

CHAPTER: V

BODO WOMEN AND POLITICAL COUNCIIOUSNESS

The different countries of the world have their own set of history regarding the women's involvement in politics. India being the largest democratic country in the world, incorporated best salient features in the constitution, adopts every possible way to grant the principles of liberty, equality and justice to all sections of the people. The constitution of India guarantees to every citizen of India in having equal rights and development irrespective of caste, creed and religion. In a way of implementation, the constitutional promises a firm footing and adequate rights based on gender. Since after India attained her independence it remains complexities in the fulfillment of the constitutional rights and gender discrimination among the sections of people and the marginalization of women are still noticeable within the patriarchal system of Indian society. The constitutional guarantee to the women's reservation was mentioned in all the level of administration, right from the local governance to the legislative level.¹ In the initial stage very few women were found in the political participation but later increasing of numbers were found significant. In the early period, mostly the political powers were exercised by men. As a result, other backward classes and women were socially and economically affected more in the light of political negligence in the country.² When we look back the historical perspective of the Indian context it was found that women were being lagged behind despite being the constitutional provisions. Indian traditional and cultural affinities might be a forefront significance that always constraint the women's involvement in the politics. Amongst that, the matter of patriarchal society also played another reason that the women were meant only for the family and domestic purposes in most of the Indian societies. The public sphere too looked into an incapability genre for women to participate in politics. Therefore, all such societal, cultural and traditional role of the women in political context stuck a hurdle in the participation.³ There had been always misinterpretation of understanding among the women's role in the society that they were meant as

home oriented and subordinated to men mostly in the context of the Indian societies, as they remained busy with their domestic work and compel them to home bound with their private life. The concept of the division of male –female inception in the society was also one kind of barrier in the field of politics. In respect of political participation the women were also not in favour of investing their role and energy by simply considering their background. The nature of political conspiracy, violence and some evil activities during the election gave the reason for which women had loosened the interest in politics which they considered politics was no more a gentlemen’s business to be involved in and hold the position. Therefore, under such inception the participation of women was at par a question in the Indian society at the same time patriarchal society also played a significant concern on this. The reason is that the gender based dichotomies of the social structure in Indian context also played a major persuasive role for women to participate in the politics.

Indian history in the 19th century can be considered as the social and political unrest that had rooted the first women’s participation in politics. India witnessed various social and educational development initiated by various personalities who were involved in dealing with the social reformation in the society. The gift of western education cannot be denied that inspired many social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who brought a key process in changing the society and encouraged women and regarded them to be a part in the making of modern India. In the medieval and early colonial period the status of women had been adversely affected by various social evils and practices prevalent in the Indian society.⁴ In this respect many leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahadev Govinda Ranade, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar rose voices against such evil practices.⁵ There were huge changes within the framework of Hindu religion which had been overwhelmed by the end of the 19th century in the history of India. Thus the movement however laid the foundation of the women’s organization to fight for their rights and became an eye opener in the political aspects.

During the colonial period the political consciousness had emerged in India under the guidance of some educated women leaders like Sorojoni Naidu, Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Sarala Devi, Choudharani, Margaret E. Cousins and

many others.⁶ For the first time in Indian history the group of women delegation met Edwin Montague, Secretary of State of British India in 1917 for the demand of franchise to place women for granting voting right in India. Furthered, they pleaded for granting same right as the males having right for voting. Again the women team led by Sarala Devi Chaudharani gave a proposal before the Montague- Chelmsford team in December 1918.⁷ Despite being demanded the voting right for women by different delegation of women's group, the Britisher at first turned a deaf ear. However, by the government of India Act 1919, the provision for women's voting right in the country was laid. According to the first instance Bombay and Madras received first legislative rights in 1921, followed by United Province in 1923, Punjab and Bengal in 1926 and Assam, Central Province, Bihar and Orissa in 1930. ⁸ This instrument of equal franchise of both male and female voters had been granted with the adult franchise.⁹ India after attainment of her Independence in 1947 the new constitution of independent India provided gender equality in all respects and granted a provision for women's reservation and rights in various clauses in the articles of the Indian Constitution. The constitution also guarantees equality before law and gives full privileges and rights for the women franchise and to participate in politics. Besides this, new commission for women was also set up to safeguard the rights and legal justice of the women as the constitutional rights. Despite these constitutional provisions, women are continued to be marginalized and negligence continues even at the different levels of commission in politics by different political parties. There had been constant threats concerning the women's role in the political co-existence level within and outside politics. Even if the different scholars have stated on the conceptual understanding that political participation means including all the governance in public affairs, in policy making, administration, and enjoying the political role and position. It is in no doubt from the fact that women may hold good positions in some other aspects but their encouragement on the political consciousness was least. Therefore, marginal share of formal political participation was witnessed in the country as well as in the state level commission.

After India attained Independence the first General election was held in between 1951-52. For the first time Indian people exercised their adult franchise in

the election. Before the election, already many women had experienced the movement, struggle, and fight for the women's rights in India during the colonial time. Then, after India attained its freedom, the Constitution of India granted them equality in all aspects, reservation quota in some areas like in the political reservation seat for the women candidate.¹⁰ So, this freedom struggle had inspired the women group to fight for their rights and continue to participate in the political aspect of Indian democratic system of Government. In the post colonial period, there was no initiative of the inclusion of women's participation in the electoral space despite of the written constitutional provisions. Women were neglected and were denied by many political groups to address their grievances and excluded from being political enjoyment and performance.¹¹ However, as a result seats for women candidates were offered by some few political parties. The women's active participation right from the first General Election of India showed some turn out in the poll and had seen some sizeable numbers of women in the country to contest the Lok Sabha election as participation in the different series of Lok Sabha General Election in India since 1952.

