of the Bodo race which lives in the scattered hamlets along the foot-

hills of the Himalayas in Northern Bengal and Assam.<sup>137</sup> From an ethnological point of view, the work is credible, but his statement on the social and domestic life including customs, local laws and religious traditions are too meager to project any clear picture of the subject concerned. In spite of some deficient in contents, however, it is the quintessence of his works. Apart from it, he is the first ethnologist, who has first tried to present monograph of the Bodos.

The work of Bhaben Narzi, *Boro-Kacharir Samaj Aru Samskriti* (1966), written in Assamese, has dwelt on various aspects of Bodo culture and society in an Indo-Mongoloid background based on actual field material gathered by him.<sup>138</sup> Though it contains a mass of unsorted information, it lacks in critical examination and historical perspective. However, we cannot deny that he has successfully attempted to provide a faithful account of the subject before us and found to be very useful for our purpose.

K. K. Brahma's *A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos*, published in 1992, is a study work of the Bodos from the point of view of their socio-religious beliefs, practices and ceremonies in the light of traditional aspects.<sup>139</sup> It appears scattered references to religious, social life, customs and manners of the people in the book. He has not made any exhaustive study on the socio-economic aspects. He has made only passing reference to some of the literary sources. The information supplied by him, of course, is of considerable importance.

The work of Sekhar Brahma, *Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition: A Historical Perspective*, (2006), deals primarily the development process of the religious movement, upward social mobility, ethnic crisis due to introduction of Brahma religion and Christianity among the Bodos.<sup>140</sup> He has thrown very little account to the subject of socio-economic and cultural traditions touching on only few points. His statements are appeared to be fragmentary and disjointed.

Premalata Devi's work on *Social and Religious Institutions of Bodos*, published in 1998, has highlighted the philosophical aspects of the social and religious institutions of the Bodos of Brahmaputra Valley.<sup>141</sup> She is the first scholar to examine the socio-psychological foundations and implications of the Bodos. But she provided very limited points in the description of the subject.

The account given by Anil Boro, in his book *Folk Literature of the Boros: An Introduction* (2001), has focused about the folklore and literature of the Bodos who still



live and breathe in their folk beliefs, institutions, practices, and folk art.<sup>142</sup> Though the account has touched on few points only about the Bodos on the basis of few literary sources, it contains useful information about the ways of life of the Bodos.

P.C. Bhattacharya in his research work, *A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language*, released in 1977, had devoted only to analyse the form of Boro language and its linguistic structure.<sup>143</sup> Though the account is very scanty, yet it provides some useful information on Mongoloid racial affinity and elements of Bodo culture.

The book of A. Roy, *The Boro Imbrogio*, brought out on 1995, make an attempt to give a glimpse of the glorious past and the present plight of the Boro, and the background of circumstances leading to the present 'Boro Imbrogio'.<sup>144</sup> However, it also slightly touches on the economic aspect of the Bodos.

The work '*The Bodos: Children of Bhullumbutter*' of 1997, was a collection of essays written by different scholars, edited jointly by T. Pulloppillil and J. Aluckal, has tried to focus 'cultural aspects like the Bodo language, marriage customs and fairs and festivals'.<sup>145</sup> It also discusses the religious belief of Bodos on the Brahma, Christian and traditional religion *Bathou*. Moreover, it contains an account on the ethics of the Bodos which is the first of its kind to be discussed. Though the contents of the text are too sparse, fragmentary and disjointed in nature, it can help in adding some data on the work.

All these works are notable in themselves, but do not portray a complete picture of the social, religious, cultural and material conditions of the people of the village life. Systematic investigations have not yet been carried out in various aspect of the village life of the Bodos.

From what has been discussed above, it is quite evident that the present work has not yet engaged the serious attention by any historian, or, ethnologist or anthropologist. In fact no research scholars have yet presented a comprehensive account of the subject embracing all the aspects of Bodo socio-economic and cultural life by using all the relevant available sources. There are still various scattered and fragmented materials, which can be knitted together to give a picture of full account of the subject.

