

CHAPTER-II

STATUS AND ROLE OF BODO WOMEN IN SOCIAL LIFE

In the study, the term 'status' and 'role', generally, indicate the particular segment of the individual position, group, or a caste distinction in the level of social relationship in the society. According to Ralf Linton –“status” is a certain behavior that comprises a collection of rights and duties’.¹ Therefore, when an individual acts this rights and duties, it is said to be performing the role of the status as defined by the system of society. To understand the status of a particular member, it is necessary to know the role played by an individual member or segment of the society in relation to others.

The Social structure and traditional customs of the Bodos are to be examined to analyze the social role of Bodo women. Bodo society is patriarchal in nature; however a few matrilineal and matrilocal elements are also found as clearly mentioned by different scholars and writers and also put forwarded that once Bodo society was matrilineal in character. In the words of P.C Bhattacharjee, Bodo social structure is patriarchal with a slight matriarchal in characters.² However, the theory of matrilineal structure is widely rejected by different Bodo scholars and writers. Throughout centuries, the Bodo society has remained attached to their culture, traditions and beliefs. Even though the later part of the 19th century witnessed various social transitions, the Bodo society had been completely unaware of the changing nature of the society that had gone to intermingle with other major faiths since the ages.

In Bodo society, the position of women is quite satisfactory compared to the women of other non tribal societies in Assam. According to the observations made by Rev. Sydney Endle, while comparing Kachari/ Bodo women with the Khasi women whose social structure is matrilineal in nature, stated that Bodo women are free from being degraded and enjoy maximum freedom in the society.³ The Bodo woman has

been playing a significant role in the family and domestic life, in socio-economic and religious life too.⁴ It is learned from the historical fact that during the ancient time Bodo queens namely Wairangma and Wairanguri of Hidimbapur fought against the *Ahom*.⁵ The other women like *Sundari*, *Bhanumati*, *Bhagyasree* also accompanied their husbands in the battlefield.⁶ Such significant evidences signified that, Bodo women were having sacrificial spirit, patriotic feeling and bravery as well as assumed equal responsibility while safeguarding their territory.

Generally, in the family bonding, Bodo women indicated as the best companion of their husband. They shared the family's problem and shouldered equal burden. They maintained common understanding with other family members by taking care of the family members, specially the old parents. They tried their best to solve the problems which caused anxieties and tensions in the family. Bodo women were free from domestic violence and other anti- social elements to a great extent. They take main leading part in socio-cultural functions and ceremonies. The sincerity and kindness in the reception of guest, affection and caring attitudes, are attributed to the highly well established social system. Their services and treatment towards other people proved that the Bodo women were of great humanitarian by nature. In times of distress and sorrows they helped each other and shared ideas and experiences.⁷

In Bodo society, women are confined more to the domestic works and responsibility. Most of the agricultural and horticulture related works in the family are looked after by the women in particular. Beside this, they manage many activities and domestic works. The women are considered as having economic proficiency and income generator in the society. They perform various religious rites and rituals during religious festivals. It is noteworthy that no religious rites, rituals and ceremonies can be done without the presence of the women. Weaving is the common art of activities seen in every Bodo village. Bodo women are considered very expert in weaving. And this activity is still continuing. Among the weaving products, the 'Eri' silk clothes remain as one of the demanding products since the ancient days. The *eri* silk products have high demand and are popular because of its being natural, having longevity and weather durability quality.⁸

2.1 BODO WOMEN IN THE FAMILY LIFE

Society begins with the formation of family and the family is formed with the composition of both parents and children respectively. So, in a Bodo family the mothers are the key person who looks after the welfare of the family affairs. Before marriage, a woman is the daughter of family and after marriage she becomes mother of other family. No doubt, each and every member in the family has got some role in the family life, but the roles played by the women are highly valued and unlimited. The young girls render their service within and outside the family as a babysitter. It is the desire of all the parents of the Bodos to get their daughters married within the marriageable age. In case the mother of the family expires in the early age, the eldest sister remained unmarried in order to look after the siblings including the minor brothers and sisters for taking care in all aspects. The daughters remain active helpers to their mother's work in the family and shoulder half of the works in absence of their mothers. The maximum responsibility of the family in Bodo society is vested upon female members. Their engagement in the labour work in the agriculture, collecting firewood, and fetching water seems a heavy-laden task performed by the women folk for the family.⁹

After marriage she occupies a responsible place in the society. Since it is a patriarchal society, the father is the sole authority in the family.¹⁰ The big joint family in Bodo society is called *Jakhua* or *Jokhar* (joint family). The women along with their husbands promise to live and go together in all circumstances, whether in good or bad times. Bodo women's relations with their husbands are always adorable, respectable, friendly and full of cooperation. In such an act, the husband also treats his wife with love and respect and considers a good companion.¹¹ When girls become new members to their husband's family, they enjoy whatever they wish. The married women keep close relations with her mother-in-laws and take part in the management of the family. She maintains a respectable distance with her husband's elder brother (*Beowai in Boro*). She maintains her relation to the younger ones in the family with love and affection and she becomes an adviser to them. Moreover she is considered as '*Noni Mainao*' or *Lakshmi*, which means she is regarded as the bright moon in the family. It is also believed in the ancient tradition that good women in the family were

considered as lucky ones that bring the prosperity in the family.¹² There are some instances that women were being punished by society by cutting hair if she was found having illicit relations with other men or showed some misconduct. But it does not mean that the society oppressed women and looked down upon them because regardless of gender men or women were liable to punishment as per the crime committed by them invoking the customs and the traditions and laws of the society. In the traditional society when a woman becomes barren or cannot produce any child she is looked in a dishonored way. Some women earn their dishonour for their irresponsible behaviour and misconduct and such women are known as *Rangkini* or *mailani* (dishonored women).¹³ Nevertheless, women possess high status in the society.

