

Understanding Bodo Movement:

With Special Reference to the
Role of ABSU over 50 years struggle
(1967 – 2018)



JAPUNGSAR BASUMATARY

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CHAPTER-1

A Brief Introduction of Bodos, their History and Culture/Tradition

In this chapter, I will be focusing on a brief introduction of the Bodos mainly answer to the question; who are the Bodos? And try to explore some basic ideas and knowledge about their origin and history. This chapter also focuses on a brief understanding of their culture and tradition. Before going to know about the Bodoland movement, readers should have basic ideas about the Bodos, their history and culture to understand and link with the emergence of the Bodoland movement.

WHO ARE THE BODOS?

The Bodos are an ethno-linguistic group living in the northeastern region of India. The Bodos are one of the Indo-Mongoloid communities belonging to the Tibeto-Burman

branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. Ethnically, the Bodos are the Sino-Tibetan origin and linguistically they are the Tibeto-Burman group. Some historians and scholars argues that the inhabitants of Bod country are known as the Bodo, *Ficha or Bodocha or Bodosha* (Bodo means land and Fisha or cha means children, hence the children of the Bod country). (Subhash Talukdar, 2016) In course of time they have come to be known as simply Bodd-Bodo or Boro. And the group of the peoples are called the Bodos or Boros but now generally known as Bodo as a community. The Bodos or Boros of the Brahmaputra valley, particularly some districts like Kamrup, Sanitpur, Mongoldoi, Barpeta, Baksa, Chirang, Kakrajhar and Odalguri are known as Bodo-Kacharis or Boro Kacharis and now they are popularly known as Bodos.^{1,2}

In the ancient time, the Bodos were known as *Kiratas, Asuras, Danavas* and *Mechasas*. (Kalidash Brahma, 2011) Ancient historians and scholars used the term of 'Bodo' to denote the earliest Indo-Mongoloid migrants to the northeastern region who were subsequently spread out all over the region of Assam, West Bengal and Tripura. According to the great historian, Sir Edward Gait, the Kacharis were the oldest inhabitant of the great valley of river Brahmaputra.

Historically, the great Bodos were the earliest settlers in the Northeastern region of India and now they are the largest

¹ Talukdar, S. (2016) "**Bodoland Movement: - A Study**". *International Journal of Scientific Research and Education*. 4, 3, 4996-5001.

² Basumatary, D. (2017) "**The Bodos and Their Ethnic Movement with Special Reference to Assam**". *International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 3, 10, 2454-8499. file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/583-1601-1-PB.pdf

indigenous tribes in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam and some part of Northeast India. The Bodos are also considered as the section of the greater Mongolian racial stock. Sir Edward Gait has given some basic features to identify the Mongolian peoples. He says, “The Mongolian original features are a short head, a broad nose, a flat and comparatively hairless face, a short but muscular figure and yellow skin.” (Mwshahary, 2004)

In the ancient time, the Bodos were given disparaging names particularly to the aboriginal indigenous people of the country by the newly advents Aryan who found their culture quite un-resembling to their own. They always tried to enfeeble the indigenous people and their culture and used to call them with disparaging names. The ancient dynasties of Pragjyotisha, Hirimbapura, Agnigarh, and Kundila all the kings ruled during those periods were belonged to the Bodo race.³

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE BODOS

The origin and history of the great Bodos in the contemporary time have become very controversial and convoluted. Many historians and scholars have their different views and opinions regarding the origin and history of the Bodos.

As the Bodo are racially belonged to the Indo-Mongoloid and as a branch of Sino-Tibetan family, it can be considered that

³ Mwshahary, S. (2004). “**Bodoland movement: a study in ethnicity and political development among the bodos of Assam from 1967 to 1993**” Gauhati University, Assam. Retrieved from <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/66676>

they were migrated from the Central Asia about 5000 B.C.⁴⁵ According to Reverent Sidney Endle, there are mainly two groups migrated into the region of Assam and Northeast. One group migrated to the Northeast Bengal and Western region of Assam through the valley of Teesta, Dharla, Sonkosh and they founded very powerful kingdom of Kamrup in Assam.

