



SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORMATION MOVEMENT OF THE BODOS IN BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY IN THE EARLY 20th CENTURY AD

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ABSTRACT

The Bodos are the branch of the great Indo-Mongoloid people of Assam. They were believed to be the first settlers of the region. They lived in the remote and scattered villages on agricultural products. In the medieval period, various circumstances deprived the Bodos from getting themselves educated. To sell their agricultural products there was no market in and around the places of Bodo settlements. Thus, dispossessed of everything the Bodos could not help themselves, but to live a degraded, wretched life to be hated and pitied by the people in the advantageous positions. The Bodos and other indigenous peoples of Assam lived at ease on shifting cultivation. In absence of a recorded land right system, they hardly bothered to remain fixed at any single plot of land. They were free to occupy and leave again any plot of land at will. Living in such easy life made them remained mentally idle. The social conditions of the Bodos were extremely deplorable and they had not progressed beyond the stage of nomadic cultivators. The general atmosphere and landscape of the country had shaped and molded both the character and habits of the Bodos as easy going. The traditional religion of the Bodos is the *Bathou* a sort of animistic belief. The sacrifices of fowls and pigs are made to propitiate the benefactor of good and master of evils which are the two main religious practices of the *Bathou* religion. The Bodos' worship of the *Bathou* predates the Hinduism in Assam. The pre-Hindu religious practices prevailed before the ascendancy of the Aryans into Assam which was in unique form easily distinguishable from their Hindu neighbours. During early part of twentieth century, the Bodos adopted the monotheistic *Brahma* religion, the worship of only one Supreme Being identified with *Brahma* who manifests Himself in Light emanating from the Sun and is worshipped in the form of Fire. *Yogyahuti* is an important aspect of the *Brahma Dharma* through which the Sun, the main source of energy is worshipped. The founder of *Brahma Dharma* is Swami Sibnarayan Paramhansa. Kalicharan Mech after comprehending well the philosophy of *Brahma* religion adopt edit for propagating among his Bodo kinsmen. Because it preaches the concept of monotheistic worship as against the

prevailing worship of starry hosts of deities under *Bathou* religion. After getting conversant in various aspects of *Brahma* religion, Kalicharan preached the new religion among the Bodos. Thus, the Bodos got opportunities to rectify their social evils by doing away with the prevailing deplorable social and religious practices. After adopting new religion, they could espouse ethnicity feeling and work for the development of education among the Bodos. In this research paper attempt will be made to examine whether the Bodos, after adopting the *Brahma Dharma*, could attained the four goals of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha* or not.

Keywords: *Bathou, Brahma Dharma, Monotheistic Religion, Sarnitya Kriya, Zaminder, Yogyahuti etc.*

Objective: The objective of the paper is to highlight the socio-religious reformation movement of the Bodos in Brahmaputra valley in the early twentieth century.

Methodology: Adopted methodology is interdisciplinary one based on primary and secondary sources which includes published work and interview.

INTRODUCTION

The Bodos

Assam has multi-racial and linguistic groups with their distinct cultures. The Bodos form a very numerous sections of those groups and are believed to be the earliest settlers of Assam. Those who lived in scattered hamlets along the foothills of the Himalayas in North-East India and Brahmaputra valley called themselves as Bodos. Considering the linguistic affinities of the Bodos with the Garos, Dhimal, Chutiyas, Koches, Rabhas, Meches, Lalungs, Sonowaletc many ethnographers opine the possibility of the existence of some ethnological relationships with each other. But, in the present work, the name *Bodo* for them would be used exclusively.

Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma's early life

The preacher of *Brahma* Religion was Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. He was a social and religious reformer and he brought unity among the Bodos. He gave to the Bodos the political and educational consciousness. Kalicharan Brahma came when the Bodos needed a strong, influential personality to guide and resurrect them. He was born on 18 April 1860 in an affluent family of Kajigaon village in Parbotjoar under the present district of Kokrajhar[1]. His father was Kaularam Mech and mother was Rangdini Mech. Kaularam Mech was a wealthy man who was both a timber trader and a landed gentry[2]

As Kalicharan was an intelligent and talented boy he was immensely fascinated by the things on earth so much that his inquisitive mind ponders over the mysteries of the phenomena of creation and destruction of lives on earth and consequently his faith in God grew slowly. Gifted with a deep sense of observation, he soon could perceive the abysmal condition in which the Bodos had placed itself and was perturbed to see the Bodos were getting belittling treatment from the other communities[1]. At his early age, as there was no primary school in and around the village at that time, he was taught by a private teacher named Birnarayan Sarkar. Thus, the young boy began his education in his native village Kajigaon in Bengali language and literature and mathematics. The young Kalicharan was, later, sent to the newly established primary school at Tipkai and then to Puthimari M.V. school, but he abandoned his studies after passing out class four [1]. Some plausible reasons those could be attributed to his abandonment of school education are perturbations in young Kalicharan's mind regarding the deplorable social conditions of the Bodos. He comprehended that the Bodo population was dwindling in numbers[1]. At that time the Bodos were rapidly changing from the tribe to caste by relinquishing their religion, custom, tradition and language to escape the humiliating treatment and indignity in the society. So, Kalicharan realised that the society had to be reformed. After leaving his school education he engaged himself in the works of his parents. He had the attractive physique and a cool temperament and was a man of strict discipline, the features which distinguished him from others[2]. He was married at the age of fifteen and got seven sons and daughters from his two wives. When Kalicharan was at his thirty-five years, his father Kaularam Mech died at his ripe age in 1896. Kalicharan inherited huge landed property from his father[2]. After he lost his father the responsibility of carrying out timber trade and management of the parental farms felt on him. From his father Kalicharan inherited the profession of timber trade as his father was an *Ejadar*. He exported Sal timber to East and West Bengal and Bihar from Bikribada sale camp. He was a good friend of Prabhat Chandra Baruah, then the heir to the *Zamindari* Estate of Gauripur[2]. In fact, Kalicharan Mech had everything in his possession for which he enjoyed the honour, power, and respect from the people.

All his flourishing business, personal prosperity and domestic happiness could not afford Kalicharan much peace of mind. His conscious mind was constantly disturbed by the pathetic social condition of the Bodos and ill practices that dominated their culture. In their religious practice, they showed a little inclination in obeying principles of religion. *Jou* (rice beer) produced profusely in every household of the Bodos was consumed in large proportion in the slightest pretext of the observance of religious festivals and any social functions[2]. Some of them became addicted to it and became sluggish, indolent, lazy and lascivious. Those were the practices for which the Bodos got disgraceful treatment from other communities where even the literate and well-to-do Bodo families were looked down upon and treated disparagingly. To escape from the disrespectful and disgraceful