Women are engaged in tremendous job in the family but their works draw hardly any attention. In consultation with her husband they manage the family.¹⁴ Bodo women discharge all the duties like raising children, cleaning the house, taking care of the family members, washing clothes, cooking, cleaning the house, maintaining the compound, looking after different domestic animals like, chicken, pig, goat, cow, buffalo, etc. Beside this, the married women accompany their husbands in agricultural works and leave all the domestic chores in the hands of elder daughters. Both the men and women are engaged in fishing. Most of time women go to river, pond, lakes, and streams for catching fish as the Bodos are very fond of fishing.

The basic role of Bodo women in the family is cooking, looking after children, household duties etc. Among the different cooked food items in the Bodo kitchen, the fish is the most regular item. It might be, because historically the Bodo people have been living on the banks of rivers and are associated with the nature. And probably it might have carried fishing as the favourite time pass activity of Bodo community. For this reason, Bodo women take keen interest to do it and very often go fishing whenever they get time. With respect to their food habits, the Bodo people enjoy a number of food items for which Endle asserted that the Bodos consumed everything and we notice eating of beef among the converted Bodos.¹⁵ They preserve meat, fish and many edible items for long period of time. The most popular preserving technique is evidenced in the preservation of fish which is called *Napaam* (*naa*-fish, *paam*

grinded *ladoo*). The traditional dishes like *Ondla*, *Narzi*, *sobai*, *kharoi* etc are prepared with the traditional technique by the women. This traditional soda or alkaline *Kharoi* is used in the preparation of curry like *sobai* curry, *ondla*, curry, *narzi* curry, *lafa* curry etc. There is an old saying in Bodo that ‘anyone who are well skill with an art of preservation did not have to beg’.¹⁶ Bodo women cultivate vegetables according to the seasons and requirement for the family throughout the year and for preservation also. Different vegetables are cultivated in the *mwigong bari* (kitchen garden) in the backyard. It is said that Bodo women can prepare more than eighteen different curries like fry, gravy, soup curry, steam curry, etc¹⁷ which are cooked with a skillful hand.

Each and every social function, ceremony, religious puja etc., is associated with the necessities of rice beer. It is the women who take special care while preparing the rice beer. ‘Endle called it “National Rice Beer” the beer which the Bodo women only could prepare.¹⁸ In the past days while welcoming the guest a cup of beer was served to the guest by the women folks of the family. However, this tradition is becoming rarer in the present days. It was also used as medicinal benefits as mentioned by Dr. Kameswar.¹⁹ But its consumption based on such notion is decreasing at present time, due to the availability of modern medical facilities. At the same time people are now aware of its side effects and the health damage caused by consuming rice beer.

Women take special care of courtyard and the surroundings of their houses. The *Bathou* Altar is regularly cleaned and plastered with a mud, mixed with cow dung. The cleaning of the courtyard is done at dawn; it is a daily schedule of women in the family. Family health issues are greatly taken care of by the women. For winter and summer seasons the women plants all the necessary herbal plants in the backyard to treat common ailments as and when necessary. Bodo women have broad ideas regarding food habits according to the seasons and feed the family in accordance with the family requirement. Thus, the Bodos have rich nutritious herbal curry. Bhuben Narzi has given details about the different jungles and herbal plants and vegetable in his book.²⁰ Bodo women also collects wild vegetables like *Lafa Saiko*, *Jaglaori*, *Anthaiabajab*, *Kungtai gwka*, *Sibru*, *Hangso Ramao*, *Samlaothi*, *Kheradakini* (all are

herbal plants) etc for making curry, which are very beneficial to the health from the medical point of view as many of these are used as medicinal herbal curry.²¹

2.2.1 BODO WOMEN AND MARRIAGE

Marriage is regarded as the most important institution in human society. Many sociologists have concluded that human social life is divided into three stages i.e. birth, marriage and death. Among these, marriage is designed as an important stage that has been instituted by God to union two fleshs into one.²² Marriage is solemnized with utmost dignity and respect in Bodo society. In the early period marriages were solemnized through traditional *Bathou* system but now it is found that marriages are also executed through different faiths apart from the traditional *Bathou*. As the present Bodo society has got assimilated into different cultures and many have converted into different religions. Therefore, Bodo marriage is not only confined to the *Bathou* systems but it is done through the systems of other religions also. When the girls attain the age of puberty they have the liberty to choose anyone as their wishes for their life partners. Generally marriage takes place when the girl attains the age of maturity. As a result, child marriage is not witnessed in Bodo society.

