The BODOS: Culture and Society

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ABSTRACT

In order to understand the social processes functioning in a society it is important to know the socio-cultural milieu of the society in which they are rooted. Thus to get the necessary insights of the Bodo distinctiveness, it is essential to have some acquaintance with the various dimensions of the Bodo society. This paper encapsulates the aspects like the ethnic background of the Bodos, their religious philosophy, economy, traditional institutions and their story of struggle since independence.

Ethnic background

The term Bodo means ‘man’. Kachari is a generic term for a number of groups speaking a more or less common dialect or language and claiming a common mythical ancestry. (E. Gait, 1926:247) and others regarded the Kachari as aborigines, or the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley i.e., the whole of modern Assam, North Bengal and parts of Bangladesh. They ruled the whole of Assam up to the 12th century A.D. and moved to the western part of the Brahmaputra valley, North Cachar hills and the plains of Cachar in the 16th century A.D. to evade the Ahom onslaught. In the course of time they dispersed over a larger area, and some of their groups became isolated from others. The census of 1881 listed 12 subgroups of them, whereas (Endle 1911:5) counted fifteen of them. (Grierson, 1927) identified nine communities as members of the Bodo speaking group. If we combine all the lists, we get a list of eighteen groups, e.g. Bodo, Dimasa, Lalung, Madani, Mech, Rabha, Saraniya, Hojai, Garo, Rajbanshi or Koch, Chutia, Moran, Hajong, Tippera, Mahalia, Dhimal, Solaimiya, Phulgaria.

A few tribes have become Hinduised and no more do they identify themselves with Kacharis. The Bodo or cognate language speakers from Tripura, due to their long isolation from the parental stock have drifted apart, and have established their separate identity.

The Kachari are now represented by the Mech in Western Assam, the Bodo in central Assam, The Dimasa and Hojai in the North Cachar hills and the Sonowal and Thengal in the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley. In the Cachar plains the Kachari are known as Barmans. As the Thengals are not schedule tribes, they have to be treated separately. The Dhimal, Mahalia, Solanimiya, and Phulgaria groups of the Kachari couldn’t be traced during 1991 census. (Singh, 1994:431)

It is well understood that the ethnic boundaries of various communities are not strictly fixed and as they are constantly subjected to the process of fission and fusion. (Burman, 1994:2). Ethnicity is created and re-created when societies undergo socio-economic change and structural transformation. In the context of the Bodos it would seem that all the above tribes, though they have attained a certain degree of autonomy, together they form a large group.

Linguistically the Kachari language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. (Grierson, 1904, vol.ii) has convincingly proved that the languages spoken by all the above groups are of the Bodo family.

Bodo concentration in the north-east:

The Bodos are found in almost all the areas of Assam in various configurations though they came from Tibet and settled in the lower parts of Bhutan, later got scattered to the different parts of North-East India diachronically. They moved west and reached Cooch Behar, Rangpur, and Dinajpur districts of North Bengal and even North Bihar. Some
sections of the Bodos moved southwards and settled in the Garo hills, Tripura, and Sylhet and Mymensing districts of the present Bangladesh. A section of the Bodos also migrated towards the east and crossed the river Brahmaputra, got settled in the North Cachar Hills district. Gradually, with the passage of time, many changes crept in their language and culture and they acquired a new identity called the Dimasas. Some of them moved farther and in course of time got crystallized into distinct communities such as Morans, Borahis, Chutias, Thengal Kacharis, Sonowal Kacharis, etc., inhabiting the eastern part of Assam.

The main concentration of the Bodos is in Assam. Their main habitat is now on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra, starting from Dhuburi and Kokrajhar district, Goalpara district in the west, Dhemaji sub-division of Lakhimpur district to the east.

The northern tract of Assam covers the following areas:

a) North and Eastern parts of Dhuburi district, the whole of the Kokrajhar district and the northern most part of Goalpara district,
b) Northern parts of Barcha and Nalbari and northernmost part of Guwahati sub-division in the district of Kamrup,
c) Northern part of Mongoldoi,
d) and Tezpur Sub-division in the district of Darrang,
e) Northern parts of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji sub-division in the district of Lakhimpur.

The southern bank of the river Brahmaputra and these are as follows-

a) Dudhnoi and Dhubhipara areas in the southern part of Goalpara district.
b) Dhubpara – Boko- Chaygaon areas, Chaygaon Rani areas, South Guwahati-Sonapur-Khetri areas in the Southern part of Kamrup district.
c) Jagiroad-Morigaon areas and Rupohi – Dhib area of Nowgaon district.
d) Southernmost part of Sibsagar district

c) Northern part of the Jalpaiguri district in the state of West Bengal. Among the areas of the northern tract of Assam; Kokrajhar is the highest Bodo concentrated district in the state of Assam. (Brahma, 1992 : 4-5)

**Bodo population in Assam state**

The physical area of BTC (Bodo Territorial Council) will comprise of four new districts-Kokrajhar, Baska, Udalguri and Chirang. On the north bank of Brahmaputra, is being carved out of eight districts Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur. The area of these eight districts is more than 27,100 sq. kilometers and about 35% of the total area of Assam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dhubri</td>
<td>6,3965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokrajhar</td>
<td>9,304,04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bongaigaon</td>
<td>9,06,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barpeta</td>
<td>7,74,229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nalbari</td>
<td>11,84,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>1,12,796 (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>7,59,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonitpur</td>
<td>1,02,369 (1991)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Census report :2001

**fig-1**

Total Population of BTC-26,31,289

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kokrajhar</td>
<td>8,98,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chirang</td>
<td>3,43,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baska</td>
<td>7,17,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udalguri</td>
<td>6,71,030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Census report 2001

**fig-2**

For, though the confrontation has always been called an ethnic dimension. The main leaders and heroes on the issue of Bodo nationalistic assertion, however remain the same, though the precise nature of their roles or the names under which they operate. Things have moved so far ahead that is s fruitless to dwell on the rationale, or the necessity and feasibility of a separate political structure for the Bodo people. The Bodo people are one, if not the largest, of the eight plains tribal people of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

**Political History:**

According to Gait : There is no historical data available till Hieun Tsang. After narrating all the
stories relating to the kings and others before the historical accounts of Hieun Tsang. Gait remarks from these stories all that we can gather with certainty is that the Brahmaputra valley was known to the Aryan invaders of India at a very early period and that the process of converting the aboriginal tribes to Hinduism, which was going on before our eyes today commenced long before the of which we have a authentic record. According to the historical sources, Bhaskar Varman was an aboriginal. “Varman is a well known Kshattriya title, and is one which is commonly adopted today by Kacharis, when they accepted Hinduism and issue the sacred thread, on the fiction that they are concealed Kshattriyas.” According to him, the presumption is further strengthened by the fact that the subjects are described as of small stature with dark yellow complexions and by our knowledge that subsequent rulers were nothing more than Hinduised aborigines. ”(Gait 1895:5)

Gait(1926:47) narrates the origin of the Koch dynasty. A certain Hajo Koch had two daughters, Hira and Jira (Meches). Hajo seems to have been a powerful ruler and it was he who brought under his government the whole of Rangapur, together with a large portion of Assam, including the government of Kamrup. Hajo Koch had a grandson named Bisu Mech who was given the name of Viswa Simha and began his rule in 1509 AD. Those who accepted Brahminism along with Bisu Mech was succeeded by Malladeva (Naranarayana) who gave away part of his kingdom to his brother Sukladeva. According to the Mohammedan Historians, the eastern part was known as Koch Hajo and the western part as Koch Bihar. Naranarayana of the west died in 1584 and was succeeded by Laksmi Narayana whose rule came to an end in 1622 A. D. Prana Narayana was the last king in this line. In the east, Sukladvaja was succeeded by Raghudeva.

