

## A STUDY OF SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BODO KACHARIS IN UPPER ASSAM: THE ROLE OF BODO KACHARI WELFARE AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL

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### **Abstract-**

Bodo-Kachari is largest the scheduled tribe community in Assam, since the 1960's these indigenous groups started movements to protect their ethnic identity, culture and social norms. This community lived in this region since ancient times and they are the son of soil in Assam state. The government provides various rights and authority through the constitution provisions, the constitution of India also gives special status to develop their socio-economic status, 2003 bodo inhabitant areas especially the district of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri declared as Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) under the 6th schedule of the constitution, every year government release millions of fund to develop their socio-economic condition. But in Assam Bodo and Kachari people also live outside the BTAD district especially they live in the Brahmaputra valley, the authority of BTAD currently known as Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) not given any importance to develop their socio-economic as well as political authority. Several years of continuous demand by the Bodo-Kachari people led to the form of the Bodo-Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council in 2020. Researchers and academicians did several numbers of research on Bodo people who lived in the BTR region, till now there is no kind of research on people who lived outside BTR specially Brahmaputra valley. This research tries to give a clear picture of the bodo-kachari people's socio-political status in the current scenario.

### **Analysis-**

The study of identity assertion of the different ethnic groups has been expressed through language, literature, culture, caste, religion, race, belief etc. but it has been marked that there is variation in the degree of assertion among them. The literary culture in North-East Indian region especially in Assam reflects the process of formation of ethnic groups, their territory maintenance, autonomy movements, separate statehood are essential aspects of understanding ethnic identity in multicultural societies. The demand for identity politics among different tribal as well as non-tribal ethnic groups is the universal character of North-East India. Bodo-Kachari is one of the major ethnic communities which were settled on this land in the very earlier time. Their customs, language, literature, religious activity, belief, dress code, food habits, and use of herbal medicines are different from other ethnic groups that lived in the state. They are rich

in ethnic culture and literature and they are occupying a distinctive position in Assamese society.

Ethnicity is defined as a shared history of culture which includes language, religion, customs, beliefs, literature, rituals etc. North-East India is full of diverse ethnic groups living together for generations and having distinct historical and structural settings. The diversity of culture, religion, practices; language, literature, traditional attires or habits etc. of those tribes have made this region an interesting study of unity in diversity. Because of ethnocultural among the tribes and non-tribes, they become more concerned about their self-identity. As a result, they have been struggling for their upliftment based on their ethnic groups' distinctiveness because the ethnic groups are scared of losing their diverse culture and literature identities mainly due to assimilating with other communities in the society, socio-political and socio-economic backwardness encroachment of land by outsiders and marginalization of culture are the main basis of the most of the ethnic groups showing identity assertion in this region and the leaders of ethnic groups mobilize their communities based on their ethnocultural identities to protect and preserve their own identity as well as to gain economic and political benefits for the community and for their own.

Assam is a major part of northeast India and has been facing several movements such as the autonomous council, demand for the territorial homeland, separate state, and scheduled tribe status going on like other parts of north-east India. Assam is considered a land of diversity, several caste, and community people lives in it and they have their own identity, culture and literature. Among these ethnic groups are- Bodo-Kacharis, Karbi, Dimasa, Rabha, Tiwa, Deoris, Mishing, Tai-Ahom, Konch-Rajbonshi, Moran, Motok, Tea tribes etc, come out their respective platform for the preservation and protection of their language, literature and cultural identity.

The state of Assam has been a shelter for the people who penetrated at different periods. Assam is unique because it happens to be a melting pot of different ethnic, religious and linguistic communities. The result can be seen in the creation of a great Assamese culture. The people belong to different stocks of population like Dravidian, Mongoloid, Tibet-Aryan, Tibet-Burmese, Austro-Asiatic, and Caucasoid who came into Assam from different angles and settle down here permanently. The unique fusion of all these groups gave rise to a new composite culture which is now known as Assamese. Assam is populated by many distinctive tribes that co-exist peacefully, each unique in its language, literature, culture, traditions, dress, and exotic lifestyle. Despite the wide use of the Assamese language as the official language, each tribe speak their own. The Presence of so many diverse people made the demographic composition of Assam heterogeneous.

