CHAPTER-VI

TREND OF REVIVALISM AMONG THE BODOS OF SONITPUR DISTRICT

6. INTRODUCTION

The Bodos were one of the dominant tribes in ancient and medieval period in the history of Assam. Actually different names were designated to the Kachari (Bodo) in the history such as Kirata, Asura, Mlecha etc. in the ancient and in medieval history of Assam. In course of time the Bodo people had to lose their kingdom due to certain reasons. However, before the establishment of British rule in India the existence of the Bodos and other tribal societies were on the verge of extinction. Frankly speaking these people were quite unaware of their societal dignity, pride and honour. It can be said that the new conditions created by the British Government changed the traditional mindset of the people of the Bodos; it was not only among the Bodo but also of all sections of the people of India.

Under new liberal intellectual conditions set by the British rule, the Bodo people developed the sense of self respect, identity consciousness of their society and soon they started to reassert their
community identity movement. They started to reassert their identity by reviewing and reconstructing their lost history, culture, tradition, custom, language etc.¹ In fact, the Bodo people of Assam started taking education through either Assamese or Bengali medium schools. Thereafter, they came to know about their past history and became aware about their language, culture. It is certainly true that the role and contribution of the British and Missionaries had helped the Bodos to re-think and re-establish the dying society once again.

When the Brahma Dharma Movement was started by Kalicharan Brahma, the process of conversion to neo-vaishnavism was also going on. According to Chandan Sarmah “the emergence of Brahma movement took the Bodos farther away from neo-vaishnavism as it opened up an alternative route for the Bodos to enter into the fold of Hinduism.”² This movement gained a new dimension and developed identity consciousness among the Bodos of that time. The formation of the Bodo Satra Sanmilani in 1919 and the formation of Tribal league in 1933 and the origin of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in the year 1952 are landmarks in the history of the socio-cultural movement of the Bodo people. The language and literary movement launched by the Bodo

¹ Brahma, B, Social Mobility from Tribalsim to Indianism, 2008, p-235.
² Sarmah, C, Religion and Social Change: Neo-Vaishnavism vis a vis the tribal Groups in the Assam Valley in Religion and Society in North East India, ed D. Nath, 2011, p-130
Sahitya Sabha and Brahma Dharma movement created an identity consciousness and intellectual environment in which the All Bodo Students Union and Plain Tribal Council of Assam came into being in the year 1967. The present achievement of the Bodo society in the field of language, literature, education, culture, economics and politics is the result of relentless efforts of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, All Bodo Students Union and other allied organizations.

The task of bringing awareness among the Bodo community by the Bodo nationalist organisations is commendable. The present Bodo society got reborn only for the role and contribution of several dedicated, self less persons of the nationalist organisations, otherwise the Bodos would have been completely assimilated to the Assamese society. Let's discuss in brief about the role of these organizations:

VI.1. Bodo Satra Sanmilan

The Bodo Satra Sanmilan can be regarded as the first nationalist organization among the Bodos which was founded by the students of Cotton College under the leadership of Rupnath Brahma and Madaram Brahma in 1919. The *Bibar*, the first magazine of the Bodos was published by the Sanmilan in 1924 under the editorship of Satish Chandra Basumatary.
The Bodo Satramilani published the *Bibar* magazine, the mouthpiece of the Sanmilani with Assamese and Bengali script. After it young Bodo writers came forward to create literature of diverse genres and laid the foundation for language and literacy development in Bodo language.

2. The Kachari Jubak Sanmilani

The Assam Kachari Jubak Sanmilani played a very significant role in its honest efforts to determine and shape the future destiny of the plains tribes of Assam. Through this Sanmilani, for the first time, the Bodo youths attempted to integrate all the different sections of the Kachari community such as the Bodos, the Rabhas, the Sonowals, the Thengals, the Dimachas, the Lalung and others. Jadab Chandra Khakhilari was the founder secretary of this Sanmilani. As the Kachari community was once ruling race of Assam, the Sanmilani claimed that they should be given opportunity to have hands in the political matters.

The Sanmillani asserted that the Kachari Sanmilani of Assam didn’t recognize themselves as a lower class of the Hindus or the untouchables and declared that they are quite independent from the Hindu community in all respects, political, social and religious etc.

The caste Hindus in those days looked down on the Bodo Kachari community and all other primitive groups in Assam as
untouchables and inhuman. Much discrimination against these people could be seen and experienced in all spheres of their lives. Even the tribal students were not allowed to dine altogether with other Hindu students and this unsavory fact was resented by the tribals who silently bore this burnt of ill treatment for centuries. It is also found from their writing that separate dining rooms be provided in M.E schools, High Schools and in colleges. Such attitude and ill treatment of the caste Hindus towards the ethnic tribes sharpened the edge of the conflict between the tribes and the Assamese caste Hindus.3

During the British regime, poverty and lack of social awareness stood as a barrier in spreading education among these depressed and backward classes of people. With a view to encourage the Kachari students, the Sanmilani demanded that free studentships and scholarships in schools and colleges be granted to Kachari students according to the percentage. The main demand of the Sanmilani were that to provide distinct and independent identity, and to identify the Community as the Bodo in the census Report of British India and to assign a separate designation in military service of British India Government.