Parikshit who followed him died in the year 1606. One of his sons Vijit Narayana became the king of Bijni and another son Bali Narayan king of Darrang and died in 1634. A.D. His son Mahendra Narayana died in 1643 A.D who was succeeded by Chandra Narayana with whose death the dynasty came to an end.

Among the other Bodo kingdoms, the Kachari kingdom in Dimapur was the most powerful. As Darshangpha was killed and the Kachari army was defeated by the Ahoms, they shifted their capital to Maibong in North Cachar Hills and then to Khaspur. The last but one Kachari king Raja Krishnachandra tried his hand at Aryанизation which was resented by the people. His younger brother Govind Chandra succeeded him and also had tried provoking people through his anti-state strategies. But people rose in revolt against him and the colonist British annexed the kingdom.

Controversy of the racial names:

The linear progression of the racial names from Kachari (Kosari) to Boro Kachari, Boro and then to Bodo indicates that the Bodos were in search of a real racial name. It is said that the original home of the Bodos was in north of China in between the headwaters of the Huang Ho and the Yang-tze Kiang rivers from which they moved out and dispersed in different directions.

One of the groups moved into Tibet and settled there for centuries. Thus Tibet became their home before coming to India. As is known, the original name of Tibet was Ti-bod. It is conjectured by some of the scholars that the Mongoloids who lived in Ti-bod were identified as bod who later changed to Bodo. It was Brian Hodgson who first applied the generic name Bodo to this group of languages. This generic name is also applied to the tribes and sub-tribes belonging to the Bodo group.(Grierson 1967:1) The controversial spelling of the word is ‘Bodo’ where the letter ‘d’ is pronounced not as ‘d’ but as hard ‘r.’ corresponding to in Assamese or in Devanagari. The variation of the letter ‘d’ as ‘r’ is a fact. The Bodo intellectual leaders of the national convention who took the decision to accept the generic name ‘Bodo’ as the racial name were aware of it as it was already in use. At present it is found that the use of the names Bodo and Boro are going on in parallel. The decision of the 1952 national convention is thus honored.

Religion:

Religion, as we know, is an ideology, a reflection of the real, material world; but it does not mirror this world in a passive, mechanical manner. It has with reality a dynamic, dialectical relationship which acts and reacts on each other finding fulfillment in its attempt to change the face of reality itself. As Marx rightly noted, religion is not only the sigh of the oppressed creature or the heart of a heartless world; it is also the spirit of the spiritless situation; religious distress is not the only expression of real distress; it is at the same time a protest against real distress. A section of the Bodo populace has embraced Christianity or other religious faiths; it was observed that they in their initial stage remain radical until the dominant class appropriates them. The reason can be
evolutionary or natural. The idea of a detribalized society was gradually being sensed and the societies were being exposed to more developed groups and their economic and socio-cultural space was also being acculturated.

Bodo Philosophy
The Bodo philosophy in itself is unique. The five holy sermons of the Bathou Borai or the five sacraments for all the Bodos, which are prayers to God, conversing religious and spiritual matters, being charitable to poor, love the community people and be united.

The five holy realizations are – realization of Sijau, the supreme soul, merger of atma (human soul) with the supreme soul (Sijau). Realization of Mainao, realization of the Panch Mahabhutas corresponding to the five main gods: Ailong, Agrang, Khoila, Sanja – Borli, and Raj Khungri. Realisation of the need of worldly affairs. The five senses of love: love to God, fellow-beings, wife and children, poor animals and nature, motherland and the world. There are many such moral and spiritual preachings which are obeyed by the followers of Bathou still.

Religion and magic:
We cannot even distinguish it fully from the worship of Gods, in terms of criteria often met with---- that magic is effected by formula, while the gods are moved by prayer; or that magic is always used with reference to specific problem, while the gods are petitioned for general well –being. Magic is an integral part of the tribal religion its importance is equally noteworthy in case of Bodo traditional religion. The chants of the Deuris, the oracles of the Doudini, the different performative feats during the religious festivals are an important aspects of the ritual.

Economic life:
In the sphere of economic life agriculture still has a dominant position, yet in the contemporary times occupation like service, trade and commerce, contracts etc are adopted; but in small numbers.

Agriculture is the main occupation of any rural society. It is also the mainstay of the economic life of the Bodos. Though a large section of the Bodos were engaged in shifting cultivation (largely slash and burn variety in the plains and to some extent terrace cultivation on the fringe areas of Bhutan and the Garo hills till many years back, now the Bodos are fully settled cultivators. Before making a settlement, they select a plot which is suitable for the cultivation of paddy. They primarily look for a plot with a vast grazing field, availability of rivers, ponds or lakes, jungles and forests for hunting animals and for collecting firewood without scarcity.

For the cultivation of paddy the Bodos select a land which can sustain water for a long. The Bodos are efficient in constructing irrigation canals, embankments and minimum traditional technology for daily use. They generally cultivate such a mustard seeds, tobacco, jute, vegetables like potato, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumber, gourd, green leaves, spices, chilly, onion, ginger etc. They produce partly for domestic consumption and partly for selling in the markets. They grow areca nut and trees in their compound. Castor plants are cultivated for producing Endi cocoon, which is a part of home industries in spinning and weaving especially for women folk.

For cultivation of paddy, there are three kinds of cultivation of the land in the society. They are Self-cultivation, Adhi system, Sukhani system. The first kind is the traditional of the Bodos, but the second and the third type might have been borrowed from others in the past.

i) Self system- The owner cultivates his land with the help of his family or male labour (Dahona) and female labour (Puwati) for a season by giving them certain amount of paddy or wages.

ii) Adhi system-In this system the land owner gives away his land to a cultivator for cultivation for a temporary phase and the total product of the land is distributed equally between his owner and the cultivator.

iii) Sukhani system- here the land owner fixes a contract with the cultivator, and the cultivator has to give a fixed quantity of product for each bigha of land he cultivated.

