

CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

Dilip Kumar Kundu said that –‘The Bodos are the first among the Tibetan-Burman speakers to enter this region. They are described as aborigines or earliest known inhabitants of Assam. The term Bodo is originally a linguistic one but it is also used in ethnic sense too. Ethnologically the term Bodo covers a number of tribes. Practically it encompasses the entire tribal population living in the plains of Assam and adjoining states like the Bodo kacharies, Garo, Mech, Rabha Lalung, Tripura, Hajong, etc’.¹ He added that ‘today Bodos are the single largest ethnic groups among the plains tribes of Assam. The heaviest concentration of Bodos is in the districts of Kokrajhar and Udalguri sub-division of Darrang district although they are found in great number all along the northern parts of Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, etc. districts. The Bodos are concentrated in some parts of Assam, Meghalya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, West Bengal in India and Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, etc. countries. They are largely concentrated in present Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) of Assam.

There are 5, 28, 774 Scheduled Tribe Population in Kokrajhar district as per the Bodoland Territorial Council Secretariat sources.² There are 8, 86, 999 populations in the land area of 3,129 Sq. Km. as per census 2011 in Kokrajhar district.

According to the linguistic Survey of India quoted by P.C. Bhattacharya - ‘The Boro or Boro-kachari belongs to the Boro (Bodo) sub-section of Bodo-Naga section under the Assam-Burma Group of Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family.’³ The Bodo Kachari was the largest Bodo tribes having 6, 10, 459 numbers although they had second lowest literary percentage with 20.51% in Assam as per the Census of Assam, 1971. The Bodo language speakers in Assam were 11, 33, 225 constituting 07.71% total speakers as per *Census of India, 1991, Assam State District Profile* in the Brahmaputra Valley. It has been seen that Bodo language is one of the 8th scheduled languages of India as per the approval of the 100th Constitution Amendment bill in Lokh Sabha of India

on December 22, 2003.⁴ It is said that maximum educated Bodo people are by-lingual, tri-lingual, some of them multi-lingual though most of them speaks Bodo language with few local variations. They have their distinct language, religion, rich culture, festivals and traditions, rites and rituals, etc. of their own.

The study of human society involves in the study of culture. Any aspect or part of a society that have presence in the mode of transmission is the foremost important in such study.

The Bodos have large number of festivals. It is said that the festivals of the Bodos are community festivals. It is celebrated with a common theme, in distinct time period. It promotes traditions, involve participation of people, create a sense of identity and contribute social wellbeing of Bodo community.

Kameswar Brahma divided ‘the festivals and ceremonies of Bodo into three — 1. Religious, 2. Seasonal and 3. Agricultural’⁵. The religious and seasonal festivals are closely related with agriculture. The festivals and ceremonies of the Bodos are the blessing, the marriage, the *Daha garnai*, the *Bwisagu*, the *Domasi*, the *Khathri Gasa Saonai*, the *Kherai*, the *Salami*, the *Dinga Puja*, etc. These festivals are the sources of their religion, culture, costume, custom, etc. It is evident that the festivals of the Bodos portray the socio-cultural life of the Bodo society. It is said that traditional festivals of the Bodos is the unwritten manuscript of Bodo society.

1.1. Aim of the Works:

The aim of the present work is to study on the festivals of the Bodos in socio-cultural perspective and its past to the present and its validation in the Bodo society.

1.2. Hypothesis:

The festivals of the Bodos have diverse scope for comprehensive and conclusive study carefully from various viewpoints. To study the festivals of the Bodos in socio-cultural viewpoints the following hypothesis is conceived.

- i. The celebration of festivals have influences to validate the socio-cultural life of the Bodos.

- ii. The festivals of Bodos give knowledge about the traditions, custom, etc. of the Bodos.
- iii. The festivals have a great impact in the socio-cultural life of the Bodos.
- iv. The changes in the celebrations of festivals are sought in modern time.

1.3. Methodology:

Descriptive and analytical methods have been followed in conducting this research investigation. The work is mainly based on field work and short survey. Attempts have been made to keep recurrent touch to the erstwhile works. The study information and materials have been collected from various social activities like - celebration of festivals, ceremonies, religious offering, socio-cultural performances, costume, rites and rituals, etc. It has been collected by observation, participation, discussion, interview, etc. The observations and discussions have been taken from illiterate, simple and young, aged and octogenarian people from the rural as well as urban areas.

(1) The primary sources of data are collected from (a) Field study, (b) Observation (c) Short survey, (d) Discussion, etc.

(2) The secondary sources of data are taken from various books, souvenir, journals, writes-up/articles, prose, poetry, collected folktales, collected folk songs, seminar papers, audio-video recording, etc. collected from various libraries, personals, institutions, etc.

