

## CHAPTER: I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Geographical Background:**

The State of Assam is situated in the North-Eastern part of India between latitudes 24<sup>0</sup> and 26<sup>0</sup> North and longitudes 90<sup>0</sup> and 96<sup>0</sup> East<sup>1</sup>. The present area of Assam is 24, 283 square miles which constitutes the plain districts<sup>2</sup>. Physiographical divisions of Assam are the Brahmaputra Valley, the Barak Valley and the Hill Regions. The plains of Assam consist of the great river valley of the Brahmaputra which is an alluvial plain with an area of 56,339 sq. km. The river Brahmaputra enters the North-Eastern corner of Assam and turns to West passing through all districts of North Assam. The Brahmaputra valley comprises the modern districts of Goalpara (now further sub-divided into six), Kamrup (into five), Darrang (into four), Nowgaon (into three), Sibsagar (into five) and Lakhimpur (into four)<sup>3</sup>. The Barak Valley is situated to the South of the Meghalaya plateau. The river Barak flows through the valley and finally joins the old bed of Brahmaputra river in Bangladesh<sup>4</sup>. The state's hill regions consisting of Karbi Anglong and Cachar hills separate the two valleys of Brahmaputra and Barak<sup>5</sup>. The state of Assam is bounded on the North by the hills of Bhutan and Indian hill state of Arunachal Pradesh, in the South-East lies the state of Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. In the South, the hill state of Meghalaya stands gorgeously<sup>6</sup>. The soil of Brahmaputra valley is very fertile which can be divided into three types, viz., red loam, laterite and alluvial<sup>7</sup>. The alluvial type of soil belongs to the districts of Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Tinsukia, Darrang, Kamrup, Goalpara and part of Cachar and Northern part of Sibsagar. It is suitable for the cultivation of rice, wheat, sugarcane, banana, tobacco, mustard, jute etc. The laterite soil is found in some parts of the districts of Cachar, Sibsagar and Nowgaon which is highly suitable for the cultivation of rice and potato<sup>8</sup>. The climate of Assam is damp and relaxing<sup>9</sup>. The recurrent showers of rain and thunderstorms check its rise in

temperature during the spring and summer. The soil is fertile and well-adapted to all kind of agricultural purpose<sup>10</sup>.

### **The flora and fauna:**

The forest area of Assam is about one-third of the total land. Among the forest regions of Assam, Goalpara district represents the most important and valuable forests which are roughly estimated at 430 square miles and the Eastern *Duars* with an area of 422 square miles. There were several large and important forests in Goalpara and Eastern *Duars*. Goalpara district of Assam abounds in the species of the naturally grown Sal Timber (*Shorea Robusta*), a kind of very important and valuable tree. Besides Sal, the forests contain the useful timber trees like Gambari (*Gmelina Arborea*), Pama (*Cedrela Toona*), Chama, Shilika (*Cetrena*), Uriam (*Andrachne Trifoliata*), Jambora, Kadam (*Nauclea Kadamba*), Singari (*Castanea*), Odal (*Sterculia Urens*), Gandh Sarai (*Camphora Glandulifera*), Bargachh (*Ficus Elastic*), Simul (*Bombax Malabaricum*). Those together with innumerable other kinds of trees, bamboos, canes etc. comprised the heavy forests and jungles of Assam<sup>11</sup>.

Besides, the rich florals the forests region of Assam is rich in animals and birds. The large sorts of game common in Assam are tigers, leopards, rhinoceros, bears, buffaloes, monkeys and deer. The smaller sorts of the game consisted principally of partridges, pea-fowl, jungle fowl, floricans, quail, wild duck, parrots etc. Crocodiles abound in the different rivers<sup>12</sup>.

### **River:**

The Brahmaputra is the principal river which flows through the heart of the state of Assam. It is the chief artery and highway of Assam. The whole history and culture of the people of Assam are intimately connected with the Brahmaputra<sup>13</sup>. The river Brahmaputra forms a great natural highway between Bengal and Assam. In both banks of the river Brahmaputra, there are numerous small and big rivers which are navigable during the rainy season and they serve as the alternative means of transportation when high land transportation system was yet to develop. Starting from the West the river system of Assam is the Sankosh, Gangia, Saralbhangha, Champamati, Aie, Beki, Manas,

Tipkai, Godadhar, Pagladia, Puthimari, Ranganadi, Subansiri, Barnadi, Dikhow, Disang, Dihing and other numerous rivers which flow down the Brahmaputra river from the North and East. The rivers in the South bank are Krishnai, Jinari, Jiri etc. form the river system of the Brahmaputra valley. In the Barak Valley, the important rivers are Kopili, Kusiara, Lohit etc. The rivers of Assam are immensely important as they act as waterways which are used to transport commodities and livestock and helps in communication too<sup>14</sup>.

### **Mountain:**

Around the state of Assam, there are lofty mountain ranges which are inhabited by the people of Mongoloid origin. The Himalayan regions of Bhutan and Tibet lie to the North of Assam. The main inhabitants of the range of sub-Himalayan hills of Bhutan and the Arunachal Pradesh are the *Bhutias* in the Western part and the Tibeto-Burman tribes (all Arunachalis) in the Eastern portion. The Patkai hill ranges lie in the East which are the home of the Naga tribes and Manipuris. The Lushai hills and the Meghalaya plateau lie to the South of Assam<sup>15</sup>.

### **Historical Background of the Bodos:**

Assam has multi-racial and linguistic groups with distinct cultures of their own which are quite different from each other. The Bodos are listed as scheduled tribes under the Constitution of India as per Constitution Order' 1950<sup>16</sup>. In the marginal areas of Assam, the Bodos (Kacharis) form a very numerous section of those groups and are believed to be the earliest settlers of Assam. In the state of Assam, there have not been less than 175 languages and dialects spoken by the small group of tribes and each of them are preserving their customs and structure<sup>17</sup>. The Bodos are the most ancient among the Indo-Mongoloids and are autochthons of North-East India<sup>18</sup>. From ancient to the modern period, the Bodos built powerful kingdoms with their capitals at various places in entire North-East India. The state formations at Pragjyotishpur, Tezpur, Sadiya in the ancient period, Dimapur, Maibong and Khaspur (Haritakar), Tripura, Koch Behar in the medieval period and Bijni, Mongoldoi, Rani, Dimarua in modern period are proof of wielding of power by the Bodos. The builders of those kingdoms were all closely allied to the great Bodo Race. The Bodos spread over the Brahmaputra valley, North Bengal

and constitute a very important group of Indo-Mongoloid people of East India. Those who lived in scattered hamlets along the foothills of the Himalayas in North-East India and Brahmaputra valley called themselves Boros (Bodos) although they were otherwise known as Kacharis in the Assam valley<sup>19</sup>. A section of the tribe who had gradually become Hindus speaking Assamese and considering their status to be higher than that of Kacharis was known as the Koch. In Brahmaputra valley, the greatest concentration of the tribe was in the district of Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Darrang, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Goalpara and Nowgaon. They also went the Southern bank of Brahmaputra and occupied the Garo Hills where the Garos still show close affinity with them. In the borders of North Cachar Hills and Dimapur, there were two distinct groups known as Dimasas and Meches who also call themselves as Bodos or Kacharis. In the range of hill south of the Surma valley, there are the Tipperahs whose language is a branch of the ancient Bodos<sup>20</sup>. Considering the linguistic affinities of the Bodos (the Kacharis) with the Garos as well as the tribes known under different names as Dhimal, Chutiyas, Koches, Rabhas, Meches, Lalungs, Sonowal etc many ethnographers opine the possibility of the existence of some ethnological relationships with each other. The Mongoloid tribes speaking languages of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan speech-family appears to have dispersed from a centre in some tract to the East of Tibet and North-East of Assam, from where they began to spread into India and Tibet sometimes in about 1000 B.C <sup>21</sup>.

The generic term *Bodo* was applied to all peoples speaking Tibeto-Burman group of languages like the Boros (Bodos) of the Brahmaputra valley, the Meches of lower Assam and West Bengal, Rabhas, Garos, Dimasas, Tipperahs, Lalungs, Sonowals etc<sup>22</sup>. The term *Kachari* was also used as a generic term like the Bodo. The Boro-Kachari, Dimasa-Kachari, Lalung-Kachari, Sonowal-Kachari etc could be cited as examples. L.A. Wadell preferred to use the term *Kachari* instead of *Bodo*<sup>23</sup>. For the Bodo group of people who dwelt in the Terai-submontane tract under the hills of Bhutan, B.H. Hodgson took the term *Bodo* for they called themselves *Boro-ni-phisa* son of *Boro* (*Bodo*), sons of man<sup>24</sup>. So, it is of recent origin and it is B.H. Hodgson who first coined and popularized the term *Bodo* in his essay “the Koch, Bodo and Dhimal tribes” published in 1847, to designate the *Boroni Fisa*<sup>25</sup>. The adoption of the term *Bodo* by B.H. Hodgson was confirmed by G.A. Grierson in his Linguistic Survey of India vol. III part-II, 1903. He said that Hodgson first applied the generic term Bodo to that group of

languages<sup>26</sup>. But the same Bodos of North Bengal and lower part of Assam are still known as *Meches*. Ethnographers have put forward divergent views on the origin, derivation and denotation of the word *Mech*. Anderson thought that the same *Mech* was given to the Bodos of North Bengal by their Bengali neighbours. N.N. Vasu in his *Social History of Kamrupa* maintained that the Sanskrit word *Mleccha* is abbreviated to the word *Mech* and they belonged to *Asura* dynasty<sup>27</sup>. Likewise, K.L. Barua<sup>28</sup>, G.A. Grierson<sup>29</sup> and S.K. Chatterjee<sup>30</sup> also expressed the same view that the word *Mech* is simply a corruption of the Sanskrit word *Mleccha*, which means barbarians, unclean, foreigner (Non-Aryans). But, Francis Hermann is of opinion that the name *Mech* is an original designation and not a derivation of the Sanskrit word *Mleccha*<sup>31</sup>. It is also said that since the *Meches* first lived on the bank of river Mechi in Nepal, they derived their name from the Mechi river and came to be known as *Mechi*, *Mechia* or *Meches*. According to Hunter, Bodos are known as *Meches* in the western part of the *Eastern Duars* district; but in the more eastern part they are called indiscriminately as *Mech* or Kachari and again further East, in Assam, they are called by the name of Kachari alone, losing their name of *Mech* altogether. Risley also opined that the *Meches* like the other Bodo groups are Indo-Mongoloids and they are one of the branches of the Kacharis<sup>32</sup>. According to Dalton, the *Meches* and the Kacharis refer to the same stock of people<sup>33</sup>. According to J.B. Bhattacharjee, the Kacharis from the plains of Assam looked upon the Dimasa Raja as lingering symbol of their racial unity and maintained allegiance to the Raja and paid tribute to him<sup>34</sup>. L. Bezbarua in his *Mahapurush Sri Sankardev and Sri Madhavdev* used both *Kachari* and *Mech* interchangeably<sup>35</sup>. Rev. S. Endle divided the Kacharis into Western, Eastern and Southern Kacharis<sup>36</sup>. But, they call themselves as the Bodo and in the present work, the name *Bodo* for them would be used exclusively.