3.Narzari,C. Dream for Udayachal and The tribals of the plain tribals council of Assam, 2011, p-37
To bring sense of awareness among the Kachari communities the Sanmilani organized annual conference in different places of Assam. Like that the 36th annual conference of Kachari Jubak Sanmilani was held at Bandarmari village of Sonitpur district on 18-19th May, 1947 at the premises of present Omeo Kumar Das High School. Aniram Basumatari was the president at that time. It needs mention here that the Bodos of that area were the on the way of complete assimilation with the Assamese society after embracing neo-vaishnavism. According to Thaneswar Boro, “most of the people of the area started accepting the surname such as Das, Saikia, and Hazarika. The influence of this conference was so strong that it helped in the preservation of Bodo identity.”

3. Tribal League

This organization was founded in 1933. The aim and objective of this organization was to unite the tribal people of Assam as well as to protect as well as make provision for the protection of the Social, Political and economic interest of the tribal people through democratic process, particularly for the protection of tribal land from the illegal encroachers and securing constitutional safeguard of socio economic

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4. Informant: Thaneswar Boro, Kokalbhangi, Khelmati,
and political rights of the Plain tribes. Rupnath Brahma, Satish Chandra Basumatary, Bhimbar Deori were the leaders of the tribal league.

It is needless to say that during the pre-independence era, from 1937 to 1946, the tribal league, a political handiwork of the Bodo intellectuals, played the roles of kingmakers in the two successive Assam Governments. Observing this situation the Assamese intellectual and Congress party got frightened and alarmed. So, they didn’t pay heed to the demands raised by the tribal organizations since its inception. In this regard Charan Narzary says, “The Assamese leaders were aware of the numerical strength of the ethnic plains tribes. They were apprehensive of the tribals becoming a potential political adversary. Therefore, they could never tolerate or accept the growing political personality among the tribals, Right from the beginning they pursued an undeclared anti-tribal policy and had been working actively in a systematic manner to keep the tribals subdued and get them completely assimilated into the Assamese society by obliterating their distinctive ethnic identity.\(^5\)

\(^5\) Ibid, P-37
4. Tribal Sangha

After the independence of India in 1947, the tribal League was transformed into a socio-economic organization called the Tribal Sangha. And still this organization is actively doing for the welfare of the tribal people in Assam. In Sonitpur district this was founded by Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Ratneswar Das in 1961. Bishnu Rabha tried to bring the whole tribes and caste into one fold. He was the devotee of Sankardeva.

He offered his 2000 bigha land to the landless people. It was really true that he worked for the interest of building a greater Assamese nationality but later he worked for the down trodden tribal society which is clearly revealed from holding the presidentship of Tribal Sangha in 1961. Why Bishnu Rabha became a president of Tribal Sangha! It is interesting to see why Bishnu Rabha became interested in the activities of the tribal Sangha. According to some informants (especially those who were closely associated with Bishnu Rabha), Bishnu Rabha was very kind hearted man, selfless man.

Though India became Independent he was not happy. He wanted to set up a socialist country here. Despite a major contribution of the tribal people during the freedom movement, they were not able to get political power as well as government facilities. Even most of the name
of tribal freedom fighter was also not included. So, the freedom fighter had not received any kind of government facilities.

The Tribal people were backward educationally, socially, economically during that time. Bishnu Rabha felt and thought for this deprived section of the people and wanted to make them aware about their language, culture and even about their fundamental rights as well as to create nationalist sentiment in the tribal society in Sonitpur district.

But this process of conversion and social oppression continued after independence also. The Bodo people of Sonitpur district also took *saran* from the *gosay* (priest) of neo-vaishnavism and completely ignored their original language and culture.

5. Borokhang Dwlr

*Borokhang Dwlr* is supposed to be the first Bodo nationalist organization amongst the Bodos of Sonipur district and founded by students of Dhekiajuli High school in 1955; the main aim was to devote themselves for welfare of Bodo society, to take role in the improvement of education in the society, to grow or create the nationalist sentiment among the students, to set up good hospitality for the students. Besides these, the main aim and objective of the organisation was to collect money for the establishment of hostel, to hold meeting with a view to inspiring as well as creating nationalist sentiment in the Bodo dominated
area during the time of schools holidays. Indeed the Borokhang dwlw initiated its activities from the river Pachnoi in the western side and Gabharu river in the eastern side and the river Brahmaputra is the southern and the reserved forest is the northern side, they started collecting money. For the first time, they worked for the construction of road from the Silikhabari to Sengahiloi and Amguri to Sialmari and they went to every household and suggested the necessity of building toilet in every individual household. Sometimes they invited some Bodo and non Bodo intellectuals in the meeting for giving valuable and constructive lecture for the welfare of the Bodo community.

Another great venture of this organization was occupation of land in Dhekeiajuli town. For the utmost attempt of the Borokhang dwlw, lastly they found 5 bigha and 2 kotha land at Dhekeiajuli town situated under word no 10. For the name of hostel construction, leaders of the dwlw started collecting money from the rich people of the Bodo community and established Swahid Maniram Memorial Bodo Hostel on this plot of land.

6. Bodo Sahitya Sabha

Another most commendable nationalist organization of the Bodos is Bodo Sahitya Sabha which was set up in 1952. Joy Bhadra Hagjer and

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Sonaram Thousen were the founder president and secretary of Bodo Sahitya Sabha. Both of them belonged to Dimacha Kachari community. The main aim of the Sahitya Sabha was to unite and preserve the Bodo language and culture as a whole.