1.4. Significance of the study:

Each festival has a very specific significance. There are festivals like Religious and Seasonal and Agricultural. It serves the purpose of bringing happiness to social lives and strengthens sense of community feeling. The Festivals are part of socio-cultural celebrations. It is the vehicle of culture and traditions. It creates cultural harmony and relieves from monotony of life. It teaches to forget enmity and embrace one another in a bond of love and affection living in the society. The entertainment of festivals emancipates and improves moral, ethical, social values of life of all. It foster and preserve art and cultural heritage and reinforce group or

community identity. It helps to come together and unite together. It gives to rejoice special moments and emotions in life with loved ones. It is the vehicle of trespassing knowledge and traditions from this generation to next generations. It is said that the festivals and its traditions are the media of social education. The religious festivals are the sources of spiritual growth. It is celebrated with zeal and devoutness. The festival marks the important significant events to the human race. The festivals help to document culture in an undocumented manner. The festivals are the communicative performances and celebration of ethnicity.

Hence, the significance of the present research works.

1.5. Area of the study:

Festivals are the essential parts of human life. The celebration of the Bodo festivals like – the *Bwisagu*, the *Magw*, the *Khathrigasa*, the *Kherai*, the *Salami*, the *Dinga puja*, the *Garza puja*, etc. along with festivals and ceremonies related with life cycle reveals the deepest values of Bodo community, their socio-cultural life. The impact, changes, roles and importance of those festivals in socio-cultural life of the Bodos are the area of study. The validation of festivals as per present society and culture of the Bodos will be another area of study. The geographical area of the present study is Kokrajhar district. It is situated in the western part of Assam. It is bounded on the north by the Bhutan and west by West Bengal state of the India; south by Dhubri and east by Chirang districts of Assam. (See Map No: 1, 2 and 3).

1.6. Review of Literature:

Rev. S Endle in his book “*The Kacharis (Bodos)*”, 1911 stated that the origin of April *Bihu* is not easy to account but it can be seen to be as a “*Saturnalia*” i.e., much more objectionable character. A few songs related to it seem to have been collected by him. It has also been observed in his study that the origin of the *Bwisagu* and the *Domasi* are still somewhat obscure and uncertain. He deals with at length about the preparation of ‘*Belagur*’ and social life of the Bodos.

Kameswar Brahma in his Doctorial Thesis “*A Study of Socio- Religious Beliefs Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos*” (1992), has divided festivals and ceremonies of Bodos into three dimensions namely Religious, Seasonal and

Agricultural. He explained the origin of the term *Bwisagu* as *Bwisw + Agu > Bwisagu*. He observed that the word *Bihu* has originated from the Sanskrit word *Visuvat* and as such turned to *Bisub = Bisub = Bisu or Bihu*. Mr. Brahma in his book entitled '*A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*. (1998) has considered that the *Bwisagu* is one of the most popular seasonal festivals of the Bodos. He also narrates different types of songs, musical instruments and dresses used in festivals. He describes festivals like the *Domasi*, the *Khatrigasa*, the *Amthisua*, the *Kherai*, the *Garza*, the *Hambai*, the *Mahoho*, the *Phuthuli Haba*, etc. and other festivals and ceremonies of the Bodos.

Dinanath Basumatary in his book *Boro Jatir Itihas, Bhasa-Sanskriti aru Kristian Missionari*, (2011), stresses on the festival of the Bodos like the *Bihu* and the *Kherai* festivals. According to him the *Bihu* is natural festival or can be called agricultural festival due to its close affinity with agricultural activities. He seems to have considered that *Bihu* is celebrated by the Bodos in three forms - *Kongali Bihu* or *crisis Bihu* in the month of *Kartik*, *Magw or Domasi Bihu* in *Magh* and the *Bwisagu Bihu* in the month of *Baishakh*. It is focused in his book, *Mwndanghini Fwrmaithi*, (2002) that the greatest deity of the *Kherai* is the *Bathou Bwrai Siva Mohadeo*. The *Kherai* is the greatest religious enjoyable day (*rongjalu san*) of the Bodos. Uses of myths on the origin of the *Kherai* have also been found in his study.

B.N. Bordoloi, G.C. Sharma, M.C. Saikia in their *Tribes of Assam Part-I Popular Series* (1987), have been observed that the '*Baisagu*' is the most important event in spring time at the advent of new year for merry-making in the social life of the Boro-Kacharis. They also celebrate *Domashi (Bhogali Bihu)*, and *Katrigacha (Kangali Bihu)* giving less important than *Bwisagu*. They also considered that another occasion '*Kherai*'- is a religious annual community festival of the Bodos. They have observed that in the *Kherai* entire atmosphere is agog with much enthusiasm and festive fervor. It is intended to propitiate "*Bathow*" or "*Sibrai*" – the chief deity of the adoration of the Boro-Kacharis along with '*Mainao*' (the Goddess of harvests) and host of other God and Goddesses. They narrated that it is the national festival of the community for some section of Bodo people. The Bodo

people of the northern belt of old Kamrup and Darrang instituted a special festival 'Fushihaba' or 'Putuli Haba' – a symbolic folk marriage of *Siva* with *Parvati* in the form of *Raona-Raoni* which is celebrated after *Bwisagu* festival. The ritualistic part of this festival unfolds the legendary saga of their history, as they observed.