Such study will help to unearth the traditional mode of living of the Bodos and reveal the psychological foundation of their ways of life. As such, they serve as tools for the best possible unfolding of human capacities, conduct and co-operation. It is quite

true that some of the problems that confront our present-day society are almost rooted to the past, and the solution to these lies towards unraveling and management of the problems we have to face today. Thus, there is an ample scope for reconstructing the subject in a historical perspective. In view of this, therefore, this work may be taken as an attempt to provide an analytical and synthetical study of the facets of the Bodo ethos, as a humble contribution towards the making of a system of constructive outlook, life and understanding as a member of the world society called humanity. Therefore, it is expected that the proposed work will throw new light on the concerned subject.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

Bodos are agrarian people living in the villages since the time immemorial. The Bodos have their settlements and habitats in compact villages in different parts of the state of Assam. The villages are pivot around which their whole socio-economic and cultural life revolves. Their village settlements have inherent linked with their economic lives that are based on pasture and agriculture. Their livelihood pattern is characterized by preponderance of agricultural occupation. In their agricultural pursuit they employ traditional skill in the various aspects of cultivation. These traits of traditional skill are needed to be examined in order to understand the problems as these valuable clues help us in the planning for our future.

Their village organization within its domain administers justice, settles land, divides occupations and distributes the produce of land. As such their emerged different kinds of set of laws that are suited to them. In fact, detail analysis and scrutiny of such social institutions and organizations will contribute towards understanding intricacies of their cultural fabric and psychology.

Bodo society is well organized and well knitted. Village being the mini republic, they established such a social system that can provide them self-governance, be it family or village society. Thus, there exist different structures of social organization. Therefore, the existence of such organization and social life, their system and process of functioning needs to be looked in a clear manner.

The socio-economic life of the Bodos seems to have developed through a series of transitional phases. The processes of change in the sphere of socio-economic life that are caused by varied factors are required to be studied properly.

Their religious belief is intrinsic in traditional *Bathou* religion and its philosophy has a profound impact on every aspect of their life. The illiterate rural folk belief superstitions in all walk of life. In their life cycle they observe host of rites and rituals. Therefore, the study of past traditions enables us to grasp circumstances which led to the existence and conditions of things and events as they stand today.

Besides, the Bodos of north-eastern display an astonishing appreciation of their immediate environments and the enmeshing of their livelihood pursuits with the surrounding natural resources gave rise to a knowledge base. Finding of such indigenous knowledge base are essential to preserve from falling into disregard and disuse, and therefore save the community from becoming alienated from the local indigenous knowledge base as has happened to numerous communities elsewhere in the country and world.

Under the circumstances as stated above, there is an ample scope of undertaking this research work to present a comprehensive account of the Bodos who live in the villages dealing with their origin, antiquity, identification, way of life and culture, settlement patterns, social life, economic condition, polity and village administration, religion and philosophy, language and literature.

No serious attempt has yet been made to provide a trustworthy account of the subject concerned in a correct historical perspective. The picture emerging out of the research carried out so far into their socio-cultural and economic life is neither graphic nor fully reflected. The sources available on their history and culture have not yet been properly and thoroughly investigated. Therefore, proper discussion on the subject will reveal many unaccounted modes of life of the Bodos.

### **Objectives:**

The study is an attempt to present a comprehensive view of socio-economic and cultural life of the Bodos who settled in the villages of Assam, with special reference to the undivided district of Kokrajhar. The main focus of attention in the work is to study the traditional mode of social, economic and cultural life of the village people of the Bodos. In the work an attempt has also been made to examine and assess the changes into their various aspects of traditional life.

The thesis attempt to study the following objectives:

- i. To study the influence of traditions on cultural life of the village folk.

- ii. To understand how socio-cultural traditions are relevant to the modern age.
- iii. To know how the changes occurred towards economic life of the Bodos, and
- iv. To understand how traditions can persist under the menace of globalization.

### **Area of the Study:**

The area of study in the research topic is based on social, economic and cultural life of the village people of the Bodos in relation to their tradition and change, with special reference to the undivided Kokrajhar district.

Location: Kokrajhar is the most westerly District of Assam, occupying the entrance to the Assam Valley. Kokrajhar, formerly sub-division of Goalpara District was upgraded to full-fledged district on 1<sup>st</sup> July of 1983. It contains an area, including the area of 40.22 sq. km comprising 20 villages of Naikgaon Gaon Panchayat of Dhubri district, which was transferred to Kokrajhar district in 1989, of 3169.22 sq. Km. as per 1991 census report. It lies extending from 89 (degree) 46/ E to 90 (degree) 38/E Longitude and 26 (degree) 19/6//N to 26 (degree) 54/36//N latitude. The Civil Station, which is also the chief town of the District, is Kokrajhar, situated at the foot of the Bhutan Hills, between 26 (degree) 25/N longitude and 90 (degree) 16/38// E latitude.

