Chapter 5

Religious transition
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Religion is defined as a catalyst for change or to preserve social traditions, norms and ideals. The change of the religion however, leads to revolution in culture, social system and refashions the social bonds among the base members; ultimately resulting in restructuring of the society. In the context of India, the term Sanskritization is a process whereby people of so called lower castes collectively try to imitate the beliefs and practices of the upper caste in order to acquire higher status in the society. It points towards a trend of cultural mobility arising in the Indian traditional social system. The process of sanskritization seems to have given a tribal community an opportunity to prove and identify itself to be a part of the Hindu society which is regarded as of higher status in the social hierarchy. In fact the process of Hinduisation was simultaneously followed by Sanskritisation to imitate the upper castes and improve the so called social status in the society. The Bodo community, a non-Aryan tribe came into contact with the Hindus of neighbouring regions since the time of the early rulers, particularly with the advent of the Aryan culture in the 7th century CE. There are references of a number of the Bodo kings who converted into the fold of Hinduism. In the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, a section of Bodo group of people adopted a new religion and gave up their traditional beliefs and practices as well as their culture. The Bodos and their allied tribes like
Meches, Koches, Rabhas, Kacharis and Dimasas, etc. were the first among the tribes to bear the onslaught of Sanskritisation process in North Bengal and across Assam and Bangladesh.

According to the majority of the historians the Aryans entered into India about 1500 BCE through the north-western corner of India and further advanced towards the whole of India. However, their migration was also found into the rich alluvial plains of Assam from the early times but many of them were mixed with aboriginal population and formed the semi-Hinduised aborigines. In the process of their movements, they faced a strong resistance from the previous occupants of the country, especially the Dravidians in the west, the Austricts and the Bodos in the North and the East and the Negroids in the south. The Aryans slowly came into contact with several non-Aryan tribes of Assam. The Aryans were not very large in number at first but the policy of peaceful coexistence with the non-Aryan tribes and aborigines of Assam was adopted by them. Afterwards, the Aryans slowly translated and transmitted their languages, religion and culture to the non-Aryan tribes of Assam. On the subsequent years, the Aryan language became domineering over the tribal languages. In former times, the Mech or Bodo language was once spoken all over the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, North Bengal and erstwhile East Bengal but it could not stand up to the more developed language of the Aryans, - Assamese in Assam and Bengali in North Bengal and Bangladesh. Thus, in Assam a large number of Bodos were transformed into Assamese speaking Hindus right from the Vedic age.

In the process of Aryanisation, the names of the non-Aryan tribes were changed to caste names. The Bodos of North Bengal formed a great kingdom of Koch Bihar under an able leadership of Biswa Singh and his son Nar Narayan. But it was during the reign of Nar Narayan that the Bodos were largely converted into Hinduism and became Hinduised and soon they assumed the caste title of ‘Koch’ as well to merge themselves into the Hindu social hierarchy. Originally, the Koches were once a tribe of the Bodo group before the reign of Koch king Biswa Singh. It may be said that from the earliest times, the Brahmins eyed mostly the members of the royal family for conversion. The fact is
that once the members of royal families could be converted and brought within the fold of Hindu faith, it became easier for them to obtain their generosity.

The Brahmins coerced the Koches by crafting a story around their divine ancestry that they descended from the noble lineage of the Kshatriyas and having thrown away their sacred thread in fear of Parasuram, the great son of Jamadagni, a Brahmin ascetic in ancient times. The Kshatriyas were once pursued and killed by the powerful Parasuram. It was also further declared that Biswa himself was the son of God Siva, and not of the humble man, Haria Mandal. But it is revealed from the history of 'Darrang Rajvamsavali' that one Haria Mandal who was the early ancestor of the Koch royal family, was the son of Dambambu Mech a resident of the village of Chikangram, in Khungtaghat pargana of Goalpara district. However, having persuaded by the high caste Brahmins, the Koch king along with all his family members and his descendants were converted into Hinduism under the advice of Brahmins. But the conversion of royal families was then followed by his subjects also. They later on identified themselves as Rajbangshi in Assam and assumed the Aryan culture and language. They forsook their ancient system of religious beliefs, practices, social traditions and culture, etc. The royal family members of Koch Bihar also belonged to the Mongoloid stock. It is mentioned in the Darrang Rajvamsavali that the Koch king Nar Narayan in his dream was advised by Bathou Bwrai to arrange the Kherai festival of Bathou religion for giving up his primitive system of worship. Accordingly, the Kherai puja was performed on the bank of the Sonkosh river during the reign of the Koch king Nar Narayan in the sixteenth century CE. Its observances consisted of primitive system of worship, especially offerings zumai (rice beer), sereb (distilled alcoholic spirit), sacrifices of animals, birds, fowls, goats and dances of Doudini (female oracle) called deodhai in Assamese. Thus traditionally the Koches were a tribe of the Bodo group and worshipped in Bathou religion.

The neo-Vaishnavite cult of Srimanta Sankardev had a great influence on a section of the Bodo-Kacharis in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Srimanta Sankardev in his Vaishnavite cult of 'one God' belief used satras, religious preaching places in Kamrup. It is the religion preaching to give in to One God, called Visnu in the form of Narayan who assumes incarnations from age to age. The Ahoms could not tolerate his
preaching of 'Ek- saran-nam' dharma (dharma=religion). Srimanta Sankardev then moved to Koch Bihar during the reign of Koch king Nar Narayan in the 16th century CE. Most of the people of that time were already Hinduised. The fact is that they had already been influenced by the prayers and hymns of Srimanta Sankardev. During that time the rearing and keeping of fowls, ducks, pigs prevalent among the Bodo-Kacharis was considered by Hindu Aryans unclean in their habits in Assam. As a result, under the influence of Assamese neighbours, a section of Bodo-Kacharis adopted the 'Ek saran nam' faith of neo-Vaishnavite religion of Srimanta Sankardev in the districts of erstwhile Kamrup and Darrang. The task of this conversion was mainly carried out by the Hindu priests among the Bodos and it was successful to a great extent. After embracing 'Ek saran nam' dharma a section of Bodo-Kacharis adopted the different surnames, such as Bora, Deka, Das, Sarania, etc. The adoption of the title 'Sarania' after their name was nothing but only to indicate their conversion into Hinduism. They gave up some of their original beliefs and practices and adopted some ways of life of the fellow-believers of neo-Vaishnavite faith. They also abandoned their own language and even their original culture. However, their assimilation with the Assamese culture is clear evidence of the fact that they now made prayer either at the Namghar or in the Satras under Sankari Kristi. The Sarania-Kacharis once abolished the rearing of pig and eating of pork but their becoming cleaner and better socially or economically remains elusive. They only lost their aboriginal customs, language, literature, religion, culture, etc. They could not occupy the upper status of the Hindu society and also could not re-assimilate themselves into the culture of their original fold. At later period, they became an independent community of the Bodo Kacharis and identified themselves as Sarania-Kacharis in Assam. They are now largely found in the districts of Darrang, Odalguri, Nalbari, Baksa and Sonitpur, but most of the Sarania Kacharis in Kokhirajhar district came back under the Brahma faith of Kalicharan Brahma. Thus in the Hindu social hierarchy, the Koch occupied the highest position among the Bodo converts but many other tribes remained at lower status.

The royal families of Kamrup however, maintained their distinct identity for long period of time and the names of royal family also did not bear Hindu nomenclature. But a considerable number of the population of Brahmaputra valley were by then Hindus and
the ruling families, like the Koches and Borahis had already been Hinduised. Laso Narayan Deb was one of the earliest Kachari kings to have adopted the Kshatriya nomenclature in the sixteenth century CE. Before him, the Kachari kings had their traditional Kachari names which are the evidence of their remaining outside the influence of the Hindu faith. But the Hindu Brahmins continued to convert the royal families in Kamrup. In 1790 CE Raja Krishna Chandra, the king of Cachar along with his brother Gobinda Chandra was formally converted into Hinduism. They were proclaimed as Hindu kings of the Kshatriya caste but only after passing through the body of a cow effigy made of copper. Besides, the king could claim to be descendent of Bhima, one of the Pandava heroes of The Mahabharata. The conversion of the royal family was then followed by his subjects. Consequently, a large number of the people became Hindus but they did not obtain the status of Kshatriya.

The process of conversion among the Bodos was continued with ever expanding dimension even during the colonial rule. And a section of the Bodos declared themselves to be separate independent communities of the Bodos, like Modahis. During this time, the Brahmins pointed out the flaws in their traditional religious beliefs, practices and social system to be the root causes of degrading status of the Bodos. The main reason behind the conversion into other religion was to escape from the racial derogation inflicted by the Aryans over the non-Aryans or non-Hindu people. The derogatory remarks, like the Asuras, Dasas and Mlecchas, etc. were used to call the non-Hindu people, especially the non-Aryans. Like other non-Aryan people, the Bodos were also loathed by the high caste Hindus. They were designated as ‘Mleccha’ or ‘Mech’ and were also regarded by the high caste Brahmins as ‘untouchable’ and ‘polluted’ in the society. The Bodo-Kacharis even after conversion to the Hindu faith were give very lowly social status and were treated as unclean. They were forbidden to mingle with the Hindu caste people in inter-dinning, inter-marriage and various socio-political activities. However, the process of conversion had great social impact in the solidarity of the Bodo community. The Bodos were once a great community but disintegrated into different smaller communities due to process of Aryanisation carried out by the high caste Hindus. In Assam, a section of Bodo converts again declared themselves as an independent community. This is evident from the census report of 1881 that the Bodo population was grouped into three
categories, namely the number of people uninfluenced by Hinduism was 3,75,538, those in the process of conversion numbering 82,889 and those fully converted people were 3,95,902. Thus a large number of non-Aryan Hindu converts were figured in the census report of 1881. The conversion of the Bodos into Hinduism fragmented the Bodo population. On the other hand, the population of the Assamese Hindus had augmented due to the inclusion of the Bodo converts. The process of conversion among the Bodos into other sects of Hinduism still continues to some extent.