The modern Bodos (the *Meches*) are regarded in ancient times as *Danavas*, *Asuras*, *Kiratas* and *Mlecchas* by the Hindu scriptures<sup>37</sup>. In the History of Assam, the Bodos or the *Meches* were the most numerous and ethnologically the most important group of people as those people had moulded and shaped the History of Pragjyotishpura and Kamrupa. Many scholars argue that from the records in the Epics- the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* it is known that in the North-Eastern frontier kingdom of India, a *Mleccha* territory ruled by the Bodo kings, referred to as *Danavas* and *Asuras* by the Aryans of the Gangetic valley, was known as Pragjyotisha and later as Kamrupa. N.N.

Vasu said that in the History of Kamrupa evidence of the rise of the *Mleccha* or *Asura* dynasty could be found even during the ascendancy of the Aryans<sup>38</sup>. Jogini-Tantra depicts as follows<sup>39</sup>:

*Siddheshi Jogini Pithe*

*Dharmah Kairatajoh Motoh.*

*Kirata Faith* was the religion of the Jogini Pitha (region) based on the ideal of Lord Siva.

The earliest inhabitants of the plains of Assam were the *Kiratas*, *Cinas* and other primitive tribes commonly designated as *Mlecchas* and *Asuras*<sup>40</sup>. According to the *Samhitas*, *Kiratas* was a name referred to the people living in the caves of mountains<sup>41</sup>. In the Puranas, *Kiratas* were designated as ‘foresters’, ‘barbarians’, ‘mountaineers’, the appellation referring to the inhabitants of the mountains of Eastern India<sup>42</sup>. In the present context, by the appellation *Kiratas*, the races with Mongoloid type of features were denoted. Linguistically the Bodos belonged to the speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages and racially they belonged to the Indo-Mongoloid group. They formed the numerous and important section of the non-Aryan peoples of Assam. The Bodo group of tribes includes the Koch, Kachari, Lalung, Dimasa, Garo, Rabha, Tipra, Chutiya and Moran<sup>43</sup>. Linguistic evidence shows that at one point of time the Bodo people extended over the whole of the present state of Assam West of Manipur and Naga hills. The Bodos built their colonies near the streams and so most of the river names in Eastern Assam are of Bodo origin<sup>44</sup>. Dibru, Dikhu, Dihing, Dihong, Dibong, Disang, Diphang Dimla etc are the rivers names of the Brahmaputra valley where the prefix *di* or *ti*, the Bodo word for water frequently occurs, shows the wide extent and long duration of Bodo domination<sup>45</sup>. In the early days of Ahom rule, the river Brahmaputra was known as the *Ti-lao*<sup>46</sup>. The Bodos moulded powerful kingdoms in different names at various places in ancient and medieval periods. The *Asura* and *Danava* dynasties found mentioned in the Epics and Puranas, Salasthambas, Palas, Burmans in the ancient period and Chutiyas, Koches, Kacharis and Tipperahs in the medieval period were all different ramifications of the great Bodo race. But all those powerful kingdoms are now represented by remnants of Koch kings of Bijni, Mongaldoi, Beltola and Raja of Rani. Since the ascendancy of the Aryan race into

Assam, all those kings became a Hinduised caste of *Kshatriyas* by the influence of Brahmans except their subjects who didn't follow their suit. But the Neo-Vaishnavite religion preached by Sri Sri Sankardeva was able to influence and convince the common Bodo people to embrace it and become *Saranias*<sup>47</sup> after they were being proselytized into the new faith.

The earliest king of the *Mech* or Bodos as handed down by traditions was Mahiranga Danava<sup>48</sup>. The next king was Hatak Asura. He was defeated and slain by another *Asura* named Narak Asura. After Narak Asura was slain by Krishna, his son Bhagadatta was installed as a king of Pragjyotishpura as mentioned in the *Mahabharata*<sup>49</sup>. The *Mahabharata* bluntly declares Bhagadatta as a *Mlecchanan Adhipati* i.e. the ruler of *Mlecchas*<sup>50</sup>. H.C. Ray said that in the description of the great Epic if there were any historical facts then with reason Bhagadatta could be regarded as a prince of the non-Aryan Tibeto-Chinese races who was referred to as *cinas*, *Kiratas* in ancient Indian literature<sup>51</sup>. Thus, we find that the mythological kings of Assam and parts of Bengal racially belonged to the *Mech* or Bodo people.

The political history of the Bodos or the *Meches* became comparatively clearer from the 4th Century to the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Some authentic sources like *Siyuki* of Hiuen Tsiang, *Harsha Charita* of Banabhatta, *Nidhanpur* and *Doobi* copper plate grants throw light on the political history of the Bodos. According to the *Doobi* copper plate grant, Pushya Barman was the first king of Pragjyotishpura. H.C. Ray said that Pushya Barman belonged to Bhagadatta dynasty and his lines were closely related to those of Salasthambha line. Salasthambha was a *Mech* (Bodo) by race who shifted the capital from Pragjyotishpur to Sonitpur and he built a Siva temple there<sup>52</sup>. One of the kings of Bhagadatta line was Kumar Bhaskar Barman.

It was during the reign of Kumar Bhaskara Barman that the famous Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsiang visited Kamrupa in 638 A.D. From the writings of Hiuen Tsiang we get some ethnological information of the inhabitants of Kamrupa in the days when Bhaskara Barman was the king of Kamrupa. S.K. Chatterjee also wrote that the Chinese writer clearly noted the Mongoloid character of the people of the country, who said that the men were of small stature and their complexion a dark yellow; their language differs a little from that of mid-India<sup>53</sup>.

During the medieval and modern period of Indian history, a comparatively clearer written History of the Bodos could be found from the Muslim and colonial writings. Colonial ethnographer Rev. S. Endle divided the Kacharis into Western, Eastern and Southern Kacharis<sup>54</sup>. The earliest notices of the Eastern Kacharis were those of the Chutiyas. They had established a powerful kingdom on the bank of the river Subansiri in the present Sadiya region. Another branch of the Kacharis was ruling over a region West of Sadiya, East of Dikhaumukh under one Manik Kachari. He was originally a small chieftain over twelve Kachari families. Later, he subdued the surrounding villages and became famous with the title of *Kachari Raja*<sup>55</sup>. At the same time, the Southern Kacharis under Susengpha had also ruled over the strips of land between Dikhau and Dhansiri river with their capital at Dimapur. In 1229 A.D. Shukapha, the founder of Ahom kingdom in Assam of the great Shan or Tai race came to Assam in 1228 A.D. after crossing Patkai hills and established a friendship with Bodoucha, the King of Matak and Thakumtha, the King of Borahis and also with other Kachari tribes<sup>56</sup>. Shukapha took those subdued Kachari tribes into his favour and engaged them into various professions like wood-cutter, Kitchen in-charge, treasurer etc<sup>57</sup>.

Many references could be found in the writings of the colonial ethnographers about the present Bodos or the *Meches* of erstwhile Goalpara district and present North Bengal which were known as Western and Eastern *Duars*. B.C. Allen reported on the general geographical, economic and social conditions of the masses. He said that the very unprogressive portion of the district of Goalpara was *Duars* where the *Meches* were the great mass of the population. The Bodos or the *Meches* were still in a very primitive and undeveloped state. Except for the rivers, the communications were bad and there were hardly any markets. Except for trade in timber from the government reserves, there was not much trade. The merchants who come up the rivers with boatloads of pottery and dried fish bartered them with the surplus products of the *Duars*. The rate of exchange was generally very favourable to the traders<sup>58</sup>. Francis Hamilton reported on the habitational areas of various tribes and castes in the Goalpara district. He asserted that the lower tract of Bhutan hills consisting of five *Duars* of Goalpara and 10 or 15 miles horizontal distance in width was occupied by the Bodos (*Meches*) and other rude tribes. The Southern portion of the tract was chiefly populated by the Koch or the Rajbangsis<sup>59</sup>.



Bikramajit Hasrat made a comment about the Bodos (Meches) of Eastern *Duars* of Bengal and Assam. He said that the *Meches* (Bodos) who were a hard-working tribe paid revenue to the *Subah* in kind viz. rice, clothes, betel-nuts, cotton, butter and ghee<sup>60</sup>. W.W. Hunter also remarked about the poor plight of the Bodo polity. He said that the Bodos (Meches) didn't achieve any form of polity of their own and they had few religious and cultural traditions. They lacked ancient songs, monuments, written character or literature of any kind<sup>61</sup>.

### **The Koches:**

The Koches appear to have been originally a Bodo tribe, closely allied to the Bodos (Meches), but many of them now present the physical characteristics of the Dravidian family<sup>62</sup>. In the Brahmaputra valley Koch, formerly the name of a tribe, has become a Hindu caste which admits proselytes to Hinduism from the ranks of the Bodo (Kachari) and other aboriginal tribes who are now regarded as Hindu castes consist largely of aboriginal elements<sup>63</sup>.

