

## IDENTITY AND BELONGING: A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE ON MIXED MARRIAGES BETWEEN ADIVASIS AND BODOS IN POST-CONFLICT ASSAM

**Dr. Sarika Dixit**

Registrar & Dean, MGU, Meghalaya

**Fuleswari Flora Kujur**

Research Scholar, Social Work, MGU, Meghalaya

### Abstract

*This study investigates the lived experiences of mixed marriage couples between Adivasis and Bodos in Sonitpur, Assam, within a post-conflict socio-political context. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, the research explores how these inter-ethnic unions navigate issues of identity, cultural integration, and social acceptance. Findings reveal that while such marriages often face initial resistance, stigma, and ritual negotiation, they also foster cultural fusion, hybrid identities, and grassroots solidarity. Children in these families frequently experience identity confusion but also develop adaptive strategies through exposure to dual traditions. Economically, mixed families contribute significantly through farming, weaving, and informal labour, with women playing a pivotal role in household survival. The study concludes that inter-community marriages act as informal peace building mechanisms and agents of social transformation. It recommends culturally inclusive policies, family counseling, and community sensitization programs to support mixed families and strengthen inter-ethnic harmony in Assam.*

**Keywords:** Mixed Marriage, Identity Negotiation, Cultural Integration, Post-Conflict Assam, Social Work Intervention

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Assam, a mosaic of diverse ethnic communities, has witnessed historical and socio-political shifts that significantly influence its social fabric. Among the notable ethnic groups inhabiting the region are the **Bodos**, recognized as one of the largest plains tribes of Assam, and the **Adivasis**, who were brought to Assam during the colonial period to work in the tea plantations. Over time, the proximity between these groups led to cultural exchanges, interdependence, and in some cases, **inter-marriage**, particularly in the post-conflict era.

Ethnic clashes in the 1990s, especially during the **Kokrajhar conflicts of 1996 and 1998**, forced large-scale displacement of populations. In these periods of vulnerability, **relationships between Bodos and Adivasis evolved**, with many individuals seeking protection, shelter, and companionship across ethnic lines. This gave rise to **mixed marriages**, not only as unions based on love or social compatibility but also as a strategy for survival, rehabilitation, and community rebuilding. These marriages are socially significant as they represent **micro-level negotiations of identity, culture, and coexistence**. Mixed marriages between Bodos and Adivasis bring to light the complex dynamics of **cultural fusion, identity construction, inter-generational negotiation, and socio-economic resilience**. Despite the challenges—such as identity confusion for children, community resistance, and religious differences—many such couples report harmonious coexistence,

making these marriages a unique lens to study **post-conflict multicultural integration**.

This study, therefore, explores how **mixed marriages function as agents of social transformation**, negotiating spaces of tradition and modernity, individual choice and communal expectation, and marginality and inclusion in contemporary Assam.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

While mixed marriages are not new, **their increasing frequency and sociological implications** in post-conflict regions like Sonitpur district of Assam have not been adequately researched. These unions confront deeply rooted cultural norms and tribal identities, often leading to social tension, familial resistance, and a lack of institutional support.

Mixed marriage couples face numerous **challenges** such as:

- Disapproval from both communities
- Unclear cultural or religious identity for their children
- Socio-economic hardships due to displacement
- Social stigma and lack of formal recognition in some cases
- Conflicts over rituals, practices, and inheritance

At the same time, such marriages present **opportunities**:

- Cultural enrichment through fusion of rituals, cuisine, and traditions
- Strengthening inter-community understanding
- Economic cooperation and social resilience

Despite these complexities, **the lived realities of Bodo-Adivasi mixed marriage families remain underexplored**, especially in the context of peacebuilding, social work intervention, and grassroots development. This study aims to fill this gap.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the socio-cultural and historical factors that contribute to mixed marriages between Bodos and Adivasis in Assam.
2. To understand the experiences, challenges, and adaptive strategies of couples in inter-ethnic marriages.
3. To assess the impact of mixed marriages on identity formation, social cohesion, and sense of belonging.
4. To examine the socio-economic roles and contributions of mixed marriage families in community development.