The undivided district has two Civil Sub-division, namely, Kokrajhar Sub-division and Gossaigaon Subdivision. The river Gangia, also called Tipkai river in the southern part is the natural boundary of two Civil Sub-divisions. The district have five revenue circles, three at Kokrajhar Sub-division comprising Kokrajhar, Dotma and Sidli; and the remaining two under Gassaigaon Sub-division are Bhaoraguri and Gossaigaon.

Boundaries: The District is bounded on the north by the Independent State of Bhutan; on the east by Bongaigaon district; on the south by Goalpara and Dhubri district; and on the west by the Sankos river, also called Gadadhar further down, which separates them from the western parts of Kokrajhar district and from the state of West Bengal.

### **Topography and Physical Feature:**

Topographically the level of Kokrajhar district is perfectly flat strip of country, lying beneath the foot of the Bhutan range of mountains. The lands in Kokrajhar may in general be divided into two parts. The northern part which is foot hills of Bhutan is known as Eastern Duars during the British rule and is full of forests and wild animals

till recently. The southern part is alluvial and plain level for which the area is densely populated. The chief characteristics are the numerous rivers and hill streams which intersect it in every direction, and also the large tracts of *sal* forests on the entire northern part along with the heavy green forests with upper steep and gradually from higher plains to lower plains in the lower steep towards the southern part. The semi-tropical vegetation in the foreground, and the snow-capped range of the Himalayas in the distance, combine to form a landscape of extreme beauty. In the plains the soil is composed either of tenacious clay, or of clay more or less mixed with sand. The following are the eight principal rivers that flow from the foot Hills of Bhutan in a southerly direction through the district of Kokrajhar. The eight rivers are: Ai, also called Bima-dwi, Kana-Makra, Champamati, Gaurang, Saralbhangra, also known as Swrmanga in the locality, Gangia, Gurupela, and Gadadhar, also called the Sankos in the higher reaches of the course.

### **Demography:**

The total population of Kokrajhar district as per 1991 census is 800659. The decadal variation in percentage of population between the years of 1971 to 1991 is 76.78 against 53.26 percentage of Assam;<sup>146</sup> and between the years 1991 to 2001 is 14.49.<sup>147</sup> As per 1991 census, the density of population is 256 per sq. km against the density of Assam at 286 per sq. km. The sex ratio of females per thousand males at present in the district is 941. The rate of literacy of male is 49.57, while the rate of female is 30.92.

The caste wise population figure of the district as per 1991 census, the number of Scheduled Tribes is 329461 which is 41.15 percent of total population, and scheduled Castes is 30114 representing 3.76 percent of the total population.

The district of Kokrajhar cover total village of 929 according to 1991 census and as per 2011 census it has shown 1068 number of villages. According to the Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2016, the total cropped area in Kokrajhar district in the period of 2013-2014 is 178672 Sq. Km. out of total geographical area of 329600 Sq. Km., representing 54.21 percent of the total land area.<sup>148</sup>

### **Methodology:**

The methodology of the study is inter-disciplinary approach i.e., historical, social and anthropological one. Accordingly, the work is based primarily on all the

literary texts and official accounts left by the British administrators and field investigation have been conducted for collecting primary sources. Every possible attempt has been made to co-relate the literary texts and the data collected from field investigation including interview to throw new light on the subject by analyzing investigation and examining all the available sources.

### **Data Collection:**

The related data of the work has been collected from different sources. In the present research work both primary and secondary data has been used. For the primary data collection, maximum field work has been done in different places of Kokrajhar District and collected relevant data from various informants through interview. For the collection of secondary sources, different libraries such as Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Caste, Government of Assam, Guwahati, K.K. Handique Library of Gauhati University, Kokrajhar College library, District library of Kokrajhar, and the library of Bodoland University have been visited and collected the related data based on the available written literary materials in the form of Thesis and books. Moreover, for collecting secondary sources, many published books, journals, bulletin, magazines, official records, internet etc. have been consulted.

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