Another group was migrated through the valley of the Sabansiri, Dibong and Dihong into the eastern region of India and founded Chutiya Kingdom. Historians, Sir Edward Gait and P.C Choudury have accepted that the Bodos were wandered along the region of India through entering and passing various mountains and river courses from the Northern region.

Some historians and scholars also believe that the origin of Bodo also can be rooted from the name of Valley and Rivers. On the basis of the Barak Valley, the term 'Boro' is defined from the name of the valley 'Barak'. However, the term 'Barak' has been derived from the word 'Bara' or 'Boro'. In Kok Borok, another group of the great Bodos the word 'Barak' means man. Perhaps because of the manly attitude of the river it was named as or became popular as Barak (Man) in the region. (Kalidash Brahma, 2011)

Besides, the Dimapur is another region which is in the present state of Nagaland. Once upon a time, it was the Capital of the Kacharis kingdoms. The Kacharis kings ruled there till 1536 and then sifted their capital to Maibong or Maibang. The term can be explained in Bodo as: Di means river; Ma means

⁴ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/195829/9/09_chapter%202.pdf

⁵ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/66676/11/11_chapter%207.pdf

big and Pur means place. The complete meaning of Dimapur is the place of a big river. Truly, this place exists near the river Brahmaputra, the longest river of Assam. The Dimasas, a section of the great Bodos are known as the son of this big river. The term 'Dimasa' is also explained that Di=water; ma=big and sa=son. (Kalidash Brahma, 2011)

Apart from that, Haflong is also the region to be considered as a place where the term 'Bodo' was originated. At present, it is a town and headquarter of North Cachar district of Assam. Before, it was a part of Kachari Kingdom in Maibang. The term 'Haflong' was derived from the Bodo word 'Hafulung' which means fertile land.⁶ Hence, the term Bodo was originated and the origin of the great Bodos has been evolved from the above discussed some valley and river.

The history of Bodos is very comprehensive that cannot be discussed in abstract. They had their very distinct and rice culture, tradition, language and they had their Kingdom and kings. But in the modern time, many historians and scholars believe that the Bodos have no their own history. The main reason behind the reluctant to describe about their history is that they were not able to write in the ancient time. They could not write in the ancient time so that the history of the Bodos has been left behind.

Hence, the Bodo peoples do not have their own historical data and evidences in the written form. But, many classical literatures of India and archaeologists, sociologists and philosopher provide

⁶ Brahma, K. (2011). "Understanding the history of the Bodos". Retrieved from <http://kalidashbrahma.blogspot.com/2011/12/understanding-history-of-bodos.html>

us some information about the civilization of the Bodo people particularly these are supported by the political system, economic system, religion, etc. of the people living in the vast region. The interdisciplinary approaches also provide us genuine premises regarding the migration, settlement and extension of the civilization and culture of the Bodo peoples since the prehistoric time.

Regarding the discovery of history of the Bodo peoples living in Indian subcontinent, no one has taken appropriate initiatives since prehistoric time. The information collected from the classical Indian literature and the archaeological evidences are not also interpreted accurately and also failed to expose the actual history of the autochthonous people and their contribution to Indian culture, history and civilization. Though it is impossible to reconstruct the Bodo culture and society in its original forms and characters with the areas where they established their civilization in the past with glories and pride; but at least we can make an honest endeavour to reconstruct their history as it was and help understanding their relation with other groups.

Many writers on ethnography, history, language, anthropology, religion, sociology etc. try to identify that the Bodo peoples are very distinct in their culture and tradition, language and they are racially very different. Moreover, some scholars on geography and topography found that on many number of rivers and places in Bodo language some of those rivers and places have already been discussed above.