They practice both ahu (ashu) and Sali (maisali) rice cultivation. “Their indigenous devices for preserving seeds and digging dongs and canals are widely acclaimed.”(Bordoloi et al. 1987)

Endle says-
............. the people are especially skillful in the engineering works for diverting water from rice-beds into their rice fields; and their efforts in this direction are very largely aided by their closely clanish organization. Whenever, the rainfall threatens to be below average, the village headman with his associated elders fixes on the spot whence water is to be brought from the nearest river to the rice fields. At this spot very rude and primitive shelters of jungle grass, etc, are put up: and here all the manhood strength of the village, each man armed
with hoe, dao etc., are compelled to take their abode until the necessary work has been fully carried out….(thus) the Kacharis have a highly efficient and very inexpensive “Public Works Department “ of their own .(1997: 12-13)

Although the old collectivist orientations are not very strong at present, the remnants of such a societal arrangement are still visible. The setting up of village granaries (raizani bakhri) with voluntary contribution of individual villagers, existence of community land in a village etc, are examples of this spirit of cooperative living in a Bodo village. However, due to the lack of various infrastructural facilities like irrigation as many as villages are far away from a river source or else are deprived of the latter due to imaginative construction of embankments by the government or other reasons), credit, fertilizers, power , and then the occurrence of periodic floods, rise in population etc, have resulted in a steady deterioration of the Bodo agricultural economy. Moreover, upsurpation of land demarcated as ‘Tribal block’ and ‘Tribal belt’ by non-tribals along with the requisition of such lands by the government itself for different ‘developmental project’ has led to acute land alienation and eventual pauperization of the Bodo peasantry. Another very important factor that has caused immense harm to the Bodo village economy is the long continuance of annual lease of their landed property. About 25% of the rural Bodo-Kachari families suffer from this malady, owing to which they are not in a position to obtain loans and advances either from other financing institutions. (Choudhury 1980: 37).

Apart from rice, the Bodo peasantry is involved in the cultivation of areca nut and betel nut in their garden land . Nowadays, they are also engaged in the as the pioneers in India rising of various Kharif and Rabi crops and vegetables if there if sufficient land. The Bodos are regarded as pioneers in India in so far as the art of rearing silk extracted from worm, especially the Eri variety and spinning and weaving of clothes out of the thread thus extracted. The Bodo women are excellent weavers with magnificent sense of design and colour. But this traditional enterprise also has failed to contribute much to the Bodo economy due to archaic technology, lack of credit and market facilities, the role of middleman, and the overall apathy of the government.

Many Bodo-Kachari people work in forest badaris (team of logging –labour engaged by forest contractors) and a few families of northern Darrang work as tea-garden labour to supplement their family income.(Choudhury 1980:36). Another important fact plaguing the Bodo society is the curtailment of forest villages had long been enjoying. This has further deteriorated the condition of the common Bodo populace. The food habit of the Bodos is also held responsible for their poverty. Excessive consumption of rice- beer and free keeping of their domestic pigs and fowls are the two main causes of the huge wastage of foodgrains.(Ibid)

In so far as the general mode and the instruments of production are concerned, there are not many differences between the peasant economies of the Bodo and the Assamese societies. The problems like land –alienation, flood, indebtedness , lack of other infrastructural facilities like irrigation, power, credit and market are confronted by the ordinary farmers of both the communities.

Acute land alienation and poverty have compelled many Bodo youths to take up various jobs involving manual labour in the cities and the towns. Many have turned into construction labourers, rickshaw –pullers, and other low category unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Many Bodo girls also have taken to working as construction labourers to economically engage themselves in the agricultural lean season.

In so far as the service sector is concerned, there are many Bodos in the army, police and other paramilitary forces. A reasonable number of educated Boros have also found employment in various public sector offices due to reservation policy. Many Bodo individuals have also occupied senior positions in the government. A section of the Bodos, though relatively small, have also entered into small - scale trade and commerce, some have become contractors and government suppliers.

Social Organization:
The social organization of the traditional Bodo society can be understood only by looking at the various institutions, customs and belief, and the social structure of the society.

Status of Women
The structure of the Bodo society is patriarchal in nature. Though man is the sole authority of the family, the families not having male issues transfer their property into their daughter’s name. Though it is quoted by some Bodo scholars that women occupy a high position in the society it was observed that it was only partially true. The Bodo women are not the members of any traditional institution. It was found that the birth of a daughter is not favoured as much as that of a son. Marital separation does not allow a woman to have a share of her husband’s property. It is needles to say that the Bodo women are hardworking and industrious. They are expert
The Boro women in the Darrang district have mainly depended on settled agriculture. Since most of the villages have been created by clearing off the forests. The Boros had to stop relying on the forests and depend on settled agriculture as an alternative. The women too had to share some of the characteristics from the settled agricultural societies. They had to resort to some other means of sustenance. The women took up weaving and bamboo-craft as their past-time activities which later helped them in generating resources. It was felt that educated women are more in number than men. But the jobs would go to men only which made the women frustrated, and thus the families stopped supporting their daughters for education. The women in the village have gained control over the domestic and the social fronts by their potential to control or participate in the production process. In the socio-cultural sphere also women have been in the forefront as organizers, and at times as official representatives of the community. Women no more go to collect firewood as the forests reserves have been cleared off. Since women are generally not allowed to assist in ploughing. In the same group women do other works such as planting, weeding, spraying fertilizers, hoeing etc. Boro women generally are not seen selling produce in the market. They do not have the access to the information on their production activities. Hence, they are unable to deal with the market.

Religion plays a great role in upholding the status of Boro women in the society. The impact of conversion in general and on the women is different in the process. Christianity has brought radical changes through the inputs of education, health and social reforms. The Boros converted to Hinduism were comfortable to relate themselves with the mainstream society without relinquishing their identity, practices and customs. But, it is difficult to say that whether these reformations laid a positive impact on the women’s status. Though the work pattern of Bodo women is traditional in nature, it is the relative autonomy that these women enjoy in particular. Earnings of unmarried young women are not appropriated by the other family members. They save it for their own expenses or invest it in pigs, goats or yarn for weaving. The women here are seen working better in groups. Since one cannot force an external system on them as they will find it difficult to adapt in such a system. They rather try to build it on the lines of their own tradition and keep relating it to the contemporary trends. The transition from the traditional collectives to Mahila Samities is also a positive factor in this regard. It was seen that rural women worked through these groups to meet their socio-economic demands, women problems, and also thought in terms of welfare activities in village.

Social Groups
There are beliefs associated with the creation of the social groups, five regulations of the Bodos known as the Baad system, beliefs and practices associated with various birds and animals, with agriculture and the penance method.