treatment, many Bodos had already converted from the traditional *Bathou* religion to *Ek Saran Nam Dharma* of Srimanta Sankardev, Christianity and Islam[2]. The relinquishing of religion, customs, traditions, language and culture by the Bodo kinsmen was too much for Kalicharan to bear, because, it tantamount to the loss of the Bodo ethnic identity. Kalicharan realised that the *Bathou* religion had been unable to sustain the Bodos spiritually and ethically and failed to promote unity and integration among the Bodos. Despite his realisation, he could not find any answer for reforming the prevailing conditions which would be acceptable to the Bodo society[2]. At last, when Kalicharan was 45, in 1905, he got a book named *Sarnitya Kriya* of Mohini Mohan Chattopadhyay in Bengali from his friend Charan Mandol. The book was on *Brahma Dharma* of Paramhansa Sibnarayan Swamiji. The book left a calming effect on Kalicharan's mind and quickly he discovered that the teachings of Paramhansa Sibnarayan Swami would be ideally suitable for the Bodos and could satisfy the immediate needs of the Bodos[2]. He visualised that it was through the adoption of the *Brahma* religion and performing *Yogyahuti*, the process of much-needed reformation could be initiated. In this way, he hoped to escort his fellow Bodos towards the path of progress and thereby to check the religious conversions[1]. Through Suren Karta, the then Zamindar of Bagribari, Kalicharan was able to procure an arrangement of meeting with Swamiji at Bhowanipur residence in Kolkata[1]. In the meeting Kalicharan's qualities of calm spirit, passion, zeal, personality, intelligence, a sense of deep understanding and knowledge impressed Swamiji who with interest and care taught and explained the principles of *Brahma* religion, the monotheistic belief. In *Brahma* religion, the God is worshipped in the form of the Fire. *Brahma* is universal, endless and all-encompassing and all-pervading. He is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the universe. *Yogyahuti* is an important aspect of the *Brahma* religion. Swamiji explained all important aspects of the performance of the *Yogyahuti* and the process of performing it to Kalicharan[1]. Kalicharan on his part had decided to spread the *Brahma* religion among his community as their first step towards reformation. The basic idea was that by adopting the *Brahma* religion, the Bodos would be able to begin a new life after shunning the evil practices of *Bathou* religion[1]. Soon after returning from Kolkata to his native village Kajigaon, Kalicharan started preaching his *Brahma* religion. As a first step, he uprooted the *Bathou* Altar from his own residence[1]. Then he approached the Bodo Society to spread and explain about the necessity of renouncing the age-old *Bathou* religion and to adopt the *Brahma* religion in its place. Kalicharan insisted that the adoption of *Brahma* religion would usher in unity, progress and prosperity while keeping their ethnic identity intact[1]. Thus, the conversion of the Bodo community into the new faith was started where within the brief period hundreds and thousands of Bodos accepted the new religion. Kalicharan was accepted as their *Guru* and they began to call him as *Gurudev*[1]. Kalicharan could lead the Bodos towards the path of progress and unity by his reformation movement.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC & RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS

The Bodos in different times and places of entire north east India ruled with pride and honour for centuries, but their kingdoms disintegrated into small principalities only to be taken possession off by the British East India Company in the nineteenth century. In the 19th and early part of 20th century hastened by the situation of dispossession of political, socio-economic powers, the Bodos of the Brahmaputra valley were in the precarious conditions. In the medieval period, they were deprived of getting themselves educated. The Sanskrit *Tols*[3] were the only educational institution where non-Brahmin boys were not taught. The colonial administrators opened schools only in the towns where substantial populations were available for enrolment[4]. The Bodos lived in the remote and scattered villages which deprived them of getting opportunities to receive education. Thus, they were dispossessed of everything those required for modernization. The degraded lives and destitute of all modern amenities are the conditions which hastened them to live a wretched life to be hated and pitied by the people of advantageous position.

The Bodos subsisted on their agricultural product since ancient days. Rice is the staple food of the Bodos. In the Bargaon Copper-plate grant of Ratnapala of the early 11th century A.D. rice is mentioned[4]. In absence of market or cash transaction, they bartered their required articles with unhusked rice[3] at a rate very favourable to the Hindu traders. The clothes they required were produced in their residence from the cotton they grew. The Bodo women produced *Eri* clothes from their reared *Eri-Moth*[5] which were sold to *Marwari* merchants for cash. They kept pigs and fowls for their own consumption and for sacrificing the chicklets to the *Garja* and *Kherai* offerings[6]. Because of such occupational practices, the Bodos were hated and were given belittling treatments. So, the Bodos who gained little awareness tried to escape themselves not only by embracing other's faiths but also by changing into other's caste[7].

Religion

The traditional religion of the Bodos is the *Bathou*. According to Smriti Das, some tribes followed a sort of animistic belief which means the worship of different forces of nature seen through its different manifestations [8]. In connection with their religion they observe many rites and rituals. The *Garja* is offered for propitiation and the *Kherai* is offered to their Chief Deity as the benefactor of good. Hunter observed in his report that the Bodos' religious belief consisted of in the worship of two divine beings - one the benefactor of good and the other the master of evils[3]. As usual among nearly all hill tribes, their religious rites consisted chiefly of the propitiation of the various evil spirits by means of sacrifices of fowls[3].