Geographically Assam can be divided into three areas, the Brahmaputra Valley, the Barak Valley, and the hilly area formed by Karbi-Anglong and Dima-Hasao hill districts. The Brahmaputra valley again can be divided into three zones namely upper Assam, middle and lower Assam. The mongoloid that migrated to Assam is said to have originally come from Eastern Euro-Asia from where they migrated to different parts of Asia. The mongoloids population presently classified as a scheduled tribe by the constitution of India includes the

Bodo-Kacharis, Deoris, Rabha, Mishng, Karbi, Dimasa, Garos etc. one very significant wave of Mongoloid migration brought the Ahoms to Assam.

The Bodo-Kochari are one of the earliest original tribal groups of Assam. The Bodo-Kochari of Assam belong to the great Bodo group of Indo-Mongoloid family and are believed to have their origin in Tibet and China. Indigenous Bodo people are generally located in the extreme north on the bank of the Brahmaputra River in the state of Assam. The Bodo people are recognized as a plains tribe in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and have special powers in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and also in autonomous division areas.

Bodo-Kachari has a distinctive culture, literature, tradition, custom, religion, language, dress code, food habits etc. but gradually they are facing challenges that come towards their distinctive features and they are very much neglected in Assam. They demand and started some movements for securing their identity but the Assam government do not give importance to it. Therefore they were involved in violence and demanded separate Bodoland to identify their ethnic identity. For this purpose they come out under their respective stage for the preservation and protection of their language, literature and cultural identity.

An ancient language rich in oral traditions, the Bodo language did not have a tradition of writing in the past. Earlier all the present states of North-East India were part of 'BOR ASOM' but only because of the language they all became separate from each other. Assam government introduced Assamese as an official bill in 1960 in the assembly. Again the government introduced a medium of instruction in 1972 so Assamese became that medium of instruction in colleges and universities. These decisions made the ethnic groups dissatisfied and they felt imposing the Assamese language on other tribes, also from 1979 to 1985 'Assam Movement' led by the All Assam Student Union, All Asom Gana Sangram Parishad started a movement for the displacement of the illegal migrants. The Bodo, Kachari, Rabha, Dimasa, Karbi, Mishng, Tiwa, Deori and other ethnic groups also helped them but the leaders of the movement forced women of various ethnics groups to wear 'Mekhela-Chador' instead of their traditional dress code. This made them unhappy; again the provision of the Assam Accord emphasized the protection of Assamese culture and language. But there was no provision for the protection and development of tribal culture, literature and language, so the tribal people became frightened about the future of their culture, language, and tradition and become more concerned about the demand for a separate state. For example 'All Bodo Student Union (ABSU)' under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma started the official Bodoland movement by demanding the divide Assam 50-50.

The socio-cultural awakening came to the Bodo people after the Brahma movement launched by Kalicharan Brahma in the first decade of the 20th century. Bodo literature developed when the native speakers became conscious of the significance of writings culture. The first Bodo magazine 'Biber' was published in 1920. A book Bodo customary laws was published in 1915 by Habarghat Bodo Sanmilani of Dudhnoi. After 'biber' magazines like Zenthoka (1926), Hathorkhahala (1932) and Alongbar(1938) were published. Literature in various genres like essays, stories and drama began to be written. Essays and critical writings on social issues were directed towards the necessity of social reform and awareness.

The modern period in Bodo literature coincides with the formation of Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1952. The search for identity assumed a concrete shape and Bodo language was introduced as the medium of instruction in the primary stage in 1963 and in the secondary stage in 1968, even in higher studies also Bodo language department has been included in recent times. A group of enthusiastic authors have taken to writings children's literature, journals, biographies, and dramas in the Bodo language poets like Aurobindo Uzir, Anju Basumatary and Bijoy Baglary have written the finest poems the language can boost their poetry. In this short span, the literature has come up as an emerging force in the whole of North-East India. Many younger poets draw their inspiration from the Bodo people's struggle for the assertion of literature and cultural identity.

The study of ethnic identities started the aspects of tribal politics and demanding for a social and political sense of power. Local organizations like the Kachari sanmilan, the Konch Rajbonshi sanmilan formed the 'Tribal League' in 1933. Bhimbor Deori was the founder and general secretary of the Assam plain tribal league. As an organized common stage, the tribal league raised issues on politics of rights, representation as well as emancipation with consciousness by an educated middle class in the early 20th century led by Kalicharan Brahma, Bodo leaders submitted a memorandum to Simon commission, demanding a separate political set up for the indigenous and the tribals of Assam. They also stated that the upper Hindus were occupying the political power by keeping them in a backward position. The 10th convention of the Assam Bodo Chatra Sanmilanin 1929, under the leadership of Rupnath Brahma brought the message that there is a necessity of education for the development of the tribal areas.