Anil Boro in his *Folk literature of the Boros, An Introduction*, (2001), considered that - the *Bwisagu* is the greatest seasonal as well as agricultural festival like the Assamese *Bihu*. According to Boro the religious minded people worship *Bathou Brai* during the *Kherai* worship or festival. He also seems to have found inference of myth about the origin of *Kherai*. He extends his views that *Garza* is held in order to expel the evil gods from the locality where the very worship is held. He also explained various songs and dances in the festivals of Bodos. Premalata Devi in her book '*Social and Religious Institution of Bodos*', (2007), considers that *Bwisagu* is the prime religious pre-monsoon festival of the traditional Bodos. It is a kind of worship as well as festival performed for good agricultural product, she observed. Kalikumar Lahary, the well known author of the Bodos explained in the book '*Rangina Sangina Thunlai*' (G.U. 2003), in an essay; entitled '*Bwisagi Sikhiani Solobatha*' (Tale of the *Bwisagi* girl) that *Bwisagu* is the festival or celebration on the occasion of marriage ceremony by the *Barolampha Terolampha* with '*Young Bwisagw Sikhla*'. Mr Birendragiri Basumatary, in his book-'*Boro Harimuni Mohor Musri*' (1993); stated that the *Bwisagu* festival is celebrated in Assam from the ancient period in the spring season. How the term *Bihu* has been derived was explained by him. He considered that the *Kherai* is a religious festival of the Bodos. His explanation of the terms appear as: *Kherai* like - *Khar* (fled), *Kharnai* (Fleeing), *Ai* (Mother) *Gosai* (God), *Aizw* (Lady). So – *Khar* – *Ai* > *Kharai* > *Kherai*. He narrates that the word *Garza* is derived from *Gao-Raja-Garza*. Lakeswar Brahma in his book '*Bwisagu Arw Harimu*', (1976), explained about the origin of the word *Bwisagu*. The word *Hu-* means celebration of '*Puja*' (*pray*) or to pray. So, Pray or prayer to cattle in *Bwisagu*, Prayer in the *Bwisakh* < *Bwisag* + *Hu* > *Bwisagu* or *Bwisagu*, he observed. Mr. Dhuparam Basumatary, in his '*Bodo-Kacharir Sanskritir Kinsit Abhas*', (1955); elaborates that the word *Bihu* is a Bodo word. Here *Bi--* means to beg something like alms and *Hu—*means to give or to donate. Thus *Bihu* means to give what is begged (*Bi* + *Hu* = *Bihu*). He

further added - during the *Bwaisagu* festival, the young boys and the girls beg alms from door to door and dancing in tune of some traditional musical instruments. In his '*Kirata - Jana-Kriti*' (2010, Revised) book S.K. Chatterjee observed that the *Kherai* puja of the Bodos has similarities between the *Ker Puja* of the Tripuris. The *Kherai* is an important religious festival of the traditional Bodo people performed in the month of *Kartik* and *Aghon* month for getting blessing of *Bathou Brai* and *Mainao Brui (Lakhimi)* along other deities for having good harvest and welfare of the villagers in an open field. It is performed for the whole night by villagers and the adjoining villages. The main role is played by the *Daoudini* and she performs shamanistic dance through whom oblation are offered to the gods and goddesses. She speaks prophecies, advice the villagers to live in righteous and virtuous path – as observed by Sekhar Brahma in his book '*Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition, A Historical Perspective*', (2006). Indramalati Narzaree in his book '*Boro Harimu Arw Thunlai Bijirnai*', (2010); *Bwaisagu* is merry-making or festival of the Bodos related with agriculture or season. The *Kherai* is the greatest religious marry -making puja. He considers that *Garza* is the greatest *puja* of the Bodo society after *Kherai*. In '*Laisini Bikhayao Indramalati*' edited by Indramalati Narzaree and Birlang Narzary, (2008, second Edn.), it is evident that festivals of the Bodos have been divided into Seasonal festivals or Agricultural related festivals and festivals related with worship of god and goddesses. He considers that *Garza* is the name of the God for those only who worship *Bathou*. Liladhar Brahma in his book '*Religion and Dances of the Bodos*', (1993); considers the *Kherai* as a prayer institution of *Bathou*. Here the primitive spiritual creator is prayed solemnly. Its incantations, holy hymns can be entitled as prayer songs while its relevant dances are prayer dances, he observed. Premananda Machahary in his book '*Socio-Political Life of the Boros in Karbi Anglong District of Assam*', (2004); stated that *Kherai-baonay* or *Kheray*-worship is a great and colourful festival of the Bodos. The *Marai-puja* used to be celebrated for seven days by the Boros in olden days by sacrificing animals, etc. and performance of dance of '*Oja-Pali*. The *Dinga puja* or *Garza puja* is another important religious ceremony or rites of the Bodos, he observed. The Bodos worship annually in the Assamese month of *Jeth* (May-June) month collectively by the villagers either *Dinga puja* or

Garzapuja, he considered. Phukan Basumatary in his book '*Phuthli Haba*', (2011), stated that *Phuthli Haba* is the festival celebrated with several rituals related with agriculture. According to folk belief two idols are prepared in the name of the *Raona* and the *Raoni*, the grand son and granddaughter of the first human being *Mwnsingsing bwrai* and got them married and allowed to float in the river after the marriage. These two idols are called *Deva-Devi* (God-Goddess). This festival is celebrated by the *Bathou* worshippers, he observed.