The Bodos had their kingdom in Assam in very ancient time. Ancient time, Assam was known as Kamrupa or Pragjyotispur or

Pragjyotisha. The earliest king of kamrupa or Pragjyotispur or Pragjyotisha pragjyotisha, was a non Aryan named Mahiranga danava. His name was Mairong for a hill on the seven mile of the Gauhati, Shillong road that is still known as 'Mairong parbat'. The name Mairong is meant as rice in Bodo language that was derived from the Sanskrit word Mahiranga. It is clearly a Bodo name and the people of this race who then inhabited the country were called Kiratas and Mlechhas as they were Mongolian immigrants. Mahiranga is said to have been succeeded in direct decent by Hatakasur, Sambarasur and Ratnasur. Mahiranga is called a danava but his descendents were called asuras. The danava and asura were applied indiscriminately to all non-Aryans.⁷

After the Kings, Ghatakasur came who was the ruler of the Kiratas possibly belonging to the same dynasty to which Hatakasur, Sambarasur and Ratnasur belong. He was over thrown by Narak who founded new dynasty. Narak was also known as Narakasur in some of the epics and he claimed himself to be the descendent of Bhaum dynasty (Born of earth). Again the word 'Bhaum' is a Bodo word that means the earth. Therefore, it is likely that Naraka was also a Bodo King. However, the oldest legendary figures in history of Assam, Mahiranga Danava, Ghatakasur and Naraka were all Kiratas and they were the Bodo kings.⁸

Thus, the Bodo had exercised their sovereignty in Assam by different names in different places in many time periods.

⁷ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/195829/9/09_chapter_2.pdf

⁸ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/195829/9/09_chapter_2.pdf

In the western section, the Bodo occupied the thrones of Koch-Bihar, Bijni, Darrang and Beltola. In the eastern branch Chutiya also established a powerful kingdom with its capital near Saudiya and then a section of eastern Bodos maintained their kingdom with capitals at Dimapur, Maibong and Khaspur in the face of continuous invasions of the Ahoms and neighboring powers till the advent of British rule in Assam. This section of Bodos is known as Dimasas or Dimasa kachari or hill Kacharis.

The last migration of Bodo King from Maibong (North Cachar Hills) to the Khaspur (North-Cachar) made Cachar Valley the ultimate region of the Bodo royal power. Eventually, the kingdom was disintegrated beyond repair under the regime of Govinda Chandra Narayan into two parts: one under Govinda Chandra and the other comprising Northern and Central portion of the kingdom was taken over by Tularam Senapati with the help of British intervention. Govinda Chandra was the last king of Bodo killed on 24 April, 1830. After the death of King Gavinda Chandra, the Governor General of India annexed the plains of the Bodo kingdom of Cachar on 14 August 1832 to the British dominion. Tularam Senapati who had been allowed to retain his dominion was pensioned off in 1854 and his dominion annexed to the paramount power. S. K. Bhuyan states that the kingdom of Cachar was only one of the numerous states set up by the political genius of the Kachari peoples. The Kachari peoples living outside the edges of Cachar was remained loyal to the Kachari monarch and the bonds of union among the Kacharis, whether within Cachar or outside, were very strong. There is no record of any attempt to combine the scattered Kacharis into

one political unit. The Kacharis living in Assam could never dream of transferring their allegiance from the Ahom monarch to the Kachari King at Dimapur or Khaspur, though the latter belonged to their own tribe.^{9,10}

Thus, the Kings of the Bodos have been fighting against their enemy since very beginning for their Kingdoms. After the annexation of their Kingdoms to the British India, the Bodos also participated in the Indian freedom struggle under leadership of Indian National Congress; many Bodos came out in the street crying for freedom. Madan Kachari, Rauta Kachari, Lerela Kachari and many Bodos sacrificed their lives on the bullets of British Raj in the 1942 “Quit India” Movement. Many Bodos were imprisoned and spent prison term that the Government has offered Tamrapatra recognizing as Freedom Fighter. (S. Mwshahary, 2004)

CULTURE AND TRADITION OF THE BODOS

The Bodos have their very rich culture and tradition. Their culture is very much different comparing with other culture in the northeast India. They have their own dress, food and social customs since the immemorial time.

⁹ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/195829/9/09_chapter_2.pdf

¹⁰ Mwshahary, S. (2004). “**Bodoland movement: a study in ethnicity and political development among the bodos of Assam from 1967 to 1993**” Gauhati University, Assam. Retrieved from <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/66676>

Dress:

Dress is the most importance components in the modern time period that used mainly by any particular ethnic group or community to identify themselves to which group they originally belong.