Traditionally, Bodo society practices six types of marriage, which have been there since the early time. They are *Swngnan Lainai haba* (arranged marriage), *Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba* (marriage by servitude), *Kharsonnai Haba* (the girl flee to the boy's house), *Dhongkha Habnai Haba* (coming to a widow's house to marry her), *Bwnan lainai haba* (marriage by abduction) and *Dwnkharnai haba* (elopement marriage). Amongst these, *Swngnan lainai haba* (Arranged marriage) is the most common regularly practiced till today. It is because the consent of a girl is given utmost importance in recent time. It is received well and commands honour and respect in the society. In this type of marriage mutual agreement of both the parents of boy and girl is required. However, weightage is given to the opinion of the girl and her parents in the case to the arranged marriage.²³ In the post colonial period also it occupies the same position as it used to in the early days. Some of the marriage systems like *Bwnan lainai haba* (marriage by abduction), *Dwnkarnai haba* (Elopement marriage), *Dongkha habnai haba* (coming to the widow's house for

marriage) are not so common in the present time because of the social changes in Bodo society including educational development, social reformation, mix-cultural development along with scientific awareness of the people and so on. Such marriages are not encouraged by the society at present and they are sometimes kept in the category of illegal marriage. Suppose, if someone tries to elope or forcefully taken against the wishes of the girl for marriage, then one has the right to lodge an FIR to the concern authority against such act. Widow re-marriage was encouraged in the early period and it is still continuing in the society. Despite several groups of religious belief in Bodo society like Christianity, *Brahma Dharma*, Hinduism, *Bathouism*, the encouragement of widow re-marriage has remained the same and enjoy the same respect in the society which indicates the high value and honour given to women in the society.

The Bodos do not encourage the practice of polygamy right from the ancient days. However, polygamous men are found among the well to do family, the richer sections of the people. A small number of common people also practice polygamy. It has been notice that some commoners are also practice polygamy under some circumstances including the women being barren or for the tendency to become polygamous for biological satisfactions.

Another popular form of marriage which is still in existence in the society is *Gwrjia Lakinai haba* (marriage for servitude). In this marriage the Bridegroom abandons his family and lives with the bride in her residence. From this it is clear that the power and dignity of women continues to hold the rights to negotiate in the various social institutions of the society.

2.2.2 ROLE OF BWIRATHIS

The *Bwirathis* are a group of women who perform different duties right from the proposal of marriage. The reception of bride's party is specially led by the *Bwirathis* with singing and dancing. The *Bwirathis* are also assigned the duties of distribution and serving betel nuts and paan leaves to each and every guest, invitees and people who have attended in the marriage ceremony. In any case the presence of the *Bwirathis* is compulsory and marriage cannot be carried out colorfully in their

absence. The *Bwirathis* are the ones who carry the essential items of bride when she is brought to the groom's house. On reaching the house of bridegroom, the *Bwirathis* of the groom's side are required to distribute betel nuts to all the wedding attendees. The *Bwirathi* dress up with new clothes called *Dhokona Taosi*²⁴ which is designed beautifully and colorfully. With the help of the *Bwirathis* the marriage ceremony becomes more festive and entertaining. Dancing, singing and merry making are the main duties of the *Bwirathis*. In early times in the district of Goalpara, according to a source a cloud of earth (turf) was tied to the back of the *Bwirathis* while they were dancing.²⁵ It is believed among the Bodos that carrying the clod of soil by the *Bwirathis* signifies that the bride will bear the child after the marriage.²⁶ The *Bwirathis* take the responsibility for dressing and make-up of the bride and leading her to till *mandab* (wedding altar). The main leading part of the marriage procession relies on the *Bwirathis* until they reach the bridegroom's house. The *Bwirathis* always take care of the bride and they encourage the entire crowd to shout as "*hinjao gwdan ni jwi*" (shouting glory in the name of the new bride). The lighting of *alari bathi*, serving tea, *muri*, betel nuts and *paan* leaves, cracking jokes, singing and dancing are the main functions of the *Bwirathis*. When the process of marriage is completed, a grand wedding feast is served at the house of the groom where most of the work is carried out by women folk. The items of the food included in the marriage feast are *ondla* curry, pork meat, *zou*, etc. The women are also actively involved in all the arrangement of the wedding feast apart from other. In fact Bodo women take keen responsibilities in the entire process of marriage. The roles of the *Bwirathis* are still significant till the recent time in the traditional marriage of the *Brahma Dharma*. The importance of the *Bwirathis* among the converted Bodo Christian is still in due reorganization, although distribution of nuts, paan and cracking jokes are not encouraged.

2.2.3 BRIDE PRICE AND DOWRY

The Bride price was very common in the early period of Bodo society. It is known as *Phon Taka* in Bodo. The *phon taka* (bride price) in earlier days was probably was made mandatory. However no fixed rate of the *phon taka* had been described. The rate of the *phon taka* differed from family to family on the basis of the

economic condition of the family concerned. The evidence shows that the price of the *phon taka* went up more than a thousand also, but in later time it was reduced to hundred and five.²⁷ It is important to note that the system of *phon taka* is not very common and not much popular among the converted Christian Bodos like that of the traditional and *Brahma Dharma*.²⁸

The rate of the *Malsa* of the bride belonging to *Sibingari* is less as compared with the bride price of *Sohaiari*. The *Malsa* remained rarely significant in the early post colonial period. The charge has become minimal a kind of token money in the present Bodo society. *Dowry* system is not a mandatory rule to be enforced in the marriage system of the Bodos. As it is not a compulsory burden imposed by the society to ensure it. Bodo society is free from dowry system as compared to other non tribal societies. However, nowadays parents of the brides give movable and immovable properties to their married daughter as a gift. The quantum of the gift by the parents of the brides depends on the capacity and capability of the parents.²⁹