Apart from the review discussed above, there are innumerable descriptions and analysis about the Bodo community, their culture, identity, migration, religion, festivals, traditional rites and rituals, language, literature and the society in their remarkable books. Besides those books, the Journals of various intervals and journal published by *Director of Institutes of Tribal and Scheduled Caste Research* give certain information about the existence of various festivals of the Bodos. Taking the advantages of the gaps left out by the above authors in their books, attempts have been made for comprehensive and conclusive study especially in the festivals of the Bodos in socio-cultural perspective. Thus in this work it is proposed to study the festivals of the Bodos in socio-cultural perspective in general and Kokrajhar in particular.

1.7. Identification of the Bodo people:

1.7.1 The Term *Bodo*:

'The term Bodo has been used in the new sense, meaning the Bodo-kacharis of the Brahmaputra Valley⁶. The term Bodo is used linguistic as well as ethnic sense at present. R.M. Nath said that – 'The Bodos are a race of great Mongoloid people who live in the north of the Himalayas and west of China. This land was known as Bod. The word Bod is supposed to mean homeland, synonymous with Sanskrit Varsha (as in Bharat Varsha the homeland of Bharat—India). There were various parts of the country known as Hor-Bod, Kur-Bod, etc. The inhabitants of the various parts of Bod country were known as Boddo-ficha or Boddo-cha (Ficha-cha-children) or the children of the Bod country. In course of time they come to know simply the Boddo - the Bodo.⁷ He added that the word Kirata is a general term referring to the people of the Mongolian origin and it refers specially to the

Bodos. Banikanta Kakati rightly said in his book '*Assamese Its Formation and Development*' (1995) that -- They (Bodos) built up strong kingdoms and with varying fortunes and under various tribal names – Chutias, the Kacharis, the Koces etc., they held sway over one or another part of North-Eastern India during different historical times. The Bodo folk who live to the west of the Kamrup district are called Mech by their Hinduneighbours⁸. The proper name of Kacharis is Bodo'.⁹ Grierson wrote that 'the Tibetans in the early days called their country Bodyut, their language Bodskat and a Tibetan person a Bodpa.¹⁰ This information suggests that Bodpa, the Tibetan person derived their name from Bod. Therefore it follows that the Bodos who were one of the inhabitants of the Bod country derived their national name from Bod. 'The term Bodo in general which is a generic name of the people, it means all the Tibeto-Burman (Bodo) speaking group of Sino-Tibetan origin.¹¹

Hence, the Bodos belong to the Indo Mongoloid people migrated from north of Himalayas and west of China, previously known as Kirata and derived their name from Bod country, at present they are known as the Bodo.

1.7.2. The Term *Boro*:

According to G. A. Grierson, the ethnic groups like Boro, Dimasa, Garo, Rabha, etc. belongs to the Bodo group of the Bodo-Naga section under the Assam-Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burman division of the Sino-Tibetan speech family and they used to live in Bodyut or Tibet and accordingly they were known as Bodpa.¹² He further holds that the sound of Bodo can better be represented by spelling it as Bada or Bara pronounced as Boro. We have references to terms Bara-fisa, meaning children of the Baras and the term Bara-fisa must have been subsequently term simply as Bara pronounced as Boro. As per R.M.Nath - 'Some section of the Bodo tribes derived other tribal names from that particular parts of the Bod country when they migrated at a later date. For instance, he refers to the Koches and the Meches as having their tribal names from those of Kucha and Mecha areas within the Bod country and retained these names as their tribal names after they had migrated to Assam.¹³ If this theory is accepted, it appears that this particular section of the population of Bod country prefer to retain their national

name Bodo as their tribal name after they had migrated to Assam and the name Bodo was perhaps spelt as Boro as stated above. P.C. Bhattacharya wrote that 'like other tribal names in Assam, the name *Bara* perhaps meant man or a male member of the tribe. For instance, in Jalpaiguri language, *Barak or Borok* means a man. He again refers to S.N. Wolfenden as having contended that the Tibetan Brog meaning 'Stepps' is the root source of the origin of the name Boro. He writes that Brogpa means 'inhabitants' of steppes' in the Tibetan language and equated the term Bara-fisa to Brogbu-tsa meaning "the descendants of the Stepps."¹⁴ In a very ancient time there was a king, called Mahiranga Danava, in Kamrupa or Pragiyotisha. The word *Danava* suggests that the king derived his name from a hillock named Mairang, near modern Guwahati. Mahiranga is a sanskritized form of *Mairang*. The root of this term can be traced from a Boro word. This king was a Kirata and his subjects were also Kiratas.¹⁵ 'In Boro Kochari language, their etymological meaning of the term *Boro* is men by which *Bara or Bara phisa* (children of the *Bara*) could be justified, the Boro is a word which is prevalent among the non-tribes. The term Bara-fisa can quite certainly be reconstructed from Tibetan Brogbut-tsa which must have subsequently underwent a transformation into Brogsa leading to corresponding transformation of Bara-fisa into Borosa, and then into Boro.¹⁶

It is evident that the word Boro comes from the Bara-ficha. It is also seen that at present the term Bodo indicates all the tribal constituents like- Bodo Kacharies, Garo, Mech, Rabha, Lalung, Tripura, Hajong, etc.