The memorandum submitted by Assam Kachari Jubok Sanmilan acknowledges that the Kacharis were never a part of a caste-divided Hindu society. The Tribal League indeed leads the argument of self-representation, self-determination and local control. The other representation was the section of educated, tribal elite. There were various reasons for the support of the tribal league towards the Bordoloi ministry including the demand for an electorate for the tribal people. Their demands also included reserved seats for the tribal in the legislative assembly as well as legislative councils. All tribes irrespective of creed, culture, and religion should be enlisted as a tribal which was the last demand of the tribal league and later become a source of several debates in the tribal politics of Assam.

Moreover, the Tribal League focused on the characteristics of separateness and differences between the tribal people and the caste Hindu Assamese. In this case, Hinduism was not a concern but conversion to Christianity was seen as a threat to mainstream Assamese. The tribal league played a significant role in the political scenario of Assam during the time and was strongly opposed and protested against the grouping of Assam with West Bengal while after the independence they merged with the Congress party. The formation of the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) in 1967 carried the demand for a separate state name 'Udayachal' for the plain tribal of Assam after the formation of Nagaland.

The demand for a separate administrative unit 'Udayachal' which was to be carved out of Assam and granted Union Territory status for Assam's plain tribes was made in 1968. Sentiments based on their political rights and identity contributed to the formation of the PTCA.

An agreement was signed between the Janata party and the PTCA before the general elections of Assam in 1978 for sharing of seats. This was the first non-congress government in Assam after independence and included twelve cabinet ministers along with four ministers of state which include three cabinet Ministers from tribal representatives and PTCA.

However, after the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, the All Bodo Students' Union under the leadership of the late Upen Brahma resumed the old demand for a separate Bodo state under the slogan "Divide Assam fifty-fifty". The Assam accord left Bodo leaders feeling marginalized and in 1988, all ABSU made a formal demand for a separate state, Bodoland. After the Assam accord, it was clear that the demands for autonomy by the Bodo people became violently contested between the definitions of nations, nationalities and homeland. However, the non-recognition of the tribal is not only a reason but it also assisted to extend the gap between the dominant Assamese and the marginalized tribal population in the state. The Bodo movement followed the same framework of the campaign as the Assam movement by mobilizing a large number of people behind a political demand. The movement of various communities to assert and protect their ethnic identities is the most significant aspect of the contemporary socio-political reality of North-East India.

The Bodo movement started in the 1980s for the creation of a separate Bodo state named 'Bodoland'. Together with it, there has been the rise of several Bodo militant outfits like the 'National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)', 'Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF)', and 'Bodo Army' etc. In February 1993, a memorandum of settlement (MoS) was reached constituting a 40-member Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC). Tripartite talks were arranged in Delhi between the leaders of the movement, the Assam government and the Union government. The content of the proposal was: "The government of India is deeply concerned about the problems of Bodos and other tribals of Assam and is committed to their economic development and other rights. The government of India proposes a committee set up to determine the area of Bodoland and make recommendations as to the autonomy, legislative administration and financial powers that may be given to them".

The talk between the government of India, the government of Assam and BLT continued and ultimately on 10th February 2003, the famous Bodo Accord was signed in New Delhi between the Centre, State and BLT. The new Bodo Accord was signed by Hagrama Mohilary (Chairman, BLT) on behalf of BLT. The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), a self-governing body is a new name added to the provision of the Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India, in BTAD, Assam. Out of 40 constituencies 30 seats are reserved for the ST, five seats are reserved for open candidates and five seats are reserved for the general category. The Governor has the power to nominate six members from among the unrepresented communities of who two are to be women.