Until second half of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century the Bodos lived amidst nature, in the forests, in the rural areas away from urban lives. Their living was from hands to mouth on their modest agricultural product. Being far away from the influences of the modern civilization they neither kept themselves linked with education, nor were there any civilizing agents working for educating them. Before the colonial administration took over Assam, it was the country of abundant land. The indigenous peoples including the Bodos lived at ease on shifting cultivation. In absence of a recorded land right system which came only with the introduction of the colonial administration, they were free to occupy any plot of land at will. Living in such an ease, they were free from any kind of pressure. It was but natural for the indigenous peoples of Assam to remain mentally idle.

The Bodos in all villages throughout Assam were on the same footing except a few variations. They were not conscious of their political, economic and social status. They just spent the days with no aspirations for change or upward mobility at all. The Bodos under both regimes- the Zamindari and the Colonial, were deprived in general from the privileges of educating themselves and so remained ignorant en-mass. The *Zamindars* who derived a large income from the people had paid very little attention towards the promotion of education to them.

As it has been discussed above, the socio-religious and economic conditions of the Bodos were very deplorable. There was no religious unity among the Bodos. Many of them had become *Saranias* after they were proselytised into Hindu fold. When the British colonizers along with evangelizers came to Assam in the first half of the 19th century, many Bodos had already embraced Christianity and a greater chunk of their population remained illiterate and ignorant with their ancestral religion, *Bathou*. Thus, the Bodos, in the 19th and early part of 20th centuries were seen divided into different religious faiths[9]. Greatly perturbed by the situation, and thus hemmed in from all sides, Kalicharan Mech (surname used by his parents) felt the need for a reassertion of ethnic identity and unity among the Bodos. He thought that it was possible only through a total change in the Bodo society by bringing about a religious unity[2]. At that critical juncture, providentially he came across a book, *Sarnitya Kriya* on Parama Hansa Sibnarayan Swamiji's preaching of *Brahma* religion which he adopted and preached among his Bodo kinsmen. His method of propagation of the new faith was the organisation of community-*Homa-Yogya* in different Bodo villages in Assam and the adjoining areas of West Bengal. Kalicharan with his impressive leading role and convincing religious conviction, he got ready acceptance of his new faith first among his compatriots (timber trading friends). The names of some notable personalities were Jamadar, Charan Mandal, Bijay, Adaityananda, Kalicharan (junior), Sadak Nepal etc from the far-flung areas of Parbotjoar in the erstwhile Goalpara district[2]. Through those neo-disciples, Kalicharan Gurudev secured the support and

mass acceptance of his new Faith among the Bodos and within a short span of time his followers swelled greatly in number. Large chunks of the Bodo populations were the followers of the *Brahma Dharma*.

The *Brahma* Religious Preacher and Reformer Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma and his votaries perceived that some of the prevailing social customs and religious practices might have rendered the Bodos into backwardness. The sorry plight of Bodos was attributed to the observance of their rites and rituals and religious practices, superstitious belief and the clumsy lengthy marriage customs. The economic life of the Bodos was static or unprogressive. There were no alternative economic activities other than the agriculture. Such a state of affairs created mental anxiety among the elite sections of the Bodos. At the beginning of the twentieth century, some sections of them got themselves educated. They gained awareness of the sorry plights of the Bodos and aspired for unity for achieving the goal of the Bodo ethnic identity.