1.7.3. The *Mech* or *Meche*:

As per Grierson 'the Bodos living in Jalpaiguri and Terai areas call themselves Mech since they settled on the banks of the river 'Mechi.'¹⁷ They are (i.e. the Kachari people) identical with the people call Mech in Goalpara and North Bengal. These are the names given to them by outsiders.¹⁸ In Assam proper the Hindus call them (the Boros or Bodos) Kacharis; in Bengal they are known as Meches.¹⁹ In ancient times the Kiratas in Kamrupa (ancient Assam) were called Mleccha and the term 'Mech' is a corruption of the term 'Mleccha.'²⁰ Vasus added 'The Bodo people who live to the west of the present Kamrupa district are called 'Mec' by

their Hindu neighbours. This word is probably a corruption of Sanskrit Mleccha. In the opinion of the R.M. Nath, the Meches derived their name from Mecha who migrated from the Mecha area within the Bod country.²¹

The 'Meches' are the descendants of one named Mechel, one of the three brothers, born of the same parents named Purango and Sinnia of Nepal and the descendants of Mechel came to be known as the Meches. They call themselves Mech because they settled in the banks of the river Mechi.²² Further Sanyal, writes the Meches are Tibeto-Burman origin and they belong to the great Bodo section of the Tibeto-Burman people. Quoting Hamilton Buchanan in 'Jalpaiguri District Handbook on 1951 census' it is stated that the Mech is a tribe of Kamrup'.²³ The Meches like the other Bodo groups are Indo-Mongoloids and they are one of the branches of the Kacharis'.²⁴ The Mech are undoubtedly merely a branch (the western one) of the *Baras* of Darrang. The name is almost certainly a corruption of the Sanskrit word Mleccha, i.e., an outcast from the Brahmin point of view,The uncomplimentary epithet "mlech padre" has sometimes been hurled at the writer when preaching to Brahmins or other high caste Hindus, though it would seem to be the recognized name for the *Bara* race from the Manas River westwards to the neighbourhoods' of Jalpaiguri. They would seem to be especially numerous in Goalpara district, where one of the principal landholders is known as the "Mechpara zamindar".²⁵ The Mech or the Meche is another name given to the Bodos by their neighbours.

1.7.4. The *Kachari*:

It is one of the names given to the Bodos by their neighbours. Edward Gait traces a Limbu legend from Herbert Risleys 'Tribes and Castes of Bengal', which relates the origin of the name Kachari. As per the legend, the 'Kacharis' were originally known as the Meches and in course of their migration, they inhabited the 'Kachar country', the name given by the Nepalese to the tract between the Brahmaputra and the Koshi rivers, and this people were later on called Kacharis'.²⁶ It is supported by C.C. Sanyal, who states that 'a section of the Boros under the name 'Meches' moved towards Nepal and settled down in the 'Kachar country' at the foothills of Nepal and subsequently come to be known as the 'Kacharis', very definitely after

the name of the country'.²⁷ 'The word Khachar is derived from a Sanskrit word meaning a 'bordering region'. The district of Cachar might have got its name after the name of its principal tribe, i.e. the 'Kacharis'. In any case it is certain that the 'Kacharis' did not get their name from Cachar. They are known by that name in many parts far removed from Cachar and were so called long before a section of the tribe took possession of that district'.²⁸ Gait also refers to a tradition to the effect that the plains of the Cachar originally belong to the Tippera kingdom and was presented by a king of that country to a 'Kachari' Raja who had married his daughter. However, the details of the matrimonial alliance and the kings involved in such a deal are not known, because the history of the 'Kachari' kings after the death of Suradarpa Narayan is shrouded in mystery for about sixty years. 'The earliest used of the word (i.e. Kachar) in their own record is in a letter of appointment by Raja Kirti Chandra dated 1658 Sak in which the Kacharis Niyam or the practice of the Kacharis is referred to'.²⁹

The following popular saying derives the name Kachari:

**Jouma futhma, bifa Hajoma*

**Dilaoma Dilungma, bima Bulungma.*

Bathoualai bandwba, Sijoualai gorongba

Dao Daoali bima gaodali

Dangdali ronjali, jajo aodal

**Pra Ari, Korosa Ari*

**Jwng Pari lari lari³⁰.*

i.e. Of all the mountains highest and whitest is the father (referring to the snow clad Himalayas). * Of all the rivers, longest and biggest is the Mother *Bulungma* (i.e. Brahmaputra). The *Bathou* have five principle, *Sizou* has five ridge our dearest mother is *Gaodali* ---- *We are *Korosa Aris* (First born sea race). * Our line is Continuous.