The main social groups are; Swargiari, Basumatari, Narzari, Musahari, Gayari, Owari, Khakhari, Daimari, Lahari, Hajoari, Kherkatari, Sibingari, Sabairiari, Bibairiari, Bingeni, Mahilari, Ramsiari, Sangphramari, Phadangari, Islari, Ganjlerari, Bargawari, Thalirari etc. (Brahma, 1992:34-40)

These groups seem to signify some kind of kinship. According to the belief these were mainly created on the basis of certain specific duties entrusted to a group or a clan to perform certain functions by the Monsing-Sing-Borai. (supposed to be the first human being on the earth). This resulted in a disciplined society with a healthy atmosphere.

iv) Swargiari: swarga (heaven)+ari(group)

Endle decribes as a heavenly folk. The priesthood dauris and ojas are selected from this class and the society entrusts the duty of worshipping the gods from among the Swargiaris.

v) Basumatari: baisamata (mother earth) + ari(group)

They are known as the landlord class of people. This group is entrusted with the responsibility of solving the land problem, distribution of land, settlement of any disputes relating to land holding.

vi) Narzari: narzoi (dry leaf of jute plant) + ari(group)

It is believed that the person of Narzari group were entrusted with the duty to collect and supply narzoi goran(dry leaves of the jute plant during the sraddha ceremony. After cremation takes place, people chew narzoi leaves to sever relations with the dead person. In the present Bodo(mech) society of
West Bengal the people of this group use the surname Narzinari.

vii) Musahari: Musa (tiger)+ ari (group)
The duty of the clan is basically to ensure the safety of the domestic animals from the danger of the attack by tigers. Some people also believed that people with magical powers could transform themselves into tigers and kill the domestic animals. Some people use the surname Baglari, instead of Musahari.

viii) Gayari: Gay (areca)+ ari (group)
This group of people were traditionally associated with the planting of areca trees.

ix) Owari: Owa (bamboo) + ari (group)
They are believed to have planted bamboo trees for the first time. Large quantities of bamboo were collected by this group for the elaborate festivals like Kherai and Garja.

x) Khakhari: Khankhala (a plant) + ari (group)
A long grass like plant which is used during the Kherai festival. The belief is that people of this group were engaged to collect Khangkhala plant for the Kherai festival.

xi) Daimari: daima (big river) + ari (group)
It is understood that some people who lived by the banks of the river got their livelihood by fishing. People also used to float down logs in the river to the towns or market centre where wood was sold. These people got their name Daimari also because they were suppliers of books.

xii) Lahari: lai (leaves) + ari (group)
These were the people who collected leaves in large quantities for the festival.

xiii) Hajoari: hajo (hill) + ari (group)
It is probable that the name of the clan was derived from the habitat. People who lived in the hills or the foothills might have been called Hajoari.

xiv) Kher Katari; kherkata (cutting of thatch) + ari (group)
The people of this group are very few in number. The people of this clan are generally found in the districts of Kamrup in Assam.

xv) Sibingari: sibing (sesame) + ari (group)
This commodity is essential in Assam. The people who were engaged in collecting or supplying sesame were called Sibingari.

xvi) Bingiari: bingi (string instrument) + ari (group)
Bingiari clan is supposed to have made this traditional instrument to play during the religious festivals. At present people of this community is rarely found.

These clans and many more have been accounted in the works of Bodo scholars. Many are no more found anywhere. The reason being that most of the duties and functions of the community barring a few are defunct. The status of the groups or the clans is of equal status. The Bodos of Assam and West Bengal have been maintaining their connection with the groups through their surnames only. Though it is observed that this clan’s or group’s social, cultural and economic significance has been lost today.

Traditional Institutions:
Though the characteristics and certain structures are still tribalistic in nature. It has been observed that strong community orientation is experienced conspicuously at the Bodo village society. A few institutions in the nature of people’s assembly (raizani afat or raizani metheng) are formed with the community elders as its members. It can take decision regarding any welfare issue of the village. Like rendering service for the construction of roads, bridges, community buildings, dongs, etc., take decision on some crisis confronting the village, small cases are also tried out and the culprits are punished accordingly. An institution of collective public granary (raizani bakhri) is also instituted. The needy and the helpless are offered the minimum help from there. Another community space, a plot of land is meant for the entire village. People collectively produce and whatever is earned goes to (raizani bakhri). During the elaborate festivals people at the end of the festivals do the auditing for the expenses incurred in the event. Then the public is made aware of it. The left over money is spent by organizing a feast. (Rrang Bathou)
Fairs and Festivals:
Fairs and festivals are essential aspects of cultural life of the people of any region. These fairs and festivals are socio-religious in content. Since the Bodos are agrarian, most of their festivals are connected to their occupation. A few festivals are celebrated at a larger scale for thanking the gods and goddesses, and also to say a prayer for their bumper crop. The Bodos celebrate one festival or the other all throughout the year.

Kherai is the greatest national festival of the Bodos. The supreme deity Bathou Borai is worshipped along with its pantheon (attendants) for three days and nights. It involves a great number of animal sacrifices which infuses in people lot of enthusiasm and spirit. Along with Bathou Borai, Bathou Buri is also worshipped. The lesser divinities of the village are also given a place at the altar of worship. This is the Bathou altar usually found in the north-east corner of the courtyard of every traditional household. Dauri (male priest), ojha (incantist) and the doudini (female shaman) are the official priests officiating in the ritual. The doudini is the mediator between the votaries and the deities. The sacrifices are carried on simultaneously with the incantation. The doudini’s performative feats are also carried out with the sacrifices.

Garja is basically an important traditional socio-religious festival. This festival has a fixed time and place. The festival is held in the month of Magha and the place fixed for the celebration is known Garja Sali. Prior to the celebration of Kherai festival the village goes on a cleansing mission. The deities worshipped are categorized as the traditional deities, Hindu deities and the Islamic deities. The festival concludes with the sprinkling of Holy water and is thus ceremonially cleaned.

Hapsa Hatarnai is performed by individual household while entering a new household. The main domestic deities such as Bathou, Mainao and other lesser divinities. The festival comes to an end with the drinking of Jau followed by feast. Ongkam Goloi Janai means the first eating of new rice The event becomes a festival because of the mass participation of the public. The ceremonial festival is marked by singing, dancing feasting and liberal consumption of the Zu. Eating of the new rice also heralds the opening of the harvest of SalI paddy. Boisagau or ‘bosorni agu’ means the beginning of the year is a great social festival of the Bodos. Though hardly distinguishable from the Assamese Bihu in spirit, content and celebration. It is celebrated in the month of Baisakha (mid April) for seven days beginning from the day of Sankranti of Chaitra, which is also the last day of the passing year. The first day is consecrated to the cattle which includes the decoration and ritual bathing of the cows. The interesting part of the ritual is performed by the cowherds who also indulge in various games, songs and dances. The day ends with the ceremonial eating of fowl meat cooked with bitter and sour leaves at dinner time. This is called ‘ Goka-gokoi-janai’. It conveys the sense of severance of all connection or relationship with someone due to misunderstanding or bad feeling. The first day of the New Year is the second Bihu day which is set aside for the worship of Bathou in individual houses or jointly at the house of the village priest. At the dawn of the New Year, members of the families take ritual baths and propitiate ‘Bathou’ and the spirits of the ancestors with sacrifices.

