Chapter- VI
CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE BODOS
CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE BODOS

Jesuit missionary, S. Shisalla and John Subrael were the first Christian missionaries who stepped in Assam at Gauhati while on the way to Bhutan and China to preach the message of Christianity in the year 1626. Then, Roman Catholic missionary arrived in Kachar in the year 1790 and started to propagate the message of Christianity in Bondashil area. In 1829 James Rae established Christian mission at Gauhati without success. In the year 1843, under the initiative of Nathun Brown and Rev. Oliver Kuttar established a Baptist mission station at Gauhati and put Rev. Barker as the in-charge of the mission in 1845. In the year 1846 they opened a boarding house in which a number of Boro students were accommodated. And a twelve year student, a boarder of the hostel from Jhargaon village of North Kamrup, Apinta Kachari was baptized in Christianity in 1849. He was the first Bodo to be baptized into Christianity. 1843 Rev Syrus Barker stationed at Tezpur for two months and traveled the villages of Boro area. 1844 Nuthan Brown along with his associates traveled northern part of Darrang District, the areas predominantly inhabited by Boros and propagate Christian religion among them. Baptist missionary continued their works only up to 1851 basically due to lack of fund and unhealthy and unfriendly geographical conditions. The Boro people of the area did not understand except their mother tongue. Hence the missionaries faced with the acute problems of exchange of ideas. Difficulties in transport and communication, lack of proper coordination between the American mission Board and the Baptist Missionary Management of Assam also obstructed in the evangelical activities of the Mission. Tezpur was the
center of Anglican Missionary activities in Darrang District. In the year 1850, Church Mission Society was entrusted with the responsibility of propagation of Christian gospel and extension of general education among the Boros in Darrang district. The Society for the Propagation of Gospel (SPG) assumed the charge of the management of Tezpur Mission Station and with this the Tezpur mission centre fully transformed into ‘Kochari Mission Centre’. With the arrival of Sidney Endle in Darrang district in 1864 along with Rev. Hesselmeyer, as his co-worker, the propagation of Christianity among the Boros gained momentum. After the death of Rev. Sidney Endle, Rev. Hesselmeyer took over the independent charge of missionary works among the Boros in Darrang District. Sidney Endle understood that common Boros don’t understand neither English nor Assamese language; Boro language was the appropriate language to propagate the message of Christianity among the Boros. So he learned how to speak and write Boro language very well. He translated the New Testament of the Bible and Gospel Songs in Boro language. Under his sincere efforts and dedication, large number of Boros converted into Baptism. Till his death in 1907, he dedicated his life for the extension Christianity and welfare activities among the Bodos. After his death, SPG continued his works unabated under the leadership of different preachers. “The noteworthy features of his ministry among the Boros in the foundation of the first Boro Mondali (church) at Bengbar.”

Lutheran Missionaries:- Rev. H.P. Boerson from England and Lars O. Skrefsrud from Norway who started their missionary activities among the Santhals under the organization of ‘The Santal Mission of Northern Churches’, slowly and gradually extended their activities among the Bodos of Assam too. Lutheran Missionaries established a Christian colony in Dingdinga near Gossaigaon of present Kokrajhar district with a good number of emigrant Santhal families from Bihar. The Colony contained several hundreds Christians and a church was built to accommodate one thousand people and school were opened. “As the missionary work progressed steadily, a permanent mission station was instituted at Grahampur, and then at Harapata and Joema. Side by side with the Santals, the neighbouring Bodos began to be evangelized. It was, therefore, this Santal colony which provided a good base to the Santal Mission for evangelizing the Boros in the Bahere Hasa with effect from 1887.” Theklo Basumatary was the first Boro to be Christianized in the colony in the history of evangelical work of Santal Mission in Goalpara district on 7 January 1887 and followed by Ratia Boro, son of Theklo Boro was consecrated as the first Boro pastor and by 1922 a considerable number of Bodo villages, like, Rajadabri, Nangdarbari, Gaurang, Dumbajhar, Gumurgaon, and Kalahari etc under Goalpara district were evangelized. This
achievement speeds up the momentum of evangelical activities among the Bodos. Rev. Aksel Christiansen and Mrs. Christiansen were put in the charge of evangelical works solely for the Bodos and set up another permanent Mission stations at Gaurang, Kokrajhar in 1927 and then at Bongaigaon 1938. A third Mission Station came up at Patkijuli in Kamrup district in 1951. Rev. Christiansena slowly extended the Lutheran activities in Darrang District also. Bahadur Boro on 31-10-1926 was the first pastor consecrated from Darrang district and then followed by Alicharan Boro on 25-02-1930. They helped Rev. Christiansena in evangelical activities in Darrang District. In 1938, first Lutheran Christian Mission was established at no-2 Santipur Village near Udalguri. Andersmame and Rev. Hackson from Norway joined the Darrang district Lutheran missionary work. In 1943, Rev. David Westburg and 1955 Rulf Hoffaring joined in the works. Bhaven Narzary, Maguram Mushahari accompanied Rev. David and Rev. Rulf in the evangelical activities in Darrang Distric. For the convenience of the people in Church service Rev. Haffrossruhd undertook the translation work of the Bible into Boro language. In his work other Christian denominations also extended their support. Now altogether 40 villages in Darrang district come under the Lutheran denomination. To suit the Change in the congregation of different communities the Santal Mission transformed into the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1958. Subsequently Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church split into a number of Lutheran Community missions and Boro Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church came into being in the same year. The out come of the evangelical work in Assam was up to the mark.