The Koch has become the name of a Hindu caste in Assam. The Hindu caste received the converts to Hinduism from the ranks of the Bodos (Kacharis), Lalung, Mikir and other tribes. As the process of conversion was continuing, the number of persons described as Koch was increasing rapidly. In North Bengal and Goalpara, the term *Koch* had been abandoned in favour of the appellation *Rajbansi*<sup>64</sup>. The Koches West of the Manas river adopted the designation *Rajbansi* when they attorned to Hinduism. In the ultimate analysis, it may be concluded that the true Koches were a Mongoloid race and very closely allied to the Bodos (Meches) and Garos. In former times the Koches and the Bodos (Meches) freely intermarried but due to the conversion of the Koches into Hinduism, the practice of intermarriage was discontinued. The Koches of the East of Manas was admitted to Hinduism without any change of their tribal name, but the other Mongoloid tribes were allowed to do so only by sinking their old designation and by joining the ranks of the already Hinduised Koches<sup>65</sup>.

The progenitor of the Koch kings was Bodo (Mech). Bisu, the son of Hira was the founder of Koch Kingdom who assumed the name of Bisva Singha and discarded their old tribal designation and called themselves Rajbansis. He became a great patron of

Hinduism. He rebuilt the smashed Temple of Kamakhya at Nilachal hill and imported numerous Brahmans from Kanauj, Benaras and other centres of Hindu religious learning<sup>66</sup>. Those Brahmans later proved to be instrumental in shaping the destiny of the Koch kings and their followers.

At the advice of the Brahmans, the kings or chiefs of the families of obscure or humble or tribal origin usually legitimized their power by successfully claiming upper caste *Kshatriya* status. For such kings the Brahmans used to invent some suitable genealogy and wrote their ancestries into the record. Such ancestries were no doubt, invented, concocted and imagined linking them to Epics or Puranic stories<sup>67</sup>. High caste identity was regarded important in the process of the state formation of the families of the tribal chief or obscure origin. The non-Aryan kings who were outside the pale of the Brahmanical Caste system, after coming into direct Brahmanical influence consciously followed their instructions to legitimize their kingship. Curious enough they even tried to hide the antecedents of the ruling families in their efforts to prove their legitimacy as rulers. Romila Thapar stated that caste identities play curious roles in the change from clan-based societies to state systems. She further said that the families, which had acquired power and ruled as an independent dynasty, back up their power by seeking legitimacy. In the process of seeking legitimacy, the practice of making of an appropriate story of origin often involving the deities and also the claim to being of *Kshatriya* status was adopted<sup>68</sup>

The founder of the Koch dynasty of Koch Behar was Bisva Singha, the son of one Hariya Mech, a tribal chieftain of Chiknagram in the Khuntaghat pargana of erstwhile Goalpara district. In course of the Koch state formation, Bisva Singha, after successfully establishing himself as a sovereign ruler, the Brahmans soon 'sought him out'<sup>69</sup>. They discovered that tribesmen were *Kshatriyas* who had thrown away their sacred threads when fleeing before the wrath of Parasurama, the son of the Brahman ascetic Jamadagni<sup>70</sup>.

The process of Aryanisation of the people of Assam or the ancient Kamrupa could be traced back to the Epic period. It is mentioned in the Epic that the prince Naraka of Videha occupied and ruled over the *Mlecchas* and *Kiratas* of Pragjyotishpur. He brought and established a number of learned Brahmans well versed in Vedas. The

inscriptions also contain a reference to the immigration of Brahmans to Assam from *Madhyadesha*. Such Brahman settlers, no doubt, spread the Vedic culture in the province and with the support of the kings, the process of Aryanisation of the people of Assam received a great impetus from the 4th century A.D.

In the *Darrang Rajvamsavali* Bisu was said to be the son of *Mahadeva*. Variants of legends may be cited here regarding the birth of Bisva Singha, the *Mech* prince. The origin of Koch kings could be traced back to the original twelve *Mech* chiefs of Chiknagram, a village in the Khuntaghat *pargana* of Goalpara district. The names of those twelve original *Mech* chiefs are found in the *Darrang Rajvamsavali*<sup>71</sup> as follows:

*Panbor, Bhedela, Avor, Guabor,*

*Phedphedo, Barihana Mech Shrestotor*

*Kothia- Baihagu, Megha Juddhabor nam*

*Garokata, jogai, Bhokhora anupom*

*Ahi Barojon Mech porom probol*

*Sobar Upori shresto Hariya Mondal*

Free English translation-

Panbor, Bhedela, Avor, Guabor,

Phedphedo, Barihana Mech (Bodo)Superior

Kothia- Baihagu, Megha are names of warrior

Garokata, Jogai, Bhokhora uncomparable

Those Twelve *Mech* are very numerous

Above all the best is Hariya Mondal

Selection of Hariya Mech as *Mondal* from amongst the twelve *Mech* chiefs is found in *Gandharva Narayan's Vamsavali*<sup>72</sup> which says as follows:

*Hariyak ani sabe Mandal patila*

*Sie din dhari taite adhikari Bhaila.*

Free English translation:

All they brought Hariya and made leader (Mandal)

From that day he became powerful (King).

In *Karganarayan's Vamsavali*<sup>73</sup> those lines were reproduced with some additions which follows as:

*Pubhat Manas, Sankosh paschimat*

*Sabe Asi Hariyak Mandal patila*

*Sie Dhari Barograme bhaila adhikari*

*Uttare Dhobalgiri dakshine Lauhit*

*Bhojbhat khaiya sabe anande chalil*

*Kahakeo na de kar aie sheema dhari*

Free English translation:

Manas in the East, Sankosh in the West

All they came and make Hariya the leader (Mandal)

Those twelve villages became powerful (Adhikari)

In the North Dhobalgiri, in the South Lauhit

After having grand feast all lived happily

Within those boundaries, give tax to none.

Among many variant sources regarding *Koch Behar Vamsavalis* mention may be made of the *Tariq-i-Assam* and *Tariq-i-Ferista* which tells us about the fourth times change of guard. Those books indicated that the *Vamsavalis* from the ancient times (4th and 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) in different conditions and their various branches welded power and transformed into present-day condition. In this regard, the *Jogini Tantra's* prediction might be mentioned which said that when *Kamakhyapitha* would suffer from the *Brahmanic* curse, at that time Bisva Singha would appear and rule *Kamrupadesha*. It was a clear indication of the transfer of power from one branch to the other amongst their *Vamsavalis*.

Many legends centred round Hariya's marriage with Hira and Jira and the eventual birth of Bisva Singha. Hariya Mandal married to two sisters- Hira and Jira, the two daughters of one Hajau (Hajo)<sup>74</sup>. Dr. Buchanan Hamilton wrote that Hira's father was Hajo. According to him, he was the valiant chief and he drove away the Mohammedans from *Kamatapur*<sup>75</sup>. Raj Gunabhiram Barua Bahadur also stated that Hira's father was Hajo, Haji, or Hakia who was a King of Hajo within Gauhati<sup>76</sup>. Amanat Ullah Khan mentioned that at the time of Dambambu (Hariya's father) one Sailoraj ruled Eastern region of Bhutan also known as *Toango*. The Sailoraj and wife Mira had a jewel daughter named Hira<sup>77</sup>.

Hariya Mech married two sisters- Hira and Jira, daughters of Hajou, by whom he had two sons, Bisu, the son of Hira and Sisu, the son of Jira<sup>78</sup>. It was said that Bisu took birth on the first day of Bihu (Kartik Bihu) so his name was Bisu, (*Samudra Narayan Vamsavali*). In the *Darrang Rajvamsavali*, Bisu was said to be the son of *Mahadeva* (16<sup>th</sup> Century)<sup>79</sup>. In the Ram Charan Thakur edited *Sankar Charita* also mentioned the same fact<sup>80</sup>. In the contemporary *Akbar Nama*, Bisva Singha was called *Mahadeva's* son<sup>81</sup>. In the *Kamrupar Buranji*, written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was said that as a result of the curse of Basistha, *Mahadeva* and his consort *Parvati* had to take birth as Hariya and Hira and Bisva Singha was their son<sup>82</sup>.

Another legend regarding Bisva Singha's birth portrayed that one day, Hariya Mech to cultivate cotton at the hill did spadework from the early morning. At mid-day, (*duipahar*) his wife Hira came to him with *Pantha bhat*, rice beer and meat for his lunch. On her way, *Mahadeva* (Siva) who was sitting under a tree, saw Hira and was enamoured

at her beauty and assuming Hariya's form took the food, rice-beer, meat and had intercourse with her. The union gave birth to one boy on the first day of *Bihu* for which the boy was called Bisu<sup>83</sup>

Another branch of the Koch kings were the Kings of Darrang. The *Darrang Rajvamsavali* written in metrical Assamese on oblong strips of *Sachipat* (*Aquilaria agallocha*), was the only detailed narrative. It belonged to late Raja Lakshmi Narayan Kuar, who was the leading representative of the Darrang branch of the Koch Royal family<sup>84</sup>. It said that later kings of the lunar race of Haihaya of Sahasrarjuna lineage twelve *Kshatriya* princes to escape from the wrath of Parasurama lived hidden at Chikna of Rathnapith under the guise of *Mech*. In their concealment, those twelve *Kshatriyas* adopted *Mech* manners and even married *Mech* girls<sup>85</sup>. The names of those twelve *Kshatriyas* were mentioned in stanza 51 of the manuscript. Their names were Panbor, Bhedela, Avor, Guabor, Phedphedo, Borihana, Kathia Baishagu, Megha, Garkata, Jogai, Bhokora. Among those *Kshatriya* princes Sumati was the greatest and Sumati's son Bhadrajit took birth, his son Bhadrasrabha, his son Basudam and his son was Dambambu. Dambambu and his consort Urbasi bigoted Haridas Mech or Hariya Mech (Mandal).