In earlier times separate days were fixed for the feeding of dogs, fowls, ducks and birds. The seventh day is kept aside for visiting and receiving the relatives and friends. On this day people perform ‘ Putuli Baha’ between male and female deities representing legendary raona and raoni. The traditional belief of the people is that if the deities are pleased the Mother earth is also pleased and produces bountiful of crops. Amidst all this young people are involved in merry-making during Baisagu.

Domachi is also another important social festival of the Bodos. The Bodo way of celebrating this festival is very much like that of the Assamese. Though in the Bodo manner of celebration of this festival, the cow and cowherds play important parts as in the case of the Boisagau festival. In early days, the celebration was livelier and elaborate, busy with one thing or the other. They used to tie cords round the fruit-bearing trees, offer food to the birds, fish and animals. A special feature in the process of celebrating this festival has been construction of Bhelaghar on the river bank by the cowherds who spend the night in the Bhelaghar on the river bank by the cowherds amidst much merriment. Towards the end of the night, they usually have their dinner. With the dawn, the cowherds set fire to the Bhelaghar, take bath in the river, warm up themselves standing by the side of the bonfire in wet clothes, and amidst much rejoicing and dancing, they sing and recite hymns and rhyme prayers for the well being of their cattle and for the prosperity of their village. With the end of the Domachi festival, comes the completion of the terms of service contract between the cowherds and their masters. In the celebration of the Baisagu and
Domachi festivals, the cattle and cowherds play important roles. The special place accorded to the cattle and herd boys reflects the importance attached to the cattle in the pastoral life of the Bodo people of the North-east India.

Language and Literature
Grierson in his monumental work, The Linguistic Survey of India describes the Boro (or, Bodo)-kacharis as a member of the Boro sub-section under the Assam-Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan speech family.

According to Shafer, the Bodo language belongs to the western branch of Barish section under the Baric division of the Sino-Tibetan family (quoted in Bordoloi et al., 1987: 15) Another authority on the subject, Bhattacharya (1996: 280) holds that the Bodo language comes under the Sino-Tibetan language family. He further says, .... The Bodo language of Assam has at least four clear cut dialectical areas with sufficient number of dialectical variations..... The Bodo speech areas in Assam intermittently from the western border of Golapara district to the eastern boundary of Dibrugarh district...... Besides Assam where a majority of the Bodo people live, the Bodo speech area includes Tripura, the Garo Hills of Meghalaya a certain other parts of the North-Easter India. (Quoted in Bordoloi et al., 1987: 16)

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Script is a major issue in so far as the recent history of Bodo language and literature is concerned. Earlier Assamese script was used for the Bodo language. But there was a movement launched by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in the early 1960s which was revamped again in the early 1970s to recognize the Roman script in place of the Assamese script. However, eventually the leadership of the movement upon the request of the central government accepted the Devanagari script. Nevertheless, the Assamese script is still widely used by the Bodos. The Bodo language was introduced as medium of instruction in the primary level schools in the Bodo dominated areas of Goalpara district way back in 1963. Subsequently, it was introduced in the higher secondary and degree levels. Now, the Bodo medium is available up to post-graduate level. The Bodo language has been declared as an associate official language of the state of Assam by an ordinance on the 18th December 1984.

The Bodos have a rich repertoire of oral literature like myths, legends, folk songs, ballads, proverbs, etc. Till the first decade of the 20th century, however, Bodo literature was mainly confined to the oral form. The Bodo written literature emerged mainly as an upshot of the Brahma movement in the first two decades of the 20th century. This movement contributed a great deal in bringing about various reforms in the Bodo society besides an identity consciousness among the Bodos. A section of the Bodo middle class that was largely an upshot of the Brahma movement dedicated itself to writing with a view to instill new consciousness amongst the other members of the community. Among the first batch of Bodo litterateurs were Pramod ch. Brahma, Ishan Basumatari, Satish Basumatari, Modaram Brahma, Dwaren Brahma and several others.

In 1952 Bodo Sahitya Sabha was formed. Since then, the sabha has been playing a preeminent role in the socio-cultural upliftment of the Bodo Society. The contribution of the Sabha in making the Bodo language a medium of instruction up to the university level is unparalleled. The Sabha is now engaged in the publication of Bodo literary works in various fields like, novel, poetry, essay, short story, drama etc.

At this stage, it would be relevant to mention that the Bodo language along with several other Indo-mongoloid languages spoken by the various indigenous communities of Assam made profound contribution to the development of the Assamese language. Various scholars have especially emphasized on the phonetically and syntactical similarity between the Bodo and the Assamese languages. In the preface to his “Collection of Kachari folktales and Rhymes, Anderson (1895) commenting on the similarity between them while studying the Bodo folktales has said, .... The Kachari version is literally, a word – for – word translation of the Assamese. I can think of no other two languages in which it would be possible to translate a long statement word-or-word out of one into the other and yet be idiomatic.... (ibid: iii)

Again on their syntactical similarity he has this to say, “(I)its (Bodo) syntax.... is nearly identical with the Assamese ....” (ibid)

This clearly shows the close proximity of both the languages. It is therefore, interesting that despite his, the Bodo leadership has launched mass movements for separate script for Bodo language in place of the Assamese script asserting that the latter is incapable of expressing Bodo phonetics in a proper way. There is much resentment though officially Devanagari has been used and a section uses roman script, they also suffer from many inadequacies like the Assamese script in representing the Bodo language. Therefore, the rejection of the Assamese
script is based more on political than any substantive ground.

Food- habits
It is almost a cliche to say that the food items are used to mark ethnic groups. Food is eaten and forbidden in the name of ethnic identity. Sharing certain special foods communicates a positive identity and solidarity, as in, for example, the use of Jumai or Jau of the Bodos. However, ethnicity is less often marked by particular food items than by the complex rules for how to prepare the items and when to eat them. Though it has been observed that in the Bodo food structure, the cooking rules are specific, and the repertoire of the dishes is limited. It is the structure of dishes, the way they are combined in meals and certain flavors that communicate Boroness.

The ethnic cuisine can be represented in truest sense of term by experiencing the Bodo food preparation and diet. The Bodos basically are lovers of non-veg dishes. They have innovated ways to keep the foodgrades intact. Mainly food is boiled, steamed and garnished with wild spices. They absolutely had no use of oil in earlier times. Many wild plants were used for seasoning and as ingredients in various dishes. The preparation methods were also very simple and less time consuming. Fish and certain plants were dried in sunlight and stored for a long period. The pungent taste and strong smell which is much liked by the Bodos is also the reason for its popularity. Under the influence of Hinduism, except for the cow they consume all kinds of meat they favor. The most favorite and prized possession is the pig. Every Bodo household has a pigsty and we can see them everywhere in a Bodo village. Non-veg preparations like dried fish and meat are made and stored for the difficult days when they are extremely busy in their fields. The vegetables they eat grow on their own in the forests and the backyards of their settlement. The spices they use as condiments are also found in the forests. The dried fish and meat known as Na-goran and Bedor-goran are further improvised by additional ingredients like stems of arum which are later grounded to-gather with the fish and meat stock. This is again stored in a bamboo tube and the mouth of the tube is covered with plantain leaves. The prepared product is known as Nap ham.