Table No: 5.1 Numbers of women won in the Lok Sabha General Election

Lok Sabha Election	Total No. Seats	Women Members Won	Percentage of Total
1952	489	22	4.4
1957	494	27	5.4
1962	494	34	6.7
1967	523	31	5.9
1971	521	22	4.2
1977	544	19	3.4
1980	544	28	5.1
1984	544	44	8.1
1989	529	28	5.3
1991	509	36	7.0
1996	541	40	7.4
1998	545	44	8.0

1999	543	48	8.8
2004	543	45	8.1
2009	543	59	10.9
2014	543	61	11.2

Source: Rimwnla Basumatary.¹²

The above table 5.1 shows the total numbers of women won in the different Lok Sabha General Election from 1952 to 2014. According to the census, the first General Election was held in 1952. It is evident from the above table that women were having barriers in the contest of election and many opportunities were having an upper hand and control by men in the political aspects.

Table No: 5.2 Numbers of women contested and won in the first General Election (Lok Sabha Election 1952)

Lok Sabha	Year	Total Seats	No. of women contested	No. of women Elected	% of women member Elected
1 st	1952	499	39	22	4.4

Source: GOI Election Commission Report.¹³

The above table No. 5.2 represents the participation of women as candidates in the first General Lok Sabha of India in 1952. In this election mostly the women candidates were freedom fighters who were fully involved in the National Movement. There were total 499 Lok Sabha Seats out of which 39 Seats were being contested by the women candidates and finally 22 numbers of women candidates were being elected in the election. This shows that less interest or opinion towards women candidature is served.

Table No. 5.3 Seats Allotted to women in the recent Lok Sabha General Election

National parties	2004		2009		2014	
	Contested	Won	Contested	Won	Contested	Won
All India	355	45	556	59	668	61

INC	45	12	43	23	57	4
BJP	30	10	44	13	37	28
Others	280	23	468	23	574	29

Source: Rimwnla Basumatary.¹⁴

From the above table it is shown that the different political parties' allotment of the Lok Sabha seats. The allotment of the women seats by other political parties increased by double from 2004 to 2014. However, women were given less importance while distributing tickets that had already a little interest in the politics and by this further lacked in winning the election.

During the first General Election thousands of women were left out as voters and the reasons behind that are many. Many women failed to register their names, as it was the first Election being held in India and many people were not aware of this, may be because of the lack of availability of transport and communication. Besides this various issues like illiteracy, poverty, caste system, religious stigma, male dominion and their opinion, working condition, health issues etc are the various reasons why women turned less in the election. The turnout of female voters was less than men. However, the women turnout in comparison to men in the different general election held from 1952 had been shown in the following table.

Table No.5.4, Turn out of women voter in the General election in India.

General Election	Total turnout	Men's turnout	Women's turnout	Difference
1952	61.2	-	-	-
1957	62.2	-	-	-
1962	55.4	63.3	46.6	16.7
1967	61.3	66.7	55.5	11.2
1971	55.3	60.9	49.1	11.8
1977	60.5	66.0	54.9	11.1
1980	56.9	62.2	51.2	11.0
1984	64.0	68.4	59.2	9.2

1989	62.0	66.1	57.3	8.8
1991	57.0	61.6	51.4	10.2
1996	58.0	62.1	53.4	8.7
1998	62.0	66.0	58.0	8.0
1999	60.0	64.0	55.7	8.3
2004	58.8	61.7	53.3	8.4
2009	58.2	60.2	55.8	4.4
2014	66.4	67.1	65.6	1.5

Source: Rimwnla Basumatary.¹⁵

5.1 POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG BODOS

The political consciousness among the Bodos came after the colonial period. There had been various movements in the North eastern part of India. In the 20th century there were tribal organizations like Chutiyas, Morans, Thais, Kacharis, leading to the emergence of different organizational movements, in the state of Assam. Bodo people are still the largest ethnic tribal community in Assam. The Bodo people felt that they were politically and economically deprived in all the facilities of the government in the past decades by the Assam government. This led the consciousness of the minds of the Bodo people to look for a solution in the political mileage of safeguarding their land, language and culture.¹⁶ The allied other tribal community groups also demonstrated seeking effective political untiring situations and exercised their eagerness for solution.¹⁷ The process of identification of the Bodo people had been significant in the British colonial period. After the treaty of *Yandaboo 1826*, the British controlled Assam and brought under their colonial province and the entire administration also came under the British regime. During the British colonial administration the entire North Eastern States, the home of different ethnic communities directly or indirectly helped in developing identity consciousness.¹⁸ Later the people also became aware that in order to preserve their identity, it is necessary to have a political power.¹⁹ The activities of the western missionaries and the modernized administration system had thrown a light on the Bodo people on the social and political life. The subjugation state of the Bodo people under Assam government had come to light that having political rights was the need

of an hour. The oppressive and suppressive nature of the Assam government added a fuel for the consciousness of the Bodo people to look forward an alternate solution. Another significant force that had led to the consciousness was the formation and emergence of various tribal revolutionary groups and organizations in Assam as well in the entire North Eastern States.²⁰

The main historical background of political consciousness amongst the Bodos began during the reformation period in the late 19th century.²¹ That paved the way for the birth of many Bodo organizations and also at the same time drew an attention for political consciousness.²² The organizations also at the same time reformed many social and evil practices in the Bodo society.²³

In the first phase of the 20th century, the Bodo people were studying in the secondary schools. During the time when education had started, their intention had been influenced by the Assamese students who were by that time already involved in the different student and societal organizations. The different activities under the banner of different Assamese bodies like Assam *Chhatra Sanmiloni* were significant at that time. Since the Bodo students were also studying in Assamese medium, they were invited by them in the different order of programmes and function to participate.²⁴ Sometimes, the Bodo students though used to attend the programmes organized by the Assamese students often got outcast and negligence by the Assamese students. They hardly got opportunity to participate in the programmes.²⁵ In this matter the western education had played a significant role in enlightening of the Bodo students to fight for the self rights and opportunity in the economic and the political aspects. The most significant awakening was the new light thrown by the western education and the *Brahma Dharma* coming to the Bodo society for change in the socio-religious reforms which had germinated the idea amongst the few educated Bodo students.²⁶ The Bodo students always imbibed with new spirit of Renaissance, which later developed into Bodo student organization. They were able to bring awareness among the Bodo educated youth especially in applying govt. jobs, preservation of the culture and traditions, cooperation amongst the Bodo students who came from different places for studies.²⁷ The student association was founded in 1919 at Dhubri, the then headquarters of undivided Goalpara district, which was called 'All

Assam Boro Student Association'.²⁸ This association continued to take care of the cultural prospects of the Bodo community and also kept maintaining the ethnic conservation of language and ethnic identity.