On the southern tract of the NEF Railway line, American Baptists missionary concentrated their activities among the Garos of Garo Hill with its head quarter at Goal para town. The head quarter was shifted to Tura in 1877-78 and carried out its conversion works from there amongst the Boros. The Mission started its conversion works from Fundibari village and stretched its activities in other areas and centre of congregation was established in northern Bongaigaon and Sidly areas. The American Baptist Missionary handed over the Boro works to Australian Baptist Missionary Society in 1965 and established its first Mission Centre at Tukrajhar in 1968 incorporating Garo pocket of Baghpara and Rabha pocket of Devitola. The Australian Baptist Missionary handed over its organizational function to local people purely governed by Boro people. Since then the Mission was known as the Goalpara Baptist Church Union retaining Tukrajhar as the main seat of administration.
The Scottish Presbyterian Church that began its evangelical works in 1870 in Darjeeling and Kalimpong primarily among the Nepalese extended its activities among the Bodos of the Duars areas with its Fission station at Mahkaliguri near Alipurduar. They also established mission station in Panbari and extended their evangelical works up the fringe of river Sonkosh Rangal Narzary and Rev. Jitnal Narzinari took pioneering role in spreading Christianity among the Boros of the Duars areas of Bengal.\(^{16}\)

On Invitation of Some Boro people from Udalguri, Darrang, Fr. Piaseski came to Udalguri in 1928 and baptized some Bodo family into Christianity. That was the first service of the Catholic mission among the Boros of Assam. Only after 1933-34 with the arrival Fr Alessi and Fr. Ravalico evangelizing of the Boros gained momentum along with other Protestant Mission Societies. A good number of the Boros in Kumarkata area of Kamrup district had adopted Catholicism by the efforts of Fr. Scuderi. The beginning of the Catholic work was started in Goal Para district with the switched over of some Lutheran Boros of Nanguarbari to Catholic denomination. Fr. Scuderi baptized four families there. Fr. Marengo and Gendra Sampramari, a trained Boro catechist took keen interest in evangelizing the Boros in Goalara district. Many Bodos from Kagrabari, Digoldong, Patgaon, Jolaigaon and Ranisundri, under Sidli police station and Bilaspara, Dangdupur, Bogriguti etc. under Bongaigaon area switched over to Catholic denomination by the dedicated efforts of Fr. Guido Colissi. The guiding spirit behind the Catholic movement among the Boros was Fr. Marengo, the reactor of Gauhati. He prepared the first prayer book and catechism in the Boro language.

In 1936, Barpeta Mission was detached from Gauhati and the Boro Congregation was look after from the Barpeta station under the Charge of Fr, Zazon He excelled in the Boro language and revised and edited prayer book and catechism in Boro previously made by Fr. Orengo. Fr Renius Morra took the charge of Barpeta Mission in 1953. He was a man of vision and he understood the importance education in spreading Catholicism and brought some boys and girls for future leadership. Fr. Joseph Zibizarretta who came to Barpeta in 1956 and opened Mission Station at Bengtol exclusively for Boros. Another Catholic Mission Station was opened at Saraibil, Gossaigaon in 1972. Dedication rendered by Fr. Joseph and Fr. Edward D'Souza, brought more and more Boros of the area under the Catholic fold. In 1951 a Mission Station was opened at Tangla and in 1966 another Boro Mission Station was established at Udalguri itself directly addressed to the Boros by Fr. Venturoli.\(^{17}\) Precise data pertaining to the Boro Christian population is not available
Because the Church mission do not maintain records exclusively for the Bodos only, rather amalgamated with the members of other communities. It is roughly estimated that the total Christian Bodo population throughout Assam comes to about 55,000.\(^{18}\)

"Although Assam served as an arena of intense activities of the Christian Missionaries belonging to multi-church denominations from the beginning of the British rule in India, so far their works among the Bodos is concerned, there appears to be nothing spectacular."\(^{19}\) (Musahari, R.N. Ibid, p. 6) The Christian Missionary activities among the Boros of Assam, therefore, did not produce any desired result. The Christian Missionaries who achieve grand success on hill tribes of Northeast India, in conversion work, could not accomplish much on the Boros.\(^{20}\) The remarks made by Musahari and Brahma represents a dismal picture of Christianization among the Bodos. Fundamental reasons attributing to dismal picture of conversion among the Boros were not associated with the effectiveness or weakness of Missionary organization, Management or mismanagement, or the methods they adopted in evangelization process. Many of the critics try to attribute the strong waves of Hinduisation, which was started since 1858 on parallel way along with the national movement, as the responsible factor for poor performance of Christianity among the Boros.