In Sonitpur district, the Sahitya Sabha was formed in 1970 at the premises of Martyr Maniram Bodo Hostel at Dhekiajuli. Khudiram Kachari was the founder President and Humeswar Basumatary was the founder General Secretary of the Sabha. The role of Bodo Sahitya Sabha towards revivalism was incomparable with other nationalist organization in the Bodo society which created a sense of socio-cultural consciousness amongst the converted Bodos. The introduction of Bodo medium as a medium of instruction created a reverse sense of community pride among them and they slowly returned to ancestral socio-cultural folds. Just after the formation of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, in the same year the Sabha started introducing Bodo medium schools in Bodo dominated areas of Sonitpur district particularly in Roumari, Hoograjuli, Rangapara, Borchola, Gormara, Missamari, Dhekiajuli, Borgaon, Khelamti, Balipara, Ghoramari, Naharbari, Biswanath Chariali, Gohpur. At first they introduced 35 Bodo medium L.P. school and the

introduction of Bodo medium schools increased up to 69 in 1973. Later they introduced Bodo medium M.E., M.V and High School.

The Bodo language was introduced as the medium of instruction in the schools in the Bodo dominated areas of Assam in 1963. In Sonitpur district, the Bodo medium school was established in 1972. Consequently Assamese speaking Bodo people also could learn and speak the Bodo language. This became possible only for the establishment of Bodo medium schools, through, which the people got the opportunity to learn the language. The writers wrote and published about the need and necessity of preserving and improving their language, culture and tradition. Some writers paid deep attention on the collection and study on folklore materials with a view to reconstruct the history of the Bodos which inspired them to look back to their rich language, cultural heritage and tradition.

7. Plains Tribal Council of Assam

The negligent attitude to the tribal people of Assam continued after independence also. The governments of Assam never cared and respected the demands of the indigenous tribal people. Among the major issues of the tribal people was the preservation of the tribal belts and block. By 1950s encroachments assumed formidable proportion and became the most crucial as in many areas of the tribal belts and block,
the Bodos found themselves outnumbered and marginalized. The demographic structure of the Bodo and tribal people became grim and pathetic. Lastly some of the educated tribal people gave up congress party only because of failure to the solution of tribal people. On 17th September, 1967 they formed political party known as Plain Tribal Council of Assam. To bring together different tribal communities to protect the land right of the indigenous population of the state through active participation in policy making was the main aim of the formation of the Plain Tribal Council of Assam. The aim was to educate people about the political marginalization of the tribes and demand for a demarcated area for the tribal population of Assam under the banner of Udayachal, the creation of separate state namely Udayachal specially the northern bank of Brahmaputra. Biruchan Dole was the founder and Charan Narzary was the founder General Secretary of P.T.C.A. The other mentionable leaders were Samar Brahma Choudhury, Jogendra Nath Basumatary, Prasenjit Brahma, Satish Chnadra Basumatary, Baputi Payeng, Kamal Basumatary, Subud Basumatary, Lila Kanta Boro and others.

Kamal Basumatary, a college teacher in the department of political science at Darrang College, Tezpur, was the first M.L.A elected, of the Plain Tribal Council of Assam from the Borchola constituency among
the Bodos in the heart of Sonitpur district. Contribution of this political party worked tremendous for the tribal people of Sonitpur district. According to Kamal Basumatari, despite the large number of the tribal population, most of the tribal villages were included in the general village. Hence they had to lose more facilities from the government. Through the collective attempt and co-operation of the workers of the Party and the non-governmental organization Bodo Sahitya Sabha and All Bodo Students Union, he was able to do for the welfare of the Bodo and other tribal people of the district.

8. All Bodo Students Union

ABSU is the most important social organization of the Bodos. The growing Bodo nationality consciousness, beginning with the social reforms of the 1920s and 1930s, followed by the language movement and ultimate culmination into the political movement of the later years, faced strong opposition from the Assamese counterpart. In Sonitpur district the union was established under the jurisdiction of Dhekiajuli in 1971. Ratneswar Rabha was the founder general secretary of this committee. The workers of this time were Podu Ram Boro, Umananda Boro and many.

At that time there was no district committee at all. Later the district committee was formed in 1980 by Dr Tenzing Daimary and Putul
Basumatary; both of them from from Ghoramary Anchalik. Later on Putul Rabha, Lalit Basumatary, Hem Raj Rabha, (son of Bishnu Prasad Rabha), Umanamda Boro, Satish Basumatari, became the active workers of ABSU. It is interesting to note here that all of them came from the families of the Assamese speaking neo-vaishnavite Bodo. They helped the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in the introduction of Bodo medium in the Bodo dominated area. Even they strongly supported and co-operated the PTCA’s demand of Udayachal.

9. Dularai Bodo Harimu Afad

Bodo Harimu Afad i.e. All Bodo cultural union is also one of the important organizations in the Bodo society. This organization brought tremendous changes and gave inspiration to revive their lost cultural traits among the Bodos of Sonitpur district. Kamal Narzari, Badal Basumatari, Rukheswar Boro were actively associated with cultural activities in Sonitpur district. The neo-vaishnavite Bodo people were very far from the track of the Bodo culture; but due to mass cultural movement under the banner of Bodo nationalist orgnaisations they have now come to know what was their original one.