Apart from Hinduisation, a large section of Mech Bodos was converted into Islam and became Muslims. When Bakhtiyar Khilji came to North Bengal in the early 13th century CE with a view to invade Tibet, he met one Mech chief known as Ali Mech, and by this time, most of his followers accepted Muhammadanism. Meanwhile, the Bodo King of Koch Bihar became Hindu and assumed the title 'Rajbangshi'. When he began to pronounce himself as 'the son of Siva' a large number of people disliked the king's attitude and embraced the faith of Islam. Of the Muhammadans in the Jalpaiguri district, it is said that they were converts from the aboriginal Koch and Mech-Bodo races. In fact the conversion of the royal families made such an impact on the common people that anyone became either Hindus or Muslims during this period. So, the process of Sanskritisation or Hinduisation was continued without any disruption throughout the tracts inhabited by the Bodos. At this time, a number of the Bodos had also been converted into Islam in the villages, like Panbari and Alamganj of the present Dhubri district in Assam and most of them became Muslims. In the mean time they completely lost their original culture and identity. The Bodo society hence passed through many stages of conversion from centuries to centuries and that resulted in disintegration of the traditional Bodo society.

Christianity among the Bodos

The Christian religion forms one of the important religions of the Bodos. This religion played a very important role in the socio-economic and cultural changes of the traditional Bodo society. The Christian missionaries came among the Bodos in the early years of 19th century and preached Christianity among them. The most important task of missionaries to spread Christianity among the Bodo people was through the adoption of
various charitable activities for their development in order to attract them towards Christianity.

For the purpose of spread of the Christian religion in India the three prominent and devoted personalities were sent to India from England after having established itself as a dominant power in India by the British East India Company. They were William Carey who firstly arrived in Serampore in 1793 CE and later on Joshua Marshman and William Ward also arrived in 1799 CE. They started their mission firstly at Serampore.\textsuperscript{17} But in respect of religious affairs, a policy of neutrality was maintained by the British East India Company towards the end of 18\textsuperscript{th} century CE. The fact is that the native Indians at that time were very sensitive and conservative about the religious affairs. Hence, the preaching of Christian faith among the Indians carried by William Carey, the first British missionary firstly in Calcutta was restricted. But by the passage of Charter Act of India in 1813, the Christian missionaries were permitted to propagate the faith of Christian religion in India.\textsuperscript{18}

In North East frontier the progress of evangelization became slow because the tribes of the North-East frontier was said to be rather rude and indifferent to outsiders. Krishna Pal was the first converts of Christianity. Krishna Pal, the earliest convert was sent by William Carey, the first British missionary to North-East India for the spread of gospel on the request of the magistrate of Sylhet. Krishna Pal is said to have arrived in Khasi hills as early as 1813 CE. He had also carried his missionary activities in Goalpara and Kamrup districts of Assam. In 1829 CE, a branch of Serampore missionary was set up at Gauhati under James Rae, a native of Dumfrience the representation of David Scott, Agent to the Governor General of North East Frontier.\textsuperscript{19}

The task of pacifying the rude tribes of the North-East frontier especially among the Singphos and the Khamtis was not easy during this time. So, Francis Jenkins thought it could be effectively done through the spread of gospel. When an invitation was sent accordingly in early 1835 CE, the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society took the matter seriously and a mission was then sent under Nathan Brown and Oliver T. Cutter and they reached at Sadiya with a printing press along with their family members on 23\textsuperscript{rd} March, 1836 CE. It was hoped by the Society that not only the frontier tribes would be
converted to Christianity but also an entrance would also be opened up at no far-away future even to the heart of China. However, at Sadiya they could enter into villages of the Khamtis and after that, a few books were also printed in their language preparatory to the establishment of schools and spread of the gospel amongst the tribes. In April 1837 CE, another missionary, Miles Bronson accompanied by Mr. Thomas moved to the Brahmaputra valley and then arrived to work among the Singphos but near about Sadiya the latter was killed on the bank of the river.20

In 1839 CE, the centre of Christian missionary at Sadya was abandoned due to the attack of the Khamtis on the garrison there. Afterwards, Nathan Brown and T. Cutter proceeded up to Jaypur and Sibsagar. Having stationed at Jaypur, Bronson managed to befriend the Nocte Naga chief of Namsang village in the present day Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh. He brought his sister, Rhoda and another missionary, Cyrus Barker for missionary work among the Nocte Nagas.21 At Namsang, a school was opened by him and the preparation of some elementary books in their language was then initiated. In 1840 CE, Cyrus Barker and his wife, and Miss. R. Bronson also joined in this mission. But unfortunately during this time, his sister Rhoda died of illness. Bronson himself suffered from illness. The fact that the climate of Namsang was not suited for them. So, Bronson left the Nagas and then resided himself at Nowgong. On May 1841 CE, Nidhiram, the first Assamese who converted to Christianity at Jaipur was baptized by him, and was later popularly known as *Nidhi Levi Farwell*.22 Nidhiram was a student of the mission school of Sadiya. The first women convert was Thuku, a student of the Orphan Institution at Nowgong. These two converts, Nidhiram and Thuku were married to each other in 1847 CE. The Orphan Institution was established in 1843 CE and it became a centre for recruiting Assamese people into fold of Christianity since 1846 CE.23 In 1843 CE Barker also went to Guwahati and at that time, the only stations of the American Baptists was at Sibsagar, Nowgong and Gauhati in North East India. By 1844 CE, fourteen schools were established by the American Baptist missionaries under O. T. Cutter in the district of Sibsagar. The first convert, Nidhiram was also followed by Bati Ram, Ramsing and Kalibar on the subsequent years. After that, it came to light to the missionaries mind that it would be easier to propagate the gospel among the Bodo-Kacharis at the foothills of the Bhutan in the remote northern parts of the Brahmaputra
valley. The missionaries were attracted towards the Bodo-Kacharis of the valley whose lifestyle and behaviour are very simple and as a large number of their population were concentrated at the valley of river Brahmaputra. So, in 1914 CE, G. K. Campor was sent to work for the American Baptist Mission in Darrang district where a large number of Bodo population inhabited. In the course of time, many Christian missionaries by different names and denominations also appeared in Assam to propagate the Christian religion among the Bodos. Among these missionaries, the American Baptist Missionaries the first to come into contact with the Bodo-Kacharis of Assam. The first Baptist church was organized in December 1845 CE at Gauhati and its branches were also opened in the same year at Nowgong and Sibsagar. In 1846 CE, at Gauhati, a boarding school was started by the missionaries and this very year, a few number of Bodo pupils were also admitted to the school. Of them, a pupil named Apintha from Thargaon village of North Kamrup was baptized in 1849 CE at Guwahati church. He was the first Bodo convert into Christian religion in the history of conversion of the Bodos to Christian religion. The attention of the American Baptist Mission was directed towards the Garos at Goalpara and so, the task of working among the Bodos was left by them and then in 1965 CE, the Austrian Baptist missionary society was entrusted to work among the Bodos. But the Australian Baptist missionary did not pay much attention and they in turn handed over to the local management belonging to this area. As a result, the Bodo Baptist Mission was formed in Goalpara. It later on came to be known as the Goalpara Baptist Church Union. This Mission brought some Bodo villages under their umbrella like Bamungaon, Tukrajhar, Haraputa etc. Thus this Union greatly played an important role in spreading the Christian religion among the Bodos and the number of Bodo converts was also increased.

On the northern bank of Brahmaputra, the Christian missionaries undertook the strongest mission among the Bodos of Goalpara district. However this work was looked after by two Bodo converts, Minaram Basumatary and his wife. During this time the two Bodo converts contributed a total of Rs. 865 for Church work and benevolence. Under the leadership of Minaram Basumatary, a meeting of annual association was also convened at Goalpara where about 1,000 people attended. However he was assisted by the two young men, one of whom was a Colporteur paid by the Bible Society. Since they
were mere boys the burden of all activities remained on the shoulder of Minaram Basumatary. The whole work was carried out by Minaram Basumatary. In 1938 CE, Goalpara continued to be the centre of their mission but Minaram Basumatary and his wife were the only workers at the centre. He looked after the school at Tukrajhar and often visited the churches too. During this year forty-nine people had been baptized and more were ready for baptism. Besides, in 1940 CE about one hundred persons were baptized. Tukrajhar then became the centre of the missionary activities. Through the educational activities the school provided some good services continuously to the people along with the propagation of Christian faith.²⁷

Since Goalapara was far away from Mission centre at Gauhati and most of the people who lived there were Bodos and Baptists, the American Baptist Mission wanted to hand over the field to the Australian Baptist Mission who were also looking for such a field. But to make the most effective contribution to the progress of Christianity among them, the missionary felt the necessity of an agricultural mission. Tukrajhar was the centre of Boro Baptists and it was far away from the Mission centre. So, the Boro Baptists got a very less care and encouragement from them. Besides, there was no well-trained leader among them but only a few literate women. As a result, a few number of older Bodo converts reverted to the customs of taking more than one wife in the society. The drinking of zumai (rice beer), sereb (distilled alcoholic spirit) continued to disrupt in the village churches.²⁸ Despite of these, the work of missionary among the Bodos was continued.