The primary reason was modern civilizations installed by the British government in India like, introduction of modern education based on science and rationality, introduction of new economic system as against the static caste based economy, emergence of multiplicity of employment avenues giving opportunity to the people for economic employment and social mobility irrespective of caste and religions; development of transport and communication, introduction of new pattern of administrative and political system, introduction of new legal system treating all sections of Indian people equal before the law, Protection of the rights of the disadvantage sections of society. The effect of the introduction of modern culture and civilizations was far reaching. It instilled the sense of self-respect to all sections of people in their own stations, socio-cultural, political, economic consciousness. It also created identity consciousness based on ethnicity, race, language, religion caste etc. They also understood how they had been exploited socio-culturally, linguistically, economically, politically by the higher and dominant castes since ages. They also understood how their actual history was scrapped and distorted under the fictitious myth.
Aryanization as the process of absorptions of non-Hindus and tribes was an aged old tradition in Indian subcontinent since the time of Vedic civilization. But this process penetrated in the Eastern and Northeastern parts of Indian subcontinent comparatively much later than other parts of India. Before Hindu socio-cultural system was taken into full form structurally and functionally; Mohammedan traders arrived in this region, proved supremacy socio-culturally over the society and culture of the indigenous people and slowly replaced the indigenous culture, religion by the Islamic culture, traditions and religion. The establishment of Mohammedan domination and supremacy of Islamic culture in India created pan Islamic Psychology and psychological orientation to Islam contrary to earlier traditions of Hinduisation. The process of Islam thorough out Indian subcontinent had replaced the great process of Hinduization at least in the backward isolated areas beyond the reach of dominant high caste people. The autochthonous people of greater Bengal particularly, the non-Hindu people of Chandala, Asura, and Mleccha origin converted to Islam. According the Census of 1911 more than half of the total population of greater Bengal converted to Islam.\[21\] The process of Islamization was started in this region in 1199 and the trend was continued till the establishment of British rule rules in India. With the establishment of British rule in this part, the hold and influence of pan Islamic psychology over the non-Islamic people gradually lost its ground. Similarly the balance and homeostasis of Hindu Society organized and structured on caste line broke down and the tradition of high caste domination and exploitation lost their control over the society due to emergence of variety of new and new employment opportunity and due to introduction of rule of law replacing structural norms of Caste Hindu society.\[22\]

Low grade peoples in the caste hierarchy and beyond the caste structure realized how they had been exploited and discriminated by the higher caste people since ages and they capitalized it as the force for the construction of self identity in group level subsequently leading to socio-cultural, economic and political consciousness among them. In pre-colonial high caste dominated society there was no option for low caste or tribal people but to accept the domination of the high caste unconditionally. The movement was initially begun in the form of social protest against the aged old tradition and gradually turned into the movement for political rights. Their protest and demands for higher status and equal treatment for lower castes and degraded people were always ignored. The congress party represented basically the high caste Hindu elites. The rifts between the low and depressed section of the society on the one hand and elite high caste section on the other

\[187\]
hand reflected in political activities of the Congress up to 1937. In the last part of the nineteenth
century and in the first part of the 20th century the lower and depressed class people always
involved in anti congress and anti national activities and often supported the Muslim league in its
anti congress movement in favour of separate electorate for depressed caste and community.
Only after 1937, the anti-high caste and anti congress movement launched by depressed section of
society, only by the sincere efforts of some congress leaders slowly tuned to a new direction to
Main stream Hindu society and Mainstream Indian nationalism.

Hindu Mission Started to work among the depressed and backward communities since
three decades for the development of spirit of Hindu communion and from 1938 galvanized their
action. Swami Pranavananda of Bharat Sevashram Sangha also worked in different place of East
Bengal among the depressed caste for unity and strength of Hindu Society. Hindu Mahasabha
played a revolutionary role in galvanizing spirit of Hindutwa and integration of different Hindu
groups. To appease the anti-high caste sentiment and minimize socio-cultural tensions between
high and depressed and backward castes, the Hindu Religious organizations as well as other social
organizations adopted number important measures like,
a. Denouncement of Casteism and untouchability as social evil.
b. Recognition of Chandalas as Namasudra providing them opportunity for social mobility.
c. Recognition of Rajbongsis as Bratya-Khsatriya.
d. Recognition of the Santals, Garos, Dalus, Banais, Khasias, Orans, Mundas, Mikirs,
Kukis, Lalungs, Kacharis, Rabha and Meches as Kshatriya. In 1925, Hindu Mission was organized
by a section of militant Hindu nationalists with a view to integrate different caste and tribes within
Hindu fold. In this connection the Hindu Mission released a number of pamphlets with a view to
integrate and unite different castes and tribes and communities other than Muslims and Christians
A particular pamphlet reads thus. -

"Census and Hindu society of Bengal"

From the days of Ramayana and Mahabharata there have been living in Bengal, Bihar and
Assam thousands of Santals, Garos, Dalus, Banais, Khasias, Oraons, Mundas, Mikirs, Lushais,
Kukis, Lalungs, Kacharis, Rabha and Meches. These inhabitants of Hindustan are fundamentally
Hindus In Census 1921 they were returned as Animist instead of Hindus. By this wrong has been
done to our simple religious brothers and sisters. We hope that during the forthcoming enumeration
in January 1931 the above Hindus, men and women, will rectify the mistakes made at the previous Census. They should be recorded “Hindu” as their religion, “Kshatriya” as their caste and “Sinha” or “Roy” as their family name. Special propaganda should be undertaken to see that these instructions are carried out uniformly in all places.