The modern political consciousness and its aspiration can be divided into three phases in the Bodo historical movement till the signing of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). The first was the tribal league movement during the statutory commission of Simon; second the Udayachal movement led by the Plain Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA) and the third, the Bodoland movement led by All Bodo Student Union (ABSU), a non political students' organization along with other allied organizations of Bodos.²⁹ It is mentioned that the political inspirations had been emerged when Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma carried out various socio-religious reforms in the Bodo Society.³⁰ Reflecting on Gurudev's socio-religious movement, Ajoy Roy mentioned that Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was to Boros, what Raja Ram Mohan Roy was to Bengalis.³¹ He wrote about Kalicharan Brahma saying that, after the initiation of *Brahma Dharma* form Paramhansa Sivanarayan in 1905 CE, Kalicharan started his social and religious reformation among the Bodos and brought social code law in the different Bodo Mahasanmilan.³² He also went on saying that, Kalicharan, what he had learned; he assimilated and taught to his Bodo people. Later many Bodo youngsters like Rupnath Brahma, Satish Chandra Basumatary, Modaram Brahma were inspired and also dedicated in the literary work and began formation of other students organizations like *Bodo Chhatra Sanmilan*.³³ It can be assumed that the reflection in the political aspects was one of its major outcomes.

The new development among the Bodo students and along with the help of various associations had started that, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma supported the need of safeguarding their land rights and legal rights which they were being neglected by the elite classes. The Assam government in those times was probably under the elite Assamese control and rule. So, in order to meet the objectives of the plain tribal rights in Assam was not that easy. Therefore when Simon Commission arrived in India they submitted a memorandum for the plain tribals living in Assam to create separate package to solve the various grievances of the tribal communities and submitted MoS before Simon Commission in 1929 in Shillong.³⁴ They also demanded

for participation in the Assam legislative council in a reservation category seat in the formation of State Government in Assam. So, on this matter Subungcha Mwshahary wrote that the delegation team demanded the census report regarding the Bodo category, demanded separate reserved council seat in the Assembly council and also demanded for enlisting a separate military regiment as Meche/ Bodo and Gurkha had been serving British military soldiers since the beginning.³⁵ Manik Kr. Brahma also went with Subungcha Mwshahary and remarked regarding the memorandum submitted to the Simon Commission with the six members' delegation team who were Kalicharan Brahma himself as the chief, Sardar Bahadur Belbungram Kachari, Jadab Chandra Khlakhlari, Giasuddin Ahmed (advocate), Karemdra Narayan Mondal and Baburam Brahma.³⁶ The memorandum was so positive in its sense of political effects that the other tribal groups like Lalungs, Miris, the Rabhas, the Deuris and the Sonowal Kacharis also politically awakened and united among them. Through the spirit of the memorandum therefore, it led to the formation of common political platforms for all the plains tribals of Assam, which appeared as the 'Assam Plains Tribal League' and gave birth in 1933 at Nowgong.³⁷ As a matter of fact, the Bodos along with different other ethnic tribal communities got reservation of five seats in the Assam State legislative Assembly in 1937 election.³⁸ On the formation of Assam Plain Tribal League, R.N. Moshahary also mentioned that the working of the diarchy established under the 1921 reforms Act and reached Assam in 1928 and worked till 1929.³⁹ Although the Commission was boycotted at that time, but Gurudev kalicharan Brahma along with other Boro leaders led a delegation team and urged the government to grant a separate electorate for the plains tribals both in the legislative assembly and the constituent Assembly, to provide compulsory free education, special scholarship for higher education of the people, and not to transfer the district of Goalpara to Bengal. They also pleaded for the creation of the 'Bodo Regiment'.⁴⁰

The language policy by the Assam government had also its great impact leading to the political consciousness on the language dissatisfaction against the Assamese language imposition policy by the government. At this juncture the Bodo people and other tribal communities felt that it was the need of the hour to preserve their own language and at the same time to demand a separate linguistic provision in

the education sector in a written accepted form. Assam is a home for different tribal linguistic tribes, so in this regard Ajoy Roy went on to say that, the educated Assamese leaders, mainly the *Asom Sahitya Sabha* had been making untiring efforts to make Assamese the most dominant language in education, administration and entry into any government job. The Assam official language Act of 1961 making Assamese the only official language showed the attitude of neglecting the other ethnic language which created strong opposition from the various non- Assamese speaking ethnic linguistic groups. That later ultimately instigated to the demand for separate Hills state and also gradually demands for separate state or union territory for each tribe were raised in the plain area also. The first such separate state was formed in the shape of Nagaland on Dec 1, 1963, and thus the process of division of Assam started. Up till now Assam has been divided into five separate states and many of councils were formed and further demands for more are cropping up frequently is continuing till at present. Of course the demand for Bodoland is one of them.⁴¹ Therefore, this language imposition of the Assamese government could be one of that reasons which had politically awakened among the Bodo leaders of that time and sought separate state like the other states which had already separated from Assam. With the same notion of Ajoy Roy, R.N. Moshahary agreed that the Assam government, however, still against all the claimed reasons by any tribal groups and remained adamant in continuing on the path of chauvinism, thus hardening the attitude and postures of the Plains Tribal people.⁴²

Land alienation was also remained as the main important motivating factor in the North East India in the awakening of the political conspiracy throughout the ages in Assam. So, it is land where all the tribal communities had been living since the ages. But during the colonial and post-colonial period, thousands of migrants encroached and settled down in the land where the original inhabitants had been living since the ages. In the recent time, the issue of land encroachment is a matter of concern due to the illegal settlement. On this issue Urkhao Gwra Brahma, the then President of All Bodo students Union said that the Bodos were the aboriginal tribe and considered as the sons of the soil of the North East India particularly in Assam. The land of Assam however, is composed of tribal belts and blocks which were

identified by the British government. It comprises of the total area of 1, 25, 28,320 bighas 1 khata 10 lechas of land. It was in this respect that proper arrangement was not done for the protected belt and blocks.⁴³ The Bodos then compelled to think of protecting themselves and ensured their rights over land. Thus, concern for the question of survival and existence continued to grow which brought the immediate attention of political consciousness.⁴⁴ In this statement Ajoy Roy also went to conclude by saying that still huge rampant of malpractices of illegal transfer of land was going on despite the government provision for protection, mentioned illegal but it was all due to the big gap between the officials and no initiative was taken from the government side.⁴⁵