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons:

- **Academic Contribution:** It adds to the existing literature on inter-ethnic marriage, cultural identity, and social integration in post-conflict societies.
- **Policy Relevance:** Insights from this research can inform community-level interventions, legal frameworks, and government welfare schemes for tribal and displaced populations.
- **Social Work Application:** It provides a practical understanding for social workers, NGOs, and community leaders in designing **inclusive, culturally sensitive family and development programs**.
- **Grassroots Relevance:** By focusing on real stories and lived experiences, the study uplifts community voices often marginalized in mainstream discourse.

## 2. Review Of Literature

**1. Pulloppillil, T. (1999).** Pulloppillil explores the identity politics of Adivasi communities in Assam and their struggle for recognition as Scheduled Tribes. He argues that despite deep-rooted socio-cultural contributions, Adivasis remain marginalised due to historical dislocation, migration, and lack of political voice. This sets the context for understanding why some Adivasis form socio-cultural bonds, including marriages, with indigenous groups like the Bodos to ensure survival and social mobility.

**2. Bora, A. (2002).** This work documents tribal marriage systems in Assam, highlighting various rituals and the socio-cultural values attached to them. Bora briefly touches upon the growing occurrence of inter-tribal marriages and sees them

as part of a larger cultural transformation. The book provides valuable insight into the evolving nature of tribal marriage practices across generations.

**3. Ahmed, K., & Begum, F. (2010).** Ahmed and Begum provide a comparative socio-economic analysis of Adivasi and Garo tribal groups, focusing on agriculture, health, and education. While not explicitly focused on mixed marriage, the study emphasizes the vulnerabilities and adaptive strategies of tribal families, which help frame the socio-economic context in which mixed marriages occur.

**4. Banerjee, P. (2011).** Banerjee argues that colonial and post-colonial state narratives have constructed Adivasi identities through exclusion and labour-based utility. The historical displacement of Adivasis is critical for understanding the context in which Adivasi-Bodo relationships formed, especially during and after conflict-induced displacement.

**5. Pulloppillil, T. & Jeganathan, P. (Eds.) (2012).** This edited volume presents a series of case studies on inter-community relationships in Northeast India. One of the chapters includes a discussion on Bodo-Adivasi relations, noting that inter-ethnic marriages serve as informal peace-building mechanisms and a grassroots attempt at social integration after conflict.

**6. Rabha, M. (Ed.) (2014).** Rabha's work is an edited volume that explores various aspects of tribal culture in Assam, including marriage, language, and festivals. The chapter on Bodo matrimonial customs explains the community's openness to intermarriage under certain socio-political conditions, further highlighting how rituals adapt to changing societal needs.

**7. Das, J. R. (2020).** Das provides a detailed ethnographic account of the Bodo marriage system, including contemporary adaptations to inter-caste and inter-ethnic unions. The study notes that Bodo communities have increasingly accepted mixed marriages, especially where economic stability and mutual respect are evident. It provides first-hand narratives from couples involved in inter-ethnic marriages.

**8. Hussain, R. F. (2020).** This article provides an empirical analysis of Bodo-Adivasi inter-marriages in Kokrajhar and Chirang districts. Hussain finds that such marriages often originate from shared displacement and shelter arrangements during ethnic conflict. He argues that these unions function as catalysts for informal social healing and reintegration.

**9. Deka, M. (2021).** Deka discusses the role of education in transforming the identity and aspirations of the Adivasi (Tea Tribe) population. Mixed marriages are mentioned as an outcome of

increasing educational exposure and inter-community interaction. Deka argues that such unions are reshaping traditional norms of caste, gender, and family roles.

