

CHAPTER-VI

CONCLUSION

The Bodos of the Brahmaputra valley are ‘sons of the soil’ (*bhumi putra*). In other words, they are the earliest settlers in the Brahmaputra valley and are believed to be the migrants from Bod country of the Tibet. Some of the names of the rivers of Assam and epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* strongly support the evidence of settling down of Bodos in this valley region since time immemorial. In the Vedas they are mentioned as *Kiratas* and in some ancient literature they are designated as *Mlecchas*. Anthropologists include them under Indo-Mongoloid stock, which belong to the Tibeto-Chinese branch.

The Bodos are basically a villagers and farmers. The village is a self-sufficient unit and produces themselves almost all the necessities of life in the village itself. They had their own ‘merchants, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, coppersmiths and carpenters and every woman were a weaver’. It is said that India had received the technique of weaving and embroidery from the Indo-Mongoloids. In Assam, the Bodos were regarded the pioneers in this respect.

The Bodos who are primarily agricultural, people like to dwell near rivers, being dependent on nature. The Bodo homestead is a self-sufficient rural unit with the main dwelling house, the granary, the cowshed, the parlour including the garden, tank and courtyard. They follow certain regulations as to their house constructions and maintenance of the homestead. The main house ‘*noma no*’ stretches from the west to the east and have three sections with the provision of a door, facing to the south. The eastern most room is meant for cooking and inner worship. The north east corner of the courtyard provides the altar of *Bathou*, the supreme God, by the plantation of *Sijou* (*Euphorbia Splenden*) tree as the emblem.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the village economy of the Bodos. They do mainly the wet cultivation. They mainly practice Asu and Sali paddy though Boaya also cultivated. They are also well-known in the art of preserving paddy seeds and digging indigenous canal system to irrigate their fields. The Bodo women rear all kinds of silk worm. They are good spinners and weavers also. Their economy is also supplemented

by animal husbandry, and by raising of certain cash crops. Many Bodo people works in forest as *Badari* (team of logging labour engaged by contractors). The villagers had owned a common land property and granary. At the time of distress, the individual families can take help from these common properties.

In every Bodo village there is a village council headed by a headman called '*Gami brai*' or Gaonbura who is the supreme in all matters within the village. He is assisted by a person called *Halmaji* (courier of errands). The villagers also select a '*Douri*' to guide socio-religious rites as well as to conduct the atonement proceedings whenever so required. Besides the village council, a bigger organisation called '*Samaj*' is formed in mouza wise in order to settle dispute of any matter involving more than one village. The Bodos have the manuscript of social laws on the basis of customs and traditions as prevailing in the society. This social law is the binding force of the society and this manuscript laws is known as the '*Pandulipis*'.

The institution of the '*Saori*' and '*Gatha*' system provide the inter relationship and understanding among the Bodo individuals. Through '*Saori*' an individual gets mutual help to perform his work like construction of houses, harvesting of crops, erecting one's granary, etc., through the voluntary labour of the co-villagers when such help is formally sought for.

Among the Bodos there is a division of labour according to the clan called '*Ari*' or '*Mahari*'. The traditional social division of the past, such as Basumatary (in charge of land), Goyary (people who cultivate areca-nut), etc., however, have lost old significance now and remain only surnames in most cases.

The social structure of the Bodo is primarily patriarchal with a few matriarchal characteristics. The father acts as the head of the family and in his death the eldest son assumes the household responsibilities. However, the position of the woman folk is at par with man. There is a provision of widow marriage. Paternal properties are inherited by sons.

They have their own social laws and customs with a number of regional variations. The Bodos have high reverence to their customs and social laws. The five '*Bad*', i.e., moral codes are the basis of social injunction to the members of the community. There are specific prescribed '*Bad*' or moral codes such as '*Agor Bad*', '*Daokhi Bad*', '*Phongslod Bad*', '*Khaoali Bad*', and '*Khoulobod Bad*' that are applied for the

offenders, accordingly punished for violation of any section of the social laws. Atonement is imperative for all offenders.