The major wave in the political consciousness came in 1933 when all the tribal groups formed 'All Assam Plain Tribal League' under the initiative of young Bodo educated Youth like Rupnath Brahma, Bhimbor Deuri and many more. It was purely a political front to safeguard the Plain tribal of Assam for their common rights and deeply concerned the political rights of the tribal people and to identify the deeply suspicious of the Assamese people of the plain. Many tribal people also supported and extended their contact with the plain tribal organizations. The Assam tribal people launched a movement under the banner of Plain Tribal League especially the Bodo people and other small allied tribal groups. The first provincial Ministry was formed in Sept. 1938, of which Rupnath Brahma joined the Indian National Congress headed by Gopinath Bordoloi.⁴⁶ So, when he joined the ministry the Plains Tribal League lost its importance and later it was converted to Boro Socio-promotional organization which is known as 'All Assam Tribal Sangha' in 1954.⁴⁷ It looked after as the competent authority in scrutinizing of issuing ST certificate, reservation quota in Job, academic institution for reservation in studies, etc.⁴⁸

The literary activities landmarked the formation of different organizations and has become the main agent in the awakening of the political inception of the Bodo people.⁴⁹ The Bodo Sahitya Sabha was then founded on 16th November 1952 at Kokrajhar. It was no doubt a profound example to the literary products into a leading wing in the emergence of the political awareness in the mind of the Bodo people. Some of the founding members of this Sabha were Satish Chandra Basumatary,

Jogendra Kumar Basumatary, Promode Brahma Patgiri, Modaram Brahma, and Joybhadra Hagjer.⁵⁰ The Sabha worked for the development of the Bodo Language and for bringing unity among the Bodos. The major steps taken by the Sabha were successful in various fields especially in the recognition of language as the medium of instruction in the educational institutions from the elementary levels to the college levels and becomes an associate official language at present. As of now it is listed in the 8th schedule of the Indian constitution and perhaps more consciousness in the fields of other aspects too.⁵¹ The *Brahma Dharma* led by Gurudev Kalicharan was also a very significant landmark in bringing the Bodo society and its people to draw the attention along with the social and religious reformation movements among the Bodos society. The movement helped in bringing recognition of social identity for the Bodo people by establishing various educational institutions like schools, training institutes and led to the forming of Bodo *Maha Sanmilani*. It also conferred the formation of organization, awareness, customs laws, political aspirations, educational modality, cultural transition, religious modification in the Bodo society.

5.2 BODO WOMEN IN POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The political consciousness of the Bodo women can be traced from the time of Gurudev Kalicharan era when the socio-religious movement began under his leadership. The Bodo women have equally borne political responsibilities in all aspects during the different movements for Bodoland movement aspiring not only political but also social, economic and education privileges in the society. The Brahma Movement also played a significant role in the spread of education that had thrown light particularly in the Bodo society at that time. Besides, there were ample factors that had served the Bodo and other tribal people in the political genre. The political consciousness emerged when different organizations started taking part in the various movements at different period of time. The consciousness amongst the male folk started early but came late in the case of Bodo women. The Bodo women possessed equal rights along with the male folks in the socio-economic and religious field. The Bodo women were also found involving in different series of movement since the ancient time. But their activities and contribution were not highlighted in the fore front. The casual participation by the Bodo women at different phases of

movement is inevitable but assumed that they took leading part at different movement passing since the early period

In Assam, Neo-Vaisnavism was initiated by Sankardeva⁵² and this new system of Vaisnavism was patronized by the Koch King Naranarayana.⁵³ It is mentioned that *Sankardeva* institutionalized *Satras* (religious institution) in different parts of Assam where his disciple Gopaladeva also established twelve *Satras*.⁵⁴ But such *Satras* could not gained popularity among the *Kacharis* even though he hailed from the *Kachari* dominated place and at the same time the Kachari/ Bodo people were continued offering their traditional worshipped to *Bathou*.⁵⁵ The Bodo people continued to stand and stick to their own traditional religion Bathou and did not devotee to the new *Vaisnavism* beiliefs. The Bodo women along with the men folks continued to stand in protesting against the new religious system that had attracted and converted many of the Bodos who were devotee to this new teaching of religion, later referred as *Sarania*. But despite of objection and protest against this matter, still sizeable numbers of Bodo *Kacharis* had initiated by this Neo-Vaisnavism known as *Sarania*.⁵⁶Such religious unrest situation has led to the involvement of women in the Dharma movement in the Bodo society.

It is mentioned that the Bodo women joined hands with men and received inspirations from the masses and supported the protest movement to end the rule of oppression, cruelty and injustice rule of Ahom ruler in the early period also.⁵⁷ The Bodos have achieved their demands and privileges from the government through the movement alone. The literary activities gave scope to identify the Bodo women to enjoy their own language and literary works which had been developed in the post independence period. The Bodo people were very late getting educational and political awareness in comparison to the other people in Assam, particularly the Bodo women. Among the Bodos the condition of the Bodo women were far more behind in their political awareness. As far the history is concerned the Bodo women like other women of different tribes in India they also participated in the freedom struggle in India. The participation in the movement, struggle and fighting for their rights had been known from the different historical point of view since the early time.⁵⁸ There had been such an individual among the Bodo women greatly participated in the

administrative position and played as agencies during the pre-colonial and colonial time.⁵⁹ The Bodo women's involvement in the protection of land during the colonial period was one of its expected examples. It is mentioned that the Bodo women like *Gambari sikla*, the tax collector under British government of *Bamunkura*, *Birgwhshri* (*Thengpakhri*) of Bijni Duar and Belshri also worked as a messenger for the Raja Iragdao, the then king of Bodos.⁶⁰ They were such an example of strong women in the ancient times that contributed in different administrations and worked for the rights and development for the safeguard of the Bodo kingdom. They were involved in the different activities and stood against the inhuman treatment of the Britishers at which they even lost their lives stood against such atrocities done by the Britishers among the Bodo people.⁶¹