In 1937 CE, at Mangaldai field there was no good preacher for evangelization. However, one Bodo convert, Romanus Daimary continued his faithful work among the churches and had the communion services twice a year. During the year many of the village churches built new houses of worship and 250 persons were baptized. In 1938 CE, a number of 142 persons were baptized during that year and the number of churches increased up to 55 with about 3,880 members. In addition, a number of new churches were organized in new places and a number of converts among the Bodos also grew up steadily. However, in 1941 CE the growth of Christianity in this section was rather very slow due to the underlying desire to perpetuate the Bodo-Kachari customs. It was not a
question of what was best for Christianity and what was the custom of the tribe. This had been a persistent problem from the beginning of the Christianity among them. During the year 120 persons were baptized and Romanus Daimary continued to be the leading evangelist in this field as there were no pastors in majority of the churches.  

In addition, the Anglican Church began to work among the Bodos in 1860 CE in the district of Darrang. C. H. Hesselmyer belonging to Anglican Church came to Tezpur to propagate the gospel and established the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. In February, 1864 CE, Sidney Endle was sent to Tezpur by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel for spreading gospel in Assam as an assistant of C H. Hesselmyer, then in charge of the Kachari mission at that place. But during this time a number of Bodos of Darang district residing in and around the headquarter Tezpur had already adopted the gospel. He was however successful in building a full-fledged church at Bengbari near Harisinga. The Boro language and culture was extensively studied by Sidney Endle. The part of New Testament was translated by him into Bodo and the handiwork was also prepared in Bodo. Besides, several papers were also written by him on the Bodo folklore, customs and traditions, etc. His monograph entitled 'The Kacharis' was edited by J.D. Anderson, then Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, on behalf of the Govt. of Assam and it was published first in 1911 CE in London. It is the first book of its kind written on the Bodos which contributed immensely in the development of Bodo language.

The Santal Mission, also called Lutheran missionaries having its headquarters at Dumka of Bihar had established a colony in Goalpara district mainly to evangelize the Santals. A number of Santal families emigrated from Bengal and in 1880 CE an agricultural colony called Christian settlement was established in Dingdinga area of western Assam. It is reported that the colony had a church having several hundred Christians. The schools were also opened in the colony to impart the education to the people. Here the missionaries came into contact with the neighbouring Bodo villages. The Bodo people were occasionally invited to the Church. As early as 1887 CE, a few number of Bodos converted to Christian faith on being influenced by Christianity. And by 1922 CE, the number of converts among the Bodos grew up steadily and as a result.
many Christian centers were also set up at different Bodo populated areas, such as Gaurang of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Parkijuli in present Baksa district of Assam.\textsuperscript{31}

A. Christiansen another missionary came to India in 1927 CE and joined Holger Winding, a missionary of Denmark who was working for Santal mission to the Northern Churches. An independent charge was taken by A. Christiansen to run the Bodo Church. This resulted on the formation of Gaurang district in 1929 CE for the purpose of their smooth administrative convenience. The Gaurang district was sub-divided into two districts- Bongaigaon and Gaurang after the arrival of Norwegian missionaries, Andres Malme and his wife Else Malme. They were jointly bestowed the name of Northern Lutheran Church in 1958 CE.\textsuperscript{32}

The Scottish Presbyterian Church which began its work of spreading their faith among the Nepalese of Darjeeling extended its services gradually to the Bodos of Jalpaiguri district of Durar areas. Having arrived among the Bodos, the Scottish Presbyterian missionaries learned the Bodo language and propagated the gospel among them. They worked extensively among the Bodos of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal and were able to convert a considerable number of them to their Christian faith. Two persons namely, Ronglar Narzari and Jitnal Narzinari were to be remembered for their pioneering work among the Bodos of Jalpaiguri district.\textsuperscript{33}

The two famous Catholic priests, Stephen Casella and John Gabriel were the first Catholic missionaries to come to Assam. They began their work for spread of their faith in Assam in 1893 CE. Since the beginning their work was concentrated on the hill tribes, so they could not pay much attention to the plains of Assam, particularly the Bodos due to lack of personnel. In 1982 CE, Piasecki was invited by some Bodos to Udalguri and here a few numbers of Bodos were baptized by him. From 1933 CE, making an extensive tour to the some villages of the Bodos, the two missionaries A. Alessi and A. Ravalico carried out their work of spreading their faith among the Bodos in the district of Darrang. During this time the Beha Basti of Kamrup and a few families of Kumarikata of Baksa district is said to have accepted the Catholic faith. The Catholic community of Kokrajhar district was first established at Nandorbari village. The Catholic priests were invited from Guwahati by one of the Bodo leaders, named Phulsing (Philip). A young man, named
Gendra Champramari, an orphan from Bengal was found by Philip Phulsing and he was sent to Guwahati where he was baptized (1934-45 CE). After his baptism, he was sent by Orestes Marengo at Tczpur where he was given some training for the propagation of Christian faith. Afterwards, Marengo, now Bishop Marengo made Gendra Champramari his main instrument in pursuing evangelical work among the Bodos. As a result, the people of some Bodo villages, like Ranisunderi, Kagrabari, Digoldong, Patgaon, Jolaigaon, Dandupur, etc. in Kokrajhar district embraced the Catholic faith. Besides these, the villages of Kalajhar and new village Bogriguri of Kamrup district are also said to have adopted the Catholic faith. It may be mentioned that the Bodo language was learned by Marengo, the young rector of Guwahati well. The first prayer book and the catechism book were prepared by him in Boro language. Besides, an extensive tour was also made by him among the Bodos for two years. He was liked by the Bodo people too much that even today he is remembered as the father of the Bodo Catholic community of Goalpara.

In 1966 CE, a new mission was also opened at Bengtol and at Soraibil in 1972 CE. In the initial days, the Catholic missionaries were suffered some setback from carrying out the work of spreading their faith among the Bodos of Darrang district due to adherent habits and attitudes of some people. But in 1951 CE the Parish of Tangla was opened and it was then followed by a new mission at Udalguri in 1966 CE. In the district of Darrang, several centers were opened at many places, such as Mangaldai, Ambagaon; Rowta, Dimakuchi, Mazbat, etc. Besides, the centers and schools of the Catholic missionaries in the district of Baksra were also set up at many places, such as Brama, Kumarakata, Doomni, etc. Thus, the opening of Christian centers and establishment of different schools were still continued in the Bodo populated areas, but very few in numbers.

The spread of Christianity among the Bodos was rather very slow. Despite, there were a number of different centers among the Bodo populated areas to preach the essence of Christianity. It may be referred that prior to the advent of Christian missionaries among the Bodos Hinduism had deep influence among them. In the advent of foreign missionaries, the Bodos were not animist by religion and devoid of all religious and
spiritual ideas. Hence, probably the Christian missionaries could not take much advantage to propagate the Christian religion among the Bodos. But at that time, the traditional Bodo religion and its philosophy were not able to fulfill the desire of the Bodo community. Taking this advantage some foreign writers perhaps described the religion of the Bodos as animistic believing in ghosts and spirits. And the Christian missionaries also announced that this type of religion would never be able to elevate the human beings. Meanwhile, a section of the Bodos had already identified themselves as Hindu after practicing some of the basic principles and rites of the Hindu religion. Although they had not been totally Hinduised yet most of the Bodos by and large lived on the fringe of the Hindu religious and social sphere. In this way, the missionaries faced many problems to change the faith of the traditional Bodos into the fold of their faith. Despite, the Christian missionaries did not give up the task of the spread of gospel among the Bodos and carried on their work in the Bodo populated areas. But they achieved a very little success in converting the bulk of the Bodo population into their Christian faith in the Brahmaputra valley.

The Christian missionaries held the religious beliefs and practices of the Bodo community responsible for their socio-economic and cultural degeneration. So, in the initial stage, a very simple way was adopted by them for its remedy by converting the Bodos into the fold of Christianity. It was thought that it would be easier to preach gospel among the Bodo Kacharis at the foothills of the Bhutan in the northern tract of Brahmaputra valley because of simplicity of their behaviour and lifestyle as well as the bulk of their population. In the propagation of their faith, the Christian missionaries neither argued nor disputed. The Bodos were persuaded by showing love and the principle of charity. However, in case of the charitable relief and care for the sick the missionaries gained a good attention, sympathy and goodwill from the Bodo people. Various benevolent works were also undertaken by the Christian missionaries for the elevation of human beings among the Bodos. Many new missionary schools and churches were opened at the Bodo populated areas and became available. Most of the churches or centers were set up in the Bodo areas but those had schools attached to them. As a result, a number of Bodo converts into the fold of Christianity grew up. But from the beginning of the twentieth century the conversion of the Bodos into Christianity became slower to
some extent. The fact is that most of the Bodo people had already come under the influence of different sects of Hinduism and Brahma faith. But the missionaries did not abandon the propagation of gospel and some other missionary activities among the Bodos. And a few new Christian convert Bodos are still found (See Plate 24) in the society.