The above saying is very old and mixed languages of the Bodos, the Tipperas and the Dimasas. The point with reference to '*Korosa Aris*' suggests that in a very dim past, the Bodos called themselves *Korosa Aris*, (first born people' or 'the earliest settlers of the region). In Bodo language, '*Koro*' means '*Head*' '*sa*' means '*child*' and '*Ari*' means clan or race suffix. The compound word '*Korosari*' (*Korosa Ari*)

therefore, means the first born race or the first settlers. The term '*Korosa*' is usually applied to the first born child. For example, the child 'A' is immediate elder to child 'B' is expressed as, child 'A' is child 'B's *Korosa*. It is not improbable that when the Bodos came in contact with the Aryans, the former identified themselves to the later as *Korosaris*, meaning 'the first settlers of the region and the Aryans later on must have spelt *Korosaris* as '*Kosaris*'. It is same like Grierson assertion that Kachari is mispronounced as "*Kosari*". The pronunciation of Kasari approximates *Korosari* rather than Kachari. It is therefore '*Kosari*'. They claimed themselves to be the first born people or the earliest settlers of the region. This proposition is not absurd in view of the opinions expressed by Rev. Endle, Edward Gait, K.L. Barua, etc. Endle holds that the Kachari races were the original autochthones of Assam'.³¹ Edward Gait was of the opinion that 'The Kacharis may perhaps be described as the aborigines, or earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley. --- In the Brahmaputra valley the Kacharis called themselves Bodo or Bodo-fisa' (son of the Bodo)'.³² K.L. Barua wrote that after the arrival of the Aryans into the Indian soil, hordes of later Mongolian pour through the north-east corner. This later Mongolians were described to be the Kiratas in the Mahabharata and other Hindu scriptures like 'Kalika Puran' and 'Yogini Tantra'. He further goes that during the time of the Mahabharata war or even earlier, the Bodo tribes constituted the balk of the population of the Assam valley, northern and eastern Bengal and the surrounding and intervening Hills'.³³ He further said that The Kacharis, Koches, Rabhas, Meches, Mikirs, Lalungs, Garos, Nagas, Kukis and the Chutias are the present day representatives of these later Mongolians or the Indo-Mongoloid and the tribe speaking Bodo (Boro) languages seem to have occupied the plains of Assam for very long time. This evidently shows that the Boros, a major constituent tribe of the great Bodo race inhabited the Brahmaputra valley from time immemorial, which has qualified them to be called the first born people of the region. Hence, the word Kachari may derive from the *Korosa-Ari* > *Kochari* ('cha' is pronounced as 'sa' in Bodo).

Dilip Kr. Kundu said - 'various constituent groups of Bodos adopted distinct names by which they are known today as they moved southward (after migration) and spread across the fertile Brahmaputra valley. But they are Bodos. According to

historians the settlers came to be known as Mech in Goalpara and North Bengal, as Dimasa in North Cachar hills, and as Bodos and Kacharis in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. With Socio-economic and religious changes in other parts of Assam some of the Bodo tribes came to be known as Rabha, Sonowal, Lalung, Moran, Chutia, etc'.³⁴

The Boros, Bodos, Kacharis, Meches, etc. are belongs to the Mongoloid people known by different name in different places. Those names are given to them by their neighbours. Their language belongs to a sub-section of the Bodo-Naga section under the Assam-Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan speech family. Today, they constituted an important section of the population of the plains of Assam. The people in the areas which have been undertaken to study i.e., the Kokrajhar district of Assam, are known as Boro or Bodo. They speak the Boro or Bodo language having few local variations. They write as Boro-Kochari in their written documents for community identification.

1.8. Physical features:

The physical features of the Bodo people are almost same with their main stock, the Mongolian people. The physical features of the Mongolian origin 'are a short head, a broad nose, a flat and comparatively hairless face, a short but muscular figure and yellow skin'.³⁵ 'They have square set faces, projecting cheek bones, with almond-shaped eyes, and scanty beard and moustache, the last mentioned being after wanting altogether'.³⁶ In general the physical features of the Mongoloids can be described as : 'yellow or yellowish-brown skin colour, black, stretched or flat wavy and coarse head hair, scanty growth of facial and body hair, black or dark brown eye colour; oblique slit and narrow palpebral fissure; brown face with prominent zygomatic arches. One of the typical characteristics of the Mongoloids is the presence of Mongolian fold in their eyes'.³⁷ The Bodo constitutes a large group among all other tribes of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. They are the earliest inhabitants of Indo Mongoloid stock to settle in the valley. 'The physical features of Indo Mongoloids of great Mongoloid race are yellow or yellowish brown skin, square set face, with broad nose, strong cheek bones, flat nose, almond shaped, black or dark brown eyes, black stretches

(sometime wavy) and course head, scanty beard and moustache. These physical traits are found among the Bodos of the Brahmaputra valley, with distinct Tibeto-Burmese marks in their language, the Bodos started to settle in the plains of Assam since the second millennium B.C.’³⁸

However, like Aryans, Dravidian and other groups of people, the physical features of the Mongoloid people; Boros, Bodos, Kocharis, etc. have of late been noticed variations due to impact of socio-cultural assimilation as well as marital alliances with other groups since the time immemorial.