It is known from the history that there have been a numbers of movements which came up during the British rule in Assam.⁶² In the beginning of 19th century according to A. Guha, mentioned about the tea labourers strike which the Britishers denied to pay the labourers wages and later through the mass women strike against this issue pressured the British Government to increase the daily wages of the tea labourers. So, in these instances he mentioned about the Bodo (Kachari) women sizeable labours present in the tea labourers and actively participated in the movement.⁶³ There are more instances regarding the movement that have brought the political consciousness among the Bodo women and another such instance was also from the labours strike in the Dhubri Match Box Company in the district of Goalpara in the 20th century.⁶⁴ The incident broke out in 1928- 36 that the labours wages strike at Dhubri Match Box⁶⁵ company and many Bodo women labourers also took part in the strike. Other than this there are various movements and incidents where the women participated in such a movement and strike that were evolved during the pre-independence period. Such movements were in Digboi Oil Company in 1939⁶⁶, Brahma Movement led by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, Script Movement by the literary organization of the Bodo society, Sharecroppers movement in 1950-55 and also the Bodoland movement in the later period were some of the subsequent movements where women were fully involved.⁶⁷ The formation of Tribal League was popular among the Bodo organization which came in 1933 and brought the educated

Bodo youths both boys and girls to fight for their different grievances through this organization. According to T.S. Deka the Tribal League and Tribal Sangha were popular organization where the Bodo members also joined in the sharecropper's movement Assam in 1950s.⁶⁸ The different communities of Assam also witnessed the new revolutionary movement which was known as 'Revolutionary Communist Party' of Assam which was founded by Sumendra Nath Takhur and Pannalal Dasgupta in 1950. According to Bhupen Boro, all communities of Assam had joined and in this organization in Assam many young dedicated leaders like-"Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Aniram Basumatary, Bipin Daimary, Prakash Basumatary, Samar Brahma Choudhury, Rati Swargiary, Balo Basumatary, Rajni Rabha, Sarat Rabha, Mohini Brahma and Sital Chandra Basumatary joined in the party".⁶⁹

The sharecroppers' movement in Assam was very significant that had inspired even in the others parts of the country as an example. So, in this movement the sizeable numbers of Bodo women had participated for the various causes. Among them were Basanti Basumatary, Khope Basumatary, Rasmi swargiary, Ashwini Basumatary, Rati Swargiary, Rajni Rabha,⁷⁰ and many others were some of the active members of the RCP. With the inspiration of the various movements at that period the women founded the '*Nari Mukthi Sangathan*'⁷¹ which implied for the rights of women in different areas and to achieve the demands or atrocities of different violence against women might be solved. The particular districts that had flooded with such movement were Kamrup, Nalbari and Goalpara.⁷² The landless peasants created a sensational movement for equal distribution of cultivable land among the peasants of Assam. Besides that the distribution of land, the implementation of the land ceiling law and the settlement of seven hundred sharecroppers' families in the grazing reserved at Baksa Mouza etc was behind strong demands of the RCP in Assam.⁷³ Thus, under the sbanner of RCP revolutionary and the '*Nari Mukthi Sangathan*', the women's organization of the present district Baksa launched a massive movement to open the grazing reserved forest to the landless peasant and with the help of such organization and they conducted various meetings and the protest movements for the awareness of the people of that locality and rights. Along with the RCP leaders the Bodo women made various campaigns against the societal issues like

preparation and consumption of the rice beer.⁷⁴ During the movement they organized a conference at Basugaon in the district of Kokrajhar in 1953 regarding the social movement. Such movement later inspired the Bodo women in a wider political aspect along with the male counterpart in the different series of movements.

In the twentieth century, the socio- religious movement in the Bodo society also gained momentum in Assam.⁷⁵ This religious movement even gained more popularity among the educated Bodo youth community.⁷⁶ Through the Brahma movement the socio-religious and few traditional practices had been transformed. Further more different constructive development was also carried out like in the field of education, health sectors, economic and social practices in the society. Kalicharan Brahma undertook active measures to bring the Bodo people in a right track because the Bodos were miserably looked down by the elite Assamese Hindu and had been neglected due to the different unhealthy social practices and beliefs in the society.⁷⁷ The *Brahma Dharma* Movement basically brought a huge contribution and benefits for the Bodo women in the society. The Bodo women were trained with different business workshops; weaving and tailoring industries were encouraged. Through the Brahma Dharma movement the Bodo women volunteer groups were also formed to look after and restrict anti social habits in the society.⁷⁸ At the same time bringing awareness in the society regarding education, economic developments were initiated.⁷⁹ The Bodo people at that time had been in a miserable stage. Therefore, the movement witnessed the women's participation and a huge flow of accepting the *Brahma Dharma* was inevitable throughout the Bodo society.⁸⁰ The Bodo women or girls were blessed through this movement, as Kalicharan established more numbers of Primary, M.E. schools, technical schools, vocational training institute and *Brahma* Hostel were established at Dhubri.⁸¹ The *Brahma Dharma* was one of the significant movements where the Bodo women got an inspiration and idea to grow socially, economically and fight for political rights.

The British came to Assam in the early 19th century. The Western Christian Missionaries came to Assam and worked among the Bodos at different places at different period. Some of the Western Missionaries who had come among the Bodos are the 'Lutheran Missionaries in 1843, Roman Catholic in 1928, Scottish

Presbyterian in 1960 and Australian Baptist Society in 1968'.⁸² The Baptist Missionary first established their mission at Gauhati to work among the Bodos, where Aphinta became the first Bodo Christian in Assam. In Goalpara district Taklo Basumatary became the first Bodo Christian in Goalpara district and other were such as Ratia Basumatary, Dabaru Bodo.⁸³ The Christian became sizeable numbers in the Goalpara district and later even the Kachari women demanded separate church for them in 1917.⁸⁴ The coming of the Christian Missionaries and their missionary activities had brought development in the education of the women. Besides, that they established girls hostels, training institute for various crafts and weaving. With the help of Missionaries various women's committee were also set up to look after the schools, health care centre etc. Through the implementation of different missionaries' works, development in political consciousness in society especially among the Bodo women and education which brought awareness amongst the Bodo women.