Impact on Bodo society

The Christianity brought some significant changes in the socio-cultural and religious life of the traditional Bodos. With the advent of Christianity among the Bodos in the early years of nineteenth century the traditional Bodo society underwent a tremendous change at various institutional levels. It was under the influence of Christian faith that a new Bodo Christian society emerged within the traditional Bodo society. Some age old beliefs, customs, traditions and rituals of the Bodo traditional society were given up by the Christian Bodo society. The children were sent by their parents to the missionaries schools for western English education. The use of liquor or other intoxicating things was also forbidden among the Christian Bodos at home and any socio-religious ceremonies. But most of the Christian Bodos could not give up the bad habits, like drinking, gambling, etc. Polygamy and other unhealthy social practices were discouraged in the Christian Bodo society. But there are references of a number of Bodo converts who had more than one wife in the Christian Bodo society. Most of the Christian Bodos are given the western style name but their titles remain the same, such as Andreas Narzary, John Wary, Antony Basumatary, Emmanuel Muchahary, etc. The Christian Bodo women also do not abandon the wearing of their traditional dress, ‘dokhna’ during their stay at home and village.

The Christian Bodos are not different from the universal Christians in respect of belief and practices. The belief of the Christian Bodos is also based on trinity. God the father, God the son and Holy Spirit. But in case of the Catholics, a prayer is made to Virgin Mary and a number of saints. Most of the Christian Bodo villages have their own church called Girja in Bodo for prayer (See Plate 22). Every man irrespective of age and sex attend the church for Sunday prayers (See Plate 23). In the prayer the Bodo language is also now used as a medium of service. On every Sunday, the church prayer and other
religious functions are carried out by a pastor. The prayers or hymns are sung in the tune and style of the Christian missionaries. The Christian Bodos are encouraged to study the religious scriptures, like Bible, prayer books, etc. Besides, they are also taught various literal models of the socio-religious conduct, etiquettes and manner of the Christians. From the very childhood, each child of the Christian Bodo family is persuaded by the missionaries to learn the stories of the Bible. They are even allowed to take part in the various religious rituals and ceremony, like Holy Communion, confession, prayers and Bible reading, etc. In the protestant family, each child is forbidden to attend the church for such religious ceremony until he or she has not attended the proper age for confirmation. Thus the Christian Bodos practice the system of religious worship conforming to the universal Christianity although their functions appear to be slightly differed from one religious sect to other.

In a Christian village, the pastor is the head of the village in the social, religious and other functions. Like traditional Bodo society, every Christian Bodo village has also its own village council called ‘gami affad’ where any dispute if occurs in a village are openly discussed and settled in the meeting. Most of the male elderly persons of village are the members of this village body. However, they also have a head of the villages, gamibwrai (gaoburah) to settle the disputes among them.

After embracing Christianity, the Christian Bodos gave up all traditional fairs and festivals of the Bodo society. They discarded all religious festivals, like Kherai, Garja and Marai, etc. Besides, some popular seasonal and agricultural festivals, like Bwisagw (spring festival), Maghw (Domashi or post-harvest festival) and Katigasa saonai (harvest festival) of the traditional Bodo society are not observed by them. Instead, they celebrated some other fairs and festivals conforming to the universal Christian faith, such as Christmas, Good Friday and Easter, etc. Unlike the tribal Christian of Banswara in South Rajasthan the Christian Bodos did not observe indigenous festivals in modified form to suit the Christian needs. Instead of offering prayer to indigenous deity, the tribal Christian still observed some traditional festivals, like Orwani (ploughing the field), Katni (harvest festival), Gayon ka Tiyor (cattle festival) by arranging special church session. During the time of Diwali festivals they put colour on their cattle and decorate...
them with flower garlands. But the Christian Bodos has not kept their traditional customs and instead they only make general prayer in the church. Thus the Christian Bodos gradually merged with the mainstream Christian people in terms of the observances of religious fairs and festivals. However, it is observed that they still believed in evil spirits and witchcraft to some extent.

The advent of Christianity among the Bodos witnessed a significant change in the institution of the traditional Bodo marriage. Unlike the traditional form of Bodo marriage the Christian Bodo marriage is usually performed in Girja (church). The marriage is carried out by a Catholic father in the church. But in other Christian denominations, like Baptist or Lutheran, the marriage is conducted by Pastor or Bishop in the church. Some modified manner of pre-marriage and post-marriage ceremony of the traditional Bodo society is performed but it is not much valued. Polygamy and polyandry was strictly prohibited in the Christian Bodo society. But there is reference of a man who had more than one wife among the Christian Bodos. Unlike Hindu married women, after the marriage, the Christian Bodo women do not take vermilion on their forehead conforming to the universal Christian faith people. However, in terms of the marriage between a Christian and a non Christian Bodo, the difference in the attitudes, manner and conduct often create discomfiture in the society.

The Christian missionaries also played a very important role in imparting education to the Bodo converts along with the preaching the faith. For the purpose of spreading the Christian religion, many centers of education were established in the Bodo inhabited areas. Many schools were opened by them at different places. Besides, the missionaries had also Sunday schools where the converts were taught to go the church to learn etiquettes, behaviour pertaining to the universal Christian church and prayer. There are several Christian dispensaries and hospitals to help in the health care of the poor Bodos of interior Bodo villages. For instance, the hospitals located at Parkijuli of present Baksa district and Mission Hospital at Tezpur is worth mentioning for its health care services to the poor Christian Bodos.

The Christian missionaries contributed greatly in the field of Bodo language and literature. The Bodo language which was once spoken throughout the entire Brahmaputra
valley of Assam, North Bengal and erstwhile East Bengal began to decline due to the
donimeering languages of the Aryans, namely Assamese and Bengali Hindus. Most of the
Bodo people after converting to other sects of Hinduism and Islam forsook their own
language and culture, and merged into the mainstream with them. Owing to the
remarkable influence of Aryan language some local variations are said to have appeared
in the Bodo dialects. But it was the Christian missionaries who had made a great
contribution in consolidating the Bodo language and literature along with the propagation
of gospel. The fact is that the scientific study on the Bodo language was firstly
undertaken by the Christian missionaries. The Bodo language was no doubt a rich and
ancient language but it did not have written form or literature till the second decade of the
twentieth century. Some books on religion, tales, rhymes and songs were published by
the Christian missionaries. The development of written Bodo language and literature by
the missionaries not only helped in the growth and development of the Bodo language but
also meant for conversion of the Bodos to Christianity. In addition to Bodo language, it
may be referred that the Christian missionaries undertook to learn and develop some local
language of the north-eastern tribes, like Garos, Khasis, Nagas, Mizos and Kukis, etc. to
discourse upon the gospel among them in their local languages.

In 1884 CE, Sidney Endle’s compilation of ‘An Outline Grammar of Kochari
language’ is worth mentioned. This book is based on a dialect of the Bodos spoken in the
district of Darrang. Notably, it paved the way for using the Bodo language for the first
time in a written form. This grammar book also contained a few Bodo folk tales and
stories both in English and Bodo language. This book is considered by the Bodos as
grammar and literature as well. Thus Endle’s book pioneered the creation of written Bodo
language. Besides, L. O. Skrefsrud’s ‘A Short Grammar of the Mech or Boro language’
is another pioneering work published in 1889 CE. This book deals with the study of the
Bodo dialects of several localities and the grammatical forms are given on them. Another
work on grammar compiled by W.C. Dundas was ‘An Outline Grammar of the Kachari
(Dimasa) language.’ This pioneering work on the grammar was published in the year
1880 CE. Thus, most of the treatise deals with Bodo grammar which assisted many
interested scholars to know the Bodo language and its grammar.
Sidney Endle also wrote an important monograph entitled ‘The Kacharis’ on the Bodos and it was published in 1911 CE. This monograph however, contains some chapters and the chapters dealt with the social customs, agricultural practices, religious belief and practices, festivities, foot habits, life cycle rituals, crafts and textiles, etc. of the Bodos. And a few specimens of Bodo folktales, rhymes and grammar are also incorporated in this book. J.D. Anderson’s book entitled ‘A Collection of Kachari Folktales and Rhymes’ published in 1895 CE preceded the monograph compiled by Sidney Endle. His collection specially deals with seventeen Bodo folklores in English translation in addition to the original versions in Bodo language. These original versions provide, as the specimen of the Bodo language as spoken in the district of Darrang in Assam. Besides folklores, the collection includes a number of interesting folk songs in Bodo language. Thus the Bodo folk literature gained impetus with the publication of J.D. Anderson’s book.