10. Bodo Women Organisation

All Tribal Women Welfare Federation, the first tribal women organization in Assam was formed under the advice and guidance of
Upendra Nath Brahma in 1987. Pramila Rani Brahma was the founder and Kanon Basumatary was the founder secretary of this organization. After one year back the name of organization transformed as All Bodo Women Welfare Federation in 1988. Pramila Brahma and Kanon Basumatary became the president and secretary of the organisation. The role and contribution of this women organization during the Bodo land movement under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma was remarkable. In Sonitpur district also this women organization was formed under leadership of Tarani Goyari, Nalasri Brahma in Sonitpur district. The women took part active role during the Bodoland movement launched by All Bodo Students Union.

Another women organization was Boro Women Justice which was formed on the 3rd October, 1993. Anjali Daimary was the founder president of this organization. There was a district committee in the Sonitpur comprising Thelamara, Dhekiajuli, Bahbari, Ghoramari, Balipara regional committee. The main leader of the forum were Santi Basumatary, Suneswari Basumatary and others. The role of this organization was more than ABWWF in Sonitpur district. This organization created and made awareness among the Bodo women in Sonitpur district particularly in Tezpur Sub-division. The Assamese speaking Bodo women were neglected to wear the traditional Bodo
dress. Despite the request of wearing Bodo ethnic dress by the Bodo organizations the Bodo women felt inferior to others if they wear it. Like other organizations the Bodo women Justice Forum could minimize such kind of inferior feeling and thinking among the Bodos of Sonitpur district.

11. Bodo Extremists Organizations

When the Bodoland Autonomous Council failed to fulfill the needs and necessity of the Bodo people, some section of Bodo leaders mainly student activitists who organized themselves into volunteer force in the wake of the agitation. As the democratic movements, stretching for several decades failed, they lost faith in democratic processes and took up arms struggle against the Assam and Indian government to fulfill their problems. Bodo Liberation Tigers was the example of this organisation which was formed in 1993. The BLT created situation forcing the centre to invite them for a talk. As a result, the talk led to an accord which opened the door for constituting the Bodo Land Territorial Council under six schedules (amended) of the Indian constitution. The memorandum of settlement was signed on Feb, 10, 2003 in New Delhi by the representatives of the Centre, State and the BLT.

It is noteworthy here that the 20 Bodo dominated villages of Sonitpur has been included in the Bodoland Territorial Council which
inspired the Bodos of Sonitpur district. They are hoping that rests of the Bodo dominated areas also are also going to be included in the near future in the proposed Bodo Land.

Another revolutionarist organization of the Bodo is Nationalist Democratic Front of Boroland. According to Gobinda Basumatary, “The fact that the Bodos are deprived of their rights to govern themselves and continue to be exploited, suppressed and dominated by the Indian government, on the 3rd October, 1986 gave rise to birth of the Bodo Security Force. Later on the idea that the Front is much more than just a security force in defense of the people, in 1933, 18th April it was re-Christened as the Nationalist Democratic Front of Bodoland. Because the Bodos have been denied the right to self-determination; their land has been deceitfully occupied and grabbed by the aliens; their social order destroyed and their identity and continuity as a people has been insidiously imperiled, the organization was founded to achieve self determination. With their distinct history, tradition, culture and identity the Bodos express the corporate will through the NDFB and their determination to live as a free people in their ancestral land.”

There are many cadres of this group in Sonitpur district. The main leaders who are now in cease fire group are Gopal Rabha,

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8. Source: Khouseni Guthal, a souvenir, Bodo National Convention, 2011, p-96
S.Boro, Bhaben Basumatari, N.Dabwr, B.Fwilao and others. It needs mention here that most of the leaders were killed by the army personnel. As informant furnished, "They organized a meeting village to village to mobilize their aim and ambition. For establishment and self-identification of the Bodo nation, we need to learn our forgotten language and we should honour our own culture and we should revive our lost culture." The role and contribution of the nationalist organisation of the Bodos is immense and their role on the development of Bodo language, culture are still and will be significant in the near future. In the Sonitpur district also their role in reviving the Bodo language, culture and identity under the initiatives of the Bodo nationalist organizations is commendable.

6.2. REVIVALISM IN SONITPUR DISTRICT

The trend of Revivalism in Sonitpur district is discussed under the following sub-heads:

1. Language

After embracing neo-vaishnavism, the Bodo people gave up their language. In this regard Dipankar Moral says, "the shifting of Mongolian people linguistically to the Indo-Aryan family is primarily due to conversion and influence of Hindu culture, religion. As soon as

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9. Informant: Budhen Basumatary, M, 52, Ghatua, Sonitpur
they convert to Hindu religion they gave up their ancestral language in
favour of Assamese."\textsuperscript{10} From this it is clearly focused that like other
Mongoloid people the Bodo people of Assam discarded their ancestral
worship, language, culture and tradition from generation to generation.

When the Bodo Sahitya Sabha was established, the language was
introduced as the medium of instruction in the Bodo dominated areas of
Assam in 1963. In Sonitpur district, the Bodo medium school was
established in 1972. Consequently Assamese speaking Bodo people
could learn and speak the Bodo language. This became possible only for
the establishment of Bodo medium schools, through, which the people
got the opportunity to learn the language.