THE GROWTH OF BODO ELITE CLASS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORMATION MOVEMENT

During 19th and early decades of the 20th centuries, some of the Bodos of Assam had gained wealth and money by engaging in the timber trade, some by joining the professions of *Mouzadar*, *Jothedar* and other government services in the colonial administration[10]. The wealthy social elite class was created out of such professions and they became aware and sensitive to their position in the society[10]. They had perceived shameful of the tribes' social and religious practices which they thought was responsible for the belittling treatment they had been getting from the neighboring communities. From Parbotjoar area, the Bodos who had become rich and wealthy with the rise and growth of timber trade, had realised the sorry plights of the Bodos and took recourse to get rid of the prevailing social malice[10].

During the first decade of the twentieth century a marked social transformation amongst the Bodos was noticed. With the rise and growth of timber trade, some Bodo people in Parbotjoar area became rich and wealthy[11]. The pioneers in the field were Kaularam Mech, Kalicharan Brahma (Mech), Charan Mandal, Mongla Khana, Gesao Brahma, Bisturam Daffadar and many more were rich timber merchants of the scattered villages of Parbotjoar area under the present Kokrajhar district[11]. They became a sort of economic class i.e. class of timber merchant among the Bodos who later pursued to make the Bodos literate as well as educated and tried to reform the Bodo Society with the Socio-Religious Reformation Movement.

The middle class had been the instrumental in acting as a backbone of the nation on whom the common peasantry leaned on for guidance and assistance during the time of crises. Among the Bodos who were one of the

major communities of Assam witnessed the growth of middle class whose social roots were traced back to early British revenue officers, the *Mouzadars* and the *Jothedars*[12]. By their affluence and social importance, they could influence upon the common Bodos to act on what they proposed or wanted. The families of the British created high revenue officers like the *Mouzadars* and *Choudhuries* in Goalpara district who had the financial resources took advantages to give western education to their children so that they could take part in the colonial administration. *Mouzadars* were the revenue collectors and their earnings were impressive which they could spend on the education of their children. Thus, most of the first matriculates came out of the *Mouzadar* family.

Apart from the class of *Mouzadars* there were some landed gentry who were wealthy enough to sponsor their children to study at distance places like at Dhubri, Guwahati and Kolkata. In the villages there were some Bodos who were exceptionally talented and intelligent enough and hard working. By those qualities they could bring vast areas of land in their possession and those landed gentries played the influential role in their respective villages or areas during the first quarter of the twentieth century when the Brahma Movement was in full swing[10].

Through the formation of organisations the Bodo leaders tried to uphold the distinct Bodo identity. The foundation of Lower Primary and Upper Primary or Middle Vernacular schools in many Bodo inhabited areas, the formation of *Bodo Chatra Sanmilani*, convening of *Bodo Mahasanmilani*, the *Ryot Sabha* and the publication of *Bibar* magazine and a plethora of other cultural organisations were based on ideas which were imbibed from the Bengal Renaissance. The children of the Bodo middle class studied in Bengali language. They were greatly inspired to reinvigorate the Bodo language and literature in line with Bengali language and literature of the Renaissance period which was demonstrated in the publication of *Bibar* magazine. They produced different genres of Bodo literature for the first time and thus contributed a lot towards the Bodo identity crystallization[13]. The period was termed as the Renaissance of the Bodo language and literature which had far reaching impact on the spheres of education, polity and economy of the Bodos. That phenomenal development facilitated the entry of many Bodo youths into the colonial job market which triggered the advent of a middle class among the Bodos[14]. The forefathers of the emerging middle class belonged to the landed gentry of the rural Assam[14].

In the early 20th century there grew a sort of middle class or elite class in the Bodos society. Some favourable factors such as availability of cultivable land in possession of the Bodos which was because of the sparse nature of population settlement in areas inhabited by the Bodos, Rabhas and Rajbansis, could be attributed to the growth of Bodo middle class. Another factor of the most vital importance was the opportunity provided by

the presence of huge Sal Forest near the Bodo settlements to trade in timber from which the Bodos for the first time got the opportunity to have the taste of trading[15]. The natural habitat of the Sal (*Shorea Robusta*) timber species was the Parbotjoar, Guma, Ripu, Sidli, Cheerang and Kachugaon Reserve Forests in the present district of Kokrajhar where cluster of Bodo settlements could be found. The Bodos could take advantage of the opportunities of timber trading as the Sal trees were within proximity to their homestead.