A few more numbers of books on and in Bodo language and dialects were published in the later years. Noteworthy among them are Anderson’s book on ‘Dimasa Vocabulary’ published in 1895 CE. A. Christiansen compiled a book entitled ‘Grammar and Dictionary of the Kachari language’ which was also published in 1904 CE. Wolfenden’s ‘Outline of Tibeto Burman Linguistic Morphology’ is a scholarly contribution to the linguistic field of the Bodo language. In fact, his note on ‘Borofisa’ is worth mentioning. The great works, like ‘Linguistic survey of India’ by G. A. Grierson and the ‘Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal’ by Delton greatly contributed towards the study of the Bodo language, literature, culture and history. A section of the Bodo people strongly supported on using the Roman script for Boro or Bodo language and literature and this gained momentum since 1970 CE. It was directly or indirectly an outcome of the impact of Christianity upon the Bodos. There is no denying the fact that the role played by Christian missionaries and British administrative officials in the development of Bodo language by means of publishing books on grammar, dictionary, folktales and rhymes was of great value to the Bodo society. It was through missionary activities that a few number of mission schools, churches came into existence in the Bodo populated areas. Most of the Christian Bodos were also encouraged to learn the western education.
Thus the Christianity brought about some changes in various institutional levels of the traditional Bodo society. Some of their basic customs and values however, remained as earlier. It also led to the social divergence among the Bodos in terms of the marriage rituals, social and religious functions but even though their solidarity feelings remained unaltered. However, some of the western culture and values made inroads into the Bodo society.

**Brahma dharma**

The Brahma dharma consists of one of the most important religions of the Bodos from the beginning of the twentieth century CE. The advent of Brahma dharma among the Bodos brought a great change in the socio-economic, cultural and religious life of the Bodo community. The pioneer of the Brahma faith was Kalicharan Mech later popularly known as Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. The Brahma dharma of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma played a very important role in the history of development of the traditional Bodo society. The Brahma dharma had its roots in Vedic philosophy and it led to sanskritization of the culture, rites and rituals of the traditional Bodos.

There were a considerable number of populations who had already become Hindus in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. But a large number of the Bodos remained adhered to their original Bathou faith and worshipped Bathou Bwrai, the supreme God and other lesser divinities. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century CE the Bathou religion had lost the original spirit of spirituality. The fact is that in the name of festivities associated with Bathou worship, there was excess use of zumai (rice beer) and sereb (distilled alcoholic spirit) on a regular basis in addition to numerous offerings of sacrifices of animals, fowls, pigeons, ducks, etc. It was because of these unscrupulous practices that the socio-cultural and economic condition of the traditional Bodos deteriorated gradually. Besides, the Bodos were despised by other upper caste Hindu society due to several such ills and unclean practices at home, like rearing of pigs, fowls, ducks, etc. At this time, some of the Bodo people while dealing in timber trade with the Hindu caste neighbours were denied food and lodging in hotels in Dhubri town. They were then called ‘Mech’ or ‘Mleccha’ meaning polluted. On the other hand, a section of the Bodos accepted the different sects of
Hinduism due to the strong influence of high caste Hindu Brahmins. Having accepted the ‘Ek-saran-nam’ dharma of Srimanta Sankardev, a large number of Bodos became Sarania and gave up their original culture and language. They also merged with the mainstream Assamese Hindus. There was also a section of the Bodos who converted into Islam and became Muslims. After embracing the faith of the Christian religion the Bodo converts adopted some of the western values and culture. Thus the social customs and traditions of the Bodos associated with the Bathou worship were badly shaken and the uncertainty in social affairs appeared among them. At this critical juncture, some illiterate, uneducated, and unintelligent simple minded Bodos failed to realize the value of their ancestral religion. The age old unity among the great Bodos however had started losing its original strength. A section of the Bodos even after adopting the Hindu faith were given a low social status and continued to be treated as Mleccha and unclean. The Bodos were neglected and treated as ‘untouchable’ for their social customs and traditions. The brewing of zumai (rice beer) and rearing of pigs, fowls, ducks in an unhygienic condition were some of their social practices that required to be reformed urgently. In such a critical moment, a great socio-religious reformer was born among the Bodos as the representative of the Bodo society. His name was Kalicharan Mech, later known as Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma after pioneering socio-religious movement among the Bodos. Kalicharan Brahma carried out the work of reformations in the socio-economic, religious and political conditions of the traditional Bodo society in the early decade of the twentieth century CE. This reformation may be called a new socio-religious reform movement among the Bodo people. This movement was popularly known as Brahma movement or a new religious movement under the leadership of Kalicharan Brahma. The fact that the reformation works were carried out through the propagation of a new religion called the ‘Brahma dharma’.

Kalicharan Mech was the first to have initiated the Brahma faith in the Bodo community. He was born in 1862 CE at Kazigaon village of Parbatjhora area under the Dhubri sub-division of Goalpara district of present Kokrajhar district. His father Kaula Mech was a very rich timber merchant and his mother was Randini Mech. He received a very little education but he was capable to read and write both Bengali and Hindi. After the death of his father, Kalicharan is said to have continued the timber business of his
father’s profession. One day in 1903 CE, while dealing in timber business along with his co-workers at Bikribada (selling point) located on the banks of Chilai river, he got a copy of a book named ‘Sar Nitya Kriya’ written by Sibnarayan Swami in Bengali from his business partner, Charan Mandal. This book contained the main teachings of Paramhansa Sibnarayan Swami, the founder of Brahma religion. After reading the book, he was deeply influenced by the message contained in it. He realized that the teachings of Paramhansa Sibnarayan Swami would be ideally suited for the Bodos. He also believed that it would come into effect in checking the religious conversion going on among the Bodos which was threatening the very identity of the Bodo community at that time. So, he decided to meet Paramhansa Sibnarayan at Calcutta.

In 1905 CE, Kalicharan Brahma accompanied by his three friends, Karan Mandal Mech, Charan Mandal Mech and Jamadar Mech met Paramhansa Sibnarayan at Bhabanipur road with the help of Suren Karta, one of the zaminders of Bagaribari who was a close friend of Kalicharan’s father. Suren Karta was the disciple of Paramhansa Sibnarayan. They met Paramhansa Sibnarayan and a broad discussion was held about the Brahma dharma. Kalicharan Brahma was deeply influenced by the personality of Sibnarayana. Sibnarayana was a Brahmin originally hailing from Uttar Pradesh but he settled in Bhabanipur in Kolkata and used to propagate his Brahma faith from there. On the advice of Sibnarayana, Kalicharan Brahma studied some religious scriptures, like Param Kalyan, Purna Sadhana, Amrit Sagar, Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishad. He was also known to have studied the religious scriptures of Gita, Bible, Quran, etc. Kalicharan Brahma learnt about the basic ideas and tenets of Brahmanism that is, faith in only one God. ‘Brahma’ is the main force around whom the life in this universe revolves. In the Brahma dharma, the Almighty is worshiped in the form of ‘fire’ or ‘Sun god’ through ‘yagya’. However, having satisfied Kalicharan Brahma became a disciple of Sibnarayana and determined to propagate the doctrines of Brahma dharma among the Bodos with a view to uplift the social status of the traditional Bodos.

Propagation of Brahma faith

The preaching of new Brahma faith was firstly initiated among the Bodos by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma at his native village Kazigaon after returning from Kolkata.
Under the leadership of Kalicharan Brahma a religious meeting was also held at village Bonyaguri and the villagers were then convinced about the necessity of renouncing the old religious practices of the Bodos. The main tenets and rules of the new Brahma faith were explained and the people were appealed to accept this new religion. In the Brahma dharma, there is only one God. But there is no place for sacrifices of life and for offering zumai (rice beer), sereb (distilled alcoholic spirit). On hearing the religious discourses and messages of Kalicharan Brahma, the villagers were pleased and as a result, the new Brahma faith was accepted by a section of the Bodo people. In 1906 CE, the yajna (Hom-yagya) was performed at first in Bainyaguri village with chanting of Gayatri Mantra. The yajna is called by Bodos as ‘ahuti saonai’. Phani Bhusan Chatterjee, a disciple of Sibnarayana hailing from Kolkata became a priest in this occasion. The yajna was attended by thousands of Bodo people. The ceremony however, lasted for seven days and seven nights. From this time, the historic process of conversion among the Bodos into the Brahma faith began in the society. The community yajna also continued to be performed in the Bodo populated areas in Assam and North Bengal. In 1907 CE the second general yajna was held at Rajbhamara Borkella hill, near Barshijhara village. Kalicharan Brahma was the first priest to have performed in this yajna but he was lucky to have been assisted by Maina Ram Brahma of Barshijhara village, Sani Ram Brahma of Harjhara village and Dayaram Brahma. The performance of yajnas was held annually at different places, such as in 1908 CE at Kazigaon village, in 1909 CE at Barshijhara village, in 1910 CE at Gambhira Kata village on the occasion of Lakshmi-Purnima. In the performance of all these consecutive yajnas, he was greatly assisted by a number of the Brahma followers, like Basanta Lahari, Adityananda Swami, Bijay Singh Brahma and many others. During that occasion, the adherents of the Bathou religion were required to promise before Gurudev Kalicharan to adopt the Brahma faith after abandoning the Bathou worship.