5.3 BODO WOMEN AND BODO SAHITYA SABHA (BSS)

The Bodo Sahitya Sabha is the literary organization of the Bodos, which was founded in 1952.⁸⁵ The organization came into being when the elite Bodo working officers in Dhubri formed a Bodo literary club in Dhubri which was known as '*Boroni Onsai Afat of Dhubri*'⁸⁶ and the BSS after its formal formation took solidarity in developing the Bodo language in the Bodo Vernacular medium.⁸⁷ As a result the Bodo language movement was carried out and it also to be the medium of instruction in the primary grade in the year 1963.⁸⁸ The BSS worked as the main guardian for preservation of Bodos language, culture and literature. The movement for the language recognition for the medium of instruction went mass awareness in Assam. The participation of all sections, men, women and children were found to be actively involved in the demand. The Bodo women continued to support and involve in different working committee in addressing the different grievances in the Bodo society. After several movements, the Assam government finally accepted the proposal of the BSS to introduce the Bodo language as the medium of instruction and was officially declared on 31st March 1968.⁸⁹

In the history of the Bodo, another movement was launched in demand of the use of proper script for Bodo language, Thus, Roman script, which was declared on 22nd April 1974 at the 15th Annual conference of BSS held at Khelmari, Tezpur was temporarily accepted. On the other side Bodo people were continually using the Assamese script in writing the Bodo language in the Primary medium school. Therefore, the Bodos launched a mass movement for the demand of the proper script for the Bodo language and in this connection Roman Script was accepted by the resolution to be the final script to write the Bodo language. Thus, many schools, night schools, private tutors, home schools, learning of the scripts were started. In this phase thousands of Bodo volunteers, both young boys and girls students joined the movement and mass involvement of the Bodo women were also significant.⁹⁰ Simultaneously the Bodo people demanded for the separate council which was launched under the banner of Plains Tribal Council of Assam and submitted Memorandum to the President of India on 20th may, 1967 to look into the matter of separate councils for the Plains Tribal. Thus, the demands of Autonomous Council and the movement was known as Udyachal comprising mostly the area of Kamrup, Darrang, Northern Goalpara, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar district of Tribal belt and blocks in Assam.⁹¹ The PTCA continued to demand the separate territory for the plain tribal, later they dropped the word Udyachal and proposed new term as 'Mishing Bodoland'.⁹² Again The PTCA later dissolved and created a new organization named as United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF). Later the movement of the Bodoland demand had been fully led by the ABSU from 1986.⁹³ The movement gained so popularity in Assam that all tribal women from the other tribal groups also joined in the movement. The Bodo women did not lag behind in the PTCA demand; they remained as the backbone in each and every programmes, strikes and protest. They remained as an active member in the working committees thereafter.

All Assam student Union (AASU) was formed in 1967 which was led by University students. This movement was also referred to as 'Peoples Agitation'. It gained more momentum in 1979 in Guwahati. In this movement the women's participation has remarkably made more significant and perhaps it is mentioned that around 80% of total participants were women.⁹⁴ The women were found remarkable

participation in the protest movement, mass rally, strike, Dharna and in mass rally procession etc. Barthakur and Goswami mentioned that at the middle of the night where about 1500 men and women picketed the petroleum crude oil and pumped out from the Bongaigaon and Barauni refineries for supplying to other states of India.⁹⁵

In the different movement in Assam the Bodo women since the beginning remain a part and parcel of the movement. Therefore, they continually supported and helped in the ABSU movement and have been connected in different activities of the ABSU and the BVF. The Bodo women joined in BVF and received basic firearms training to carry the message and the other necessary articles and they continued to join BVF despite of being received criticism by AATWWF.⁹⁶ In 1986 the ABSU under the initiative of U.N Brahma, S.K Bwiswmuthiari, Subash Basumatary and Daorao Dekreb Narzary the 'All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation' was formed. This organization was formed with an aim for ensuing women's rights and in political and social justice of the Tribal women in the spheres of their socio- economic and political. It also ensure for their socio-domestic drudgery and preservation of the self indigenous identity of different tribal groups living in Assam.⁹⁷ The main goal of AATWWF highlighted the women's social issues like ethnic, culture and political as well. It also carries women issues of the north East Tribal alongside, particularly women of the Bodo Community. No doubt they didn't have their own programmes but mostly worked under the direction of ABSU and AATWWF had also fully involved in the different activities of the Bodoland movement.⁹⁸ The new name of AATWWF with ABWWF had brought more acceptable and indicating the Bodo women represented in this organization by the Bodo community but it was not so with the other tribal community because its activities are mended according to the influence Bodoland Movement. It is mentioned that through this, Bodo women extended full support and participated to other movement as well. Later, under the umbrella of ABWWF the political consciousness among the Bodo women has been encouraged to participate in the social and political activities as a whole.