There were some big landed gentry among the Bodos, the oral information of whom are still extant. They were in an advantageous position than average Bodos who could spare a little amount of capital for carrying on small scale trade in timber. By the introduction of the Permanent Settlement of Bengal in 1793 the Southern portion of Goalpara (district) which was a part of the Rangpur district till 1822, came under the Zamindari system[16]. Since the period of Zamindari System, the extraction of Sal Timber from the Parbotjoar Estate was carried out by the system of leasing out of the *Sal Mahal*. The person who took the *Mahal* on lease was called the *Ejadar*. In turn, they would employ *Daffadars*, the intermediary class of people who were the supplier of labourers. The labourers engaged in 'Sal Timber Operation' (felling, barking and dragging activities) were called the *Badaris*[17](lumberjacks) by the Bodos and those class of people were also engaged as 'timber rafters', for rafting down the Sal timber logs along the river routes to the sale points situated at Bagribari, Bilasipara, Saraishor Badri, Sapatgram. By engaging themselves in those professions many Bodos became rich and somewhat wealthy who later came into limelight amongst the Bodos.

The factors of timber trading and the existence of landed gentry among the Bodos as discussed above provided the fertile ground for the growth of middle or the elite class among the Bodos. The instances of the various roles played by the middle class in the social upheavals or the revolutions were many in various parts of the world. The Bodo elite class was also not exception to it in leading their society, particularly in leading the Socio-Religious Reformation Movement among the Bodos in early 20th century. Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was the pioneer among the leaders of the Bodo elite class. He was able to arouse a new spate of consciousness among the Bodos who were reeling under poverty, darkness and backwardness[10]. The Bodos were illiterate at that time. There were very few literate and educated men among them. Rupnath Brahma was a student of Law College. Satish Chandra Basumatary was a student of Cotton College[18]. Jagat Chandra Mushahary was himself a *Mouzadar* of Patgaon. Kaularam Mech, the father of Kalicharan Gurudev, was an *Ejadar* under Bagribari Zamindari Estate who was a successful timber trader of Parbotjoar. Sobharam Brahma Choudhury was a rich land owner and a liberal donor. Haladhar Brahma and Modaram Brahma were real representatives of the Bodo middle class[10]. Many Bodo youths from Parbotjoar area engaged themselves in Timber trade in various capacities like *Ejadar*, *Daffadar*, Bidderand some as *Badaris* (Lumberjacks) who could lead a comfortable life by their

occupations. That small group of Bodo elite controlled a disproportionate amount of wealth and privilege in the society. Their positions and interest became common and united. The educated youths from those wealthy classes worked like harbinger of new ideas among the Bodos. They had played an important role as self-appointed mediators between their community and 'mainstream' Assamese society and became competitors for establishing ethnic Bodo identity. The neo-educated Bodo youths became successful businessmen, teachers and some acted as journal editor published in the distinct ethnic community language. Thus, they acted as the harbinger of Bodo literature who laid the foundation of written literature in Bodo language by publishing journals like *Bibar* and *Jenthoka*. *Bibar* was the journal of the *Bodo Chatra Sanmilani* which was started in 1919 at Cotton College, Gauhati. *Bibar* was the first magazine ever to be published in Bodo ushered in a new awakening among the Bodos. It created an atmosphere of zeal, inspiration and enthusiasm among them. It helped to create a new train of enthusiastic writers who devoted themselves whole heartedly to the writing of poetry, prose, story and play. All those articles were written with a definite end in view- that of social reformation by awakening of ethnic consciousness[10]. The common Bodo masses did not possess instinctual awareness of their positions and therefore needed to be enlightened and guided by the elite class. They were able to acquire a more enlightened understanding of their social status by approaching reality from the multiplicity of perspective. Thus, they led the Bodos to recognize that they had a stake in each other's well-being and from there they did develop ethnic consciousness.