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The vegetables collected are wild plants that are used as vegetables and for medicine also. All the wild plants are of different tastes. Some are bitter, some sweet and some are tasteless too. The most common and favourite of the wild plants are 'sibrú' (a thorny plant used as a vegetable), 'doushrem' (a kind of small creeper of sour taste), 'jaglauri' (a scented plant), 'ungkhom gajang' (a creeper of sour taste), 'hangso ramai, (a small plant) 'raidang' (cane tree). The most commonly found wild vegetable is 'anthababaj' (a small plant with scent). The Bodos cherish a special dish of 'andla khari’ that is prepared with rice powder, the chicken and the shoot of bamboo. The alkaline dishes are hot favorites for them. Samlaothi and Kheradpini are small wild plants used or vegetables. The variety of meats consumed by them are of the animals that are found in their environments. Bodos basically love hunting and make every effort to collect meat and wild plants for the guests and other special occasions. Most of the animals like, fowls, deer, and goats are readily available at home. Community hunting and fishing is done at times for food.

Sacred Food
The holy offering that is offered to Bathou is raw in nature. Mainly rice flour, sacrificial animals (pig, hen and goat), entrails of the birds, jatras, pati-dei, jau, betel-leaf and areca-nut is offered to the gods and goddesses. The cut animals are then cooked together in a separate pan and distributed to the community members in equal share. The different meats are cooked together which in normal cooking is not done. A portion of the meat is also roasted. This transference from nature to culture is also imbued with meaning and signifies group membership. The sacrificed animals are also roasted in a separate hearth and then mixed with the rice and lentil mix (Indian khichidi) which is more in quantity and can be easily distributed.

Preparation of Jumai
Jau or Jumai of the Bodos carries a significant place in the social life of the Bodos. Jau is a traditional drink which is used during celebrations, other social occasions and as a regular drink. It is also used as medicine for various ailments like disorder of bowels and earlier in cholera. It is offered to the gods and the goddesses of the Bodo pantheon the community takes pleasure in preparation of Jau, which starts a month ago in the village. It can be preserved for two to three months. It is a custom of the Bodos to entertain their guests with Jau. Still another variety of traditional liquor, photika which is more raw and harmful to health is also made for commercial purpose.

The jumai or jau is prepared in a traditional system. The ingredients necessary for preparation of jau are emaw (medicine), mokhana (wild flowers), leaves of...
Jackfruit tree, leaves of pine-apple tree, roots of agarchitha (small wild plant), bongphang rakheb (wild plant) and the tender leaves of the plantain tree. The above-mentioned things are grinded and a paste is made and later with the paste cakes are formed. These cakes are known as Emaw. They are kept for three to four days to dry. The cooked rice is placed on a winnowing fan and the dust of Emaw is mixed with it. Then it is kept safely in an earthen pitcher (maldang) for three–four days. At the maximum without preservatives it can be kept for a week or so. The Jumai prepared from Bara rice is tasty as honey. It can be preserved for more number of days.

The entire process of preparing Jau can be explained as a metaphor for nature versus culture. Cooking represents human ability to transform nature. Within the domain of the cooked according to Levi-Strauss in his Culinary Triangle – the raw— is contrasted with the other two points – the cooked and the rotted. Cooking signifies transformation through culture, but rotting is transformation by nature. Within the domain of the cooked, the two common processes roasting involve direct contact between fire and food, but boiling is mediated by both a pot and a cooking medium. According to Levi-Strauss, boiling is thus more culturally mediated, and roasting is closer to rawness and to nature.

Through several more steps of logic, boiling is ascribed to endo-cuisine --- that which is for domestic use, closed group; roasting belongs to exo-cuisine --- that which is for more culturally mediated, and roasting is closer to rawness and to nature.

Various cultures use food systems as elaborated domains of meaning to express important messages about relationships to sacred forces.

**Dress and Ornaments**

The set of all items worn on the human body functions as signs. The distribution of types of clothing in relation to different climatic zones and the variation in clothes worn with changes in weather conditions show their practical, protective function. Furthermore, types of clothing vary with types of social occasions, which indicate that the wearing of clothes is also subject to socio-cultural norms. The mode of dress of Bodo people is unique and full of colors, with style and attractiveness. The traditional attire was always handwoven which is also a testimony of Bodo women's talent in weaving.

The male person, both young and old put on Gamosa woven at home, which hangs down to the knees from the loins. In the present times they have started using Gamosas which are mainly stripped and are in different colours. They earlier used to wear vests made of Cotton or Endi which is rare nowadays. Besides, they put on Aronai (a small wrapper) around their neck. The women wear Dakhana of two types for different purposes. The plain woven Dakhana is called Sala Matha and the one with woven designs is called Dakhana Thawsi which is also important for marriage purpose. The designs that are mostly common are Dauthu godo (design of dove neck), Phareo Megon (pigeons eye) Phar agar (design of hill scenery), Moiden agen (designs of elephants foot print) etc. The Christian Bodos use white Dakhana and a veil for marriage purpose in conformity with the western style of dressing. The men wear suits during the occasion. The Bodos of Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgaon districts also use Sari with the Dakhana occasionally. Since the ethnic assertion of the Bodos, the Bodos of Udalguri have resorted to wearing of Dakhana only as their national dress and otherwise too. The designs, patterns and quality of the textile is such that in a very short time they have earned a reputation of producing quality material.

They have started using Jacquard looms to increase production, efficiency and quality of the Bodo textiles. In Kokrajhar wearing of traditional dress is compulsory in schools and colleges too.

**Finery**

Apart from textiles jewellery had a minimum significance in the life of the Bodos. They seldom used to wear gold and silver jewellery. The common ornaments found among the Bodos are Kherai or Kheru, Jakhiring, Talangura, Boula for the ear, Nak-phul and Bulcki for the nose, Chandrahaar, Bisahaar, Thansakiri, and Jibouz-siri for the neck, and Mutha, Asnan chundi for the hands. It is true that in the present times Bodo women have resorted to modern jewellery.

**Marriage system of the Bodos**

Marriage creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the two new people, between each and the kin of the other, and establishes the status of the offspring’s when they are born. The social ceremony which gives sanction to this is the marriage ceremony of the Bodos. The Bodo word for marriage is ‘Haba’. The Bodos have a very high regard and dignified concept of chastity and they live by it. Traditionally the Bodos have as many as six types of marriages.