2.3 BODO WOMEN IN BIRTH AND NAMING CEREMONY

Bodo women perform very noble work during the delivery of child. Since the early days the elderly women in the village have been acting as midwife. When the baby is born the umbilical cord is cut with a sharp *Owa theol* (bamboo strip) by the midwife women.³⁰ There is a belief among the Bodo that if the cord is cut by a woman of bitter hand the cord dries fast and if it is cut by a sweet hand it does not dry soon.³¹ Rev. Sydney Endle also mentioned that the umbilical cord was also cut by a bamboo blade.³² The midwife duties acted by the elderly women are still relevant and are found, where no medical and health care facilities have not yet reached or may be at the time of urgency during the delivery of the child birth.

After few days, a ceremony called *Nam dwnnai* in Bodo (naming ceremony) is conducted to give name to the newly born baby. It is a very simple ritual and the Bodos names are mainly given on the looks and physical appearance of the child. *Hongla, Tobsa, Donda, Bandaru Tota, Lota, Kaosa, Dampla, Mebla* etc are given to the male child while names like *Kanduri, Dondi, Mwinali, Rupati, Nable, Rangkini, Mwinali, Bugali, Maduri, Rakaosri* etc are given to the female child. Besides, the

naming of child is also given according to the adorable appearance of the child like *Jarou, Rani, Dodere, Mainao, Okhafwr, Rwisumwi* etc. Naming ceremony is mainly done in the family among followers of the *Bathou*, the traditional religion, and even the Hindu followers. Among the converted Christian Bodos, they go to the church and name is given to the child in front of the church priest.³³ In the naming ceremony the concerned mother of the child is given utmost priority in such a ritual and dedication to both the mother and child is being served through this ritual prayer.

In Bodo society women are very much concerned about food after a mother gives birth to a baby. They take extensive care on the foods-what to be eaten and what not to be eaten in the initial stage until the baby grows 5-6 months.³⁴ Solid food is given to the baby when the child attains the age of five months. This ceremony is known as *wngkam doujennai* in Bodo (food feeding ceremony). The mother of the baby calls her relatives to participate in this small traditional ceremony. This ceremony is observed by all religious faith in the Bodo society.

2.4 BODO WOMEN AND INHERITANCE OF PROPERTY

Since, Bodo society is patriarchal in nature, the hereditary rights in the family pass to the male members. The sole authority of the hereditary rights lies in the hands of the head of the family. As long as the father lives the property rights remains in his hand. Generally, the property is distributed among the sons by their father. In case of the father's dead the property is divided among the brothers within themselves. It may be mentioned that amongst the brothers the one who takes his mother gets double share to look after her and this has been a common provision since the early days.³⁵ The distribution of property is also agreed on the basis of mutual understanding amongst the family members. Nowadays female member is given share to enjoy the rights of inheritance of the parental property.³⁶ Generally, if a daughter gets married she claims nothing regarding the land rights, but can have other moveable assets of the family whatever is her due in the family. When there is no son then the whole property is distributed among the daughters of the deceased person. They can enjoy such rights even after their marriage.³⁷

The responsibilities of rearing domestic livestock are also mainly given to the women. Thus, they are the sole owner of the domestic livestock and even the father has to take prior permission from his wife or daughters whenever he desire to consume or give away to others any livestock in the family. If there is only a single daughter in the family then the entire property is owned by the girl.³⁸ In that case the family members generally look for a boy who can come over and reside in that family as a husband of the lone daughter and the system which is known as *gwrjia Lakhinai* in Bodo. In *Dhongkha habnai haba*(widow remarriage) if the husband again die then all the properties of the family remain with the widow. The property rights remain with the widow and are passed to her offspring. But the husband under *Donghka habnai haba* does not have rights on the property of the deceased husband of the widow. This system is still current in Bodo society and the system is not considered as outdated.³⁹

2.5 BODO WOMEN IN DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

When it comes to traditional dresses and ornaments, Bodo society does not lack behind. It has a rich culture of their own traditional identity with their own dress and weaving culture. According to Endle, “The *Kachari* women, if they are not disturb or interrupted in their work, it is said that they can weave about one and half metre or half a yard each day”.⁴⁰ Weaving bears significance as Bodo women are very expert in the field of weaving. In ancient times Bodo women, without weaving expertise, were not given a due respect, therefore, each and every girl child in the family was taught the art of weaving. The dress defines the dignity and elegance of Bodo women and is also a part of their social discipline. Weaving activities of the women draw an attention, as one important quality, a preferable demand, to get married in right time. This was a very necessary quality for Bodo girls in the early period. On the other side, such skill of weaving was also required for generating income of the family. Skillful women were highly praised and welcomed by other families for becoming their daughter in-laws. Such women earned respect in each and every corner in the society. The weaving skill was the first lesson taught by their mothers in the early period as soon as they enter the age of teenage. Therefore, in the early period weaving loom was found commonly in every house in Bodo villages.