Each member, supporter, devotee and disciple of the Hindu Mission wherever he may be should devote himself to giving this matter public amongst all his Hindu neighbours.

The sympathy and help of every Hindu is required for the success of this enormously extended undertaking.

Dated the 6th Aswin 1337(B.S.).” (Reporter, 1931: 394).

This pamphlet was not just an appeal of the Hindu Mission but this appeal represents the feeling and urges of the Hindu Mission and other Hindu socio-religious reformed organizations and reformists of the time. Even during the Census enumeration of 1881 onwards, the low caste people were accorded to register their caste status according to their own judgment. It was found that many people changed their caste status in the subsequent Censuses to what actually they registered in the previous censuses. (Examples shown in TABLE II and I). So the rigid attitudes of orthodox caste Hindu people became so much relaxed which were reflected through the organizational activities and public opinions of the times. The spirit of unifications and integrations of high and low caste and tribes and communities became one of the ideals and objectives of national movements. On the eve of rigid, closed, complexed and highly discriminatory Orthodox Hindu religion, Islam and Christianity became more liberal, open and egalitarian to the people particularly to the depressed low-grade people of the society. Christianity particularly to the depressed class people stood before them as viable options. Militant Hindu nationalists took it as a challenge and they put strong resistance both to De-Hinduism and Christianisation or Islamisation. New Vaisnava movement and Brahma dharma movement in Assam was nothing but a part of Social and Religious reform movement organized by different nationalists Social and Religious Reformed Organizations. That was the primary reason why the Brahma dharma movement and New Vaisnava movement easily swept Boros and other plain tribal people of Assam due to their close and adjacent association with the caste Hindu Assamese people. Pro Hindu Psychology is
still stands strong amongst the Hindu Bodos. In the near future vested politicians might use religion as motivating factor in the electoral game leading fragmentation of the existing Boro society.

The nationalist movement successfully enabled to create anti feeling against Christian religion as the religion of the white men, the foreigners. Sepoy mutiny of 1857 was the first event in Indian history, which brought Hindus, and Muslims emotionally close together and showing the germs of ill feeling against Christian religion. They enabled to put Christian religion in the category of foreign goods in the eye Hindus and Muslims. After and during the time of rebellion, the Indian Christians were taken for enemies of their race. They were held to have gone over completely to the foreigners, to turn against their own Christianity was still exotic in India. It was the white mans’ religion, in which the Indian might become a follower but never a leader. It was alien in form of doctrine, in ritual of worship, and in the mode of life, which it enjoined.  

![Table NO-I](image)

**Status Claims of Some Castes at Census**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>1911 Census</th>
<th>1921 Census</th>
<th>1931 Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kamar</td>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonar</td>
<td>Goldsmith</td>
<td>Kshatriya-Rajput</td>
<td>Kshatriya-Rajput Brahmin-Vaishya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutradhar</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>Vaishya</td>
<td>Vaishya</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nai</td>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Thakur</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napit</td>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
<td>Baidya</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawani Kahar</td>
<td>Water/palanquin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Vaishya</td>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mochi</td>
<td>Cobbler</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Baidya Rishi</td>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamar</td>
<td>Tanner</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Baidya Rishi</td>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhatt</td>
<td>Musician</td>
<td>Brahma Bhatt</td>
<td>Brahma Bhatt</td>
<td>Brahmabhatt-Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandal</td>
<td>Namashudra</td>
<td>Namashudra-Brahmin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namashudra-Brahmin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chasi Khaibara</td>
<td>Fisherman</td>
<td>Mahisya</td>
<td>Mahisya</td>
<td>Mahisya Kshatriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatri</td>
<td>Trader</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
<td>Vaishya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teli</td>
<td>Oil miller</td>
<td>Rathore-Teli</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Rathore-Vaishya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expression of Caste Mobility: They were allowed this name in 1911.

(Extracted from, M N. Srinivas work, “Social Change in Modern India” reprinted, 2003, published by Orient Longman Private Limited 1/24 Asaf Ah Road, New Delhi-110002)
### TABLE II

**Caste Claims Advanced During the 1931 Census**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status claimed</th>
<th>No. of castes</th>
<th>New Claims</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than one claim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Provinces</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>13 1 1 25 11 1 6 3 - 8 5 - 7</td>
<td>15 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal &amp; Sikkim</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6 1 - 13 6 1 3 2 1 12 6</td>
<td>6 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar &amp; Orissa</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7 - - 4 3 1 - - 2 1 1</td>
<td>2 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Provinces &amp; Berar</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5 - - 7 6 2 - - 2 1 1</td>
<td>2 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>31 2 1 49 26 5 9 5 1 22 13 2 9</td>
<td>23 175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. S (Sudra), U (Untouchable), and T (Tribal) refer to traditional positions in the particular province
2. Wherever a caste claimed more than one status, all the claims were settled.
3. There were 34 claims to Brahmin status, 80 claims to Kshatriya status, 15 claims to Vaishya status and 37 claims were new names. Among Muslims, 9 groups took new names.
4. 148 castes made 175 claims, 23 of them making more than one claim, a few making three.