‘Swngnanwi lainai haba’ or arranged marriage is the most common socially accepted marriage custom of the Bodos. The bride is selected by the parents of the bridegroom and then the marriage is settled after negotiation. Till today this form of marriage is
solemnly celebrated. However the bride price is no longer compulsory.

‘Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba’ is very rare in the present times. Earlier in the families where there were no sons or male members, member of the community or a person who works in the family is asked to be the bridegroom with his consent. He becomes a member of the family. It may be called a marriage by service.

‘Kharsonnnai Haba’ is a mutual agreement between the young boy and the girl. The consent of the parents is not considered important. The society frowns upon such marriages but tolerates it.

‘Bwnanwi Lainai Haba’ was always considered by the Bodos as an evil. This system was prevalent in earlier days. The girl was forcefully taken by the bridegroom and then the marriage is solemnized.

‘Donkharlarningna Haba’ is not socially approved, but is still in practice in some communities. This is the marriage by elopement of both bride and the bridegroom. This is the irregular system of marriage.

‘Donkha Habnai Haba’ is marriage between a widow and a man from the community who stay together as husband and wife. But, their marriage has to be regularized according to the social customs. Although widow re-marriage is allowed in the society, certain restrictions are there. A widow can only marry the younger brother of the husband and similarly a widower can marry the younger sister of the wife.

‘Hathasuni Khurnai’

Traditional form of marriage known as Hathasuni Khurnai was a simple affair which bears testimony where the bride offers meals to the bridegroom in a simple function. The meal consists of a special chicken curry with broken rice without applying any spices or colorings agents. This is called Ondlakhari in Bodo. After consuming a portion of the rice the couple prays to Bathou Borai for peaceful conjugal life. Before offering the meal to the bridegroom the bride offers a portion of the meal to the goddesses and god of the main house (Nomano). Introducing the bride to the god the Deuri chants mantras and the advices are given to the bridegroom by the elders of the community. The meal thus prepared is served to the villagers. The marriage festival which used to run for seven days was restricted to three days later. There was abundance of food and merry-making at various levels. Preparation of rice beer was given much importance and two persons (jau sirgra and jau rangra) were involved in distribution and making of the rice beer. The event was certainly a marked celebration for the individual and the villagers.

A few post-marriage customs are also prevalent in the Bodo communities today.

1. ‘Kholar Gothainai’ The act of returning the bride and the bride price (malsa) is known as kholar gothainai. This is done when the husband expires suddenly after marriage. The bride returns to her parents and the malsa is given back to the deceased husband’s by the parents of the bride.

2. ‘Mamai Mara’ The uncle of the deceased niece has to receive the bride –price of her female child in case it has not been payed during her marriage.

3. ‘Athmangal’ is performed on the eight day of the girl’s marriage. Only a few selected relatives are invited for a feast on the occasion. The couple leaves for the bridegroom’s place after receiving gifts by the bride’s relatives.

Divorce takes place in a Bodo society by tearing a betel-leaf into two pieces. This is known as fathwi bisinal leng. The betel –leaf is kept in the presence of the village elders in the house of the Gaon bura. However, if the reasons for divorce are not very serious from husband’s side, he has to pay for her livelihood. If the woman is been divorced for her unfaithfulness, the entire money spent on her by her husband’s side is to be returned. Once the amount is paid she is free to live with her new husband.

At present the Bodo society has undergone many changes. There are only a few marriages that are performed in the traditional manner. Due to the various factors that led to mass movements in this part of the state. People have mixed reactions to deliver when it come to asserting their own stand on the issue of orientation, involvement and apathy to the situation prevailing around. Most of the people who have been converted to some other religious faith at the core of their hearts do still follow the traditional religious philosophy. The Bodo - Christians wear the same traditional dakhana but put a veil on their heads as a part of European culture. The customs followed in the pre-marriage rituals are strictly traditional. In some places it is the standard Assamese way of celebrating marriage except for a few interludes in the marriage that are strictly Bodo in nature.

During the independence movement in India, the tribals co-operated with the other non-tribal people in their common struggle to drive out the British from India.

Though the evangelistic work done in the garb of humanism, the missionarises, however indirectly instilled in the minds of the tribals a love for western culture and distaste for what is Indian. This had
It was the bureaucracy and foreign missionary who had all these years taken the tribal people under their wing, clung to them as their private reserve and stood in the way of their integration with the mainstream of Indian culture.

The Bodos are a simple folk who even shy today from the hustle and bustle of the civilization and like to live in the cozy lap of nature. In most of the areas their modes of production are still simple, the primitive methods like slash and burn are still used, they somehow still are bereft of the concept of private property, they neither had the sense of acquisition nor accumulation. Gradually they are a changed lot, still much behind.

The economic degradation by the government and the exploitation by the land-owners and the trading community did also create unrest in them. The core of the problem lies in the feeling of humiliation and fear for loss of identity.

**Struggle Movement of the Bodos**

The Bodo movement is a tragic account of the struggle by the Bodos to safeguard and preserve their ethnic identity. It is a tale of those who fear of the extinction of culture and tradition by being reduced to an ethnic minority in their own homeland. They have the constant fear that the immigrants and infiltrators from across the border would some day reduce them to a small minority in the region. They strongly feel that they are being alienated in their own soil. This fear constantly haunts them. Consequently, this has generated ethnic tensions and conflicts in the state of Assam.

In the course of time, the Bodo movements have taken different shapes in realizing their political ambition. The Bodoland Movement is a recent phenomenon which has attracted the attention of the whole country. It is a movement launched by the Bodos with the other plains tribals of Assam, to procure for them an autonomous region in the bank of Brahmaputra. Both the Bodo leaders and the ruling political leaders are unable to come to an agreement to discuss the matter. Getting no appropriate solution to their demand for an autonomous region to be called “Udayachal” the Bodos have now launched a “do or die” movement for “Bodoland”- a There are several causes for such developments. In this paper, an attempt is made to understand the real issues and the analyse the deeply rooted factors responsible for the outbreak of movement which has exacerbated the situation in the State of Assam, especially, in the Bodo populated areas.

**Factors Responsible For Bodo Mass Movements**

There are several factors responsible directly or indirectly for the Bodoland movement.

**Means of Livelihood:** The Bodos are agriculturists. The cultivation of paddy is the mainstay of their economy. Though they are absorbed into the Hindu religion, they remained impoverished peasants. They lost their land in the merciless grip of the moneylenders, landlords, and were exploited by the high caste-landlord (‘mahajan’-the rich) combine. The restriction on ownership and transfer on land in the tribal belt and block have been observed in its breach. Consequently, there was a large-scale alienated of land owned by the Bodos and other plains tribals. For example, in the four Mouzas, namely, Ambagaon, Harisinga, Barsilajhar and Dakuwa, in Udalguri sub-division of Darrang district, the Bodos make up twenty-eight percent of population but own only twelve percent of the land. While in Dhansiri village, ninety percent of the cultivable land is owned by Nepali Brahmans- each family owning on an average three hundred bighas (one hundred acres). The Bodos work on their farms as landless laborers. This explains why Udalguri subdivision has been the focal point where the Bodoland movement has been the most intense.