Bodo women of other districts like *Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgaon* used *Mekhela* in addition to their traditional dresses.⁴¹ The traditional dress worn by Bodo women were woven with hand in the past. Now-a-days machines are used to produce the traditional dresses of Bodo women but it does not mean that handmade woven traditional dresses are totally discarded. The different types of clothes worn by Bodo women are like *Dhokona, Fashra* or *Jwmgra* etc. *Dhokona*, has a number of designs like *Bidun, Gwmw gwtang batho Gab, Daorai mwkreb*. *Dhokona's* length is about two meters and its breadth about one meter.⁴² In ancient times the use of blouse and petticoats were not known to Bodo women. They also use a fabric (scarf) called *gamcha* with which they cover their heads, knees and tie around their waist while working in the field. *Kwrwm* or *Paitha* made from *gambari* wood is worn as their sandal.⁴³ Traditional Bodo women wear *Dhokona* all the time day time, working time, leisure time or sleeping time. Women supply all the required dresses in the family. *Gamcha* is the dress of man which is mainly used by the male members all the time. Among the dresses Bodo women also wear *Aronai*. Generally this piece of clothe is worn round the neck, tied around the waist and sometimes tucked on the forehead. It is mentioned that in ancient days, Bodo women used to tie *Aronai* round the waist of their husbands or across the shoulder of soldiers at the time of departure to the battle field.⁴⁴ And it is also known history that *Aronai* was woven over night and tied to all the soldiers going to battle field. It was believed to serve as a protective shield during fighting war.⁴⁵ The renowned Bodo litterateur Renu Boro was also of the opinion that *Aronai* was tied to the soldiers before setting off to the battle field by the women and it had to be woven overnight.⁴⁶ In the bygone days women were the producers of all the traditional dresses of both male and female. Of late the culture of weaving is gradually descending because of the surplus of machine products which have easy accessibility in the recent markets. It is noticed in present days that all the women are not engaged in weaving as they used to do earlier.

The ornaments, such as *Ashan* (Bangles) , *Kuli Mutha* (bracelets), *Phulkuri* (A kind of ear ring), *Mala,bisahar, Thangkha-siri, Jibou-Zin-siri* (necklace/ chain), *Khera or Kheru, Jabkhring, talingglura or dul, boula* (ear-ring), *Astham* (finger ring), *Sela* (Chain), *Nakaphul, bulaki, Nolo* (nose pendent) which are made from

gold, silver, bronze, copper, brass, amber, rhinoceros horns, ivory etc, are traditional ornaments of the Bodos which they have been wearing since ancient days.⁴⁷ The ornaments are used to beautify their body at ear, nose, neck and hand, made with different designs and names.⁴⁸ Bodo women were special designs of ornaments made of gold and silver during wedding ceremonies. In Bodo society failure to give an ornament to the bride in the wedding ceremony is considered as a sign of poor condition. The women particularly think so as it is a special material that belongs to them. It is also considered women's property and they take the utmost care in preserving ornaments as they love ornaments and want to pass it generation to generation in the society.⁴⁹ The ornaments are considered as luxury items but they also help during the time of crisis or financial problems.⁵⁰ With the passage of the time, dresses and ornaments are found slightly or partly modified to meet the needs of the time. The dresses like pant, trousers, Coat, suit, neck-tie, shirts, jeans, skirts, *salwar*, *suridar*, semis, etc are now in use. Use of *Dhokona* is continuing in the society till today but originality of *Dokhonas* seems to be deteriorated. Wearing of *Dhokona* was made compulsory in the past but now it becomes an occasional dress among the urban Bodo society.

2.6 BODO WOMEN AND SOCIO-CULTURAL FESTIVALS, DANCES

The roles and positions of Bodo women are reflected in socio-cultural festivals of the Bodos. The women are significantly contributing to the preservation of the traditional cultures of the Bodo. The womenfolk have more roles to play than men in the traditional festivals. The socio-cultural traditional dances of Bodos are grandly performed by the women folk since the early times. There are different dances like *Rwnswndri mwsani*, *Bardwi sikla mwsanai*, *Mwsaglangnai*, *Sagwlaui mwsanai*, *Naa gurnai*, *Kofri sibnai mwsanai*, *Daosri delai mwsanai*, *Satrawli mwsanai*, *Bwisagu mwsanai*, *Bagurumba mwsanai*, which were very popular in the colonial period. At present, dances like *-Bardwisikla Mwsanai*, *Bwisagu mwsanai*, *Bagurumba mwsanai* are still popularly practiced in the society. *Bardwisikla* dance is performed by young Bodo girls. *Bardwisikla* means 'air/wind-water' dance, which symbolizes the goddess of spring. The young women or girl pray to god to keep them safe and they perform *Bardwisikla* dance a kind of prayer for the welfare of the whole community.

Among all the dances in Bodo society, '*Bagurumba*' is the most popular dance. It has been demonstrated in every cultural show, program, during *Bwisagu*, conferences, meeting etc of the Bodo. This dance symbolizes praying to the five gods to come down to earth for blessing to the mankind.⁵¹ The *Bagurumba* dance is basically performed by girls /women along with some men who play musical instruments for the dance.