Besides these, the Sabha’s initiatives to teach the Bodo language
was commendable. Besides the Bodo schools, they advised to set up the
Bodo language learning institute for the common Bodo people to teach
the Bodo language in the district. In this regard, Jogeswar Boro
explained that he was a teacher of the Bodo learning institute set up by
the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in Ulubari in 1991 so as to teach the Bodo
language to the Assamese speaking Bodos. A good number of Bodo
learners came here to learn Bodo language. Interestingly a few non

\textsuperscript{10} Moral, \textit{D. Upabhasa-Vigyan}, 1991, p-75
Bodo people also joined in the classes.¹¹ In fact, there are few Bodo language learning institutes under Dhekiajuli circle located at Ulubari High School, Ulubari and Missamari Higher Secondary School, Missamari.

Now, it is seen that most of the non-speaking Bodo people can understand and speak their traditional language fluently. The language has attained a position of pride with the opening of post graduate course in Bodo language, culture and literature in the University of Gauhati in 1996. And, the language has also been included as the scheduled language in Indian constitution in 2004.

Script movement was one of the main movements that occurred among the Bodos. In Sonitpur district also lots of the Bodos and Rabhas also co-operated in the roman script movement. In Sonitpur district the administration took necessary initiative against the agitators. There was a Gana Sangram Parishad to lead this movement that was formed to guide the agitators. The main leader of this parishad was Subud Basumatary, Lila Kanta Boro. Like other district of Assam thousands of people were injured and arrested by the police. Such kind of participation in ethnic movement was the first for the people of the

¹¹ Informant: Jogeswar Boro, M, 56, Thelamara, Sonitpur
Bodos of Sonitpur district and this brought common sense and created nationalist sentiment for their lost language and culture.

B. Religion

Another domain revivalism has occurred among the Bodo society is Religion. There is a revival of the worship of Bathou as the supreme god. Many of the educated Bodos have returned to that practice. The courtyard of many educated Bodo families has an altar of Bathou. Like the Bodos, the Meitei of Assam and Manipur were converted to vaishnavism under Chainatanya and now it is seen that they are also on the process of revivalism towards their traditional Sonamahi cult.

Joy Narayan Basumatary was the first Bodo person who performed Bathou worship without sacrificing animal and worshipped with flower. Sadou Asom Bathou Mahasangha was founded by Dhuparam Basumatary in 1957. He wrote a book entitled Bathou Dharmar Kinchit Abhas, i.e A brief Introduction About Bathou religion.

Another organization is All Assam Bathou Thansali which was formed in 1970 by Ram Das Basumatary. He also wrote and published valuable essay on Bathou religion and its philosophy. The main aim of this organization was to modify the system of Bathou worship and to bring uniformity regarding Bathou worship. They convened a general meeting once a year and discussed the philosophy and religious world
view of *Bathou* religion. After prolonged discussion they had taken resolution to hold a meeting in different places of Bodo living area. But in later years this organization could not hold a meeting.

Sadananda Sing, a young energetic research scholar in the department of Manipuri at Manipur University shared some ideas about revivalism in Manipur. As research scholars we talked and interchanged our feeling, emotion within us to know something about our society and research. One day when I asked him about their history of conversion, immediately he replied everything one by one—"A few years before in Manipur particularly Meitei people used to say their religion was Hindu, now some section of educated people have changed their mind and comment completely against such saying that their religion was Hinduism and they say their religion is *Sanamahi*, an indigenous religion, that is blood and backbone of their community. As soon as possible, the devotees of this cult will revive and preach completely among the Meitie community living in different parts of state and countries. Like in Assam and in Manipur, the trend of revivalist tendencies of indigenous cult are going on in the entire north east in India. In Arunachal, *Doiny polo* and *Seng Khasi* in Meghalaya are also trying to revive their own indigenous religion to identify themselves as a distinct community completely different from the Hindus, Christians, the
Buddhists in the world maintaining their faith and ethos. In the Bodo society also, some section of the Bodos converted to neo-vaishnavism, Christianity, Brahma, Anukul Thakur etc. But a few people have been maintaining their age old Bathou religion. However, these people thought deeply about it and they haven’t converted to other religion. They convened meeting and conference for discussing the reasons for conversion to other religion and how they would be able to make suit for the current society. On the other hand, conversion to other religion leads to loss their language and culture. Language and culture is like the bread and butter of the society. Without it no one can preserves one’s identity. They worked for the necessity of maintaining and modifying their ancestor religion.

After long years back, Dularai Bathou Dwhwrwmari Gouthum (All Bathou Religious Union), socio-religious organization was formed in 1992. The pioneer workers of the religious organization were Rupnath Basumatary, Baneswar Basumatary, Dr Mangalsing Hazowary, Basanta Swargiyari, Hiren Deka Narzi and others. Of course they are still playing great role in preaching the philosophy of Bathou religion. The aim of this organization is to stop the animal sacrifice in the name of God during the worship, to modify the way of worship and to bring uniformity in the Bodo society. The organization has been holding
seminar, workshop, meeting randomly in the Bodo populated area of Assam and even in West Bengal and foreign country in Nepal since its inception. Recently they changed the nomenclature of their organization. Now this is known as Bathou Mahasabha.