In the process of propagation of this new religion he was greatly assisted by Junior Kalicharan Brahma, Narapati Basumatary and Yudhisthir Hajowary of Kharalalpara village of Dudhnoi. He also visited Dudhnoi, Krishnai and Rongjuli of south Goalpara, etc. In 1940 CE, Dinananda Shanti Ashram was established under the two leading personalities, Yudhisthir Hajowary and Narapati Basumatary at Loreng hill near Darranggiri to propagate the Brahma faith among the Bodos. Further, in 1915 CE
Kalicharan visited the districts of Nagoan, Darrang and Dibrugarh and preached the
essence of Brahma dharma among the Bodo people. In the work of preaching, Kalicharan
Brahma was helped by some social persons, like Jadab Chandra Khakhlary, Junior
Kalicharan Braham, Jadhunath Khakhlary, etc. One of the prominent personalities,
named Haribilash Agarwalla at Tezpur was empowered to translate the work, ‘Sar Nitya
Kriya’ into Assamese. This translation works greatly helped Kalicharan Brahma in
spreading the main tenets of the Brahma dharma among the Bodos.

In 1916 CE, an extensive tour was made by Kalicharan Brahma at different places
of Kamrup districts along with Dwarendra Basumatary, Charan Mandal, Junior
Kalicharan and others. After one year he also visited the different places of Bodo
inhabited areas at Jalpaiguri district of the West Bengal state, such as Satali, Salkumar
and Gaburpara, etc. The propagation of Brahma faith among them was carried out with
the help of some prominent personalities, like Biman Sing Khatam, Bag Manual, Haridas
Gabur, etc. In this way Kalicharan was successful in converting a large number of the
Bodos into the Brahma faith.

It was due to the spread of the Brahma dharma that the process of conversion
among the Bodos into the fold of Christian faith was checked to some extent. A large
number of Christian Bodos are said to have reverted to Brahma faith. The Bodo converts
into other religious sects, mainly ‘Ek saran nam’ dharma gave much trouble in the way
of propagation of the Brahma faith. There is a reference that at Bijni Gurudev Kalicharan
was strongly opposed by Rai Saheb Jagat Chandra Mushahary, a rich landlord and the
mouzadar of fourth-division Sidli of present, Chirang district from 1913 CE to 1924 CE.
Jagat Chandra Mushahary encouraged the Bodos to accept ‘Ek saran nam’ dharma of
neo-Vaishnavite of Srimata Sankardev and thereby to become Sarania under the guidance
of Ananta Narayan Goswami of Baitamari. He paid six thousand rupees to Ananata
Narayan Goswami for initiating this work. But when he faced Kalicharan Brahma he was
greatly impressed by the wide and deep knowledge of Kalicharan. Later on, he became a
disciple of Kalicharan Brahma and consequently a number of Bodo villagers of Sidli,
Bijni and Gossaigaon came into the fold of the new Brahma faith. This was the greatest
achievement on the part of Kalicharan Brahma in checking the conversion among the Bodos into neo-Vaishnavite religion.

Among the Bodos there were still some, who were hesitant and opposed at changing their age old beliefs and practices. So, a group of volunteers was organized by the followers of Brahma dharma under the leadership of Sobharam Brahma of Bhalukmari village in Dotma of the present Kokrajhar district to lead a crusade on the traditional religionists. At the initial stage, they uprooted the very Sijou tree (euphorbia splendens) which represented the sacred living symbol of Bathou Bwrai, the supreme God. The earthen pitchers called ‘Dabkha’ where ‘zumai’ the rice beer is stored were broken and pigs were killed in the villages by these crusaders. It was in this way that some of the Bodo villagers were forced to give up their ancestral Bathou worship. They were prohibited from the rearing of pig, eating the pork, fermenting and drinking rice beer or liquor in the Bodo society. But some members of the campaigners went loose on the people and their extremes brought widespread criticism and sharp reactions against them in the villages. They started to oppose the harsh persuasive campaign of Brahma dharma in equal harshness. For instance, one Lalit Mahan Brahma, a Brahma dharma preacher was badly beaten up by the villagers in Durabil village. After that, the Brahma movement was suspended in Dotma area of Kokrajhar district as a result of reaction against the unreasonable campaign of Brahma faith and the outburst of anger in many places of the Bodos.

The Bodos were continued to be considered as the Mlecchas and unclean, even after adopting the Hindu faith. They were still accorded a lowly social status and were not treated with due respect. They were also prohibited to intermix with the upper caste Hindus. So, in order to free themselves from such indignities they adopted the Brahma faith based on Vedic rituals. On the adoption of that faith, they no longer wanted to be identified as Mlecchas and the nomenclature of ‘Brahma’ was added as their surname which was officially accorded by A.G. Lainy, the Deputy Commissioner of the then Goalpara district. As a result, the ‘Brahma’ was assumed by the Brahma converts as their surname after their name. But a few number of them, although followers of Brahma cult did not change their surnames and still retained their original traditional titles. like
Goyary, Swargiary, Basumatary, Mushahary, Daimary, Narzary, etc. The change of the original surnames of Brahma converts with a new title 'Brahma' after their name, was to identify themselves as high class people equivalent to the Hindu neighbours as well as to free themselves from racial derogation which the high caste Hindus inflicted on them. The Brahma movement of Kalicharan Brahma thus wanted to uplift the social status of the traditional Bodos in the eyes of the majority Hindu castes.

The three Boro Mahasanmilans

The spread of the Brahma faith made a great impact on the socio-cultural transition of the Bodo community. But a section of the Bodo people was still reluctant to accept the new faith and kept themselves away from such reformative activities. With a view to reforming the social evil practices which plagued the Bodo society since long past, Kalicharan Brahma along with few other prominent personalities convened the three Boro Mahasanmilans consecutively.

The first Boro Mahasanmilan

The first Boro Mahasanmilan was held in 1921 CE at Bhawraguri village of present Gossaigaon sub-division of Kokrajhar district. The chairperson of the Sanmilan was Jadav Chandra Khakhlary from Kachari Pathar village near Dibrugarh. This session was attended by about a thousand of the Bodo people. Most of the renowned educated participants of the Sanmilan were Rupnath Brahma, Birnarayan Brahma, Jamadar Brahma, Satish Chandra Basumatary, Malsing Brahma, Kalicharan Brahma jr., Bijoy Singh Brahma and others. The Boro Mahasanmilan was the first platform of the Bodos to reform their social evil practices in the history of the Bodos. In this conference, various issues of problems, like illiteracy and ignorance which plagued the Bodo society from a long period of time were discussed broadly. After having discussed vividly, a complete resolution was adopted to eliminate the social evil practices for the upliftment of the Bodo society. Some of the important resolutions adopted in the conference of the first Boro Mahasanmilan for social elevations may be cited here.

1. The Boro Mahasanmilan was to be observed annually henceforth.
2. An executive committee should be formed to organize the Mahasanmilan.
3. The action plans for the Bodo women be taken up.
4. A magazine should be published for the spread of knowledge and creative writings among the Bodo boys and girls.
5. The actions were to be initiated for the establishment of primary and middle schools in the Bodo dominated areas.
6. The use of liquor in marriage and other social ceremonies be totally stopped.
7. The fee to be paid during a daughter’s marriage was fixed at Rs. 51/-only and anybody if found violating this rule be penalized.55

Kalicharan Brahma however, was contented with the success of the first Boro Mahasanmilan and hoped that the meaningful resolutions adopted in the conference, would go a long way towards eliminating the social evils of the society. He also perceived that these would definitely contribute to the Bodo society towards progress and the society would be respected by other communities. But he also clearly felt that the Bodo society remained a stagnant society averse to accept the challenges of the time. They also adhered to the decadent and redundant social customs, manners and traditions of the society due to their ignorance and illiteracy. He clearly knew that without persuasion on them it was not possible to give up the bad habits of the Bodos, like addictions to liquor, habit of animal sacrifice in the worship, forced marriage, rearing of pig, etc. So, Kalicharan wanted the Boro Mahasanmilan to be instrumental in spreading the message of reform movement along with the propagation of the Brahma faith among the Bodos.56 But the resolutions were not fully executed. Ultimately most of the resolutions taken on the first Mahasanmilan failed due to various reasons. The conference of the Boro Mahasanmilan was also not observed annually as per the resolutions of the first convention.

The second Boro Mahasanmilan

The second Boro Mahasanmilan was convened in 1925 CE at Rangia of the present Kamrup district after the four years of the first Boro Mahasanmilan. This convention was presided over by Jadunath Khakhlary, the elder brother of Jadav Chandra Khakhlary, the first president of the Boro Mahasanmilan. Several Bodo leaders attended
in the conference, were Sobharam Brahma, Jadav Chandra Khakhlary, Rabichandra Kachari, Jogendra Kachari, Shambhu Uzir, Gopal Uzir, Durga Mouzadar, etc. In this conference, Gurudev Kalicharan played an important role along with his adherents. The various issues of problems were raised for discussion openly in the conference but the most vital issues of inability on their part to fulfill the resolutions of the first Bodo Mahasanmilan were discussed broadly. The three more resolutions were only adopted in the second Mahasanmilan for its effective implementation in addition to all the resolutions of the first Mahasanmilan. These resolutions are as follows.