As Bodo people are continuing the *Kherai* puja till today, the dance named *Strawli* is performed during the *puja*. The *Deodini*, a spiritually possessed woman is the one who performs such dance during the *kherai* puja.⁵² The *Bwisagu mwsanai* dance is performed during the time of *Bwisagu*. It does not have any formal raga and the dance can be performed by all the Bodos irrespective of age and sex. During *Bwisagu* young girls wear a *dhokona* called *bidun* while the young boys –wear *gamcha*. With these traditional dresses the boys and girls dance together by playing traditional musical instruments. The young girls take their time to meet their friends and go in group to perform *Bwisagu* dance from door to door and house to house. During *Bwisagu* the women are found busy in the preparation of *Zou*, *oma bedor* (rice beer and Pork meat) and other food items to be eaten during the dance. Still today the traditional *Bwisagu* dance is performed like it was done in the early times but slight changes are found in regarding the use of music, raga of dance, musical instrument etc.

2.7 BODO WOMEN AND KATI GASA SAONAI

Khati gasa saonai still remained as one of the popular seasonal festivals practice among the Bodos associated with the agricultural activities and it is observed in the month of *karthik* of Bangla calendar and *Ahin* in Assamese month. This festival is observed just before the harvest of the paddy. It is performed with an aim to harvest good crops. Lighting of *Alari Bathi* (earthen lamp) is done in paddy field, at the door of *Bakhri* (granary), *Mwswo Goli* (cow shed), at *Bathou* (on the altar of *Bathou*). These are the important parts of the main rituals of the festival. *Kati gasa saonai* is performed for the protection from insects and unseen evils that may cause harm and the damage to the crops. It is believed that with the performance of these festivals the farmers can harvest good crops.⁵³ To mention the role of Bodo women in this festival,

it is a matter of significance and dignity of Bodo women that they are associated with this festival. In this ritual festival only women are assigned the task for lighting the *alari bathi*. In *Kati gasa saonai* the women of each and every family go to the field for lighting the *Kathi saonai* (lighting the lamp). They do it not only in the paddy field but also at different places like in cow shed, granary, *Bathou* altar etc. It is noteworthy that the tradition of this lighting of *Kati gasa saonai* is only done by the women folk. In the believe system of the Bodos the work of the *Kati gasa saonai* done by the women is that it will bring the more fruits to the crops.⁵⁴

2.8 BODO WOMEN AND ZOU PREPARATION

Zou or *Jhumai* (rice beer) drinking is a socio-cultural tradition of the Bodos since ancient days. It is used on each and every occasion, right from the birth of a person to till the time of his death as well as on cultural and religious festivals. *Zou* or *Jhumai* is offered to gods and goddesses while performing religious rituals. It is also offered to guests while welcoming them in various cultural festivals. In agricultural work, while constructing houses, etc *zou* is offered to all the members involved in the work. It would not be wrong to mention that in each and every socio-cultural and religious function and celebration the use of *Zou* is an important part of traditional Bodo society. While mentioning Bodo women and the *Zou*, two perspectives can be analyzed- one is to study the role of women in preparing *Zou* as a social role in the society and the other perspective is the economic activities by preparing *Zou*. Bodo women have inseparable knowledge in the preparation of *Zou*.

Zou plays a key role. It occupies a very important place in the traditional society of the Bodos as its use is mandatory in social and religious functions. With the importance of *Zou* in the society there is the importance of women as they are the maker of *Zou*. The women folk supply the requirement of *Zou* in social and religious functions of the traditional Bodo society. So here lies the importance of women in social and economic activities of the society.

Bodo women's contribution through the preparation of *Zou* is not only an option but it is a matter of cultural symbiosis which is found within the genre of *Zou* culture in Bodo society. In earlier days, the Bodos were looked down upon by other

higher caste Hindu society because of consuming excessive *Zou* which was noticed by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma and hence he launched socio and religious reformation movement with the *Brahma dharma* to eradicate all the social evils practiced.

The preparation of *Zou* can only be done by Bodo women alone. Therefore, it is a great contribution and role of Bodo women in the preparation of the *Zou* and the preservation of the traditional knowledge and skill. Even in present days many social organizations like ABSU, the ABWWF, the *Bodo Harimu Afad*, women's committee, religious group - Christianity, *Brahma Dharma* etc. strongly oppose the preparation of *Zou* as a result of which the traditional skill and knowledge of the preparation and the preservation of *Zou* is declining. Such organizations and other stated faiths discard the consuming and preparation of *Zou* as it is believed that religiously it is not healthy or a good sign for the society. But to preserve it as a cultural practice that has come down as tradition many of the Bodos continue to consume it in the name of culture and tradition. Thus, the women remain as an important gem in Bodo society for the preparation of *Zou*.

2.9 BODO WOMEN AS OJHA (MEDICINE WOMAN)

The role of Bodo women as medicinal practitioner is widely popular in the traditional Bodo society since ancient days. In *Kwma- Guntung- thuplongnai* (ear-nose perforation) Bodo women are the persons who perform this task. In earlier times, when there were no needles, the women used the thorn of lemon plant to pierce the ear and nose for ear-ring and nose-ring. After piercing a hole they use to insert a straw or broom stick through the hole for future use of ear-ring and nose ring. Piercing of a hole also depended upon the quality of the hands of a woman. The sweet handed woman was less painful in case of the piercing in the belief of the Bodos.⁵⁵ They acted as medicine women who were considered very useful and this has been continuing traditionally since ancient times. However, the popularity and importance has declined due to the coming of modern technology. Bodo women had the knowledge of traditional medicine. The traditional antiseptics are made from dried soil, ash of straw and dead spiders which were applied as ointment on umbilical cord.⁵⁶ It was not only this; they also provided different traditional medicines for

treatment of different diseases. Bodo women used to plant a number of herbal medicinal plants for controlling diseases and sickness. Such traditional knowledge of medicine has been still preserved and thus practices it in some villages; especially in remote areas where modern medicinal facilities are not yet covered.