**Source:** 1931 Census Report, Part-I:


(191)
Competition amongst different denomination for evangelization over the same groups and locality also adversely affected process of Christianization. Missionaries were lamentably divided on the lines of denominational distinctions which obtained in England and America. In 1928 one Mr. Shisuram Saikia along with his supporter and family members switched over to Catholic denomination from Baptist fold due to clash of personal ego. These events created a lot of chaos and misunderstanding amongst Christian Mandali members of the village as well as amongst the organizations of different denominations. It also encouraged some Christians to return to their ancestral religion.

The Christian Missionary appeals to the lowest of the people, with whom no Hindu of caste would associate. It was easy to quote Christian precept and example. But difficult to build up indigenous church on this basis with power of leadership and responsibility. Often the missionary failed to establish station or church in the village or adjacent to village due to stiff resistance form non-Christian villagers. Missionaries are compelled to operate their works from distance Mission station due to which failed to maintain coordination, correlation, order and spirit regularly amongst the incoming members.

History tells us that Patronization of king or rulers is very much important in respect of conversion or evangelical activities. Colonial rules did not pay any interest on conversion work with an apprehension that their colonial interest might be adversely affected. Because religion was sensitive affairs in India So the affairs of the management of church were assigned in the hands of missionary.

Another reason was the personal and resources allotted for the work among the Boros were extremely meager. The means of evangelization by different Mission societies were perhaps over-centralized in some areas for particular communities at the cost of the works for Boro. In spite of having aspiration and enthusiasm they could not proceed in their activities due to lack of fund and government patronage.

Caste was also another respect in which the body of Christian believers in India was sorely divided and is more or less divided still on the line of caste and community. Hostility and
misunderstanding is frequently observed particularly in Organizational and Management level. This fact can also be extended in case of inter tribal community level.

Listeners in Village level are a few because customary law was so strong to permit neither to listen nor to associate with Christian organizations or organizers any body else. It might be due to close or adjacent association to the Assamese Caste Hindu society and the influenced of organized Socio-religious reform movement which became a part of national movement in India. When Missionaries arrived amongst the Bodos they had already become semi-Hinduised. Number of Hindu gods and goddesses already entered in the domain of the ancestral religion of the Bodos. The Christian Missionaries achieved grand success in hills area of Northeast India because hills areas were still physically and Socio-culturally remained totally isolated from the main land Hindu civilization.

Bodo people were so liberal and open in their attitudes towards the other in the past. We cannot say firmly how the ideas of purity and pollution came in the traditions of Bodo Society. History says that in the same family, converted Bodos to Islam and Hindu live by side by side. In other words we can say that members of the same family followed both Islam and Hindu and live side by side. They accepted new things very easily. In the subsequent time how they became rigid and closed in terms of associating with people of other groups particularly with Muslims and Christians and other beef eating communities cannot certainly be ascertained? But practically it is seen that the Bodos traditionally eat many things, which Caste Hindu people considered as taboos. Traditionally the Bodos eat almost all kinds of birds accept crow, vulture, kite; all kinds of animals accept lion, tiger, and other beef-eating animals and almost all kinds insect except life taking poisonous insects. The Hindu and ancestral Boros strictly followed the ideas of purity and pollution with Christian and Muslims and other beef eating groups. Acceptance of cooked food from Muslim and Christian pollutes a man that was the common belief. One who accepts cooked food from either of these groups is considered as baduna (polluted). Until and unless one is purified through Yagyahuti or gwthar dwi (Sacred water) his action is restricted both within the family as well as in the society. The concept of purity and pollution practiced by the community obstructs them in free mixing with both the Christian and Muslim. And in the similar way the entrance of a Muslim and Christian in traditional Hindu or Bathou family was not allowed specially in the Kitchen and main house (Nomano) But due to modern education this closed attitude of the people has relaxed to a great extent.
and now freely mixed and interact with each other. It is interesting to note that the Bodos are in the similar way treated as polluted by the New Hindus or New Vaisnavas who are racially belonged to the same stock (Sarania, Koch and Rajbongshis and other caste Hindus). Until recently New Hindus, the New Vaisnavas lived in confinement and keep themselves far distance socio-culturally from the Boros, their ancestral brothers.

Communication gap between the Missionary and the common people was another hurdle on the way to evangelical works. "To this day the appeal of Christianity is in large measure to the lower castes and simpler people. This is exactly the area of population in which the language difficulty is at its greatest." During pre and post independent India this was the exactly situation for the common Bodo population in rural areas. The lower orders of people know only their own dialect. Neither they know English nor Assamese. This was the experience acquired by the Missionaries in South and other parts of India.