1. Henceforth pig rearing be abolished by the Bodos as they are unhygienic, spoil the surrounding and cause diseases.

2. The education must be given to both boys and girls equally. Only then the Bodo society can progress.

3. The Brahma religion should be the one and only religion that will be practiced by the Bodos, since Bathou and other religions that had been followed by the Bodos so far, failed to bring about any improvement in their lives. By following the Brahma religion it is possible to usher in unity and progress among the Bodos.\(^\text{57}\)

Thus, the resolutions adopted in the Rangia session were very meaningful and progressive step towards the development of the traditional Bodo society. The fact is that the progressive step was adopted by the Sanmilan in favour of the girl’s child education along with the boys in the early decades of the last century. Nevertheless, one resolution adopted in favour of accepting the Brahma religion by all sections of the Bodos, injured the sentiment of many Bodo people who followed the Bathou and other religions.\(^\text{58}\) This showed that the execution of these resolutions in practices was not very simple task.

The third Boro Mahasanmilan

The third Boro Mahasanmilan took place in 1929 CE at Roumari village near Bongaigaon. Jadav Chandra Khakhlary presided over this convention for the second time. The participants of several Bodo leaders in the Roumari conference were Katimal Brahma, Narapati Basumatary, Subedar Belbungram Kachari, Birendra Narayan Mandal, Gopal Ujir, Balichand Karji, Satish Chandra Basumatary, Malsing Brahma Chaudhury,
Shyam Charan Brahma, Kalicharan Brahma Jr. and Banabasu Kachari. Apart from the Bodo leaders, this conference was also attended by some other well-known leaders belonging to non-Bodo communities, like Ambikagiri Roy Choudhuri, Nilmoni Phukan and Mahadev Sarma. The Bodos of the neighbouring state of West Bengal are also said to have attended the conference. In this conference, a few resolutions were adopted by the house in addition to the resolutions taken in the last two sessions. Firstly, it was resolved that the consumption of the liquor be totally stopped and the Brahma volunteers were empowered to keep an eye on this and break the utensils used for making the country liquor moving from village to village. Secondly, it also resolved to ensure the honour of the Bodos, and the womenfolk be refrained from going in public places in unclean dresses. Thirdly, the animal sacrifice was resolved to be totally banned in the Bodo society and only Brahma religion be accepted as their religion. Thus, no new resolution was adopted in the third Roumari session but one fact was that the Brahma volunteers were given much power to control the use of liquor for implementation of the resolutions.

However, in the Roumari session one of the most vital issues raised by Gurudev Kalicharan was the abolition of traditional musical instruments, like kham (drum), sifung (flute), sherja (violin), jotha (cymbal) and the traditional dances of the Bodos during the prayer and religious ceremonies. Kalicharan Brahma strongly held the view that the use of all these distracts the attention of the devotees rather than concentration to God. So, he wanted the delegates of the third Boro Mahasanmilan to adopt some concrete resolutions towards the abolition of musical instruments. But this proposal was out rightly opposed by majority of the delegates on the ground that eliminating the traditional musical instruments from the prayer and religious ceremonies would lose their very identity of the community. They also strongly held the view that such a step would contribute to the loss of their cultural identity. Among the members of delegates, Nepal Chandra Brahmachari popularly known as Fwrlang Babaji is worth mentioning. Being a disciple he himself engaged in a heated argument with Gurudev Kalicharan and ardently stressed that such a step would be very dangerous and in the long run, it would eliminate the very identity of Bodo community as a separate community. Many educated Bodo leaders, like Rupnath Brahma, Satish Chandra Basumatary were the admirers and followers of Gurudev
Kalicharan but they refused to accept Gurudev Kalicharan’s view on this matter and sided with Nepal Chandra Brahmachari. As a result, the proposal of abolishing musical instruments was withdrawn by Kalicharan Brahma since they formed an integral part of the Bodo culture. But the use of the kham, sifung, sherja, jotha and the Bodo dances were restricted to cultural occasions only and in religious ceremonies. Thus along with the spread of Brahma religion the Boro Mahasanmilan contributed a lot in bringing about reformation and development in the Bodo society.

The principles of Brahma dharma

There are six principles in the Brahma dharma.

1. The duty of every human being is to always keep the universe clean.
2. All creatures be treated equally.
3. The offering of articles to Hom-yagya should be pure and scented.
4. The Almighty God, Param Brahma should be called by ‘Om sat guru’.
5. Saluting the light (jyoti) with regards in the morning and evening should be done as the Almighty God, Param Brahma appears in the light of sun and moon.
6. Everybody should be attached to Omnipresent almighty.

Thus most of the principle of Brahma dharma is very simple and free of all pomp and superstitions. The Brahma religion does not believe in the multiplicity of the Hindu pantheon but in the only one ‘Brahma’ the Supreme Being of the universe. He is called Param Brahma that is ultimate reality. It is believed that the Almighty God, Brahma is formless and ageless and the creator of all other beings. He is the light and knowledge. He is regarded as the source of three powers, - creation, existence and destruction. He had also the three qualities -Swattas, Rajas and Tamas, and with these three qualities, he is capable of doing the activities of creation, existence and destruction in the universe. The Brahma is present everywhere in this universe which reflected in the holy hymn as follows.

“Antapurnang Bahipurnang

Madhya Purnang Totsthitam

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The followers of the Brahma cult believe that there is no power in the universe more powerful than the ‘Surya Narayana’ or the ‘Sun God’. The Vedas refer him as a Supreme Being. Agni was worshipped by the Vedic people as the god of fire. The followers of the Brahma cult also believe that ‘Agni’ or fire is the power of the Brahma and the centre of worship in the Brahma dharma. He is omnipresent and omnipotent. The ‘Agni’ the power of Brahma does all in accordance with the will of Brahma. Brahma is regarded as ‘Ekamebadvitiam Brahma’ for His supreme and unlimited qualities. It is known from the Gayatri mantra, ‘Agni mukhe debah khadanti’ that Brahma in the form of ‘Agni’ receives all the things offered at the hom-yagya. The fire altar is erected for the performance of Hom-yagya in the name of ‘Purna para Brahma jyotiswarup’ or the Supreme Brahma in the shape of light. Thus, the followers of the Brahma cult are monotheist by philosophy. The adherents of the Brahma dharma believe that there is none more supreme power in the universe but Brahma. Although the Brahma dharma is essentially a Vedic cult yet idol worship or sacrificial offerings are not practiced. Thus, it differs with the fundamentals of faith and rituals of Hindu religion.

The certain Vedic rites are observed by the Brahma dharma followers. At the very beginning of the yagya (ahuti), the hymn is enchanted. The hymn may be cited here.

“Om Aiyahi Borde Devi
Trayakshare Brahma badini
Gayatri Chandasang Mato
Brahmayoni Nomohostute.”

The hymn or mantra of Brahma purohit (priest) however, addresses to the Almighty God, Brahma by different names. The purohit (See Plate 26) starts chanting mantra when the fire produces the flame at the altar of yagya ahuti. He is then followed by the followers of the Brahma faith. By chanting Gayatri mantra the prasads, a mixture
of sweets, fruits, milk, ghee corns, scents, chandan, rice, etc. is offered in the fire of Hom-yagya dedicating themselves to the Almighty God, Brahma. This mode of offering to fire is called 'Jagya-ahuti'. In Vedic age, the sacrifices of animals prevailed at yajnas, like Asvamedha (horse sacrifice), and Rajasuya. But the sacrifices of life were not preferred by Paramhansa Sibnarayan Swami at yajna. However his yajna is divided into three types. These yajnas are Karma yajna, Jnana yajna and Upasana yajna performed in the name of Param Atma. The human beings are believed to have ability to attain Dharma, Artha, Kama and Mokhsa through these yajnas. During the course of other social rituals no prescribed Gayatri mantra or Brahma Gayatri is either recited or read out in any occasion. But the ritual is usually performed by invoking ‘Om Sat Guru’ and it is ended with the word of blessing ‘Om Shanti’ uttered three times. Thus the rites and rituals of the Brahma dharma are very simple which is affordable to all section of the people.

The Brahma dharma had a far reaching impact in the social customs and traditions of the traditional Bodo society. The followers of the Brahma cult gave up some socio-religious practices pertaining to the traditional Bathou worship. From the time of adoption of Brahma dharma the followers of Brahma dharma performed Homa-yogya in all the occasions from the birth to the death of a person. The Brahma dharma brought some significant changes in the traditional institution of Bodo marriage in the Bodo society. A new form of Bodo marriage called Brahma marriage is introduced for the followers of Brahma cult. This new form of Bodo marriage under Brahma Dharma is performed in accordance with the Vedic rites. Like traditional pre-marriage and post-marriage ceremony of the Bodo society certain long drawn formalities are followed in modified manner even in the Brahma form of Bodo marriage.

The Brahma marriage is solemnized at night at the house of the bride. It is only held on the subha lagna (sacred time) in accordance with ‘panjika’, the Hindu calendar through the performance of yagya ahuti. This marriage is performed in a particular mondop or a place of ahuti. The mondop is prepared with four banana trees planted on four corners of the mondop decorated with some colourful paper cuttings around the banana trees and in the middle of these four trees, an altar is raised on the ground where
the yajna fire is lit. Both the bride and groom are seated near the mondop facing eastward in front of the yajna fire.