Sumati (Mech?)<sup>86</sup>

Bhadrajit

Bhadrasrabha

Basudam

Dambambu

Hariya (Mech)

Bisu

It showed that the progenitor of the Koch kings was *Mech*, whose name was Hariya Mandal, a resident of Chiknagram, a village in the Khuntaghat pargana of Goalpara district<sup>87</sup>, now under Kokrajhar district. Hariya Mech after being selected as the

Chief over twelve *Mech Sardars* assumed the title Hariya Mandal. In his contemporary period, the small kings were called Mandal. In the seventh chapter of the *Manusamhita*, it is mentioned that the small kings and *Samantas* were designated as *Mandal*<sup>88</sup>. During *Guptaraj* also the provincial administrators were known as Mandals<sup>89</sup>. It indicated that the appellation *Mandal* was not of clan name but an ancient official designation.<sup>90</sup>

The *Buranjis* of Assam also corroborate the fact that the Koch Kings were the Bodos (Mech) by nationality. In the lineage of Bisva Singha, it was said that at Cooch Behar there was a Kachari named Hariya. He had two wives namely Hira and Jira. As to the origin of the Koch Kings, different scholars expressed divergent views. Some contemporary literary sources enlighten us with important information regarding the origin of the Koches. Minhas-Ud-Din Siraj in his book *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* an official account of the expedition of the kingdom of Kamrupa by Muhammed-Bin- Bhaktiyar Khalji asserted that the regions of Kamrupa were peopled by the Kunch (Koch), the Mej (Mech) and the Tiharu (Tharu) tribes<sup>91</sup>. In *Padma Purana*, the Koches were referred to as *Kuvacka* which indicated that they had no choice of food and spoke a barbaric tongue and betrayed no sophistication in their manner. The *Yogini Tantra*, composed in about the 16<sup>th</sup> century, referred to the Koches as *Kuvacas* and indicated that they were born of a *Mech* woman<sup>92</sup>. *Dharma Purana* of the 18<sup>th</sup> century stated that the Koches did violence to all kinds of creatures and used to take even beef<sup>93</sup>.

There are a group of scholars who argue that the Koches are definitely of Mongolian stock. Brian Hodgson asserted that the Koches exhibit marked Mongolian type more distinctly<sup>94</sup>. Waddel also said that they didn't belong to the Dravidian Stock, but was distinctly Mongoloid<sup>95</sup>. Buchanan in the *Dacca Blue book* classed them with the Bodos and the Dhimals. Rev. S. Endle says that the Rabhas, the Meches, Dhimals, Koches, Dimasas, Hojais, Lalungs, Garos, Hajongs and such other tribes fall within the fold of the great Bodo Race<sup>96</sup>. E.A. Gait in his census of India stated that the Koches of Assam belonged to the Mongolian rather than to the Dravidian Stock<sup>97</sup>. S.K. Chatterjee also held the same view that the Koches were of Mongoloid origin. No doubt, the Koches are of Mongoloid origin having close affinities with other Bodo tribes. But their inter-marriage with the Dravidians gave birth to an inter-mixture of Dravido-Mongolian features having a preponderance of Mongoloid characters.

In course of time, the designations of Rajbansi have been applied to the Koches. According to Gait, the Koches West of the Manas river adopted the appellation *Rajbansi* when they atoned to Hinduism and appropriated the caste name of the most numerous Hinduised community in their neighbourhood, which was originally referred to as an entirely distinct community of Dravidian affinities<sup>98</sup>. Dr. D. Nath supported Gait's view and cited Mr. Rislely who said that in Cooch Behar, the cradle of the community, the adoption of the designation of *Rajbansi* in the Census of 1881 was so complete that not a single person was returned as Koch in the census<sup>99</sup>. He further argued that in any source whether in the Persian records or in the foreign accounts or in any of the dynastic epigraph of the time, the Koches were not mentioned as *Rajbansis*. Even the *Darrang Rajvamsavali*, which is a genealogical account of the Koch royal family, which was written in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, does not refer to the term. Instead, all those sources call them as Koches or the Meches<sup>100</sup>. Thus, he (D.Nath) concluded that the term *Rajvansi* as applied to the Koches was of recent origin<sup>101</sup>.

Thus, the Koch Kings (1515 A.D.) who were no doubt of non-Aryan descent had been identified by the Brahmans as sprang from the *Siva*, the God having taken the form of one of their ancestors and visited the queen, who was herself none other than an incarnation of his divine spouse Parvati. The Brahmanical deduction of theory of origin for kings of the non-Aryan descent and the manufactured ancestries for them have interestingly been found acceptance in the discourse of the history of the unlettered tribes. Similar initiation was made for the Kachari kings of Dimapur by satisfactorily tracing back their ancestry to Bhima, the second *Pandava* princes of the *Mahabharata*. Likewise, for the Ahoms the God *Indra* was selected as the progenitor of their Kings. Not only the genealogies of those non-Aryan kings were manufactured by the Brahmans but also the non-Aryan deities, religious myths and cults derived from the races beyond the Brahmanic pale were adopted and developed into special cults along sectarian lines. Such attempts by the Brahmans seemed to discard or hid the low origin ancestries of the kings of non-Aryan descent which becomes degradable to them to accept offices under such non-*Kshatriya* kings. Hence, the claiming upper-caste *Kshatriya* status by the non-Aryan or tribal origin kings had become somewhat mandatory.



The worship of Siva prevailed in Kamrupa from a remote period and was the popular form of religion both amongst the aboriginals and the Aryanised people<sup>102</sup>. Ray Bahadur Gunabhiram Barua in his *Assam Burunji* stated that the King Jalpeswar first introduced the Siva worship in early Assam, who was a king of North Bengal (Jalpaiguri) which was formerly included in the kingdom of Kamrupa<sup>103</sup>. The *Skanda Purana* narrates the story how the King Jalpa, came to be a Siva worshipper, the Brahmans for their own sake also manufactured the myths of those deities. Along with the new places of pilgrimage suitable myths to make them respectable were also introduced. The Epics and Puranas were full of such materials<sup>104</sup>. The worship of those newly absorbed primitive deities was part of the mechanism of acculturation.

Thus, it is found that the founder of the Koch dynasty of Koch Behar, Bisva Singha in his effort to claim high caste *Kshatriya* status, had hidden the antecedents of his original ruling family name *Mech* which is outside the pale of the Brahmanical social hierarchy. He was a son of a *Mech* chieftain of Chiknagram of Khuntaghat pargana of undivided Goalpara district of Assam.

### **History of Goalpara:**

The undivided Goalpara lies at the extreme Western part of Assam. Undivided Goalpara was created as a separate district in 1822<sup>105</sup>. During historical periods it came under the rules of many dynastic rulers. In the early period, the Kamrupa kings ruled over that strip of land and then came under Khen Kings who were again dethroned by Mohammedan ruler Hussain Shah of Bengal in 1498. It passed to the powerful Koch Kingdom which was established by Bisva Singha. In the declining days of the Koch kings again Mohammedan rulers of Bengal occupied the portion of it while the Northern part remained under the rule of the Dev Raja of Punakha (Bhutan) till 1864-65. The Southern portion of the district came under the British East India Company as early as 1765 by the treaty of Allahabad which granted the Company, the *Diwani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. In the midst, it suffered many times from the onslaught of Mohammedan invasions. Its majority inhabitants were the Bodos, the Rabhas, the Rajbansis and the Garos and other minor Bengali traders and Marwari merchants settled in the towns of Dhubri, Gauripur, Goalpara, Bilasipara etc. In Goalpara, like other parts of India Zamindari system flourished in this part of the country under the Kamata

kingdom towards the later part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>106</sup>. It comprised the Zamindari Estates of Bijni, Gauripur, Mechpara, Chapar, Karaibari, Parbotjoar and Sidli. At the time of the Permanent Settlement, there were altogether 19 permanently settled areas in the district of Goalpara<sup>107</sup>. The permanently settled areas were- Habraghat and Khuntaghat Parganas of Bijni Raj Estate, Ghurla, Jamira, Makrampur, Aurangabad, Kalumalupara, Gola Alamganj, Kayarpar, Noabad Futuri and Dhubri were estates of Gauripur Raja. Mechpara, Taluk Goalpara, Dekdhoya, Dhar Brahmaputra were the estates of Mechpara Zamindar. Chapar Zamindari comprised the estates of Chapar Kasba-gilla and Kajipara. Parbotjoar was a single estate but later divided into 8-anna, 5-anna and 3-anna parts each under a separate Zamindars. Karaibari had its estates of Karaibari, 12 annas, Karaibari 4 annas, Gauripur's Taria was later added on the purchase<sup>108</sup>. It remained backward since historical periods for which rulers were to be blamed. In the past, the Zamindars and the British Authority simply used it as a supplier of rich natural resources and revenue thereof. They did nothing to improve the district by establishing industries and didn't create avenues for the promotions of education for its populations. Since the Bodos and Rajbansis were the majority population of the district, they were the most sufferers and remained ever backward until today. Before digging deep into the factors that provided opportunities to the Bodos of those areas it had become imperative to know a bit of the history of the Parbotjoar.

Parbotjoar area was a forest estate with full of trees, shrubs, herbs and vines. It also abounds in various kind of wild animals, jungle fowls and birds. Within the deep forest areas of the Parbotjoar estate, there are some unexplored historical sites which may, if explored, throw some lights on historical information. But this historic Parbotjoar Estate was disconnected from all sides-even no motorable roads were there. So, it remained isolated for centuries. The main inhabitants of the area were the Bodos, the Garos and the Rabhas but it was difficult to ascertain as to how long they had been living there. As far the oral history current among the old Bodo folks, the Zamindars of Bagribari and Rupsi were the descendants of the Haria Mandal Mech of Chikhrajhar. As revealed in the history of Assam, he belonged to the Bodo race. Those dynastic rulers once ruled the petty states of Bijni, Sidli, Abhayapuri, Chapar, Bagribari, Rupsi, Koch Behar. Although they were Bodo kings but later they had become Hinduised kings and came to be known as Koch. The old folk sources said that the Bodo, Garo and Rabha

inhabitants of the area must have come from Southern part of the river Brahmaputra ie. Dudhnoi, Lakhipur, Tikrikela etcetera<sup>109</sup>.