KALICHARAN'S PROPAGATION OF BRAHMA FAITH

The most significant event in the history of the Bodos was the birth of a great soul 'Srimot Kalicharan Gurudev'[12]. In the year 1905, he accepted *Yogyadiksha Swarup Mantra* and *Yogyakriya* from Sibnarayan Paramhansa Swami of Kolkata. In 1906, he for the first time with the help of Charan Mandol offered *Yogyahuti* at village Bonyaguri which was the beginning of his preaching of *Brahma Dharma*[12]. He appealed all the Bodos to remain united and shown the path to live with distinct ethnic identity. He was able to draw the attention of the unconscious Bodos to socio-religious, political and economic milieu.

Some notable persons, who as the votaries of the *Brahma Dharma* of Kalicharan Gurudev roamed along with him from village to village to organize meetings for spreading the messages of *Brahma Dharma*. They also spread the courses of action for reforming the Bodo society throughout undivided Goalpara district and Assam among the Bodos[12]. Some of them were *Jothedars*, *Ejadars*, *Mandols* and others were landed gentry. All of them were somewhat literates and wealthy persons of Parbotjoar area. They helped Kalicharan Brahma in his

efforts to spread the *Brahma Dharma* and various other activities like establishment of schools at different villages.

Kalicharan Gurudev after becoming conversant in the principles of *Brahma* Religion, took initiative to propagate his new faith among the Bodo kinsmen which he within a very short span of time, found a lot of followers from amongst his Bodos of the villages of Parbotjoar area. He went on offering *Yogyahuti* from village to village to initiate village people as a whole and as a result the strength of his votaries and areas he covered increased by lips and bound. He covered the entire Parbotjoar, Binyakhata and Patakata areas within a short period and he also covered Kokrajhar, Haltugaon and Bongaigaon in a sweeping manner[12]. That's why his propagation of *Brahma* Faith (*Brahma Moth*) was rightly called the *Brahma* movement. The acceptance of the *Brahma* Faith by the Bodos in such sweeping manner leads one to think that the Bodos were fade up with their traditional religion. He toured far and wide, with a mission to unite all the Bodos under a single religious umbrella.

The main reason behind getting ready acceptance of Kalicharan's New Faith everywhere he made his tour was that there was simmering tension among the elite sections of the Bodo tribes over their losing ethnic identity by proselytizing into different Faiths. They were not in favour of compromising their own identity by relinquishing language, customs, traditions and culture. On the state of that tension, they might have thought that the New Faith could work as panacea to their problems. So, without hesitation, they accepted Kalicharan Brahma and his Faith as he was from their own Bodo tribe.

Srimot Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma launched a Movement which may be termed as 'Socio-Religious Reformation Movement'. Gurudev secured the support and appreciation from all sections of the Bodos. He was able to organise the resources and energies available to them into meaningful associations which he manipulated them into constructive works in his favour. By organising the *Bodo Mahasanmilani* conferences in various places in every four years, he was able to secure supports of youths in his effort in preaching *Brahma Dharma* and his Reformation Movement. The direct help of some of the noted Bodo leaders like Jadav Chandra Khakhlyar from Dibrugarh, Subedar Bahadur Belbungram Kachari from South Goalpara, Karendra Brahma Mandal, Baburam Brahma Mandal from Parbotjoar etc. were readily available to him whenever Kalicharan Gurudev approached them while preaching his *Dharma*[1].