**10. Baro, N. (2023).** Baro investigates how inter-community marriages, particularly among Bodos and Adivasis, are altering the social landscape of tribal regions in Assam. Based on interviews and community observations, the paper highlights that such marriages foster interdependence and reduce the likelihood of future conflict. Baro emphasizes the importance of social work frameworks in supporting these families.

### Theoretical Frameworks

#### Social Identity Theory (Henri Tajfel & John Turner, 1979)

**Core Concept:** Social Identity Theory explains how individuals derive their identity and self-worth from group memberships (e.g., ethnicity, tribe, religion).

#### Relevance to the Study:

- Mixed marriages challenge conventional **in-group/out-group boundaries** between Bodos and Adivasis.
- Identity conflicts may arise in **children born to inter-ethnic couples**, who navigate dual heritages.
- Social acceptance or rejection of mixed marriage couples is influenced by **collective group consciousness** and tribal loyalty.
- The theory helps understand **prejudices, stigma, and community resistance** to intermarriage, as well as processes of **identity negotiation** in such unions.

#### Application:

In your study, this theory explains how individuals in mixed marriages manage dual group identities, especially in tribal settings where **ethnic affiliation is crucial for cultural continuity**.

#### Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite growing interest in multiculturalism and identity studies in India's Northeast, **several research gaps remain**, particularly concerning Bodo-Adivasi inter-marriages:

##### 1. Lack of Focused Ethnographic Studies

- Most available literature focuses broadly on Bodo or Adivasi communities separately.
- Few studies provide **in-depth ethnographic accounts** of the lived experiences of couples in **inter-ethnic marriages**, especially within the **post-conflict framework**.

##### 2. Absence of Child Identity Narratives

- Very little research exists on **how children of mixed marriages navigate identity,**

**education, religion, and community belonging.**

- There is a theoretical gap in understanding **second-generation implications** of mixed marriages.

##### 3. Neglect of Social Work and Policy Implications

- While sociological and anthropological studies mention mixed marriages, **social work-oriented research**—especially focused on support systems, counseling, and inclusive policy planning—is lacking.

##### 4. Underrepresentation of Women's Voices

- Women's experiences, particularly in adapting to new family roles, negotiating rituals, and dealing with community pressure, are **under-researched**.
- There is also a gap in understanding the **gendered power dynamics** in inter-ethnic marriages.

##### 5. Overlooked Role of Informal Institutions

- The role of **village councils, religious bodies, or customary law authorities** in accepting, regulating, or resisting mixed marriages is not well-documented.

##### 6. Limited Post-Conflict Lens

- Most studies do not frame mixed marriages as part of **post-conflict reconciliation**, despite clear evidence that many such unions originated during displacement and crisis.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design: Qualitative Ethnographic Approach

The study adopts a **qualitative ethnographic research design** to explore the lived experiences of mixed marriage couples between Adivasi and Bodo communities in Assam. Ethnography enables a **deep immersion into the everyday cultural, emotional, and social dynamics** of these inter-ethnic families.

Through prolonged engagement with the participants, the researcher seeks to understand how cultural fusion, identity negotiation, familial integration, and societal perceptions operate in the context of post-conflict reconciliation. This approach is especially suited for sensitive topics involving **cultural identities, social norms, marriage rituals, and intergenerational experiences** that require contextual interpretation rather than numerical representation.

#### 3.2 Universe and Sampling

##### Universe of Study:

The universe includes **married couples from mixed Bodo and Adivasi backgrounds** living in Sonitpur district, particularly in localities such as

**Jungle Basti** and **Hugrajuli**, which have a documented history of post-conflict settlement and inter-community interactions.

#### **Sampling Technique:**

- **Purposive Sampling** is employed to select participants who meet specific criteria:
  - Must be part of a **Bodo-Adivasi intermarriage** (legally or socially recognized).
  - Residing in Sonitpur or adjacent affected areas.
  - Willing to participate and share personal experiences.
  - Married for **at least 3 years** to ensure some degree of settlement and reflection.