The Bodo are the largest ethno linguistic group in the Assam state of India. They are a part of the greater Bodo-Kachari family and are spread across North-East India. The Bodo-Kachari welfare council was established in 2020 by comprising all the Bodo inhabitant villages of 20 districts of Assam, within the framework of the constitution of India. The population of the as above 10 lakhs. The Bodo people are recognized as a plain tribe through the 5th and 6th

schedules of the Indian constitution. The Bodo-Kachari inhabitant outside the 6th schedule areas of Assam is recognized as the plain tribe of the 5th schedule. Bodo-Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council comprised of Bodo-Kachari community inhabitant villages of educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Bodo-Kachari community residing outside six scheduled areas.

### **Review of the Literature:**

Udayan Mishra (2001) in his book 'The Transformation of Assamese Identity; A Historical Survey' stated that Assam is an ethnically diversified society and the territorial boundaries between and among the ethnic groups which are not static but subject to continuous change. The history of Assamese identity is rather an interesting one for the very reason that it is once a story of the formation and transformation of the community. It has been pointed out that what has been happening in Assam over the past few decades in the matter of widening of the parameters of the Assamese nationality as a result of swift demographic metaphorphosis, may be said to be unparalleled not only in relation to the other states or regions of India but also in relation to other regions of the world where cross-border migration has been a common problem.

Sanjib Boruah (1999) in his book 'India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality' argues that in Assam, the distinction between groups of people who are regarded as indigenous and immigrant is noteworthy. On the nationality issue in Assam, he stated that although the term immigrant community itself is problematic, the distinction is part of the ethno-political landscape of the region. Apart from immigrant community, there is a distinction between tribal and non-tribal community in Assam. Non-tribal and non-immigrant community in Assam mainly consists of caste - Hindu Assamese, and a small number of Assamese Muslims who are distinct from the immigrant Bengali Muslims.

Gustavo Esteva (2001) in 'The Meaning and Scope of the struggle for Autonomy' argued that autonomy is the focal point for a new semantic constellation for social change: a tradition of resistance has been transformed into a project for liberation. Furthermore, this article argued that autonomy could potentially end the historical conflict that has divided Mexicans since the nation's birth and created an alternative to globalization

James Manor (1996) In his book entitled, Ethnicity and Politics of India addressed the problems attached to the use of the term ethnicity in the Indian context, and contested the view that ethnic conflict in India poses a threat to democracy there or to the cohesion of the Indian State. He showed how four different types of identities in India that may be described as ethnic either cut across one another or never come to the conflict; and how the tendency of Indians to give priority to one or another level of identity as circumstances and preoccupations change prevents the emergence of lasting fault lines in society and politics. Finally, he identified three ways in which ethnicity has been managed in India, only one of which, the accommodations approach is successful.

Girin Phukon (1993) in his book Assam's Attitude to Federalism, is of the opinion that most of the tribes of the plains are culturally less distinct from the Assamese Caste Hindus than

the hill tribe because of the relatively greater interaction between them through the centuries. The tribal communities have contributed for the growth and development of the Assamese culture yet a section of the tribal elite felt that they are different from the Assamese Caste Hindus; so they have to preserve their distinct tribal identity.

Niru Hazarikas (2005) in her thought-provoking book titled 'Ethnic Autonomy Question in North East India: Search for an Answer' deals with cultural pluralism of North-East India. To her, the concepts of Autonomy, Integration and Development have different dimensions. She argues that autonomy cannot be divorced from responsibility and integration that invites an environment in which mutual respect for each other exists. Development, at the same time, is close to the process than to the end, as it calls for change-oriented, action-oriented and result-oriented administration. Problems of ethnic autonomy are very rightly linked with youths and controversial issues are dealt with referring to an in-depth study on ethnic based youth organizations. Though the book has raised many questions on the problem of ethnic autonomy of north-east India, it is difficult to find out answers and alternatives for which the scope of study has been unlimited.

P.S. Dutta's (1993) book 'Autonomy Movements in Assam' is essentially a collection of documents of autonomy movements of both hills and plains tribes and some of the non-tribal people. With the emergence of a middle class because of expansion of modern education and entry to jobs under colonial administration, seeds of identity consciousness were sown. Dutta argued that the major contribution of this modern middle class was that they could provide a definite direction to their identity through articulation in tune with the changed relational-legal framework.

Anuradha Dutta analysis the issues in her 'Bodo Movement in Assam: An Overview' the dynamics of Bodo-Kachari community socio-cultural problem, backwardness and also political mobilization to overcome these problems, Bodo people started movements and demanding for a separate state and divide Assam 50-50. Through a separate Bodo state they might be able to identify or continue their distinct identity and there is need of socio-political development for uplift their Bodo-Kachari society.