Bodos are no animistic though they believe minor gods and goddesses. Their primal God is '*Bathou borai*' or '*Sibrai*', the supreme-being, whom they worship along with the '*Bathou buri*' or '*Mainow*' (the goddess of harvest or wealth). It is represented by a *Sijou* (*Euphorbia splendens*) tree by planting it in the altar of north eastern corner of the courtyard, which they called '*Bathou*'. They believe in ghosts and spirits also, but the Supreme God is predominant in their conception. They do not employ any priest or Brahmins in their religious ceremonies. Religious rites and rituals are performed by their female oracle '*Doudini*' and male worshiper '*Douri*'. Both '*Doudini*' and '*Douri*' are not hereditary but chosen from the adults of the village.

They observe various ceremonies and festivals in relation to religious, birth, wedding, death and agricultural activities. The '*Kherai*' is the religious national festival of the Bodos. Here '*Bathou*' is propitiated by performing various ritualistic dances through female oracle '*Doudini*'. It is believed that worship of '*Bathou*' and '*Mainao*' gives abundant yield of crops. The celebration of '*Domashi*' or '*Baisagu*' festival provides another occasion of much merrymaking. Dancing and singing are part in the '*Baisagu*' festival where everybody participates irrespective of age and sex. Free consuming of rice-beer (*zumay* or *zou*) accompanied by feast is vogue in the festival. They have fine music, dances and musical instruments. Their musical instrument consists of the flute (*siphung*), the jew's harp (*gongona*), the violin (*serenja*), cymbal (*jotha*), and the big drum (*kham*).

The dietary habits of the Bodos include rice, vegetables, fish and meat obtained from tortoises, crabs, fowls, deer, pigs and goats, but they never take beef. Drinking of milk was a taboo among the Bodos in earlier days. Dried fish and dried meat are favourite food for them. Rice is used in brewing rice-beer which is their common drink in any ceremonies and worships. The members of the community relish much the dehydrated powder of the sun-dried fishes called '*Napham*' and almost household preserve it in the bamboo pipe for future use. The art of fishing and hunting and preserving the dried fish or meat is well-known to them. They have the habit of betel-chewing.

The Bodos are exogamous in their marital relationship, though originally, they are endogamous in the past. There is no hypergamy among the community. As a rule, their society is monogamous. Polygamy is not encouraged. Polyandry is totally absent. Two types of marriages are prevalent among them: (a) alliance by negotiation (b) alliance earned by the groom by serving the family of the bride. The latter form of marriage presumed to have originated from the practice of matri-local residence amongst the Bodos. '*Chamdang jagarnai*' or marriage by servitude and '*Donkha habnai*' or widow remarriage are the remnant of the Bodo matriarchal characteristics. The customary ceremony of marriage is '*Hathasuni*'. However, the Hindu convert Bodos perform '*Hom-Yojna*' ceremony before the sacred fire. The practice of demanding bride price has faded away completely among the enlightened section. There is a practice of demanding '*Malsa*' or a contribution from the groom to be paid to the girl's co-villagers. This amount is utilised in social purposes of public nature.

They have a definite cremation ground for the village. They practice both burial and cremation for disposal of the death. However, burial is the normal practice. The use of magic, witchcraft and prayers on different occasions and ceremonies is note-worthy. Their sacrifices consist of rice, fruits, male goat, pigs, cocks, pigeons, etc.

Thus, the Bodos have varied and rich cultural heritage which is a part and parcel of the Indo-Mongoloid culture. The Bodo culture of Assam has to some extent influenced the Assamese culture and vice versa.