During *Zamindari* system, the scattered villages of the Bodo, Garo and Rabhas of Parbotjoar area fell under the *Zamindari* Estates of Bagribari and Rupsi. The tribal inhabitants of the Parbotjoar area looked after the trees, plants and natural resources and they paid regular taxes once a year to their respective Zamindars. The rivers which flowed through the Parbotjoar were- Chilai, Joima, Tipkai, Gadadhar, Bamnai etc. Along those rivers innumerable traders came in boats to trade in mustard seeds, jute and timbers. The Zamindars could amass a lot of money but the dreams of the inhabitants were never fulfilled. No roads were constructed, and no schools were founded for their education.

Within the deep forests of Parbotjoar, some places of historical importance and stone sculptures are still lying unnoticed by the historians and archaeologists because of which the Parbotjoar as a place of historical importance failed to secure a niche in the pages of history. The first is the *Mahamaya* temple of Bagribari where the Hindus from all walks of life had been worshipping the mother Goddess *Mahamaya* since medieval days. The legend of erection of the temple of *Mahamaya* is closely connected with the Sal timber extraction and trading from the Parbotjoar forest. It was built by the Zamindar of Bogribari on advice of a timber merchant from Dacca. The merchant once happened to intrude the bathing place of *Mahamaya Devi* on the Tipkai River while rafting down the Sal logs. The enraged Devi at this offence told the merchant in dream that he would die within a month. The merchant before his death narrated the story to the Zamindar of Bogribari and died exactly one month later<sup>110</sup>. In between the village of Goraimari and Sundrihora, there is a place called *Bikribada* through which the river Tipkai is flowing gorgeously. From that place, the Sal timbers of Parbotjoar were sold to the big timber merchants coming from distance places. So many *Daffadars*, *Bidders* and *Badaris* (lumberjacks) used to camp there. There was a big single block of stone called *Silban* at a place in the deep jungle. The builder of the stone dam and the purpose for which it was built is yet to be ascertained. At Dolonghora village there are two stone sculptures which are the images of a pestle and a mortar. Near Thurshijhora village on a hillock, there is a place of worship from where many implements of worship and some pieces of swords

were recovered. The Rabha community worshipped there during *Siva Ratri*. Sivananda Sarma in his *Goalpara Zillar Itihas* described it as *Barma Rajar Thila* (hillock of *Barma Raja*)<sup>111</sup>. Near that place, in the marshy field, a stone sculpture of an elephant is lying uncared. The British in their colonial days constructed Rupsi aerodrome but it is now abandoned. In the South West of Rupsi, there is a place called Ghilavijaypur where it is said that Raghudev, the nephew of the Koch King Naranarayana established his capital after the Koch Kingdom was bifurcated. Bindigarh is yet another name of a place of historical importance. There is a deep gorge probably it was used as the storehouse of the arsenals by the King Parikshit, the son of Raghudev. There is a road still visible connecting Bindigarh with Ghilavijoypur<sup>112</sup>.

The Rangamati Mosque near Panbari is a famous historical place where Mirjumla while returning from the invasion of Assam took shelter there and built the famous Mosque. Gyanada bil was another place where Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma convened a *Brahma* Religious congregation and offered Homo-yogya where Rani Gyanada Sundari of Bagribari attended and donated money for construction of *Brahma Mandir* (Temple) there<sup>113</sup>.

Tengphakri the historical figure of the Bodos was from the village Bhelakobha of Parbotjoar. She joined Jaolia Dewan of Baldi Bauti of Bijni in his fight against the British soldiers where she lost her life while quenching her thirst in the river Aie. She was also known as *Birgoshri Sikhla*. Her sword was collected from the place of her martyrdom and placed at the hillock known as Bhageswari and people worshipped her as Bhageswari Devi<sup>114</sup>.

Ali Mech is a famous historical figure from Parbotjoar area. He was a Bodo convert to Islam. He had the credit of having shown the path to Bhutan and then to Tibet to Bakhtiar Khilji when the later lost path in the deep jungle on his way to invade Tibet<sup>115</sup>.

### **Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma's life and contribution:**

Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was a preacher of Brahma Religion. He was a social reformer, a stirrer for development, education and unity among the Bodos. He

gave to the Bodos the political and educational consciousness and was primarily responsible for preventing the Bodo community from the total obliteration of its identity. 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<sup>116</sup>. 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. He had huge landed properties filled with fisheries, orchards and two elephants for employing in the timber trade were his added prestige. Kaularam took *Ejadary* (forest mahal) from the Bagribari Zamindar<sup>117</sup>.

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<sup>118</sup>. At his early age, his parents planned to enroll him in school, but there was no primary school in and around the village at that time. An alternative arrangement for providing him education was made by keeping a private tutor. He was taught by a teacher named Birnarayan Sarkar. Kaularam Mech found a suitable teacher for young Kalicharan in Birnarayan in exchange of food and lodging and a salary of Rupees 3.00 PM<sup>119</sup>. Thus, the young boy began his education in his native village Kajigaon in Bengali language and literature and mathematics. After rigorous two years of education at home by tuition, the young talented Kalicharan was sent to the newly established primary school at Tipkai and after completion of his primary school education he was sent to Puthimari M.V. school, but he abandoned his studies forever after passing class four only<sup>120</sup>. The reason for his discontinuation of school education at an early stage could not be ascribed to any particular aspect or problem. According to B. Narzary, the primary responsible reason for Kalicharan's stopping of studies was the mental anxiety and perturbation about the sad condition of the Bodo society that had disturbed him after he had attained awareness of the world around him<sup>121</sup>. Another reason for which he dropped the school might have been the location of the Puthimari MV School which was at a quite distance place from his native village Kajigaon. In absence of improved means of transportation and

communication, in those days, the distance from Kajigaon to Puthomari M.V. school was, in a sense far away. The reason which had perturbed young Kalicharan's mind was that he could perceive that the Bodos didn't have any status in the society. Another vital issue which he could perceive was the dwindling number of the Bodo population<sup>122</sup>. The Bodo people were rapidly changing from the tribes to caste by relinquishing the religion, custom, tradition and language to escape the humiliating treatment and indignity in the society. The conversion was too much that it threatened the existence of the Bodo community with their own self-identity. So, Kalicharan realised that the society had to be reformed, but the ways and means how it could be accomplished was yet to come forefront. After leaving his school education he engaged himself in the works of his parents. When he attained the age of fifteen he had the attractive physique- looking bright, fair complexion, tall, broad chest and sharp nose. He had long arms which could reach up to his knees like that of Mahatma Gandhi and a long and big ear comparable to that of Gautama Buddha, which often was believed to be a lucky person. He had a cool temperament and was a man of strict discipline, the features which distinguished him from others<sup>123</sup>.

As it was the common practice among the Bodos and other communities at those times to get their children married at a quite young age, Kalicharan too was succumbed to that practice. He was married to a girl name Khamsri Mech at the age of fifteen. They remained in peaceful conjugal life for a few years and were blessed with two daughters namely Dondi and Nalini. Even after the lapse of many years when they failed to get a male child, Kalicharan's parents put pressure on him to get second marriage for having a son, the heir to the parent's property<sup>124</sup>. Getting a male child in the family for the continuation of the generation was regarded important. For the sake of having a male child and with the consent of his wife, Kalicharan married again to a girl named Upashi Mech, the daughter of Nauka, from his own native village. Their dream of having a son was fulfilled when they got three sons and two daughters- Debendra, Khokhaisri, Chandra Kumar, Hirani and Kanaklall. When Kalicharan was at his thirty-five years, his father Kaularam Mech died at his ripe age in 1896. He left for Kalicharan the huge landed property of 250 *Bighas* including homestead and orchard garden, two elephants, an enormous number of cattle, a shotgun etc<sup>125</sup>. After he lost his beloved father, the responsibility of carrying out timber trade and management of the parental farms felt on

him. He carried out all those responsibilities successfully. Despite his busy schedules he always looked forward for having the opportunity of grasping the ways and means to fulfill his dream of reforming the Bodo society. Kalicharan's father Kaularam Mech was an *Ejadar* who took the forest Mahal (Block) on lease from the Bagribari Zamindar. From his father Kalicharan inherited the profession of timber trade which flourished under his able management, he used to export Sal timber through the river Chilai, Jaladhar and Sisti to West and East Bengal and Bihar from Bikribada sale camp. According to Dr. K. Brahma, he was a good and courageous hunter. He was a good friend of Prabhat Chandra Baruah, then the heir to the *Zamindari* Estate of Gauripur with whom he often goes for hunting<sup>126</sup>. Their favourite hunts were the wild boar and the deer which were plentiful in the forests of their Estates. In fact, Kalicharan Mech had everything in his possession for which he enjoyed the honour, power, respect from the people. Prabhat Chandra Baruah and Kalicharan Mech were the intimate friends to such an extent that Prabhat Chandra Baruah, despite being a Raja of Gauripur, the title given by the British Government in 1901, often paid a visit to Kalicharan's house riding on an elephant and the latter too reciprocated by paying visit to him whenever he went to Dhubri and Gauripur<sup>127</sup>.