5.4 BODO WOMEN IN DIFFERENT MOVEMENT

The Bodo movement at different phases in Assam has been rampaged by different issues and problems related to illegal migration, social alienation, cultural assimilation, terrorism, insurgency, ethnic conflicts, climate disaster, human displacement and so on.⁹⁹ All these factors have been scared and pressed down the life of women and children particularly. Besides numerous social issues based on gender violence against women crept in to the society which was hampering the healthy development of society. Different steps were taken to bring proper development and awareness towards the women by involving them in different activities in the society. The participation of women in politics can be observed in two perspectives, one by considering their involvement in the different phases of movement while the other is to direct participation in the constitutional right by exercising their voting rights and the democratic provisions. During the ABSU movement another branch worked as an underground wing which was known as the Bodo Volunteers Force (BVF). In 1989 ABSU and BVF leaders trained the women to use firearms and basic training was given how to fire rifle, pistols etc. and also trained to carry message and article from one place to another. Different mobilization groups were also formed and carried out the activities at different levels where it drawn from the AATWWF.¹⁰⁰ In the mobilization of the ABSU movement AATWWF played a significant role. The rise of consciousness of Bodo women as contrasted against the feminist movement in the world is noteworthy. Gender biasness or injustice was not known to Bodo society. In this the Bodo women got together for the first time on 14th July 1986 under the name of 'All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation' then the organization was later renamed as 'All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF)' in a conference held at Tamulpur on 6th November 1993.¹⁰¹ The organization embarked on the pioneering works of social reformation related to the different issues of Bodo women in addition to participate the movement. Anil Boro writes that it was the movement of the middle class, as most of the leaders of BSS, ABSU, PTCA, PTCA (P) and UTNLF belonged to the educated families who were working as teachers, Doctors, Lawyers, Artist, Naval officers, school, college and government employees etc.¹⁰² Women from all category of age groups took active part in the ABSU movement. The women were found taking public Processions, *Dharnas*, *gheraos*, *rasta rokho*, rail ways and National Highway blocked, protest movement,

human chain movement, bandhs, cycle rally, mass gathering, hunger strike, rail rook etc in the different phases of movement. In this regard a young dynamic Bodo woman whose name deserves was Pramila Rani Brahma, initiated AATWWF with the consultation of U.N Brahma, Sansuma Kungur Bwiswmuthiary on 14th July 1986.¹⁰³ Among the other women leaders of AATWWF were Malati Rani Narzary, Kamali Rani Basumatary, Latika Hajoary, Hira Rani Brahma, Meera Basumatary, Umarani Basumatary, Supriya Rani Brahma, Bishnupriya Khakhlary, Protima Kachary, Malati Daimary, Rita Basumatary, Junu Daimary, Sunali Doimary, Giribala Brahma, Guneswari Brahma, Joymoti Basumatary, Ila Basumatary, Anupama Goyary, Padma Basumatary, Manju Brahma, Dulu Brahma, were some of the Bodo women leaders and members of AATWWF who had been working tirelessly with organizations and continuously involved in the ABSU's movement throughout the movement in each and every gender issues, problem as well for the nation. It is also needless to mention that along with the Bodoland movement another arms revolutionary group called Bodo Security Force (Br.S.F) was formed under the leadership of DR Nabla alias Ranjan Daimary in 1986, fighting separate homeland 'Bodoland' in Assam. Later, they changed its organization's name into National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB). It was in the question of this organization that the Bodo people though the aboriginal settlers in the whole of Brahmaputra valley comprising half of the population in Assam remained backward and discriminated in the socio-economic and political privileges in the hands of the elite Assamese ruling class of Assam government. Thus, through the arms fight the movement continued with various incidents of bombardments, killing, fighting and atrocities were some of the significant activities of the organization.¹⁰⁴ Many cadres were recruited in this revolutionary organization and were trained in different neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal etc. The base camp and hideout were mostly found in the Bangladesh, Myanmar and Bhutan. Sizeable numbers of Bodo women or girls were also recruited and continued the arms struggle. The justification of this group in connection of the women is that the Bodo women took active participation in each and every movement led by any organization for any cause in the Bodo society. The road map of movements were carried out particularly by the different women organizations itself through different programmes like observing international

women's day, rally, road rally, cycle rally, flag march, awareness regarding RTI, RTE, Food security, etc.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, in such programmes a lot of dedicated young girls/ women both married and unmarried enthusiastically with the mission to work relentlessly for women empowerment in all aspect of social, economic, cultural and political dream to achieve. The noble cause of women services to society for the political demands and consciousness grew louder and provided more scopes for the young women leaders to hone their leadership skills and deliberation of women's dignity in the society and state as a whole.

5.5 FORMATION OF BODO WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

It is important to mention that the under the banner of the ABSU leading and the Bodoland movement, the political consciousness and the political participation by the Bodo women had opened a new road map to form organization. Accordingly 'All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation' (AATWWF) was formed at Debargaon in the district of Kokrajhar on 14th July, 1986, having with an aim of bringing equal rights in the socio-economic and political spheres. Such organization looked after the women's related issues in domestics as well as in society. The major activities it played was found in the Bodoland Movement. The Bodoland Movement led by ABSU at this point gradually turned the other tribal bodies and slowly got alienated from the AATWWF. The Bodo community and their active involvement for the Bodoland demand was felt and consequences had resulted change in the nomenclature from All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation to All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) resolution taken at the annual conference held at Tamulpur in 1993.¹⁰⁶ Mrs Pramila Rani Brahma was the President and Mrs Malati Rani Basumatary was the secretary of the federation by that time.¹⁰⁷ Among the Bodo women as an active member in AATWWF Deepti Daimari of Udalguri was also an active bonafide member who reflected in the Bodoland movement. Therefore, it is encouraging to note that the Bodo women have realized the necessity of community participation and joined in active political activities. It was unthinkable in earlier. But it is a reality now.¹⁰⁸ The forming of new Bodo women organization like Bodo women's justice Forum was also agreed and formed that unless there is unity, it wouldn't be possible to meet the solutions of different demands in order to solve the

Bodos' problems and felt it was the need of the hour to unitedly work for the society.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, this new women organization took active part to look after the different women's problem, in terms of different political demands, fight for human rights violation, crime against women, domestic violence, bringing awareness among the Bodos women for various social and political issues etc. The Bodo women organizations had opened a new chapter and evolved a means of solution to the Bodo problems in the society and as well as for the greater interest in the state affairs.