Ignoring the old way of worshipping Bathou, now a day this primitive or folk religion is made an institutional religion and made up to date by All Bathou religious organization. Earlier the Bodos didn’t have permanent temple like Church and Mosque. Now they have established Bathou Thansali to worship Bathou. It is seen that each and every religion has a separate day for worship. Like Sunday is for Christian. Considering its necessity to assemble the followers of Bathou once in a week, they have accepted Tuesday as the best day for them. A devotee of Bathou, Bhaben Fwrwngiri, he also called Tuesday is the sacred day and suggested to worship Bathou on that day. Now this day has been accepted by the organisation as the sacred day for them and observes regular service of prayer like the Christian. In fact that All Bodo Religious Union has been making all out efforts to give an organized and institutionalized shape to the Bathou religion. Prayers and regular services are conducted on the basis of prescribed religious text. Each and every village has set up Bathou Thansali (Prayer hall).
In Sonitpur district, All Bathou Religious Union was formed in 1998. This organization has been doing and preaching their philosophy and has achieved their success. The active leaders of the organization are Ehem Bwrai, Santi Ranjan Basumatari, Fuleswari Narzari, Umananda Boro and so on. Interestingly, a few converted people, specially neo-vaishnavite Bodo people, are coming back to Bathou religion. However, the permanent vaishnavite's Namghar is being reconstructed as Bathou Thansali. It is interesting to mention here that some of the Assamese speaking Bodo people also can speak Bodo language now and even they can pray fluently in Bodo language in the Bathousali without any hesitation. According to the follower of Bathou, this is a grand success. According to Jogeswar Baro, “We got re-birth and survived through Bathou. Once day Sankardeva disintegrated our society as well as blocked the path of our walking in the Bodo society. Now we have earned and achieved the path of learning and teaching our mother tongue and culture to our next generation only because of Bathou.”

Four years ago, I visited a neo-vaishnavite village named Dhekiapelua with a view to collecting folklore materials situated just near the Missamari Army camp. As a research student, I interviewed with the informants and collected a few folklore materials from the

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12. Informant: Jogeswar Boro, 57, Thelamara, Sonitpur
elderly men and women associated with neo-vaishnavism. When I visited again in this village in the month of April, 2009, the old picture was completely changed. This is a strange! “A flag of Bathou Religious Union was hoisting within the campus of the namghar”. The village namghar was being made as Bathou thansali. It is interesting to note here that they demolished the manikut and the Bathou altar was established here. The performance of Bathou aroj methai (Bathou prayer song) was also going on inside the village namghar.

C. Burial of the Death Body

Generally there are two ways of disposing the dead bodies – 1. Burial and 2. Cremation. Traditionally the Bodo people followed the burial system for the disposal of the dead body. But due to influence of Hindu religion they follow both the burial and cremation system.

In the neighbouring Assamese society it is seen that the death bodies of the old man or adult are generally cremated. In some particular cases, of course, like suicide, accidental death, victims of deceases like Cholera, Small pox etc. the dead bodies of the aged men are buried or cremated. But the dead bodies of the children are always buried. Now a days it is also seen that the corpse is cremated. On the whole it can be said that no such rigid rules and customs are followed in the disposal of corpse in the Hindu society. Among the Bodo society it is seen that
there is no hard and fast rule about the disposal of corpse. It needs to be noted here that when burial is decided finally the corpse is taken to the banks of a running river or stream by the relatives and other dear and near one. But no female is allowed to attend the funeral party. This procedure is also seen same in the Hindu societies.

But the follower of Bathousim has discarded the cremation system and started following past tradition. There is a belief about this that if the dead body buried then the bone will tell the generation of the Bodos.

F. Naming

Generally the Bodo kept their sons and daughters name with their own community’s words. There was a ceremony of name giving tradition among the Bodo society. As informed by the informants they kept their sons and daughter names observing the size, colour, behaviour, month, day etc. of birth the boys and girls. If the boy had short nose or flat nose, then he was named Nabla, if the girl is born in the month of Bwisagu (the new year of the Bodo) is named as Bwisagi etc. But under the influence of other religions, specially, Hinduism and Christianity, they used to keep Hindu names, like Ganesh, Bijoy, Durga and the impact of Christianity ushered in names like John, Abraham, Michel, Entina etc. Let’s see the following chart:

Chart I:
Bugab Saikiya (Kachary) Bugab is Bodo word (18th century)

Masuay Kachary (Kachary) Masuay was also Bodo word (19th Century)

Purna Kachari, Purna is Assamese word (20th century)

Thaneswar Boro. Thaneswar is also Assamese (20th century)

Sona Mainao (Bodo) (21st century)

Chart II:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Bodo names and Hindu and Assamese names</th>
<th>Christians names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

It needs mention here that the naming of the people was done with the original Bodo words. Still most of the old men names are to be found as mentioned in the chart. In this context it is seen randomly that
after the conversion to neo-vaishnavism and Sanskritisation in the first
decade of 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the Bodos started taking education through
Assamese medium schools which influenced them greatly. The non-
Bodo teachers of the school who couldn’t pronounce the Bodo names
changed their name and gave Hindu names. Even it is seen that they
kept Assamese names and surnames in place of Bodo names and
surnames. It continued until the 90’s of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century not only in
Sonitpur district but also in district of Assam.