2.10 BODO WOMEN IN SAORI

The term *Saori* is used as a metaphorical concept to define the work culture of Bodo society. Sydney Endle defines it as a highly efficient and inexpensive “Public Work Department”⁵⁷, that has been at the centre in Bodo socio-economic and cultural life since ancient times. In the social perspective, *Saori* is a traditional community service in which community members render services in turns. *Saori* is still important to the Bodos socially, economically and culturally.⁵⁸ It is a specific technical cooperation during an intensive labour process associated with agricultural operation. *saori* reinforces a broad sense of community and belongingness.⁵⁹ *Saori* is the invitation to the members of the community for a particular work which was called *saori janai* in Bodo. It is accompanied by feasting whether in family, community, or corporate works. Earlier, Bodo people’s social work and domestic life depended much on *Saori*.

There are two types of *Saori* in the familial community work or event. The first is called *dighal saori*, which last from dawn to dusk; members from each family come to co-operate the family whoever summons.⁶⁰ Another *Saori* is known as *gatha* system in which the villagers work in co-operation on agricultural activities.⁶¹ *Saoris* are performed for the maintenance of socio-economic and cultural life that foster solidarity, cooperation and a sense of collective identity. It is a symbol to describe Bodo People’s conscious about the values and meaning of life. The familial *Saori* is basically confined to extend help or support mainly in the agricultural activities like rice planting, ploughing, harvesting, uprooting saplings, house construction, cutting firewood, any community work, harvesting different crops like mustard seed plant etc. Sometimes *Saori* is considered as free services for others and this *Saori* is not on compulsion but of voluntary. The involvement of Bodo women in such services are significantly witnessed in different *Saori* work.

During cultivation, the activities of *Saori lingnai* are seen in most of the Bodo villages. On a fixed day the owner of the field along with villagers go to the agricultural field for ploughing jointly, and later on women folk also join the work. Before starting planting, the wife of elder brother of the family concerned offer two areca nuts and a pair of betel leaves to *Mainao*,⁶² applying little mustard oil to some seedlings facing towards the east. After that the ritual the plantation of paddy begins.⁶³ Therefore, all the men and women involved help each other in the course of the agricultural work right from plantation to harvesting. When the plantation is completed they perform *Haal Jangkra Janai* (feasting over the completion of the work) with a grand feast in which rice, *oma bedor*, *Zou* etc. are served.

Besides planting of rice and harvesting crops in *Saori* the women also participate in fishing, grinding of rice, *Sii swngnai* (warp preparation for handloom) etc. More or less these traditions are almost discontinued, but few examples are still seen in the cultivation of paddy in remote villages.

Bodo women have been playing an important role in preserving their social system. Although Bodo society is patriarchal in nature, yet the status of women is more or less equal to that of men. The involvement of women in various socio-cultural spheres shows the higher status of women in Bodo society. However, whether the women enjoy the same status and privileges with men have becomes a very relevant issue in present society. There has been a debate that women's status and their roles in the society do not receive due recognition, although they are given lip services on public occasions by the leaders of the society.

Endnotes

¹ Linton Raif, *The Study of Man*, D. Appleton century Co.: New York, 1936, Chapter VIII, pp. 113-131.

² P.C Bhattacharya, *A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro language*, Gauhati University, 1996, p.16.

³ Sydney Endle, *The Kacharis*, Cosmo Publication, New Delhi, 1975,p.22.

⁴ Sekhar Brahma, *Religion of the Boros and Their Socio-Cultural Transition*, DVS Publication, Guwahati, 2006, p.40.

⁵ Nalinindra Kumar Barman, *The Queens of Cachar or Herambo and The History of the Kachchhari*, Lakshmi Prasad Barman, Silchar reprinted, 2007, pp.59-104.

⁶ M.M Brahma, *The Role Played by Bodo Women in the Past*, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Kokrajhar, 1977, pp.15-18.

⁷ A. Boro, Women in Bodo Society, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 2018, Vol.7, Issue 3, pp.23-24.

⁸ M. Islam, *Women in Bodo Society*, Frontier, Vol.44, January 22-28, 2012, No.28

⁹ Patricia Grimshaw, “Faith, Missionary Life and the Family” in *Gender and Empire*, ed, Philippa Levine, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, pp.270-271.

¹⁰ Dr. Kameswar Brahma, *A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices And Ceremonies of the Bodos (With special reference to the Bodos of Kokrajhar District)*, Punthi Pustak Publication, Guwahati, 2009, p.33.

¹¹ Endle, *op.cit.*, p.23.

¹² Interview with Dudri Islary, age-60, Occupation- house wife, Vill-Tipkai Monglajhora, PO- Tipkai, Dist-Kokrajhar, Assam on 26/11/2018

¹³ Bhaben Narzi, *Boro-Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti*, Lawyer Book Stall, Guwahati, 1871, p.156.