During his spreading of the *Brahma Dharma* in the first decade of the 20th century young Kalicharan was an active Timber Trader. By his quality of leadership, he could exert influences on other fellow timber

traders. He kept all his compatriots under his influence. Under their initiatives many schools in every Bodo inhabited areas were opened with help of Mr. A.J. Laine, the D.C. of Dhubri and the Chairman of the Local Board. The reason for establishing such schools were very clearly stated that the Bodo masses were illiterate and too ignorant to understand the principle and value of his Religion. He declared that unless the Bodos understand the principle of his religion, his efforts to ameliorate the deplorable conditions of the Bodos would not help. Another great leap forward towards making the Bodos conscious was the publication of *Bibar Magazine* which was the first ever published magazine in Bodo. It was brought out by the initiative and patronage of the *Bodo Chatra Sanmilani*[19]. It also got the blessing of the great Socio-religious reformer Srimot Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma when he was the chief guest of the first session of the *Bodo Chatra Sanmilani*. He implored students to bring out the *Bibar* magazine immediately for facilitating the spread of education among the Bodos[19].

To rescue the Bodos from wretched position many efforts were made to arouse their consciousness by forming various organisations such as *the Bodo Chatra Sanmilani*, *the Bodo Mahasanmilani*, *Dakshin Kul Sahitya Sabha* etc. Before the formation of the *Bodo Chatra Sanmilani* in 1919, the spreading of *Brahma Dharma* and the social reformation movement under the leadership of Kalicharan Brahma, was in full swing. Many of the elite sections of the Bodos and students alike had already joined the movement in their own accord. Gurudev inspired and implored the Bodos to form organisations like the *Bodo Mahasanmilani* for the seniors and the *Bodo Chatra Sanmilani* for the youths for guiding the innocent and illiterate Bodos. In the religious congregations, Kalicharan sought the help of the young educated boys and girls and passionately induced them to come forward to work for the greater interest of their society. He impelled that for leading a good family life, education was important, only educated could understand the meaning of *Dharma* (Religion), *Artha* (Economy), *Karma* (Volition) and *Moksha* (Salvation), the four principles of life. He exhorted the students to become a learned man, to cultivate polite manner, truthfulness and to learn to respect old and the young alike. He forbade all from indulging in intoxication. Gurudev Kalicharan also entreated the students to take initiative for bringing out the *Bibar* magazine immediately.

Kalicharan's aspiration to organise the *Bodo Mahasanmilani* Conference was fulfilled. He took an active role in organising four successive *Mahasanmilani* conferences. The guiding spirit behind organising such conferences was to foster unity among the Bodos. The basic principle was forging unity. They garnered support and enthusiasm of the literate and illiterate Bodos alike for eradicating evil social practices.

CONCLUSION

The efforts to awaken and to arouse ethnicity feelings among the Bodos sprang up from within their own population. Some sections of the Bodos received elementary education during colonial period and some gained economic advantages by involving themselves in Sal timber trade. Those classes of the Bodos became aware of the social, religious and economic conditions. They reorganised the social system in modern fashion by discarding some of the medieval practices. The new elite class perceived that the excessive drinking of *Zou* (Rice-Beer), rearing of pigs in an unhygienic condition, taking bride price and unsolicited marriage practices etc. were the source of mental anxiety for the educated Bodo elites. So, the setting up of schools in Bodo inhabited areas for bringing the children to school, the spreading of Brahma faith of Srimot Kalicharan Gurudev, the launching of socio-religious reformation movement by the Brahma protagonists came spontaneously from within the Bodos. As there was none to help them at the Local Boards in getting schools granted, they felt the necessity for political representation. Hence, they were hastened to form associations like the *Bodo Chatra Sanmilani*, the *Bodo Mahasanmilani* and the Tribal League (the incipient political organization) in the early part of the 20th century. Through such organisations, the activists took up the course of socio-religious reformations movement and spread the education among the Bodos in ever-expanding horizon. They reasserted the ethnic identity by giving safeguard to their language, culture, traditions and religion.

At last, it should be clearly concluded that almost all those volunteers, activists, prose writers, poets and leaders especially of the *Bibar Age*, were the followers and votaries of the *Brahma* faith and hence the preaching and spreading of the *Brahma* faith (*Brahma Moth*) by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma had many-faceted role in the rise of the Bodo ethnic consciousness in the early 20th century.

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