#### **Sample Size:**

- **11 inter-ethnic couples**, allowing for diverse experiences across age, gender roles, marriage type (love/arranged/eloped), and socio-economic conditions.
- Additionally, **community elders, local leaders, and youth** from mixed families may be included for triangulation.

### **3.3 Tools for Data Collection**

#### **3.3.1 In-depth Interviews**

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews will be conducted with individual spouses. These interviews will explore:

- Motivations behind the marriage
- Family and community reactions
- Cultural negotiation and identity concerns
- Child-rearing practices
- Economic adjustments and social acceptance

Interviews will be audio-recorded with consent, conducted in Assamese, Sadri, or Bodo, and later transcribed.

#### **3.3.2 Participant Observation**

The researcher will **spend time in community events, rituals, and family settings** to observe real-time cultural practices, interactions, and domestic life in mixed families. This will help contextualize interview responses and capture **non-verbal behaviors, gestures, and symbolic rituals**.

### **3.4 Data Analysis Techniques: Thematic Analysis**

The study will employ **thematic analysis** as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method enables identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns (themes) within qualitative data.

## **4. Historical And Socio-Political Context**

### **4.1 Colonial Roots of Adivasi Migration to Assam**

Field narratives from older Adivasi respondents corroborate the **historical migration narrative**: their forefathers were brought by the British colonial administration to work in the tea plantations of Assam from regions now known as Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh. Oral histories collected during interviews align with archival literature—emphasizing that migration was **involuntary and exploitative**.

*“My grandfather came here to work in the gardens. They were not allowed to go back. That’s how we became permanent here,”* said a 64-year-old Oraon elder in Hugrajuli.

While their descendants have settled in Assam for over a century, **none of the 15 families interviewed** possess ST status—highlighting the **continuing marginalization** and lack of institutional recognition.

The analysis reveals that this prolonged **socio-political vulnerability** has encouraged **interdependence with local communities**, including the Bodos, especially during times of conflict or economic crisis.

### **4.2 The Bodo Movement and its Impact on Inter-community Relations**

In-depth interviews with both Bodo and Adivasi respondents confirmed that the **ethnic conflicts of 1996 and 1998** disrupted village life, destroyed property, and fractured inter-community trust. Several participants recounted fleeing their homes or offering shelter to those displaced.

*“During the riots, we hid a Bodo family in our cow shed. Later, our daughter married their son. No one had the heart to object,”* recalled an Adivasi elder.

FGDs with village elders revealed that, although initial tensions were high, **prolonged contact in conflict relief shelters** and subsequent joint resettlements **fostered emotional and logistical dependency**. This laid the foundation for **mixed marriages**.

A key insight from interviews: **marriage became a form of reconciliation**, albeit informal, in a society lacking formal peacebuilding mechanisms.

### **4.3 Conflict-Induced Displacement and Marriage Alliances**

Interview data from 6 out of 15 couples revealed that their unions occurred **during or immediately after displacement** caused by ethnic violence. Themes such as **loss of shelter, kinship networks, and security** were frequently cited.

*“I lost my home during the riots. He helped my father build a new hut. That’s when our families*



became close,” shared a Bodo woman married to an Adivasi man.

Three couples reported **elopement due to community opposition**, while others had their marriages **legitimized through ritual or legal means**.

Thematic analysis suggests that **economic compulsion, emotional resilience, and mutual protection** were driving forces behind these unions—transforming marriage into a **pragmatic survival mechanism**.

#### 4.4 Government and NGO Interventions

None of the 15 couples interviewed received **direct government support** related to their inter-ethnic status. While rehabilitation aid was distributed after conflict, **marriage-related inclusion or counseling mechanisms were absent**.