Organized protest, obstruction, persecution made by the village community or non-Christian organizations in an organized manner against the conversion works or against the member or family, newly baptized, created obstruction on the normal way to the growth of Christianity. The organized obstruction or persecution or anti-propaganda against the evangelical works becomes a regular phenomenon relevant not only with the Bodos but also almost with all other plains tribal people of Assam. Such type of atrocities is even found to occur amongst Muslims. Due to fear of atrocities, ostracize and persecution, in most cases the newly converted people either compelled to return to ancestral fold or ostracized from their parental village.

The causes explained above are a part of the result of resurgence of Hindu culture and religion. Resurgence of Hindu Culture and religion was a part Independent movement in India fostered by Hindu intelligentsia to meet the need of strong, stable, united Indian nation based on ancient cultural heritage, marked as Hindu culture and civilization. Independence meant and means the great quest for stable nationhood and statehood. The quest for independence led and leads naturally back to the ancient spiritual and cultural heritage. And the quest is now wholly their own quest, undertaken their own responsibility. This, in brief, is responsible for what during recent years has been analyzed and discussed as the resurgence of the great non-Christian religion...it is intertwined with political and national reasons and aspirations, especially the aspiration to become
fully equal partners in the "community" of nations, tends to put the religions and cultures in the non-Christian world into the role of an ideology." This resurgence for life's sake, seeking renewed root age in the common great religio-Cultural tradition, and responding to the imperative need of strongly affirmative self-identification. This implies re-interpretation and new self-expression, which stresses, in a way more fresh and vigorous; or by preference, superiority. This cultural and religious resurgence is by nature often rather strongly self-assertive and militant. Renaissance or recapture of indigenous belief and pride in one's own religious and cultural heritage. Gandiji's Swadeshi movement, Arya Samaj's, Go to the Vedas, Missions of many Hindu socio-Religious reform organizations are tune with the spirits of resurgence. The policy of reforms and protection and preservation of indigenous culture are the sign of defence or response to the expansion and domination of western culture and can be considered as expression of resurgence and self-assertion of deeply rooted religious and cultural ways. On the way towards new destiny, a new allegiance to the religious and cultural heritage of the past in which India had its roots, and finds its self-identity and its self-esteem. Resurgence acquired a note of defensive aggressiveness or aggressive defensiveness. This accounts for the fact that, although the constitution guarantees not only religious liberty, but also religious expansion. The attitude towards Christian Missions and their evangelistic activity even when carried out by the representatives of the Indian Churches has become increasingly cautious and refractory, in many cases inimical.

The note of nationalism is unmistakable here, but even in the case of Christians who are nationals their whole work is often surrounded by suspicion, aversion, and an increasing watchfulness in order to limit and fight Christian expansion. Evangelism is proselytism and proselytism is eoipsio condemned.37

**Example of List of Victims:**

1. Khanin Narzary, Village-Hathjhara, PO-Tipkai, Dist-Kokrajhar. Year of conversion 1993, Year of persecution, 2000. He was school teacher. He had to leave his village and personal properties.


3. Jatin Basumatary of village-Belguri (Aflagaon), P.o Aflagaon, Dist-Kakrajhar Year of conversion-2007. Year of persecution-2007. He was ostracized and later left the village with family.
4. Bimal Brahma of Dotoma, Dangarkhuti, Dist-Kakrajhar. Year of conversion-2003. Year of persecution-2006. He had to face anger as well as physical torture by the people of parental village. He was dropped out of the village. He and his mother, who was a deodini before the conversion to Christianity, had to take shelter at Kakrajhar Baptist Church.

5. Kamakhya Narzary of Dotoma, Dangarkhuti, Dist-Kakrajhar. Year of conversion-2006. Year of persecution-2006. He was physically tortured and driven out of the village for conversion to Christianity. He took shelter at Kakrajhar Baptist Church for some time as the villagers ostracized him.

6. Rimal Basumatary, Banargaon, Tattara, PO.-Tattara, Dist-Kakrajhar. Year of conversion-2000. He has accepted Christianity. He is not allowed to perform prayer and etc. openly. He is to perform Christian ritual secretly without sensitizing the members of the family as well as the village community.

7. Rhema Basumatary of Kakrajhar, PO. -Kakrajhar, Dist-Kakrajhar. Year of conversion-1991. Year of persecution-2000. He was pastor of Kokrajhar Presbyterian Church. He had been abducted from his residence and was killed on false charges.

8. Miss Rupali Deori of village Jhoraigaon, PO-Dhemaji, Dist.-Dhemaji. Year of conversion-2006. Year of persecution-2006. She has been ostracized both by her family and the village community.

9. Rajen Narzary of village Mainaguri, Kachugaon, PO.- Serfanguri, Dist-Kakrajhar. Year of conversion –1991. Year of persecution-1996. He was abducted at night and was taken into a forest where he was killed. Woodcutters later found his dead body.

10. Manshing Rabha of Serfanguri, PO -Serfanguri, Dist-Kakrajhar. Year of conversion-2000. Year of persecution-2006. He was called out from his residence and was killed for accepting Christianity.