All his flourishing business, personal prosperity and domestic happiness could not afford Kalicharan much peace of mind. His alerted mind was constantly disturbed by the pathetic social condition of the Bodos and the ill practices that dominated their culture. In their religious practice, they showed a little inclination in obeying the principles of religion. *Jou* (rice beer) could be produced profusely in every house of the Bodo families which was consumed in large proportion in the slightest pretext of the observance of religious festivals and any social functions<sup>128</sup>. Some of them became addicted to it and made them sluggish, indolent, lazy and lascivious. At the downstream of the practice was that after squeezing the *Jou* (rice-beer) from its juicy solid stuff called *ophri*, the residue was used for feeding their reared pigs which had become a sort of imperative to keep a pig at least one in each household. Again, in the name of feeding the reared pig, they took pretext of making next round of *jou* (rice beer) preparation. And thus, the process continued in cyclical order- preparation of *jou* and rearing of a pig for feeding *ophri*. It was the practice 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 which they got from their Hindu neighbours, many Bodos had already converted from the traditional *Bathou* religion to *Ek Saran Nam Dharma* of Srimanta Sankardev, Christianity and Islam<sup>129</sup>. 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 national identity. Kalicharan realised that the *Bathou* religion had been unable to sustain the Bodos spiritually and ethically and also failed to promote unity and integration among the Bodos. Despite his realisation, he could not find an alternative answer for reforming the prevailing conditions which would be acceptable to the Bodo society<sup>130</sup>. As the years rolled, Kalicharan had attained the age of 45, in 1905, on a day of hot summer, he happened to visit the camp of his intimate friend Charan Mech (Mandal) at Bikribada which was located on the bank of the Chilai river. As usual, on that fateful day too, he walked a long way from his village Kajigaon to Bikribada only to find Charan Mandal (Mech) was absent in his camp. As he was tired, he thought to take rest by lying on the bed of his friend in his absence. There, by chance, he discovered a book named *Sarnitya Kriya* of Mohini Mohan Chattopadhyay in Bengali from beneath a pillow. Out of curiosity, Kalicharan browsed through the book which was written on the preaching of the *Brahma Dharma* by Paramhansa Sibnarayan Swami, the founder of the *Brahma Dharma*. A slight glancing on the few pages of 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<sup>131</sup>. He visualised that it was through the adoption of the *Brahma* religion and performing *Yogyahuti*, the process of much-needed reformation could be initiated. Thereby, he hoped to escort his fellow Bodos towards the path of progress and thereby to check the religious conversions which was threatening the very identity of the Bodo community<sup>132</sup>. Suren Karta, the then Zamindar of Bagribari had a house at Kolkata and he was already a follower of Paramahansa Sibnarayan Swami. Charan Mech (Mandal), Kalicharan's intimate friend, by dint of his acquaintance with the Zamindar of Bagribari, was already a follower of Brahma religion. When Kalicharan came to know all the fact he too within a very short time decided to become Sibnarayan Swami's follower and convert to the Brahma religion because the book had a strong impact on him<sup>133</sup>. Sibnarayan Swami was from Uttar Pradesh, but he made



Kolkata the headquarters for preaching his religion. Suren Karta, the Zamindar of Bagribari was a disciple of Swamiji. Kalicharn Mech after his father's death became the *Ejadar* under the Bagribari *Zamindari* Estate and by virtue of the relationship, Kalicharan was able to procure an arrangement of meeting with Swamiji by Suren Karta. Kalicharan along with his three friends-Jamadar Mech, Karan Mandal (Mech) and Charan Mandal (Mech) went to Kolkata and met Swamiji at Bhowanipur residence<sup>134</sup>. In the meeting Kalicharan's qualities of calm spirit, passionate nature, zeal, personality strength, intelligence, a sense of deep understanding and knowledge impressed Swamiji who with great interest and care taught and explained the principles of *Brahmaism*, the basis of which was the monotheistic belief. In *Brahma* religion, the God is worshipped in the form of the Fire or the Sun God. He is the main and only God around which lives in the universe exist. Fire is ordained as *Brahma* and *Brahma* gives lives to the entire living beings on the earth. *Brahma* is universal, endless and all-compassing 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<sup>135</sup>. He was very quick to comprehend all aspects of Swamiji's explanations so much so, that he ordained Kalicharan into the fold of *Brahmaism*<sup>136</sup>. 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<sup>137</sup>. After returning from Kolkata to his native village Kajigaon, he was determined to spread his new religion among his people. After thorough discussion with his friends and compatriots, Kalicharan started preaching his *Brahma* religion. As a first step, in the direction, he uprooted the *Bathou* altar from his own residence<sup>138</sup>. 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 national identity intact<sup>139</sup>. Thus, the conversion of the Bodo community into the new faith was started where within the brief period of time hundreds and thousands of Bodos accepted the new religion. Kalicharan was accepted as their *Guru* and they began to call him as *Gurudev*, because the spiritual and religious guidance was given by him<sup>140</sup>.

Kalicharan could lead the Bodos towards the path of progress and unity by his reformation movement.

### **Ethnic group:**

The concept of an ethnic group refers to a community or a group of people who share the same culture or to descendants of such people who may not share this culture but who identify themselves with this ancestral group. In America, minority groups are categorized as ethnic groups but in ethnic conflict, the connotation of the minority is by and large absent. Glazer and Moynihan describe ethnic group as a social group which consciously shares some aspects of a common culture and is primarily by descent. Pathy observes that ethnic group is used in anthropological literature to designate a population which is a part of a plural society and yet is largely biologically self-perpetuating, shares a common cultural tradition and language, has an ascribed membership which identifies itself as being alike by virtue of a real or fictitious common ancestry, and is identified by others as constituting a distinct category in a plural society<sup>141</sup>.

### **Ethnicity:**

The term ethnicity was first used by David Riesman in 1953 as referred to the 1972 supplement of Oxford English Dictionary<sup>142</sup>. Ethnicity is an ascribed identity or assigned status, something inherited from one's ancestors. Ethnicity is a very deeply rooted primal bond to one's ancestral bloodline. The important corollary of ascribed identity is ethnic boundaries, which demarcates who is a member of an ethnic group and who is not, are fixed or immutable. Ethnicity is static. The determining factor of ethnicity is common ancestry. In other words, people belong to an ethnic group because members of that group all share common biological and cultural origins<sup>143</sup>. Philip Q. Yang quotes primordialists, Geertz 1973, Issacs 1975, van den Berghe 1981 as saying that it is the primordial bonds that give rise to and sustain ethnicity.

Van den Berghe (1981) argues that ethnicity is an extension of kinship. Ethnic affiliation originates from membership in a nuclear family, then an extended family and finally the ethnic group. Ethnic identity develops and persists due to the common ancestral bonds of group members. An implication of this view is that ethnicity will

never perish because kinship always exists. Ethnicity on the primordial system of categorization is an ascribed identity a status which is given to an individual or which one inherits from one's ancestor and this ascribed identity are fundamental and fixed. Most of the scholars apprehend ethnic group and ethnicity in the sense of consciousness of collective identity and historically crystallized sentiment associated with the identity in the context of the state<sup>144</sup>.

Primordialist argues that ethnicity is something given, ascribed at birth, deriving from the kin-and-clan-structure of human society, and hence something more or less fixed and permanent. The concept of the ethnic group is the most basic, from which the others are derivative. He (Isajiw) argues that the concept of ethnicity is derived from the concept of an ethnic group which refers to ethnicity as the collective phenomenon. Ethnic identity refers to ethnicity as an individually experienced phenomenon. Thus, ethnicity itself is an abstract concept which includes an implicit reference to both collective and individual aspects of the phenomenon. According to him, ethnicity has both subjective and objective dimensions. Objective aspects are those which can be observed as facts in the existence of institutions, including that of kinship and descent and in overt behavior patterns of individuals. The subjective dimension refers to attitudes, values and pre-conceptions whose meaning has to be interpreted in the context of the process of communication. The terms ethnicity and ethnic group are often used interchangeably. But in actuality, there is a nuance dividing them. While the ethnic group is a social group based on ancestry, culture or national origin. Ethnicity refers to affiliation or identification with an ethnic group.

### **Ethnic Identity:**

Ethnic Identity may be defined as a manner in which persons, on account of their ethnic origin, locate themselves psychologically in relation to one or more social systems and in which they perceive others as locating them in relation to those systems. By ethnic origin is meant either that a person has been socialized in an ethnic group or that his or her ancestors, real or symbolic have been members of the group. The social system may be one's ethnic community or society at large or other ethnic communities and societies or groups or a combination of all those<sup>145</sup>.

### **Review of Literature:**

The Bodos are one of the major ethnic groups of Assam. An extensive amount of study appears to have been done on them. The colonial ethnographers and official historians wrote on Bodo history and society. The following works done by the prominent scholars on the subject matters are discussed as follows:

Rev. Sydney Endle, in his valuable work *The Kacharis (1911)* presents an interesting fact on Bodo Society and history which is an original work accomplished after encounters with the Kacharis while working as the Christian Missionary in Darrang district. He, as a great sympathizer and a well-wisher of the wellbeing of the Bodos, was able to present in detail the society, history and domestic life of the Bodos of Darrang district.

Hira Moni Deka, in her book *Politics of Identity and the Bodo Movement in Assam*, presents an original and lucid interpretation of Bodo Movement from 1987 to 2003 and able to present successfully the overall history of Bodo identity assertion in Assam in a very comprehensive manner. It is indeed an excellent piece of her work so far, she has done.

Bidyasagar Narzary & Malabika Mitra, in their work *Journey towards enlightenment: Gurudev and the Bodo Society* present valuable contributions of Kalicharan Gurudev, the great soul, towards the Bodo society. Although the Gurudev was the saviour of the Bodo community no comprehensive book on him in English was written so far. In his work, the author successfully presents the great contribution made by Gurudev who had salvaged the Bodo community from darkness, illiteracy, ignorance and medieval practices and shown them the path of enlightenment and progress in all spheres of life. The book really is able to serve the purpose of disseminating information about the valuable contribution made by Gurudev Kalicharan to uplift the Bodo society.

Smriti Das, in her work *Assam –Bhutan Trade Relations 1865- 1947* presents yet another valuable work which gives us information regarding trade relation between Assam and Bhutan which developed through the *Duars* and its working not only as the channel of communication but also as a conduit of trade and commerce between the two

countries. Through her book, Smriti Das has shown how this trade relation had a major socio-economic impact on Assam.

Jadav Pegu, in his work *Reclaiming Identity: a Discourse on Bodo History*, presents a valuable fact and in-depth analysis on the Bodo identity movement in the 1980s and 1990s and it is also an attempt at defining the identity of the Bodos from a historical perspective.

Bikramajit Hasrat, in his book *History of Bhutan* (Thimphu;1980) made a comment about the Meches or Kacharis of Eastern *Duars* of Bengal and Assam. He said that the Meches were a hard-working tribe and paid to the *subah*, the revenue in kind-rice, clothes, betel-nuts, cotton, butter and ghee, is indeed a testimony of the real fact that the Bodos or the Meches of Eastern *Duars* had the political and trading relationship with the Dev Raja of Punakha, Bhutan.