1.9. Migration and Settlement:

‘The original homeland of the speakers of the Tibeto-Burman language is considered to be the upper courses of the Yang-tse-Kiang and Hoang-ho rivers in the southern China. At one time a group of the Tibeto-Burman people left their original habitat and migrated towards south. Somewhere in north - eastern Burma, the group split up. One group moved towards further south to reach as far as Southeast Asia, while one group migrated westward following the foot-hills of the Himalayas and reach as far as Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan, and at a later date in successive waves, from there they migrated to the south to occupy the valleys and hills of Assam’.³⁹ B.M. Das added that ‘on their way to Southeast Asia some (early Tibeto-Burman) members of the first group changed their direction and moved westwards to enter into different parts of Northeast India. All these populations scattered themselves in different parts of northeast India and came to be known by various names like the Boro, Naga, Kuki, Tiwa, etc. The third group entered Assam by the Brahmaputra valley. Thus, it appears that the various Indo-Mongoloid populations now known by different names came to Assam by various routes and at different times. ‘Mongoloid tribes from western China speaking forms of Sino-Tibetan speech appear to have been pushing south and west from their original homeland from pre-historic times, but certain large-scale movement of which we have faint inklings seems to have begun in the early part of the first millennium B.C.’⁴⁰ Around 5000 BC large scale immigration of Tibeto Mongoloid people took place from China, Mongolia and adjoining region. Historically the Bodos are the earliest known settlers in Assam’.⁴¹ About the migration of the

Bodos S.K. Chattarji wrote, different branches of the great Sino-Tibetan speaking people which had their nidus near the head-waters of the Yang-tse-kiang and the Hoang-Ho rivers to the west of China pushed south and west, probably from 2,000 B.C. Onwards and tribes of these infiltrated into India mostly along the western course of the Brahmaputra. The great Bodo tribe would appear to have been established over the valley of the Brahmaputra fairly early and to have extended into the North and East Bengal and also North Bihar.⁴² ‘When the Mahabharata and the Ramayana were taking shape between 500 B.C. to 400 A.D. particularly in the pre-Christian centuries, they had occupied the southern tracts of the Himalayas and the whole of the North-Eastern India, North Bihar contiguous to Nepal and to the north of Ganges, the greater part of Bengal, and Assam, including the areas through which the Ganges (the Padma or Padda of the present day) passed into the sea. Eastern Nepal and the Lauhitya or the Brahmaputra valley was the lands specially connected with them⁴³. About migration of the Bodo people who are also known as Mongolian as a whole, K. L Barua wrote – ‘The Mongolians belong to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Indo-Chinese group and their representative of the present day are the Kacharis, Koches, Rabhas, Meches, Mikirs, Lalungs, Garos, Nagas, Kukis and Chutias. Of these, the tribes speaking the Bodo (Boro) language seem to have occupied the plains of Assam for a very long time. These Bodo people were no doubt the Kiratas and Mlecchas spoken of in the Mahabharata⁴⁴. ‘Judging from the wide ranges of extension of their language, the Bodos appear first to have settled over the entire Brahmaputra valley, and extended west into North Bengal (in Koch Bihar, Rangpur and Dinajpur district); they may have pushed into North Bihar also, and the Indo-Mongoloids who penetrated into North Bihar might equally have been either Bodos or ‘Himalayan’ tribes allied to the Newars. They skirted the southern end of the Brahmaputra and occupied the Garo Hills, where, as Garos, they form a bloc of Bodo speech. South of the Garo Hills they spread in northern Maimensing, where the semi-Bengalese Hajong tribe is of Bodo origin. From Nowgong district in Assam their area of occupation extended to Cachar district (particularly in the North Cachar Hills) and into Sylhet, and from Cachar and Sylhet they moved further to the South to Tripura State, where there is still a Bodo speaking bloc in the shape of the Tipra tribe which founded the State;

and from Tripura they spread into Camilla and possibly also Noakhali district: and thus they occupied the mouths of the Ganges by the eastern sea. With the exception of the isolated Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the whole of Assam (barring the eastern parts inhabited by the Nagas and the south-eastern parts inhabited by the Kuki-Chins) and North and East Bengal was the country of the great Bodo people.⁴⁵

As regards the foundation of kingdom by the Bodo people, Maheswar Neog said, "In the Brahmaputra valley and its neighbouring hills and forests the Tibeto-Burman Boro people have been dwelling from ancient period. They are mainly Chutiya, Mech, Rabha, Tipra, Garo and the Hajong of the Moimensing district. They also ruled the state in different periods and in different places for a long period. The ruling period of the Bodos is the longest of all the ruling groups of the same stock. The Bodo name of the places and rivers may prove this that they maintained their powers as a ruling class for a long period. They created more obstacles to the Ahoms who started foundation of their state by subjugating the local rulers⁴⁶ Endle observed that 'the Bodos or Kacharis migrated to the valley from their homeland Tibet and China'.⁴⁷ Endle pointed out that 'at least two great immigrations from the north and north east into the rich valley of the Brahmaputra, i.e., one entering North-east Bengal and Western Assam through the valley of Tista, Dharla, Sankosh, &c., and was founded the powerful kingdom of Kamarupa. The second flow was through the Subansiri, Dibong and Dihang valley into Eastern Assam where the branch of the widespread Kachari race known as Chutiyas established their Chutiya kingdom having the capital near the modern Sadia.⁴⁸