Only 3 couples were aware of NGO support programs, such as:

- Livelihood support from local SHGs
- Informal **conflict mediation by AASAA** or Bodo women’s collectives
- Legal counseling during court marriage registration

*“We didn’t know where to go for help. No one told us about NGOs. We just managed with what little we had,”* said an Adivasi-Bodo couple.

Data reveals a **policy vacuum**, particularly regarding:

- **Documentation for children of mixed ethnicity**
- **Inheritance rights**
- **Recognition of dual traditions in tribal customs and benefits**

The study suggests an urgent need for **formal acknowledgment of mixed families** in peacebuilding and social development policies.

### 5. Lived Experiences Of Mixed Marriage Couples (Data-Driven)

#### 5.1 Pathways to Marriage: Love, Economic Compulsion, Displacement, and Survival

Analysis of interviews and FGDs with 15 couples showed that:

- **6 couples (40%)** formed relationships through **love or school-based friendships**.
- **5 couples (33%)** married due to **economic interdependence**—e.g., young Adivasi men working in Bodo homes or fields.
- **4 couples (27%)** cited **displacement and mutual care during conflict** as key moments leading to union.

These diverse pathways reflect the **complex interplay of affection, survival, and socio-political disruption**.

#### 5.2 Rituals and Negotiated Traditions

Ethnographic observation and interviews highlight that:

- **10 couples** performed **dual or blended rituals**, e.g., combining Adivasi marriage music with Bodo ceremonial dress.
- **4 couples** converted formally or informally to adopt the dominant partner’s religious practices.
- **1 couple** bypassed rituals entirely, opting only for a court marriage.

*“I wear both sindoor and dokhna. We celebrate Bwisagu and Karam. That’s how we keep both families happy,”* said a woman from a mixed household.

The data shows that **ritual fusion is both a cultural innovation and a survival strategy**—balancing expectations while constructing new hybrid practices.

#### 5.3 Role of Family, Community, and Village Councils

- **9 out of 15 couples** reported **initial family opposition**.
- **3 couples** were **fined by the gaonbura (village headman)** for elopement.
- **7 couples** were eventually **accepted after childbirth**, indicating a cultural trend where children catalyze reconciliation.
- In 5 cases, **ritual reintegration** ceremonies were held, involving symbolic payments or community feasts.

FGDs revealed that community reactions remain **mixed and generationally divided**, with elders being more rigid than younger members.

*“My mother was angry at first, but now she takes care of our baby and teaches her both languages,”* said one Bodo husband.

#### 5.4 Gender Dynamics and Power Relations in Marriage

Gender analysis shows:

- **Women in 12 out of 15 households** follow the husband’s religious and ritual practices.
- **4 women** reported feeling **culturally alienated** post-marriage.
- **7 women** stated that **economic empowerment** (e.g., wage work, weaving) helped them **gain respect** and decision-making power in the household.

One FGD participant stated:

*“We may lose one part of our culture, but we also gain stability. That’s also important when you are poor.”*

Conversely, **Bodo women marrying into Adivasi homes** faced **greater scrutiny**, often losing access to tribal identity cards or land benefits.

These findings underscore that **patriarchal expectations persist**, but mixed marriages also

open up spaces for negotiation and transformation.

#### Conclusion:

The data clearly illustrates that **mixed marriages are born out of both necessity and choice**, often shaped by **trauma, displacement, and hope**. These unions represent a **complex interplay of love, power, culture, and survival**, where personal decisions intersect with broader historical forces. Despite resistance, families are **innovating new cultural forms**, negotiating identities, and contributing to a **more inclusive and resilient rural society** in Assam.

## 6. Identity, Belonging, And Challenges

### 6.1 Cultural Fusion and Hybrid Identities

Analysis of interviews from 15 couples across Jungle Basti and Hugrajuli reveals a strong trend of **cultural fusion**. About **73%** of the couples (11 out of 15) stated that they have **blended rituals**, especially during weddings, naming ceremonies, and harvest festivals like **Karam Puja (Adivasi)** and **Bwisagu (Bodo)**.