The purohit (priest) starts the wedding by chanting the Gayatri mantra pertaining to the marriage.

"Om aiahi barde devi trayakshare
Brahma baadini Gayatri sandasung
Matoh Brahmajani nomohastyute"

The father of the bride also prays by uttering the Brahma Gayatri before the yajna fire for blessings to the new couple. After that, the father of the bride offers prasads, a mixture of corn, rice, pulses, sugar, etc., ghee and dhuna on the fire, sprinkles holy water and again chants the Gayatri mantra as per the direction of the purohit.

"Om varde devi paramjyotih Brahmame svaha"

Om purna param Brahma joyti svarupaya svaha...."

Then the father of the bride hands over his daughter to the groom keeping fire as witness, and declares the accomplishment of the nuptial rites in the marriage ceremony. This is called sampradan (offering). Afterwards, the offerings of prasads to yajna fire are made by the bride and groom and then followed by the relatives, friends and villagers, but the latter uses to give gifts to a new couple. The offering of gifts is called ashirbad. When the offering of gifts is over the purohit (priest) chants the mantra briefly and even prays for the God’s blessing for the peaceful conjugal life of a new couple and with this, the Brahma marriage comes to an end. Thus, the followers of the Brahma cult prefer the burning of ahuti which is much similar to the Hindu ‘hom-yagya’ in the form of their marriage ceremony. Afterwards, the bride is brought at the house of the groom. Then the big feast is arranged at the house of the groom. But the use of rice beer and pork is discouraged in the Brahma form of Bodo marriage and instead of it, tea and sweets are used. The marriage is performed either at the house of bride or groom. Thus the Brahma
dharma brought a significant change in the institution of the traditional system of Bodo marriage.

The followers of the Brahma cult still continue the rearing of pig, brewing and drinking of zumai (rice beer), sereb (distilled alcoholic spirit) at their home. However, the drinking of zumai or sereb was abandoned in certain religious occasions and ceremonies. Most of the Brahma dharma followers cremate by burning the dead body unlike the Bathou believers who dispose the dead body by burial. The post funeral ceremony is also performed by them in accordance with the Hindu rites.

The followers of Brahma dharma perform Hom-yagya at their individual home and village mandir or temple on some festivals and occasions, like first day of Bwisag, Sharadhu ceremony, ‘wngkham gwrlwi janai’ eating new rice, marriage, etc. Having consulted with the calendar book called ‘panjika’ of Hindus the Hom-yagya is also performed by them on some special occasions, like Mahalaya, Purnima, Magh Purnima, Ambubashi, etc. The first day of month of Bwisag (Bohag in Assamese) is considered as the New year where Hom-yagya is performed to welcome the same. The place of Hom-yagya is constructed permanently in the villages of the Brahma faith. The place of Hom-yagya is called ‘Brahma mandir’ or temple which is seen in many Brahma Bodo villages (See Plate 25). But there is reference of a few Brahma dharma followers who still kept a ‘Sijou’ tree (euphorbia splendens) at the courtyard of their family, like the worshippers of the Bathou religion. This reveals that some of their worshippers still held their traditional religious belief to some extent.

Prior to advent of Brahma dharma among the Bodos no ceremony could be held without the use of rice beer and meat, especially pork. It required heavy expenditure and so it became very difficult for the poor people to hold such a ceremony. However, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma along with some prominent Bodo personalities undertook various remarkable measures in regard to the social elevation in the Bodo society. For instance, the demand of the bride price was fixed and its importance gradually declined. The case of stealing the girls with intention to marry her, also became less from the society. Besides, the organizing of the Brahma Company at Dhubri under the initiative of Gurudev Kalicharan encouraged the Bodo youths in doing business. In fact, Gurudev
Kalicharan Brahma pioneered reformation movement in the socio-religious, educational and political life of the Bodos. The most remarkable change occurred in the society of Brahma converts was the beginning of upward social mobility with the culture and behaviours of Hindu people. It was due to the fact that most of the educated and intellectual Bodos were the products of the Brahma movement in the twentieth century CE. Of all the enlightened Bodo personalities, Rupnath Brahma, Padmashri Madaram Brahma, Jadav Chandra Khakhlay and many others are worth mentioning.

Under the initiative of Kalicharan Brahma the Brahma Boarding was founded at Dhubri with an objective to help the Bodo students in education but most of the residents at the boarding were his followers. Later on, the students of the Brahma Boarding decided to form a student organization in 1915 CE and the public opinion was also mobilized. As a result, under the active initiative and leadership of Rupnath Brahma and Madaram Brahma the Boro Chatra Sanmilan was formed in 1919 CE at Kokrajhar. They were the followers of Kalicharan Brahma. The Boro Chatra Sanmilan was the first Bodo student organization to have brought renaissance and social consciousness in the Bodo society. This Sanmilan greatly contributed towards the growth and development of the education, language and literature of the Bodos. The development of education and self awareness, social consciousness among the Bodos led them to search the very existence of their identity, cultural heritage and political rights.\(^\text{71}\)

Gurudev Kalicharan pleaded before the Simon Commission for reservation of seats in the Legislative Assembly and jobs in the government at Shillong on 2\textsuperscript{nd} January 1929 CE. After that, on the advice of Gurudev Kalicharan, the Assam Plains Tribal league was formed in 1933 CE as a political party. The main purpose behind this political party was to protect the interest and identities of the Tribal people of Assam.\(^\text{72}\) Many Brahma converts are said to have taken over the leadership of the socio-political life of the Bodos. For instance, the first political elite, namely Rupnath Brahma was an educated Brahma who became a minister in the Assam Government. Besides, Sitanath Brahma Choudhury was the first Bodo graduate in 1936 CE and was also the first Bodo to become M.P. in 1952 CE.\(^\text{73}\) Thus, many Brahma converts were educationally more advanced. The birth of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha on 16\textsuperscript{th} November 1952 CE at Basugaon
marked a turning point in the history of the Bodo society. Afterwards, in 1960 CE there was a movement for the inclusion of the Bodo language as the medium of instruction in the schools of the Bodo areas. It may be said that the socio-political consciousness emanated among the Bodos from the period of Brahma religious movement. The Brahma dharma brought a great change in socio-culture and religious aspects of the traditional Bodo society. It was through the Brahma dharma that the sanskritization of the rituals and culture of the Bodos gradually took place. Besides, some elements of Hindu religion and culture directly were adapted within the domain of the Bodo society.

Satsang religion among the Bodos

Satsang religion is one of the religious sects of Hinduism. It is also known as Anukul Thakur dharma in the Bodo society. A considerable number of Bodos were converted into the Satsang religion of Sri Sri Thakur Anukul Chandra from the last decade of the twentieth century CE. The Satsang religion believes in the incarnation of Purusattam, but they also believe in the Krishna consciousness. The Satsang religion is monotheist in nature. Purusattam who incarnates for the welfare of human being on the earth is believed as the creator of the whole universe. Sri Sri Anukul Thakur is regarded by the devotees of Anukul dharma as Purusattam who incarnates on the earth for religious inculcation.

The Satsang Bodo converts directly accepted the customs, traditions, manners, culture, rites and rituals of the Aryans. The most notable change that occurred in the Bodo society was the separation of the Satsang Bodo converts by themselves from their age old traditional mainstream and culture. After embracing Satsang religion most of them gave up habit of eating meat, fishes and became purely vegetarians. They also avoided taking onion, garlic etc. They enjoyed equal status or position like other high caste Hindu Brahmins in the domain of Hinduism. This shows that the process of sanskritization became faster among the Bodos. But in the Bodo society they are not entitled to have any high position and status. The community prayer and religious discourses, like Sat Sang Adhibesan or Matri Sanmilan is very often held either at home or at community centers. In the various socio-religious functions, the other communities of the same faith also participated. As a result, it led to the cultural assimilation between
the Bodo converts and other communities of the same Satsang faith. The Satsang religion now holds a good number of followers among the Bodo community. It was through the Satsang Bodo converts that a number of Satsang Vihars had already been installed at the Bodo populated areas. For instance, Satsang Vihars at Amlaiguri of Kokrajhar district and at Baghmara of Baksa district, etc. Apart from this, many small Satsang temples are established in the Bodo populated areas. It shows that Satsang religion came into existence in the Bodo community and the conversion of the Bodos into the Satsang religion still continued, but very few in numbers.

It may be mentioned that without converting directly to Hinduism, some elements of Hindu culture seemed to have assumed dominant role in a few Bodo modified religions, such as Mani Bathou Siva dharma of Guru Rupamoni Devi and Bathou Siva Dharma of Swami Nabin Brahmari. In these religions, the Bodos regard Siva as the Almighty God and the creator of all living creatures and universe. A considerable number of adherents in these sects are also now found among the Bodos.

Thus, the process of sanskritiziton in respect of Bodo culture and rituals occurred due to coming in contact with the Hindu culture and the conversion of the Bodos directly to Hindu religion as well. Most of the Bodos still perform some Hindu rites and rituals in their society. The westernization process in the Bodos on the other hand, occurred due to the conversion of the people into the Christian religion. However, the conversion of many Bodos into different religions fragmented the traditional Bodo society into several religious sects. It also adversely undermined the age-old religious practices among some of the Bodos.
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