¹⁴ Walter Fernandez and Geeta Menon, *Tribal Women and Forest Economy- Deforestation, Exploitation and Status Change*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1987, pp.117-119.

¹⁵ Endle, *op.cit.*, p.15.

¹⁶ Interview with Teleb Basumatary, Age-67, occupation –retired LP school Teacher, Village Tiniali Debargaon ,kokrajhar Assam on 2/11/13

¹⁷ Bhoben Narzi, *Boro Kacharir Samaj aru Sanskriti*, Lawyer book stall, Guwahati, 1971, p.21.

¹⁸ Sydney Endle, *op.cit.*, p.50.

¹⁹ Kameswar Brahma, *op.cit.*, pp.17-18.

²⁰ Bhoben Narzi, *op.cit.*, pp.147-149.

-
- ²¹ Interview with Gaide Brahma, age-55, occupation- vegetables vendor, vill-Tangapara, Dist-kokrajhar, Assam , 20/12/2015
- ²² The Bible, Genesis 2:24.
- ²³ Mangal Singh Hazowary, *The Traditional Boro Festivals: A Critical Study*, Unpublished Thesis, Gauhati University, 1997, p.248.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*,p.86.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ Dr. K Brahma, *Aspects of Social Customs of the Bodos*, Bina Library, Kokrajhar, reprint, 2015,pp.38-39.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ Endle,op.cit.p.22.
- ³⁰ Medini Choudhury, *The Boro- Dimasa of Assam*, Tribal Research Institute of Assam, Guwahati, 1998, p.121.
- ³¹ S.K Sarmah, *History of Education among Bodos*, N.L Publications, Guwahati, 2017,p. 20.
- ³² Endle op.cit.p.41.
- ³³ Interview with Fulsri Borgoyary, age-60, occupation –house wife, vill-owabari, Kokrajhar, Assam, 20/12/2017
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*,p.33.
- ³⁶ Interview with Monojit Brahma, Age -70, occupation –Retired Teacher, vill-Tipkai , Dist- kokrajhar, Assam, 29/03/2018
- ³⁷ S.K Sarmah, *op.cit.*,p.19.
- ³⁸ Dr. Kameswar Brahma, *op.cit.*,p.33.
- ³⁹ Interview with Roje Brahma,age-70, occupation –social entrepreneur in the society, vill-Dotma, Kokrajhar, 26/01/2019
- ⁴⁰ Endle, *op.cit.*,p.21.
- ⁴¹ S.K Sarmah, *op.cit.*,p.20.
- ⁴² Interview with Minati Narzary, age-37, occupation- Dhokona weaver, Vill-Sumdempuri, PO&Dist- Kokrajhar, Assam, 20-04-2020

⁴³ B.K Brahma, *Social Mobility:From Tribalism to Indianism: The Bodos: The Aboriginal People of Eastern India*, Ansumwi Library, Kokrajhar, 2012, p.24.

⁴⁴ Dr. Indira Boro, *The Bodos: The Frontier Aboriginal of Assam*, Vol-1, 1st edition, Kokrajhar Govt. College, 2014, p.228.

⁴⁵ Sarbeswar Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, Asami Nagaon, 1988, p.180.

⁴⁶ D.D Mwshahary, National Bodo Mela, *Souvenir*, New Delhi, Giyan offset, Kokrajhar, 2003, p.1.s

⁴⁷ Paresh Bhuyan, *Bodo- Kachari And Rabha Tribes of Assam*, Bodo sahitya Sabha, Kokrajhar, 2015,pp.58-59 & Also See Kameswar Brahma, *op.cit*, 1998,pp.12-13. & Dr. Indira Boro, *The Bodos: The Frontier Aboriginal of Assam*, Vol-1, 1st edition, Kokrajhar Govt. College, 2014, p.228.

⁴⁸ Dr. Indira Boro, *op.cit.*, pp.230-231.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,p.231.

⁵⁰ Sekhar Brahma, *op.cit.*, p.42.

⁵¹ Paresh Bhuyan, *op.cit.*p.65.

⁵² *Ibid.*,p.73.

⁵³ Binoy Kumar Brahma, *Boroni Subung Harimu*, N.L Publications, Kokrajhar, BTC, 2009,p.8.

⁵⁴ Dr. K Brahma, *op.cit.*,p.57.

⁵⁵ Interview with Iraboti Basumatary, Age-50, occupation –women area religious leader, vill-Sudempuri, Kokrajhar, Assam, 12/10/2019

⁵⁶ Interview -Dudri Islary, *op.cit.*

⁵⁷ Sydney Endle, *op.cit.*,p.13. See Sen Chaudhury, *The Bodo Movement and Women's Participation*, Mittal publication, 2004, pp.44-45.

⁵⁸ Shyam Kumar Basumatary, *Keeping Faith An Integrative Model of Christian Religious Education in Post Colonial Perspective*, ISPCK, Delhi, 2017,p.65.

⁵⁹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, Inc., publishers, New York, 1973, p.148.

⁶⁰ Chandana Bhattacharjee, *Ethnicity and Autonomy Movement: Case of Bodo Kachari of Assam*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1996, pp.37-38.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Mainao is a household deity, second highest goddess in Bodo pantheon consort as Bathou or Sribai, See Sydney Endle, *op.cit.*,p.37.

⁶³ Dr. Kameswar Brahma, *op.cit.*,p.115.