The tendency to go back to the Bodo names became stronger after
the ethnic movement for the creation of Separate Bodoland launched by
All Bodo Students’ Union from 1986. But it was not seen very much
during the movement of Plain Tribal Council of Assam. The Bodo
people started taking Bodo names in place of the Assamese or
Aryanised names mostly during the Bodoland movement launched by
ABSU. Let us see the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional and modern names</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iragdao</td>
<td>The name of a King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swmdwn</td>
<td>Legendary hero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambari</td>
<td>Legendary heroine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hirimba</td>
<td>A legend, got married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mithinga</td>
<td>Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bwhwithi</td>
<td>Flow, current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derhasar</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainao</td>
<td>Lakhi, one of the goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilifang</td>
<td>Dusk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samaina</td>
<td>Beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sansuma</td>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwjwn</td>
<td>Peace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now, the Bodos are very crazy about their names. There is also a growing preference for the Bodo names for individual and places. Many Bodos, especially of the younger generation, now, speak only Bodo and prefer not to speak Assamese. They are keeping their son and daughters' names with the Bodo words.

**E. Costume**

Dress has separate specific role in the maintenance of the cultural and ethnic identity of a community. Why people need to change their ethnic dresses really matter of great concern. It is assumed that Sankardeva, did not advise these people to change their ethnic dresses. For the process of initiation of neo-vaisnavism among the masses was
very simple that everyone could access easily, there was no much restriction using their dress and food. Restriction about wearing traditional dress could be suggested by the preacher of neo-vaishnavism. As the information furnished by the informant, some of the Satradhikars didn’t want or allow putting the Bodos traditional dress. They visited two or three times a year in the neo-vaishnavite villages when they found anyone wearing the traditional dress then they scolded them and advised the villagers mainly the village president and secretary including the Deuri, pathek etc. wear the Assamese costume like chador, gamocha etc. From this, it is clearly revealed that the change in the Bodo traditional costume occurred with the intervention of the Satradhikar who were in charge of that locality.

Until a few decades ago, the converted Bodo people used to dress like Assamese people. Women folk used to weave and wear Chador mekhela (Muga pat) and men folk used to wear dhuti and gamocha. In the respect of the revivalism in Bodo dress, the ethnic Bodo organizations played a role. They urged upon the Bodos to wear the traditional dress called Dokhona. It is seen that women who disobeyed their instruction were castigated. Even the activists mutilated the dress of the women who used to wear the non-Bodo dress. Now the Bodo

\[13\] Informant: Keshab Saikia Daimari, M. 60, Dhekiajuli
people have started dressing *dokhona, phali* and *aronai*. But that is not true that the Bodo of Sonitpur have completely discarded the Assamese dress. People still use the Assamese costume at home and social functions. But on some specific occasions and public gatherings called by the Bodo organization, they wear Bodo dress like *Dokhona* and *aronai*.

**F. Dance**

As already mentioned above regarding the Bodo dances that the Bodos have varieties of dances performed in the *Kherai* worship which are ritualistic dances. Due to acceptance of Neo-Vaishnavism the Bodos discarded these dances and accepted the Assamese dances. I interviewed a young college student, Rupam Boro (26), he was the president of the Thelamara Anchalik committee, All Bodo Students’ Union says-“Due to acceptance of Sankari culture we lost our ancestors religion, culture and even identity. In fact, we are very unfortunate for this, as a result, we don’t know how to play and perform our traditional dance and music. It is certainly true that the previous generations are responsible for this. Understanding and maintaining the culture of our society now, we
started learning our ancient music, dance and reviving our traditional Bathou religion.”

It is seen that little change has occurred after the Bodo ethno-nationalist originations’ mobilization in Sonitpur district. The young educated Bodos started learning as well as performing traditional dances. The Bodo Bwisagu dance is now organized in community pandels now in place of Assamese Bihu dance. Moreover, the Bodo folk dances such as Bagrumba, Bardwi Sikhla, Rumbang dances are being accepted as the main dance of the Bodos of the district for entertainment. It may be wrong to say that Assamese dances are totally ignored; its prevalence is still there as these are getting same position with the Bodo dances and have occupied the heart of the Neo-vaishnavite Bodos.

G. Musical Instruments

The Bodos have their own traditional musical instruments like Kham (big drum), Siphung (flute with five hole) and Zotha (Cymbol). These instruments are a part and parcel of the traditional Bathou religion. It needs mention here that Kalicharan Brahma, a preacher of Brahma religion formed a volunteer group to help him in preaching the philosophy of Brahma religion among the Bodo

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14 Informant: Rupam Boro, M.23, Balisia, Thelamara
community. On the advice of Kalicharan, once day the workers of Brahma religious movement burnt down the musical instruments which form part of the Bathou worship. According to Kalicharan Brahma, God cannot be pleased and invoked with the help of the musical instruments; religion is a spiritual and mental state of affairs. We don’t need such kinds of musical instruments to pray the God.

Like neo-vaishnavism and Brahma religion, Christianity has strong hold among the Bodo people. After conversion the people discarded their traditional musical instruments in their society. Now it is seen that these instruments are very essential for identity.

The Bodo extremist organizations also took various initiative to teach Bodo language to the Assamese speaking Bodos in the district and even they tried to continue it in the society they bought and distributed Bodo traditional musical instruments like Kham Sifung, Serza, Thorkha etc. In the respect of dress the workers of the group urged upon the Bodos to wear the traditional dress called Dokhona. It was also seen that those women who disobeyed their commend were kept under surveillance and action was taken. They mutilated the dress of the women who used to wear the non-Bodo dress.