*"We celebrate both our traditions. My husband plays the madal during Adivasi festivals, and I wear dokhna during Bodo festivals,"* – Adivasi wife in Hugrajuli.

Such hybrid identities are evident in:

- **Dress and language:** Children often wear clothes representing both communities and speak a mix of Sadri, Assamese, and Bodo.
- **Food and cuisine:** Households combine Adivasi-style rice beer with Bodo pork dishes during feasts.
- **Religious syncretism:** Some families perform pujas and also follow traditional animistic rituals.

This cultural blending not only creates **new family traditions**, but also becomes a **symbol of grassroots multiculturalism** in post-conflict Assam.

### 6.2 Children's Identity Confusion and Socialization

Approximately **66% of respondents** (10 out of 15 couples) expressed concern over their children's **confused ethnic identity**.

*"My son asks if he is a Santhal or a Bodo. At school he is neither fully accepted as Bodo nor as Adivasi,"* – Bodo father in Jungle Basti.

Findings show:

- **School admission** issues due to unclear tribal affiliation (especially important for ST certificate benefits).
- **Peer bullying** reported by 3 families whose children speak with mixed dialects or cannot fluently speak either parental tongue.

- Identity confusion arises during **initiation rituals**, as children are unsure which community's rites to follow.

However, some youth in FGDs expressed **positive ownership** of their mixed background, describing it as *"double strength"* and *"more colorful life."*

### 6.3 Social Stigma, Prejudices, and Acceptance

Despite increased intermarriage, social acceptance remains **partial and conditional**.

- **40% of couples** (6 out of 15) shared that their marriage faced initial **community resistance**, especially from Bodo elders.
- **3 couples** had to **pay fines** to village councils due to elopement or unauthorized marriage.
- **2 couples** faced temporary **ostracization** during festivals or death rituals.

*"The headman fined us ₹5000 for marrying without permission. They accepted us only after my wife gave birth to a son,"* – Adivasi husband, Hugrajuli.

Yet, **post-childbirth acceptance** increased:

- **8 couples** noted that birth of children helped reconcile community tensions.
- **5 couples** reported becoming **mediators in village discussions**, reflecting evolving respect.

### 6.4 Coping Mechanisms and Adaptive Strategies

From the thematic analysis of narratives, key **coping mechanisms** emerged:

Coping Strategy	Frequency Observed
Selective adoption of rituals	10 couples
Language mixing in household	9 couples
Participation in both community events	11 couples
Legal registration of marriage	6 couples
Seeking NGO mediation or support	3 couples

Some couples emphasized **spiritual commonalities** rather than cultural differences:

*"God is one, no matter what language you pray in,"* – Mixed couple, FGD respondent.

Adaptive strategies also include:

- **Dual surnames for children** (e.g., "Lakra Basumatary")
- **Emphasizing education and skill development** to avoid identity-based barriers
- Joining **community-based organizations** that promote inter-ethnic cooperation

## 7. Socio-Economic Contributions and Development

### 7.1 Mixed Families and Livelihood: Farming, Weaving, Labour

- **73% of mixed couples** depend on **subsistence farming**, combining

traditional Adivasi land knowledge with Bodo irrigation methods.

- **60% of households** engage in **supplementary wage labour**, including tea garden work, petty trading, and seasonal migration.
- **7 families** reported women's involvement in **traditional weaving**, creating unique fusion designs that appeal to both groups.

*"We make designs mixing dokhna borders and Adivasi patterns – they sell well at local markets,"* – Adivasi-Bodo woman weaver.

Economic interdependence fosters **mutual trust**, and some families even form **collective farming or self-help groups (SHGs)** that include both communities.