**The Privileged Society:** Domination by the Assamese in the Bodo populated areas, according to some authors has created a strong feeling among the Bodos that they have been deprived of their right share. The Assamese in the Bodo populated areas are faring well in all walks of life. They have better standard of living, better education and easy access to government jobs. According to these authors the Bodos conceive that they have been treated as “second class citizens” of the state. This has bought a bitter feeling towards the Assamese and frequently they use phrases like “Assamese chauvinists” to indicate their hatred for the Assamese. They think that they have no access to the promotion of the standard of living. This suspicion has brought about an unhealthy atmosphere in the state, especially, in the Bodo populated areas.

**Immigration:** The fertile land on the north bank of Brahmaputra in the course of time, invited a good
number of migrants to the state. The immigrant Muslims from the erstwhile East Pakistan poured into Assam’s soil and constituted twenty five percent in 1945. Even today they have been gaining tremendously. Most of the Muslims have settled in the Brahmaputra valley area and have merged with the mainstream.

According to V.M. Badola(1983), analysis of the effect of this showed that the tribals, the original inhabitants suffered the most in the bargain. Their percentage has gone down to fifty today from seventy. The huge influx of Bengali speaking Bangladesh refugees make the inhabitants fear getting swamped and losing their political and cultural identity, along with the loss of economic opportunities, according to Kula Saikia.

According to Myron Wiener(1978) the number of marwari migrants too is very high. The 1961 census estimates 22,000 migrants from Rajasthan. Today they occupy a prominent place in whole of Assam. They act as moneylenders, bankers, businessmen, traders, etc. It appears that their domination in the small towns in Assam is enhancing day by day. He also speaks of the other migrant communities which include: Tribal laborers from the Chota Nagpur region of Bihar and Orissa, namely, belonging to the Santal, Oraon and Munda tribes, who were employed in the British owed tea gardens; the Nepalis, who have settled in the low-lying hills around the Brahmaputra valley tending cattle, the Biharis, who work as businessmen and as seasonal migrants in the constructional projects and the Punjabis, who work in the transport industry.

State’s attitude: After Independence, the Government of Assam was compelled to constitute thirty-three “Tribal Belts and Blocks” under the provision of “The Assam Land and Regulation (Amendment) Act, 1947, to protect the tribal land from alienation and encroachment by the non-tribals which challenged their very existence. But according to M.C. Paul, the “loopholed Act” did not provide “adequate protection of tribal from the pressure of non-tribals,” even though the “Amendment Act” spelt that “no person shall acquire or possess by transfer, exchange, lease, agreement, or settlement any land in any area or areas constituted into belts and blocks.” There had been riots in the tribal areas due to the encroachment by the non-tribals, but the, “Government of Assam never took the necessary interest to take adequate steps to amend the wrong done to these tribal belts and blocks.”(Aluckal &Pulloppillil, 1997: 96-97)

The adoption of the Constitution in 1950 did improve matters for the Bodos and the “plain tribes” in Assam. Whereas the tribal offices in the hills areas of the north-east were granted a large measure of administrative autonomy and protected from land alienation through “autonomous district councils” the Bodos and other plains tribes were persuaded to accept the so called “tribal belts and blocks” where the Assam Land Revenue Rules and Regulations in theory put restrictions on possession and transfer of land by non-tribals but were not very effective. The Bodos believe that they have been robbed of the elaborate constitutional protection contained in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Moreover, the 1952 report of the Commission of Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes states that the dwelling place of tribals are either the “forests” or the “hills”. The constitutional provisions under the Sixth Schedule for forming autonomous district councils, therefore, extended only to the hill tribes. In the line with this policy Government of India granted the hill tribes of Assam in the Karbi Anglong and the North Cacher districts the right to form an autonomous district council within the State. It is the Government’s bias against granting the district council status to the plains tribes’ which has pushed the Bodos to take up this destructive position. (EPW,1989: 645-646)

Hinduisation: A large section of them have embraced Hinduism in the recent past. The Hinduised Bodos have abandoned their ancestral language, religion and culture. The Bodos, who are not converted to Hinduism, have been trying to retain their distinctive culture, language and tradition. They have come to a realization that their very existence as a tribe is in peril. They are devising ways and means to reunite the tribe and survive. The most compulsive force is an invitation to their original religion Bathou as Hinduism is creating a great threat to the very foundation of the Bodo culture. The feelings of deprivation, negligence and insecurity are goading them to find out the ways and means to liberate from oppression, exploitation and underdevelopment in their economy and society.

The account of the Bodo struggle, thus, indicates that the problem is serious and calls for immediate consideration and all embracing planning with assiduity.

Most of the proposals of the Expert Committee on matters relating to culture and pattern of development
fall in line with Nehru’s five point principles of tribal development. Again, the issues relating to land fall within the framework of Gandhiji’s concept of trusteeship. But the problem is that neither Nehru’s five point principles nor Gandhiji’s trusteeship has fully been implemented.

To blame the Christian Missionaries for any and every movement of the Bodos is frivolous. According to some, the Christian Missionaries are involved in the past movement of the Bodos and that they have provided them with all the possible assistance, though there is not a shred of evidence. On the other hand, some observe that the Christian Missionaries have succeeded in satisfying the tribals in providing whole hearted services especially in medical and educational field, where the government agencies have failed. This is so because of the whole hearted commitment to the plains tribes.(Shourie,1994: 206)

What is urgently needed today is the transformation of the socio-economic system in the state which would promote equality, justice and peace among all sections of the people. It calls for the proper utilization of the natural resources and man-power in the state. The developmental programmes and schemes are required to cater to the different ethnic groups. The peaceful co-existence of various peoples in the state envisages better living standards, particularly, for the indigenous peoples.

**Mass Media:** Mass Media has played a very significant role in conscientizing the people of their real situation and in getting support of the movement. These include literary and analytical essays, press notes booklets and map lets handbills, circulars, folksongs and poems. Their traditional folk-songs depict profound thoughts and imaginations. Folk-songs and poems have been composed specifically on particular aspects of the movements. They are mostly composed in Bodo language. During the present phase of the movement, folk-songs and poems have played a vital role in inspiring the plains tribals. People have sorted out ways to awaken and remember their glorious past in the social, cultural and political spheres.

**Conclusion**

No doubt, the Bodoland movement has been gaining great momentum. Simultaneously, there is also a growth of communal tension, fear, hatred and suspicion in the minds of people. It would appear that the tension will continue to exist unless and until all concerned people come to a common understanding.

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**Articles**

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