Devendra Nath Sarma, in his book *Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma* (1983) (in Assamese) is a pioneering work on the life and works of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. He successfully able to highlight the contribution made by Gurudev Kalicharan not only for the upliftment of the Bodos but also for the unity, communal harmony and integrity of Assam.

Kalicharan Brahma (Junior), wrote *Jieu Kourang Arw Saya*, that contains full information on the life and works of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. This book gives valuable information in detail regarding various activities of Gurudev and his compatriots from his own life experiences as he was contemporary to his Guru.

Dr. K. Brahma, in his book *Srimot Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma* (in Bodo), is yet another work on the life and works of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. It gives us valuable information regarding how Kalicharan accepted the Brahma Faith and spread it among the Bodos and how he along with the spread of his Faith did social reformation movement for removing the evil practices from the Bodo society.

Jagendra Nath Basumatary, in his book *Fwrlang Babaji*, (in Assamese but translated by K. Brahma into Bodo) deals in details the contribution made by *Babaji* in spreading the important messages of the Brahma Religion and the helping hand he

rendered for the social reformation movement launched along with the spread of *Brahma Dharma* among the Bodos. His work is basically on the life and works of *Fwrlang Babaji* who can aptly be called the chief disciple of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma.

Hira Charan Narjinari, in his article *A Study on the Bodos of North-East India* presents a valuable historical account of the origin of the words Bodo, Mech, Koch and Kachari and their denotation, connotation and derivatives which are found expressed in the writings of various anthropologists, ethnographers, linguists and historians. He explains at length the Bodo ruling families of Kamrupa, Pragjyatisa, Dimapur, Tripura, Cooch Behar and other places.

Dr. K. Brahma, in an article *Impact of Socio-Religious Reforms of Srimot Kalicharan Brahma on the Bodo Society*, discusses at length the contribution made by Kalicharan Gurudev through his preaching of *Brahma* Faith and his Social Reformation Movement. His contribution was all-embracing- in the field of social practices of the Bodos, in the field of politics, education and also contributed a lot of harmonious living amongst various sections of society of Assam.

Dr. Anil Boro, in an Article *Rise of the Bodo Middle Class: Its Impact on literature, culture and Society of the Bodos*, presents a detail discussion on middle-class people and their rise in every society. He drew the example of the rise and growth of Assamese middle-class vis-à-vis the Bodo middle class who were responsible for carrying out social and religious reformation movement in the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century amongst the Bodos.

Dr. A. Boro, in another article *Folklore and Oral History: the Search for Identity among the Bodos* he dwells at length the importance of Oral Traditions and Oral History for the reconstruction of the history of the people who do not have the written scripts or literature. In the search for the identity of the people, the role of history is regarded important for establishing or claiming past glories and pride that their ancestors had achieved in the past in political and cultural spheres. The Bodos did have the ancient glories and historical achievements but unfortunately, they didn't have written script and hence didn't have the written history, in absence of which it is difficult to establish a link with the glorious past of the ancient Bodos.

Sobha Brahma, in an article *Bodo Sahitya Sabha: Appraisal in Retrospect*, dwells at length on the history of the struggles of the Bodos to survive their language, culture and traditions against all odds throughout the ages. He also deals in detail the contributions, life-long efforts, constant endeavours and sacrifices made by some Bodo heroes at the altar of the Bodo literature for its survival whom he prays by bowing down his head. As a background, he made a brief mention of historical narratives which still in extant amongst the Bodos as memories handed down from generation to generation by the words of mouth as traditions and oral history.

Rupnath Brahma, an ex-minister of Assam, in his article (in Assamese) *Boro Jatir Songkipto Parichoy*, presents an interesting historical explanation as to how the Bodo Kings from time immemorial had been ruling over the vast areas of Assam, present Bangladesh, Tripura and Bengal and who later after coming into influence of the Brahmans of the Aryan descent had given away to become Aryanised Kings after they were being given the status of *Kshatriyas*, the ruling class of the Brahmanical social stratification. Later, after them, the common subjects of their race followed their suit and became assimilated into Aryan fold for which the size of the Bodo population dwindled.

Dr. Santo Barman, in his work *Zamindari System in Assam during British Rule: A Case Study of Goalpara District* is an original contribution of a high order to the economic and political history of the North-East region of India. His work adequately focuses on the agrarian relations of the permanently settled areas in the region under the British Raj. Dr. Barman has brought for the first time under scientific scrutiny the relations of *Zamindars* and Peasants of permanently settled areas of Goalpara district in historical perspective. It also traces the roots of the system back to the Moghul days for its origin. His work is based on massive sources and a meticulous and pioneering study which were never tapped before by any other scholar.

Prof. Surath Narzary, in his seminar paper entitled *Literature for the Growth of Indian Nationalism with reference to Unscheduled Languages like Bodo*, which was presented in a seminar held at International Youth Centre, New Delhi, he highlighted the various aspects of the Bodo life embracing religion, language, history and on the whole the culture which was found expressed in the writings of various scholars, ethnographers, historians linguists and anthropologists from the hoary past till recent times. He drew the

attention of the participants and audiences of the seminar to the writings of various writers starting with D. Mackenzie Brown, Dr. Suniti Chatterjee, B.K. Kakati. Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya and others on the Bodo history, language, religion and culture. He opines that the Christian Missionaries and European scholars have got something to do with the growth and development of various regional or vernacular languages across India because for spreading of Christian gospel they used those vernacular languages. Earlier, during the ancient period, Sanskrit was the only language which was used in literature, but during medieval period- from the age of Bhakti cult the regional or vernacular languages came into prominence in various parts of India.

N.N. Acharyya in his *The History of Medieval Assam* attempts to provide valuable analysis of the contents of the *Buranjis* to indicate its importance as the sources of History of Assam. He tries to prove that the *Buranjis* of the Ahoms provide a detailed account of the darkest period of Assam's history in respect of the source materials for writing history.

*Asomar Itihas* of Gajendra Adhikary is a massive source material collected from inscriptions regarding the roles of temples as a centre of economic redistribution and the area for the legitimisation and consolidation of the Hindu or Hinduised kings of the old Kamarupa in tribal surroundings.

Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed in his *Cooch Beharer Itihas* (P-I) narrates and analyses the History of the Koch Kingdom which emerged as a powerful Kingdom in N.E. India in early sixteenth century. He traces the origin and antecedents of the Koch kings to the Mech family of the Chignagram in Khuntaghat Pargana of erstwhile Goalpara district. It is an authoritative History of the Koch kings of Koch Behar and Koch Hajo.

*The Comprehensive History of Assam*, edited by H.K. Barpujari, in multiple volumes deals with the History of the entire N.E. India. With the contribution of many authors on various aspects, the book is a comprehensive and authoritative one.

B.K. Barua in his *A Cultural History of Assam*, (early period) V.ol.1, deals with the cultural aspects of the early period of the Assam History which is the first of its kind.



More specifically it deals with the material, social, religious, aesthetic and cultural conditions of the people of Assam.

S. Baruah in his *India against itself, Assam and the Politics of Nationality* highlights the issues of subnational challenges, militant separatist movements in Assam, Punjab and Kashmir and Indian state's response and approach to nation-building are also discussed.

S.L. Baruah in her book *A Comprehensive History of Assam* narrates the History of Assam since mythological period embracing all aspects of human life- political, social, religion and economy.

*Boro Harimuni Mohor Mushri* written by Birendra Giri Basumatary highlights the various aspects of the Bodo cultures and some rules to be observed in connection with the religious observance along with songs and proverbs of the Bodos.

T.C. Basumatary in his *Gudi Bathou Dharam* discusses at length on the origin of the *Bathou* worship and various rules for observance and ceremonies were also laid down in details.

*Kachari Buranji* of S.K. Bhuyan is the only authentic history of the Kachari Rajas of Dimapur. He retrieved the History of the Kacharis from the Ahom Buranjis which highlights the Ahom-Kachari conflicts, relationships and enmities since the coming of the Ahoms into Assam.

B.N. Bordoloi, in *Tribes of Assam* in three volumes, discusses various aspects of the tribes of Assam which may be considered as the authentic account of the tribal people of Assam.

D. Bora, in his book *Prithak Rajyar Dabi: Asomar Janajati*, discusses various issues relating to Identity, Autonomy and politics of backwardness of the tribal people of N.E. India.

S.K. Chatterjee's book *Kirata Jana Kriti* discusses the origin, migration and affiliations of the Indo-Mongoloid people of the Eastern India who were called the

Kiratas in ancient literature. Linguistic affinities are studied to ascertain the Racial affinities.

Ajit K. Danda (ed), *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Integration*, is a book which touches the definitions and issues relating to Integration in India in theoretical perspective.

A. Guha in *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral politics in Assam, 1826-1947* discusses on the East India Company who came in India as traders but later turned rulers and the evils of their rule on the economy of India. He also tries to understand the state and society of the period by integrating the economic information in his writings.

Francis Hamilton in his books *An Account of Assam* highlights the polity, Economy, Religious and Social position of the peoples of Assam.

*Indo-Tibetans* written by Fr. M. Hermanns, discusses in details about the Mongoloid origin peoples occupying the Himalayan Kingdoms of Nepal, Bhutan and the entire N.E. India who are called the Indo-Tibetans.

Dr. R.N. Mosahary, in his doctoral dissertation, *Social History of the Boros of Assam: A Study of Oral History* highlights the Religious practices and Social system of the Bodos.

*Roots of Ethnic Conflict: Nationality Questions in North East India*, written by S. Nag touches the issues and problems of nationality questions and traces how the issue leads to ethnic conflicts in N.E. India.

Hira Charan Narjinary in his article 'A Study on the Bodos of North-East India', published in P.N. Borgoyary (ed), *The Bodo* discusses on the origin, migration and ethnic affiliation of the Bodos.

Bhaben Narzi's *Boro- Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti*, deals with various aspects of the Bodo life encompassing the belief, customs, traditions, religion, economy etc.