With distinct Tibeto-Burman marks in their language, the Bodos started to settle in the plains of Assam since the second millennium B.C.⁴⁹ According to historical accounts, the Mongolians entered into India by three sides: (1) The first group spread in the valley of the Ganges through Bideh, Mithila or the present North-West-Bihar and the North Bengal of ancient India, (2) The second group entering into the Brahmaputra valley through the tributaries of the Brahmaputra river of the north east, established small states in the foothills, (3) The third group of the Mongolians entering through the South-east of India established some states like

‘Purba Desh’, Tripura, etc. and spread culture and civilization in West Bengal and middle India. The ancient ‘Pratyanta bhumi’, Purba Desh, Suhma, and Tripura are known as the present ‘Srihatta’ Chattagram, Maimensingh, Dhaka, etc. Most of those places are now in the present Bangla Desh⁵⁰.(See Map No: 4)

Banikanta Kakati said that ‘The Bodos lives in scattered groups of villages that spread out from the extreme North-East of Assam to the districts of North Bengal.’⁵¹ R.M. Nath said that ‘The first batch of the Bodos who migrated to Assam came from a place situated at the confluence of two rivers – Dila-Ubra (big river) and Changibra (small water), due to the area being disturbed and converted into a desert by an earthquake. ---- ‘By batches they (Bodos) came and spread over the whole of Assam; sometime ousting the Austrics and sometimes living amicably with them.’⁵² He also added that ‘The Bodos migrated to and settled in the vast plan area comprising of the present North Bengal, and this was probably the first area of wide and vast plain land that they settled in. He was also in the opinion that the present Bangla (Bengal) has derived from Bodo words - the country *Ha* (Land) *Bang* (Plenty) *La* (big, wide) meaning plenty and wide land. The Bodos in the western area, north of the United provinces and central provinces, mixed their blood with the Aryans when they later settled in India’. Discussing with various probable routes to be migrated by the Indo-Mongoloid Bodo people in Assam, R. N. Mosahary said ‘it is to be noted that the flow of immigrations to North-East India was a continuous process from pre-historic times. To suggest a particular route for all immigration, therefore, would certainly be far from the truth.’⁵³

The flow of immigrations were a continuous process spreading over the period of thousands years, than it is very likely that the successive waves of the immigrants must have entered Assam through various routes at different times. Nevertheless, emphasis can be certainly laid on the conjecture that the bigger waves of immigrants must have followed the courses of big rivers such as the Chindwin, Irrawaddy, Monam, etc. thus landing in Burma when they filtered into Assam through the Patkai range of India and Burma while others found their way to Assam and Bengal through the courses of the rivers, such as the Brahmaputra, Teesta, Dharia, Sonkosh, etc. Other smaller groups of immigrants must have

sneaked into Assam through various mountain passes at various points along the Indo-Bhutan borders stretching from eastern Assam to North Eastern Bengal, such as Punsling, Karikola bazaar, Zomduar, Gelempu, Sandrup Jhongka, Bhairabkhund, etc.

The Bodos have their settlement and habitation in some scattered pockets throughout Assam. The concentrations of the Bodo are – whole the present Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) i.e. Kokrajhar, Chirang, Bagsha and Udalguri districts and north-eastern parts of Dhubri, some parts of Bongaigaon, Northern parts of Barpeta, Nalbari, and Kamrup, northern parts of Darrang and Sonitpur and the northern parts of North Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts of Assam in the northern valley of the Brahmaputra river.

Anil Boro in his ‘Folk Literature of Boros An Introduction’ said that the above areas of concentration in the northern tract covers an area of 10,000 square km. and have about 10 lakhs of Boro speaking people’.⁵⁴

The Bodo concentrated areas in the southern tract of the Brahmaputra River are - Dudhnoi, Rangjuli and Dhupdhara areas of the Goalpara district, Boko, Chhaygaon and Rani Areas in south Guwahati—Sonapur-Khetri areas in the southern parts of Kamrup district, Jagiroad- Morigaon areas in the Morigaon district and Rupahi, Dhing areas in Nagaon district, southern most part of the Sibsagar district, Howraghat- Langhin areas of Karbi Anglong district and north-eastern parts of Dibrugar district in Assam.

The Bodos are also settled in the neighbouring states like - Tikrikilla areas of Garo Hills in the State of Meghalaya, Dimapur areas in Nagaland, some areas of Arunachal Pradesh, northern parts in Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts in the West Bengal state of India. The present Bodo populations are also concentrated in the Myanmar, the Nepal, the Bangladesh and other countries of the world.

Conclusion:

The Bodos are the first settlers and aborigine people of North-east India. They are known in different names like- the Bodos, the Boros, the Meche, the Kacharis, the Dimasa, the Chutia, the Deori, the Thengal, the Sonowal, etc. in different places

and times by their neighbours. The physical features of the Bodos are Mongoloid in origin but of late they seem varied in modern times. The Bodo language belong to the Bodo-Naga group of Assam-Burmese section of Tibeto Burman under Tibeto-Burman proper of Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family as per Linguistic Survey of India. It is now 8th scheduled language of Indian Union. The concentrations of the Bodos are large in the present Bodoland Territorial Council and varied in other parts of Assam, North-east India, India and abroad. The field study is the basis and the primary and the secondary data have been used in the study.

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XXX