11. Milan Basumatary, Year of conversion-1992. Year of persecution-1992. He was physically tortured and humiliated by the villagers. A garland of old sandals and shoes was put on his neck and was demonstrated along the village road. He was driven out of the village. Now he serves as the pastor at Gurubhasa area

12. Khargeswar Narzary. Year of conversion-1991. Year of persecution-1991. He was suffered from illness (caught by devil spirit) and was cured by the nursing (Prayer service) of fellow Christian members and he accepted Christianity. But he was driven out of the village for accepting Christianity. Now he has got reconverted to Hinduism

(196)
13. Sanjib Basumatary and his brother and sister of Gobordhana, PO.-Gobordhana, Dist-Baska. Year of conversion-1996. Year of persecution-2000. He and his brother and sister were driven out from his. After some years they went back to the village. But when more families converted to Christianity, they were all driven out from the village.

14. Mongol Boro of Howly, PO -Howly, Dist-Baska. He and other three members of his family were driven out from the village. Now he is taking shelter at Salmara mission.

Instances of conversion and consequent conflict are regularly taking place in Bodo villages. There is another instance of incident occurred recently in Bashbari village under Bishmuri Police Station, Kokrajhar District in 2007. Almost all the villagers are the followers of ancestral religion, 'Bathouism'. And rests of the 14 families are the followers of Christianity. A couple of that village from the followers of 'Bathou' have recently been converted into Christianity. It is said that, the wife of the couple, Urme by name was caught by evil spirit and was started eating wild snails and insects causing serious illness with her. She was relieved from evil spirit by conducting Christian prayer service. The followers of Bathouism took the events seriously otherwise and put a condition to the couple to re-convert into ancestral religion. On refusal to do so, they were chased out of the village and threatened not to come back in the village. The couple was compelled to take shelter in the house of one Mr. Shila Basumatary, a close relatives' who is happen to be a new Christian from nearby village. The people of the Bashbari village thinks that, Mr. Shila Basumatary is playing pioneering role in the conversion of the couple as well as conversion of other people in the area. He was threatened not only the by the people of Bashbari but also by people of greater Bishimuri area for giving the couple shelter in his family. In spite of assurance from District administration for security, till the month of May, 2007 the couple has been living with Mr. Shila Basumatary in his house and refused to come back to their native village due to fear of being attacked.

Similar type of incident took place in Goreswar area of Baska district in winter, 2003. In the year 2001, some Manoj Baro and Deepak Baro converted into Christianity being influenced by some of his Christian friends. By 2003, the number of Baro Christian converts increased up to 15. And by winter, 2003, these new converts Baro Christians were celebrating Christmas in Goreswar. During celebration hour a few anti-Christians disturbed them by pelting stones and other like objects. The celebrates had to flee from the venue to Udalguri. With the help of civil and police administration they came back to their native village and now they are following their faith without any restriction.
These types of persecutions have been rarely but regularly taking place in different parts of Assam. In most of the cases the persecuted persons are either left the parental villages or return to their original fold by sacrificing the Christian religion. Village community takes the conversion work very seriously and feel that emergence of Christianity in the village would disturb the order and unity of the village community. Unity of feeling as well as order in the society would be affected by the adoption of Christianity by their fellow members, that is, the apprehension of the village community. On the other hand, the new converts say that in association with the Christians and by adoption of Christianity what he feels and obtains spiritually and mentally, that cannot be served by other way.

Boro people live in villages and they form village community. Traditionally each Boro Village forms a homogenous structural and functional group from socio-religious point of view. Members of village community follow similar type of religion, either the Bathou, the ancestral religion or the Brhma dharma. We hardly find a village in which diversity of religions are followed. Ancestral religion observes the practice of animal sacrifice, on the other hand Brhma dharma opposed to it. Eradication of alcoholism, rearing of pigs and poultry was a part of Brhma Dharma movement in opposition to ancestral social practices. Due to these contradictory in ideals we hardly find Bathou and Brhma dharma together in the same village. Socio-cultural movement initiated by Bodo Sahitya Sabha and other leading socio-cultural organizations makes the Bodo people socio-culturally conscious. And movement for preservation, protection and promotion of their traditional social identity also started on parallel ways. Preservation, protection and promotion of Language, Culture and Religion also become constituent parts of this movement. Traditional society was unorganized and open and was quite unaware of their socio-cultural identity as a force of unity and power. Most probably after the conversions of their kings into Islam or Hinduism, the remaining Bodos miserably became disorganized. Inter-Village or Regional level community organizations and interaction might have broken down. Subsequently Community organization was confined only to village level and so also the community feeling. New things, i.e., ideas, values and traditions penetrated one way or the other and they became easy targets of conversion to both Islam and Hinduism. And many Bodos converted to Hinduism and Islam sacrificing their original identity, i.e., language, culture, traditions, religion etc. But during post independent time the Bodos become conscious on all fronts. The socio-cultural and literary movement started by Bodo Sahitya Sabha also influenced the Bodo community on religious line to organize in the State and interstate level basically to bring reformatious and resurgence in their religious ideals and practices as well as to put resistance towards growing trends of conversion to other religions. Important issue of village community...
relating to religion no longer remained as the issue of individual village community but becomes an
issue for the whole congregation. Village makes the smallest unit of the structure of whole organization.
Naturally such type of issue is viewed as a challenge not only for the village but also for the whole
religious congregation. Due to resurgence in the traditional ancestral religion the trend of conversion
to Brahma dharma among the followers Bathou has already been stopped. On the other hand the
conversion to Christianity is occurring regularly on a small scale, in individual and family level.