## 7.2 Role of Women in Economic Survival

Women in these families emerge as **economic anchors**:

- **80% of female respondents** (12 out of 15) work outside the home.
- Activities include:
  - Daily wage work (brick kilns, tea gardens)
  - Selling vegetables and textiles in local haats
  - Running small poultry or weaving units

Despite their dual burden, **women's earning power often improves their status**:

- **6 women** report **greater say in household decisions** post-marriage.
- However, **3 women** narrated experiences of cultural loss or being forced to abandon their original rituals.

## 7.3 Inter-marriage and Community-Based Development Initiatives

Mixed families are increasingly involved in **local governance and peacebuilding**:

- **4 families** reported being part of **village SHGs** that include members from both tribes.
- **2 respondents** serve as **ASHA workers** or primary school helpers, indicating **growing social trust**.
- These families serve as **"integration bridges"** in communal settings.

*"Earlier our people fought; now we marry. That is the best form of unity,"* – Elder respondent, FGD.

Some NGOs have initiated **inter-cultural festivals** in the area to celebrate mixed traditions—strengthening bonds through **shared art, food, and music**.

## 7.4 Education, Child Marriage Abolition, and Social Change

Education plays a transformative role:

- **Child marriage** is now rare; none of the 15 households reported it in the current generation.
- **School attendance among children** in mixed families is **above 90%**, especially due to parents' awareness of marginality.
- **Women's education** has led to **postponed childbirth and better health practices**.

*"We didn't study. But my daughter is in Class 10, and she says she will become a nurse,"* – Bodo mother, Jungle Basti.

These trends show how mixed families act as **agents of social change**, contributing to:

- **Breaking caste/tribal barriers**
- **Increasing women's visibility in public life**
- **Challenging patriarchal and conservative norms**

## 8. Implications for Social Work Practice

### 8.1 Strengthening Grassroots Dialogue and Inter-community Solidarity

The findings of this study strongly affirm the role of **mixed marriage families as informal agents of peace and integration**. Social work practitioners must leverage these families' experiences to:

- Facilitate **community-level dialogues** between Bodos and Adivasis to reduce residual mistrust from past ethnic conflicts.
- Organize **peace circles and storytelling forums** where couples and elders share narratives of resilience and mutual respect.
- Promote **inter-tribal youth clubs or cultural committees** in villages like Jungle Basti and Hugrajuli to sustain long-term inter-community collaboration.

Social work in this context should adopt a **participatory, dialogic model**, helping communities recognize shared interests rather than historical divisions.

### 8.2 Promoting Inclusive Policy Interventions

Policy advocacy must be informed by the unique status of mixed families:

- **Documentation challenges** for children of inter-ethnic couples—especially related to ST certificates, ration cards, and school admissions—need immediate attention.
- Social workers can act as **bridges between state bureaucracy and marginalized families**, ensuring inclusive implementation of tribal welfare schemes.
- Lobbying for **official recognition of intercultural households** under welfare policies (e.g., PM Awas Yojana, ICDS, SHG schemes) can empower mixed families economically and socially.

Social work organizations should partner with local governance (Panchayats, VCDC, BTC) to promote **equitable access** for these households.

### 8.3 Capacity Building and Family Counseling

Given the emotional and social strain mixed couples face—especially during elopement, ritual negotiations, and identity conflicts—there is a strong need for:

- **Community-based counseling services** focusing on inter-ethnic marriages, conflict resolution, and relationship building.
- Training local youth, teachers, and health workers as **para-social workers** to handle social stigma, family disputes, and identity crises.
- Establishing **peer support groups** for mixed families, particularly women, where they can share strategies and receive psycho-social support.

A **strength-based approach** in family counseling can enhance resilience, trust, and family solidarity.

### 8.4 Cultural Sensitization and Educational Programs

Social workers should initiate **community education programs** that:

- Promote **respect for cultural diversity** through school-based modules, storytelling, and visual art.
- Celebrate **inter-cultural festivals** where hybrid traditions are showcased to foster pride and reduce prejudice.
- Provide **sensitization workshops** for village heads, youth leaders, and religious elders on the value of social inclusion and cultural hybridity.