5.6 ORGANIZATIONAL AND BODO WOMEN'S ROLE

The formation of All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation (AATWWF) under the prominent leadership like Mrs Pramila Rani Brahma supported the movement. Later, it was known as All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) which played a significant role as an organizational role in the Bodo society and was founded in 1986.¹¹⁰ Mrs Pramila Rani Brahma the then serving as the Forest Minister in the state of Assam was the first founding president who had served the organization till 1991. During her President-ship she actively participated in the Bodoland movement and led the women force. She stood stoutly for the cause of women during her tenure. So when the movement was going on under the call of BPAC-ABSU, during that period Mrs Brahma participated in the State Assembly election and won from the East Kokrajhar (ST) constituency and had consecutively won several times. Earlier ABWWF activities were seen mostly helping and involving in the Bodoland movement and besides this bringing the political awareness amongst Bodo women in the field of socio-economic, domestic issue and worked for all-round development in the society. The purpose was also to spread the message and fully support the Bodoland movement to bring about the political consciousness among the women section.¹¹¹ The ABWWF played an important role in awakening consciousness and pioneering the various atrocities related issues of women. During the movement there occurred various violence, protests, police atrocities, where women were raped and the incident of Bhumka raped case by the police personal was one of the highlighted issues handled by ABWWF. So, in this case ABWWF took active role as an organization and fight in the Gauhati High court.¹¹² The members of ABWWF readily came forward to raise voice against such brutalities and made it an utmost effort to

help the victims regain their dignity. Many Bodo women became martyrs, put behind bar, killed, being raped and thus, their supreme sacrifices had become a source of inspiration to many young generations which brought more political awareness among the women masses. It remained as an active organization that participated in the various programmes of the Bodoland Movement so, in such a protest, rally, rail rokho, road blockad, movement the police fired bullets and the two young girls died of police firing namely Helena Basumatary age-15 years and Gaide Basumatary age-32 years on 12th may, 1988 at Soraibil under kokrajhar district, Assam. This organization continued to participate as a peaceful and non-violent organization in the Bodoland demand.¹¹³ The demand for separate state Bodoland was the main goal under the leadership of All Bodo Students Union which evoked as the major sense of political awareness among the Bodo people in general and also among Bodo women and in particular. The active participation of movement or organization in different programmes had been choked out till the creation of Bodoland Autonomous council (BAC) in 1993 and Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in 2003. Here the significance of the women is found only in the form of different agitations throughout the phases of movement. But little transformation has been noticed in the form of agitational politics after the formation of BTC as huge numbers of Bodo women took active part in exercising their electoral rights. The participation in the electoral politics was very few prior to 1987 among the Bodo women, even though they were involved in the different movements and programmes in the early period. The All Bodo Employee Federation which was formed in 28th October, 1989 with a view to bringing all the Bodo employees together extended the support of Bodoland movement led by the ABSU. In this connection many women employees left their jobs, some were arrested, imprisoned and killed in the various incidents during the massive Bodoland Movement.¹¹⁴

5.7 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF BODO WOMEN

Besides the participation in the various organizations and worked for the rights of the Bodo women, it was the need of the hour to represent in the formation of government to place the grievances and atrocities of the women, their problems and rights in the society for greater interest of the women wing. The Bodo women

representative candidates was also selected to fight for the election in the Assam state legislative Assembly. However, the women's participation in the State elections and their representative as candidates in the Assam Assembly elections are found in sizeable numbers but the Bodo women had been found only single candidate since 1991 in State Assembly election.

Table No: 5.5

Women's representatives in Assam legislative Assembly, 1952-2016

Year of Election	No. of Contestants		Elected Candidates		Seats in Assam Assembly
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
1952	452	6	107	1	108
1957	303	6	103	5	108
1962	405	4	101	4	105
1967	478	6	122	4	126
1972	510	12	118	8	126
1978	938	22	125	1	126
1983	464	3	107	2	126
1985	1226	29	122	4	126
1991	1600	50	121	5	126
1996	1183	45	120	6	126
2001	854	53	116	10	126
2006	927	70	113	13	126
2011	896	85	112	14	126
2016	973	91	118	8	126
Total	-	482	-	85	-

Source: Rimwnla Basumatary.¹¹⁵

The given table shows that the women candidates contested in the Assam State legislative Assembly Election from the 1952-2016. It fairly represented the Assam's state legislative Assembly where only total 85 women candidates so far participated in

the state legislative Assembly against the total women contestants 482 from 1952-2016 state elections. Among this only one female candidate Mrs Pramila Rani Brahma, the founder president of AATWWF in 1986 who served in the same capacity till 1991 became the elected legislative member from the Bodo women contested from the ST reserved category from the 30 East Kokrajhar Constituency in the Assam state Assembly. In the 2016 State legislative assembly out of 91 women contested only 8 women won the election out of which 2 were Bodo women namely Smt. Pramila Rani Brahma and Smt. Kamali Basumatary.¹¹⁶ The participation as a candidature in the state and local council like BAC, BTC was not so significant but it is needless to say that the Bodo women have remained as the most dedicated contributors in the different phases of the council agreement and parts of the massive participation in the different phases of movement for the Bodoland.

Table 5.6 Women in BTCLA poll.

Years	Total No. of Seats	Numbers of Elected members		Percentage of female elected members
		Male	Female	
2005	46	44	02	4.54
2010	46	43	03	6.97
2015	46	41	05	12.19
Total	138	129	09	23.70

Source: BTCLA Election.¹¹⁷

The table 5.6 had shown the figure that indicates Bodo women's participation in the election as candidatures was few in numbers. The Bodo women like Smt. Malati Rani Narzary and Smt. Moonmun Brahma contested from their respective constituencies and became successful in the election. From the three consecutive BTCLA elections also found that very few women candidates contested the election. But it does not mean that the Bodo women were far behind the political consciousness. At the same time it clearly shows that consciousness in voting election was so satisfied that can be understood by observation during the voting time at every election whether parliamentary, state or council. Besides these women were also

continued to be involved and worked even in the village council level areas and became members in the different organizations and committees in the political groups and as well as in the administrative areas.

Thus, from the study it can be mentioned that the participation of the Bodo women in the Politics can be traced back from the various phases of time. Their role and activities in various movements draws more political awareness and consciousness. Thus, ignited mindset begins, right from the Roman script movement to their participation in the Bodoland movement by forming with their own women's wing organizations. The Bodo women had realized the need for political participation in empowering the women in socio- economic and cultural development as well for the formulation of their political rights in the society and for nation building. The women's role in the political mileage had set an impressive significant contribution in the shaping and meeting of the various aspirations of the Bodo people through movements and the way forward where the women played a significant role and given a huge contribution to each and every stage of Bodos political issues in the country.

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