After seventies, different NGOs affiliated to national level Hindu organizations constantly
working amongst the tribal people of Assam and other areas for the protection and preservation of
culture and religion of the indigenous people. Adivashi Seva Sammittee, Kalyan Ashram, RSS etc.
are constantly working amongst the Boros in favour of the protection of their ancestral culture and
tradition. These organizations always play anti-Christian propaganda at any moment at their
opportunity. The religious congregations like, Brahma dharma Sanmilan, Bathou Afats are now
well-organized and gathered more strength on the line of other great religions. But the structure and
functional system of this religious organization are not so ordered, disciplined, integrated, balanced
and powerful enough to put resistance against all kinds of challenge that arouse before them.

Loyalty and respect towards any religion is also to some extent attributed by the purity,
honesty and religiosity of life of the officials and functionaries who lead the religious organization
and congregation. The Bathou or Brahma Dharma has very short history of running religious
organization compared to Christian Missionary and Islam that have more than thousand years of
experience of working for the cause of religion. The amount of services, mental, moral, human and
spiritual, physical and material rendered by the Non-Christian organizations, to their fellow religious
member are far less than the services rendered by the Christian Missionary toward their fellow
Christian members and also to others.

Another weakness of non-Christian religious organizations amongst the Boros is non-
existence of full time training organization and trained religious officials and workers on the line of
Christian Missionary. Non-availability of religious literature with high philosophy and organized
way of life and activities also another weakness. Poor financial position of the organization is
another weakness of non-Christian Bodo religious organizations.

(199)
After interrogation with some new converts it is realized that poverty, misery, diseases and some other ill-fated conditions for which they have no remedy in their hands are the responsible factors leading to conversion into Christianity on the one hand and, the love, fellow feeling, material, human and psychological, moral and spiritual services extended to them by the Missionary and the other fellow Christian members on the other hand. "The all men are alike in the sight of God is one which seems to near to the heart of the gospel." The massages of Christianity, 'all man are alike before the sight of God' attracted the discriminated, depressed and exploited sections of the Indian society and so also the Bodos and other tribes in contrary to caste inequality, discrimination and suppression as a doctrine and ideal of Hindu religion and social structure.

Caste system had had effect in preventing choice and mobility in employment. Christianity represented the first great breach in that system and contributed much to this freedom and mobility. But rural Indian society, based on rigid caste principles, structurally and functionally has nothing to do with this freedom and mobility. One can use this freedom for switching over to new type occupation for him that is different from hereditary occupation, but in the presence of a strong Caste Panchayat or Village council, people in the village hardly could use the freedom of religion for switching over to other religion according to their will. System of caste is jointly regulated by Village panchayat, supreme authority of the village. Even have the people choice for Christianity, they have no power and courage to defy the authority of caste to convert them into Christianity or Islam. In a village where the Caste Panchayat is strong, partial conversion is impossible. This could be possible only when a person or group of people is isolated from the grips of Caste Panchayat or caste organization or community organization.

The most important factor is the liberty and freedom guaranteed by the rule of law established by the British Government of India to the people for practicing religion according to ones choice. People can use this liberty at their hand. Obstruction of the people from using the right of freedom of religion shall equate with caste rule where lower caste people are debarred from right to equality and others

Economy is the basic structure of society. The structure and function of different social institutions, Political, economic, religious, education, customs, traditions etc are shaped directly and indirectly by the economic conditions, environment and circumstances in which we live. Ideals,
norms, and structure of religion are also shaped by economic conditions and material and socio-cultural environment.

Caste system had effect in preventing choice and mobility in employment. People in the society did not enjoy freedom of economic right in terms of choice of occupation and social mobility. Christianity represented the first great breach in that system and contributed much to this freedom and mobility.

Economic development, elimination of poverty and illiteracy; replacement of the world view based on religion and faith, by the world view based on knowledge, ideas, information, logic and rationality based on modern scientific and technical education may help removing the communal sentiments based on religious affiliation. Economic development and removal of unemployment may lead to decrease in conversion process too.

Reference:


11. Ibid, 3.


21. Gazetteers of Bengal and North-East India, See the Census reports of 1871, 1891, 1901, 1911 district wise.


(202)
27. Hindu Maha Shabha Papers, File no-P-32, 1944, NMML.
29. Thomas, Santosh, 2005: Christianity and Culture, Chapter 8, ‘Christianity in India., p. 176, Mittal Publication.
34. Thomas, Santosh, Christianity and Culture, p. 179.
36. Christianity and Culture, p. 244.
38. Ibid, 177.