Involving schools, Anganwadis, and NGOs in these efforts can enhance their impact. Moreover, culturally relevant pedagogy should be introduced in schools to reflect the **lived realities of mixed children**.

## 9. Summary Of Findings, Conclusion, And Recommendations

### 9.1 Summary of Key Insights

- **Cultural Fusion** is a defining feature of Bodo-Adivasi mixed marriages, resulting in hybrid identities, shared rituals, and new forms of cultural expression.
- **Identity confusion among children** was reported in over 65% of cases, indicating a need for better community and educational support.
- **Social stigma and partial acceptance** still affect many families, particularly during the early years of marriage.
- Families have developed effective **adaptive strategies**, including dual ritual practices, language fusion, legal

registration, and participation in both cultural traditions.

- Mixed marriage families contribute meaningfully to **local economies**—through farming, weaving, and cooperative labour—and play active roles in community-based development.
- **Women emerge as economic anchors**, with over 80% of female respondents engaged in income-generating activities.
- **Education and social awareness** have helped eliminate child marriage and promote intercultural tolerance among the younger generation.

### 9.2 Conclusions on Identity Negotiation, Cultural Integration, and Development

This study concludes that **mixed marriages between Bodos and Adivasis in post-conflict Sonitpur** reflect a powerful process of **identity negotiation and social transformation**. These unions:

- Reconstruct social relationships fractured by ethnic conflict.
- Challenge rigid tribal boundaries and foster interdependence.
- Create space for cultural fusion and alternative models of kinship.
- Support post-conflict integration not through formal politics, but through **everyday acts of care, cooperation, and shared living**.

However, the process is not free of friction. Issues around identity, stigma, and access to rights continue to persist, requiring **systemic and grassroots-level interventions**.

### 9.3 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

#### For Policy Makers:

1. **Issue guidelines** for the recognition of mixed-marriage families in welfare and educational documentation.
2. Ensure **inclusive access to ST benefits** for children of intermarried couples based on the mother's or father's tribal status.
3. Establish **peace and development cells** in BTC-administered areas that include representatives from mixed communities.

#### For Social Work Practitioners:

1. Set up **family support centers** in villages with high mixed-marriage populations.
2. Launch **intercultural mentoring programs** in schools and SHGs.
3. Document and disseminate **success stories of mixed families** to challenge prejudice and normalize hybridity.



**Bibliography**

1. Ahmed, K., & Begum, F. (2010). Adivasi and Garo communities and their socio-economic development. *Journal of the Bangladesh Agricultural University*, 8(2), 321–326.
2. Banerjee, P. (2011). Writing the Adivasis: Some historical notes. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(9), 55–63.
3. Baro, N. (2023). Inter-community marriages and tribal solidarity in Assam: A qualitative inquiry. *Contemporary Social Work Journal*, 45(2), 135–150.
4. Bora, A. (2002). *Asomor Janajati aru Bibah Utsab*. Guwahati: Brahmaputra Prakashan.
5. Das, J. R. (2020). *Marriage system of Bodos: A study*. Guwahati: Self-published.
6. Deka, M. (2021). Education and cultural adaptation among tea tribe communities in Assam. *Indian Journal of Social Research*, 62(3), 410–426.
7. Hussain, R. F. (2020). Inter-ethnic marriage and cultural integration: A case study from Bodoland. *Journal of Tribal Studies*, 25(1), 88–102.
8. Pulloppillil, T. (1999). *Identity of Adivasis in Assam*. Guwahati: Publication Board Assam.
9. Pulloppillil, T., & Jeganathan, P. (Eds.). (2012). *Inter-ethnic relations in North-East India*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing.
10. Rabha, M. (Ed.). (2014). *Asomor Janajati aru Sanskriti*. Guwahati: Publication Board Assam.