Kusumbar Bhuyan's (2008) 'Sixth Schedule in North-East India' is basically a case study of Karbi Anglong District. In this work it is argued that the Autonomous district Councils have come into existence as a result of certain historical and social compulsions. The tribes for whom the councils were created have certain historical backgrounds which are completely different from those of plains people of India. The basic idea of introducing the Autonomous Councils was to help the hills tribes to maintain their tribal way of life and at the same time to develop socially and economically by managing their own affairs by themselves. The study also reveals some of the shortcomings and problems of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, on the basis of which certain generalisation are made. However, these are limited structural foundations only.

Sujit Choudhuri (2007) in his book *The Bodos Emergence and Assertion of an Ethnic Minority* has attempted to trace different phases of history through which the Bodos emerged as the most dominant ethnic minority in Assam. Significantly the term Bodo is used in a new sense,

meaning Bodo- Kacharis of the Brahmaputra Valley and throws some light on the complex process of formation of the Assamese nationality vis-a-vis the evolution of Bodo society.

### **Objectives**

- To study socio-political, cultural, economic status and development of Bodo-Kacharis in multicultural societies.
- To emphasize Bodo-Kacharis various issues and challenges compare with six schedule area.
- To examine the relation between the bodo-kachari ethnic identity and Assamese civil society.
- To find out their ethnic identity and cultural status in the light of Bodo-Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council.

### **Methodology:**

The proposed research will based on descriptive and empirical methods to understand and explain the socio-political status of Bodo-Kachari in Upper Assam specially in Assamese society. Both qualitative and quantitative tools will be used for the explore the current status of Bodo-Kachari autonomous in Assam. For the primary data the extensive field survey will be conducted in the study areas. Study will also based on group interview, personal interview with the local leaders, bodo-kacharai indigenous people, autonomous council members, government officials etc. The secondary data will be also collected from the books, journals article, published government data, census, government report, autonomous council yearly report, internet sources, newspaper etc.

### **Research Gaps:**

Bodo-Kachari is largest the scheduled tribe community in Assam, since 1960's this indigenous groups start movement to protect their ethnic identity, culture and social norms. This community lived in this region from the ancient time and they are son of soil in Assam state. Government provides various rights and authority through the constitution provisions, constitution of India also give special status to develop their socio-economic status, in 2003 bodo inhabitant areas specially district of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri declared as Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) under the 6<sup>th</sup> scheduled of the constitution, every year government release millions of fund to develop their socio-economic condition. But in Assam Bodo and Kachari people also live outside the BTAD district specially they live in Brahmaputra valley, the authority of BTAD currently known as Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) not given any importance to develop their socio-economic as well as political authority. Several years of continuously demand by Bodo-Kachari people led to the form of Bodo-Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council in 2020. Researcher and academicians done several numbers of research on bodo people those lived in the BTR region, till now there is no any kind of research to people those who lived outside BTR specially Brahmaputra valley. Through this research try to give clear picture of bodo-kachari people's socio-political status in current scenario.

### **Conclusion:-**

In Assam there are various ethnic groups with their own culture, tradition, religion; through



these researches is a humble attempt to study one such prominent tribe Bodo-Kachari from sociological perspective. Many existing scholar focus on the ethnic identity and social structure and crisis or issues of Bodo-Kachari and give emphasis on how to overcome these problems and prevailing systems. This study is an attempt to connect the gap between the ethnic crisis and various movements of Bodo-Kachari. Outside BTR or 6<sup>th</sup> schedule area because of assimilation with other communities in Assamese society. The purpose of the research would be to find out the tribal issues and socio-political status and development of Bodo-Kachari in Upper Assam should be counted. This research analysis will be helpful for future study in understanding the various conflict among the ethnic or tribal groups of Assam, their culture and tradition, Bodo-Kachari a large tribal group of Assamese society with distinct features and Assamese people created challenges towards their identity and assimilating with other tribal groups or due to residing in other tribal autonomous areas they are facing problems. Numbers of movements is going on for the development of socio-political status as well as condition of outside 6<sup>th</sup> schedule areas for Bodo-Kachari and they try to attract the government that there is need of some step should be taken by government for resolving their prevailing issues.

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