However, a clear trend of the change can be visualised in the various aspect of the life of the Bodos since the beginning of the 19th Century. The traditional religious conceptions of the Bodos began to change with the preaching of Brahma faith by Kalicharan Brahma. Kalicharan Brahma got initiation to Brahma faith from Srimat Param Hansa Sibnarayan Swami of Calcuta in 1907 and soon after he began preaching Brahma religion among the Bodo brethren in erstwhile Goalpara districts of Assam. The Brahma followers started '*Hom-Yajna*' practice by burning sacred fire which is followed by chanting of '*gayatri-mantram*' and abandoned traditional worship of '*Bathou*'. In its form and content, the Brahma movement was not only a religious upheaval, it was rather a movement for total change of outlook in the domain of - social, religious, political, economic and educational. The Brahma converted section propagated and tried to spread education and social reforms, such as, changes in

marriage customs, stoppage of dowry system, use of liquor and pig rearing. As a result, the Bodos became educationally and culturally more advance and took over the leadership of the socio-political life of the Bodos. The trend of spread of higher education has created a band of social elite among the Bodos who prospered in more strides in all fields. This section of the people in the subsequent years were able to put into motion the political aspiration of the tribal people ultimately led to the formation of the All Assam Tribal league in 1935 for achieving this purpose. Thus, in the later days this sensitiveness to political problems grew stronger with the passes of time. In succeeding year their strive of political aspiration under different socio-political organisations and leaderships culminated in the creation of a self-governing administrative set up known as Bodoland Territorial Council within the state of Assam on 10th February 2003 under the Sixth scheduled of the Indian Constitution.

Similarly, the advent of the Christian Missionaries and their evangelical work among the Bodos began to change all religious and spiritual ideas of the Bodos. The converted Christian Bodos adopted Christian manners instead of traditional customs in all aspects. They are leading a separate Christian society under Christianity.

In the changing situation, due to urbanisation, spread of formal education and increasing diversification of occupation, the age-old sentiment of joint family of the Bodos has undergone significant changes. There is a clear trend towards emergence of nuclear family. Of course, it is more noticeable in the urban areas than in the village.

Changes have also taken place in recent times in the livelihood pattern and the way of life of the Bodos. In the agricultural field it has undergone diversification replacing traditional one-year one-crop pattern. The place of indigenous wooden plough and cattle has been going to be replaced by tractors. In a bid to produce more crops they are now more prone to the use of chemical fertiliser and pesticides. Earlier crops are produced for domestic consumption only, but now it has been produced for commercial purposes also. The Bodo farmers of many areas have taken up areca nut, banana, vegetables and coriander cultivation on a commercial scale. In recent years many parts of Bodo dominated area is coming into limelight in the commercial production of silk and *endi* cocoons and finished products from *endi* yarn. Now many Bodo women are employed themselves as vendors of vegetables in the local markets where the Bodos are

predominant. A new venture of businesses like opening shop of varied items and hotel keeping industry has sprang up in the areas of northern belt of Kokrajhar district.

It is a fact that in the context of the present-day fashion-conscious world, great changes have taken place in the dress outfits both in the male and female sections. Use of western garments and fabrics are now gaining popular among the younger generation. Not only in fashion world, even dietary habits also changing.

With the spread of education many youths got educated and are employed themselves in Government jobs under various capacities. There are many educated unemployed youths who have taken diversified occupation at their own accord. In search of occupation many village folks have migrated to settle in the town.

The industrial revolution which brought modern communication facilities and other scientific amenities has led changes in certain items of material changes among the simple rural folk of the Bodos. In the traditional housing pattern, now Assam type houses on plinth are seen in the village. In roofing materials also C.I. sheets replaced the thatch house of the few well-to-do sections. Modern steel utensils, China clay cup plates, chairs, tables and *purdahs*, etc. are found in the well-to-do Bodo household.

Earlier the village people have faith on traditional medicine and magico religious cure of ailments, but now they begin to use allopathic medicines.

Thus, a trend of change has already set in and in the process not only their outlooks have changed, rather the entire way of life of the Bodos is undergoing to transform in many facets, and are expected many more changes in the days to come.