I interviewed a young boy, Atul Chandra Boro (26), a member of the Thelamara Anchalik committee, All Bodo Students’ Union. He said,
“due to acceptance of Sankari culture we lost our ancestor’s culture and identity. In fact, we are very unfortunate for this that we don’t know how to play and perform our original songs and dances. It is certainly true that the previous generation is the responsible for this. Understanding and maintaining the culture of our society now, we have started learning our ancient music, dance”.

H. Surname

Generally the common surnames of the Bodos are Swargiyari, Bwisumuthiary, Narzary, Khakhlary, Borgayari, Mahilary, Sumframary, Mochahary etc. But the Bodos of Sonitpur gave up their surname under the impact of Neo-vaishnavism. There are some reasons behind changing their surname. One of the reasons was the conversion to Hindu religions and another was the titles offered by Ahom king. During the reign of Ahom rules for the convenience to rule the country, they distributed some areas to the local people of different caste tribes, e.g. they offered 100 families for Saikia, one thousand families for Hazarika etc. Like the other castes and tribes the Bodo people also got this opportunity and accepted these posts offered by the Ahom king. Later on they changed their surname and their next generation also accepted these as their surname and became identified as Bora, Saikia, Hazarika, Tamuli, Das etc.
As information furnished by Banga Ram Barmahalia, in Dhekiajauli, another reason for accepting Assamese surnames was due to Omeo Kumar Das. He was one of true, faithful leader of the congress during the freedom movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. He was the Gandhian and a great devotee of neo-vaishnavism. Everyone respected him. He had lots of workers holding under him different posts and portfolios. There were also lots of Bodo workers with him. During that time most of the people of Tezpur area gave his honour as a selfless worker and dynamic man. He took initiatives to awaken the illiterate man and tried to educate them. Even he organized many meetings to discuss the various problems relating to the basic obstacles of taking education and development of the society. He tried to bring them into one fold or umbrella. Following his motto and ambition, most of Bodo people co-operated with heart and soul and took *saran* under neo-vaishnavism. As the informant furnished, he advised his followers to accept his surname. Consequently, a few Bodo people also accepted his surname.\(^{15}\)

Another reason was the lure of job opportunities the Bodo people had to take Assamese surname to get the government job in Assam. This, in the same way of other helped the formation of greater

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\(^{15}\) Informant:Bongaram Barmahalia,M-95,Amguri,Sonitpur
Assamese society by bringing to one fold all the tribes or non tribes of Assam. But it is seen mostly in case of the tribes and the ethnic groups including the Kacharis. Hence started the process of de-tribalisation. But it was not acceptable for some conscious section the Bodo people. They thought that those processes and techniques were initiated by the government itself and the local Assamese people were not logical and negligible. So, the conscious people of Sonitpur district formed ethnic organization to make their people aware about their language, culture etc. The ethnic movement made them conscious and the Bodo people began to change and take their own traditional surname.  

On the other hand it is also seen among the Bodos specially the followers of Brahma religion launched by Kalicharan Mech, that they also started taking and using Brahma as surname discarding his traditional Bodo surname. Consequently, the next follower of Brahma religion also accepted Brahma as the surname without any hesitation. For example, Bipul Brahma, Keshab Brahma, Jwngsar Brahma etc.; but some sections of the follower of Brahma religion used their traditional surname since the beginning. Now, it is seen that the new generation of Brahma religion have also started taking their traditional surname.

Let see the present surnames of the Bodos:

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16. Informant: Keshab Saikia Daimari, M.62, Dhekiajuli
Traditional surnames | Accepted surnames
---|---
Swargiyari, Basumatari, Daimari, | Brahma, Saikia, Hazarika,
Gayari, Khakhari, Sumframari, | Mahalia, Deka, Chamua, Das
Machahari, etc | Saraniya, Rabha etc.

The Bodo people of Sonitpur district are bi-lingual: They can speak Bodo and Assamese. Of course, most of the Bodo people of Sonitpur cannot speak their mother tongue. Assamese language is the first language and used in everyday life at home and outside. As furnished by the informants, “the converted Bodo people took a decision to stop Bodo language at home whereas they started speaking Assamese language instead of Bodo language at home and outside home. If any follower of neo-vaishnavism spoke the Bodo language they had to pay fine with 25 paise in those days.”

It is another reason for forgetting their own mother tongue Bodo people who are scattered in every nook or corner of Assam had to keep close contact and live with the neighbouring Assamese speaking Hindu society. From this it is revealed that there was a wide gap with the Bodo

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17 Informant: Kachari, Gukul, M, 48, All India Radio Centre, Kokrajhar,
knowing people. Consequently they adopted the Assamese language and culture as their own.

It needs mention here that earlier they identified themselves as either Assamese or Kachari but now they began to call themselves as Bodo just after the Bodoland movement. It is very interesting to notice here that some of the Bodos specially those involved in the revivalist movement launched by the Bodo nationalist organizations in the earliest days are now initiated to neo-vaishnavism and other sects of Hindu religion like Anukul Thakur, Sankar guru, Krishna guru etc and on the other hand some are still practising Bathousim.