*The Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Assam, Sankardeva and his Times* by M. Neog narrates the life and works of Mahapurush Sri Sankardev. The role of Neo-Vaisnavite religion in integration and assimilation of various communities including the tribals of Assam into greater Assamese nationality is discussed in details.

W.W. Isajiw, in the article *Definition and Dimensions of Ethnicity: a Theoretical Framework*, presented in details the theoretical aspects of the ethnic group, ethnicity and ethnic identity. In the article methodological framework of research and the theoretical framework for the studies of ethnicity is discussed in a comprehensive and lucid manner. Various dimensions of the theoretical and conceptual terms are discussed in detail. He resorted to the method of singling out the number of approaches for the study of ethnicity and critical evaluations into a synthesized one.

Philip Q. Yang, in his book *Ethnic Studies: Issues and Approaches*, presents the existing theoretical perspectives of ethnicity into three schools of thought with initial introductions and analyses on the basic ideas and specific variants of each school. Lastly, an integrated approach to the three competing theories of ethnicity is presented. **The above-mentioned scholars have made a valuable contribution in the concerned subject but still awaits thorough investigation or treatment within the wide canvas.**

### **Objectives of the Study**

The chief objective of this research paper is to present a systematic, comprehensive and graphic accounts by unveiling how the historical discourses of the Bodos helped them in arousing ethnic consciousness among them and which in turn helped them in the formation of the Bodo identity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Another aim of the study is also to investigate the other contributing factors for launching Socio-Religious Reformation Movement in the early part of the 20th century and why the leadership thought the ethnic mobilization to be necessary?

### **Methodology:**

The study is a historical one. The work has primarily been based on all the literary texts which included consultation of a number of written sources and also on the official accounts left by the colonial administrators. However, a social anthropological

approach is also adopted for the study. This implies that both primary and secondary sources have been complemented by fieldwork in the form of interviews.

Till now, a research study on the role of historical knowledge in arousing the Bodo consciousness and in the formation of the Bodo identity has not been done by any scholar utilizing all the available sources. Some scholars indeed, have brought to light the processes of the identity formation but the vital role the historical facts, artifacts etcetera have played was not seriously done by anyone before in their respective works. However, it still awaits thorough investigation and treatment within a wide canvas. The Bodos those who had gained awareness took the pioneering role in making efforts to rescue the tribes from missing in oblivion which they by introducing Socio-Religious Reformation Movement became successful in arousing consciousness among them for saving the identity of the Bodos. The headings and subheadings that follow are the discussions on findings.

The area of study is the Bodo inhabited areas of North-East India with special reference to the Brahmaputra valley.

### **Chapterisation:**

Chapter- I: Introduction

Chapter-II: The Socio-Economic and Religious Conditions of the Bodos before Launching the Brahma Dharma Movement in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Chapter-III: The British Administration and Its Impact on the Bodos.

Chapter-IV: The Role of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma and the Bodo Elite Class in the Socio-Religious Movement.

Chapter-V: Role of the Socio-Political Organisations in Arousing Consciousness among the Bodos.

Chapter-VI: Conclusion.

Chapter one as introductory chapter deals with geographical background of Assam and entire North-East India with its floras faunas and natural surroundings. It also deals with the Bodos History from the remote past to the annexations of the Kachari Kingdom of Cachar in 1954 by the East India Company and that of the Koch Kingdom of Koch Behar. Here only a historical outline of the rise and fall of the *Mleccha* or Mech country of Pragjyotishpur and of the Kamarupa were given as vanguard of the historical proof of the existence of the Bodo kingdoms since the very remote period. The historical sketches of the state formations by the Bodo or the Kachari kings in various places of North East India in the medieval and modern periods are discussed in outline. It was felt necessary keeping in mind the modern Bodo elite class used those historical glories and pride for arousing ethnic consciousness by recalling them through their writings in magazine especially in the *Bibar* magazine from 1924 onward and that led to the process of identity formation among the Bodos. Along with it, discussion for clarification on the confusion created by calling the Bodo tribe's name in various appellations like the Bara, Bodo, Kachari or Cachari, Mech, Mleccha, Asura and Danavas in the writings or reports of the colonial administrators and of the ethnographers, anthropologists and historians, despite the fact that they all belonged to the same tribes or sprang from the same stock. They misinterpreted and mistook those tribe's names to be a different tribe for each different name.

The history of the Parbotjoar Estate under Goalpara district deserves special discussion keeping in view the importance they got in so far as the Bodo awakening is concerned. Parbotjoar is rightly called the epicentre of the Bodo intellectual awakening and also the cradle of the modern Bodo civilization. Goalpara, a marginal strip of land between Assam and Bengal always created confusions as to which state it should be tagged during colonial rule and before when it was under different dynastic rulers.

The introduction to the Koch dynastic rulers is also occupied space in this chapter. Their origin and historical antecedents are discussed with much interest and attention by which it is attempted to identify the Koch tribe as sprang from the great Bodo race. The life and contribution of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma are also discussed in brief in this introductory chapter as the research paper is centred on his contribution towards the emergence of the Bodo national consciousness in the early twentieth century.

The second chapter is the discussion on social, economic and religious conditions of the Bodos in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the perspective of the colonial administrative reports and from the Oral history current among the Bodos. Their perceptions and observations on every perspective on the Bodo life were recorded as administrative reports which every researcher is expected to rely on. The chapter also deals with the situations of the Bodos' mind when they were treated lowly by the neighbouring Hindu communities because of their degraded social standings and how the fact was taken as challenges, in turn, by the Bodo elite class in the formation of new Bodo identity in various levels.

The third chapter throws lights on how the colonial administration impacted on the Bodo life in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries resulting in the awakening from the medieval way of life. The colonial administration directly or indirectly coerced the Bodos to change their attitude and to adapt themselves to the new situations at all levels. The semi-nomadic life and outdated barter economy became obsolete to face the challenges from the modern money economy of the capitalist jargon. The focus of discussion was to put on the erstwhile Goalpara district for it had proved to be the epicentre of the Bodo intellectual exercise during the period of the study, whether it was in the South of the Brahmaputra River or the Northern part of the district. The Bodos had proved themselves that they were the independent tribe with the capacity to upkeep their ethnic identity and to uphold other national aspirations. There were other disturbing factors too which greatly perturbed them was the large-scale conversion to other religious faiths and the new population immigration because of the colonial administrative policy. Those two factors were really the thought-provoking issues detrimental to the local indigenous populations of Goalpara district. As the saying goes, 'necessity is the mother of invention', the Bodo intellectual elite class had to transform their thoughts and their kinsmen from medieval to modern.

The fourth chapter which begins with the discussion on how some of the Bodos of erstwhile Goalpara district by their talents got opportunities to deal in timber trade and as a result of which they had risen to economically better off position over other fellow Bodos. There were also landed gentry and the British created revenue and other officials who could play the vital role of the middle class to uplift their people. They used the new

power bestowed by ‘print-capitalism’ to represent their ideas and thoughts in arousing consciousness amongst the Bodos. They were responded overwhelmingly to their call which they made them possible by using the print media.

The fifth chapter deals with how the Bodo elite class had used their intelligence, ideas and the power of wealth in shaping the various organisations for benefiting the common Bodo masses. The main motives behind the formation of those organisations were to arouse consciousness and to forge unity among the Bodo tribes for reshaping their lost ethnic identity. Through those organisations, the Bodo elite class could achieve the near total unity of the Bodos and thereby reduced to a great extent the conversion and transformation to another Hindu caste. They formed an incipient political organisation known as the All Assam Tribal League and through it, in the colonial state, they could secure some political concessions like the reservation of seats including line system to protect the indigenous tribal people from the immigrant population.

Chapter six is the conclusion of the thesis highlighting all the finding of the work and conclusion drawn.

### ***Endnotes:***

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- <sup>1</sup> Internet source, *m.mapsofindia.com* browsed on 27/11/17.
  - <sup>2</sup> B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, (early period) Vol. 1, Bina Library, Guwahati, 1986, p.1.
  - <sup>3</sup> Internet Source, *m.mapsofindia.com* browsed on 26/09/17.
  - <sup>4</sup> S. Das, *Assam-Bhutan Trade Relations 1865-1949*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, pp. 12,13.
  - <sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.
  - <sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.11.
  - <sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

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- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> E.A. Gait, *History of Assam*, LBS, Guwahati, 1997, p. 7.
- <sup>10</sup> S. Das, *op. cit*, p. 12.
- <sup>11</sup> S.L. Baruah, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2003, p.7.; B.C. Allen, E.A. Gait, H.F. Howard and C.G.H. Allen, *Gazetteer of Bengal and North-East India*, A Mittal Publications, New Delhi, (reprnt) 2005. P. 22.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.7.; *Ibid*, p.23.
- <sup>13</sup> B.K. Barua, *op. cit*, p.2.
- <sup>14</sup> Internet Source, *op. cit*, browsed on 26/09/17.
- <sup>15</sup> B.K. Barua, *op. cit*, pp. 1-2.
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- <sup>19</sup> S. Endle, *The Kacharis*, Reprint LPP Delhi, 1997, p.4.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p.5; Oinam R. Singh & K.R. Basumatary, “Historical Basis of the Bodo Identity Formation” in *IOSR-Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, vol. 22 issue 6 ver. 12, 2017, p.22.
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- <sup>23</sup> L.A. Wadell, *The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley*, Logos Press, New Delhi, (Second reprint) 2000 p. 44.
- <sup>24</sup> J.D. Anderson, “Bodos”, in James Hastings (ed) *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II, T & T Clark, Edinburg, 1974, p. 753.
- <sup>25</sup> P.D. Goswami, Prefactory in J.D. Anderson’s *A Collection of Kachari Folk-tales and Rhymes*, Folklore Society of Assam, Gauhati, 1981, p. 8juII.
- <sup>26</sup> G.A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol-III, part-II, 1903, P.1.
- <sup>27</sup> N.N. Vasu, *Social History of Kamrupa*. Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 1983, p.34.
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- <sup>29</sup> G.A. Grierson, *Op. Cit*, p. I.



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