In India, huge numbers of ethnic groups are living in every part of the country. They have their own culture and tradition to identify themselves which ethnic/communities they belong to.

As early mentioned about the Bodos are the Mongoloid tribes they have also their own dresses to identify themselves as an ethnic group or community. It was the Bodos who first created culture and civilization in the Brahmaputra valley maintaining their distinctive ethnic identity in the region. (Jogendra K. Das, 1994) However, in the northeastern region of India, those tribes belonging to the Mongolian races in the region deserve the same character of dresses."¹¹

In the Bodo society, the main traditional dresses are *Dokhona*, *Jwmggra*, *Gamsa* and *Aronai*. The dresses of Bodo women are a distinguishable feature of Bodo culture. As the Bodo peoples are mostly the settlers in the village areas so that they use to wear their traditional or ethnic dresses.

Dokhona is a cloth with the length 2.5 m & width 1.5 m that is used by the Bodo women to cover all body from the chest to the legs.

Jwmggra is another cloth used by the Bodo women along with *Dokhona* by folding on the chest and put on both side of

¹¹ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/195829/9/09_chapter%202.pdf

the shoulder and keep in the back side surrounding the neck. It covers upper portion of body with length 2 m & width 0.7 m.

Gamsa and *Aronai* is another traditional dresses used by the Bodo man. *Gamsa* is used to cover body with 1.5 m length & 1.2 m width that is tied on the waist. It covers only the body from waist to the bellow of knee. It is used by men with different colours like green, slight red and mixture of different colours like-white & green, white & blue and more colours. But green is the main colour and ethnic cloth of the Bodos.

Aronai is a small scarf, the most beautiful cloth of the Bodo peoples that indicates the tradition of the Bodo community. It is used to felicitate people with honour and also used in all Bodo dances. In ancient time, the Bodo warriors used to put “*Aronai*” as a belt in the battle field weaved by their wives. *Aronai* is used by both male and female depending on the occasion sometimes it is used to take on the neck sometimes tied on the head and waist as well during the dance.¹²

The Bodo women used to weave *Dokhona* and *Ghamsa* from the treads of *Eri* and *Muga* before a decade. The Bodo women weave different kinds of *Dokhona* with different ‘*Agor*’ (design or flower) and colors for *Dokhona*. “*Matha*” or “*Salamatha*” which is the term used for plain *Dokhona* i.e. *Dokhona* without *Agor* is popular among the Bodo people and used to wear in worshipping God. Among the colors, yellow is the main traditional colour and “*Matha*” *Dokhona* with yellow colour is used as a wedding wear. Besides yellow they use to weave *Dokhona* in a variety of colours

¹² Bibar Online Information retrieved from <http://bagurumba.blogspot.com/2016/08/bodo-traditional-dress.html>

like-green, red, violet, blue etc. But now, due to the modernity and advancement of science and technology, the traditional dresses of the Bodo are weaved with the help of weaver machine and sale in the market and nobody use to weave cloths.

Food:

The food habit of the Bodo peoples is very distinctive in nature comparing with other ethnic groups in the Northeast India. In the Bodo society, Rice is the main food that is eaten with various types of curry. There are many types of rice like *Maimaa*, *Zwsa*, *Khara baowaa*, *Aijong*, *Maibra* etc. the most popular rice is *Zwsa* i.e. scented rice.

Rice is generally eaten thrice in a day following morning, afternoon and night. In the morning they prepare fried rice of remaining rice in the last night. Afternoon and night generally follows lunch and dinner.

In the Bodo society, there is also some special food prepared depending on the occasion such as rice cake which is called '*Phitha*' that are generally prepared only on special occasions like the *Bwisagu* or Bihu (a spring festival), *Magw* (harvesting festival) and some other festivals.

Meat is another food prepared in the Bodo society. Meat is very much favoured food in the Bodo society. There are various kinds of meat such as Pork, Chicken, Mutton, Buff and Beef. The most popular meat in the Bodo society is Pork that is generally accepted common and stable food. In the Bodo society, all those food are prepared to eat with rice and prepared also during the time of festivals.

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