

CHAPTER: IV

THE ROLE OF GURUDEV KALICHARAN BRAHMA AND THE BODO ELITE CLASS IN THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORMATION MOVEMENT

During 19th and early decades of the 20th centuries, some of the Bodos of Assam had gained wealth and money by engaging in the timber trade, some by joining the professions of *Mouzadar*, *Jothedar* and other government services in the colonial administration¹. The wealthy social elite class was created out of such professions and they became aware and sensitive to their position in the society². They had perceived shamefulness of the tribes' social and religious practices which they thought was responsible for the belittling treatment they had been getting from the neighbouring communities. The Bodos were treated lowly by the Hindu neighbours³. They tried to escape from the perceived shamefulness by converting to other established religions. Many Bodo tribes, in the undivided Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Nowgaon districts, had converted into the Neo-Vaisnavite Religion of Mahapurush Sankardev. They were known as the *Sarania* Kocharis⁴. Some of them had become the followers of Christianity. In such critical juncture, some Bodos from the undivided Goalpara district, especially from Parbotjoar area who had become rich and wealthy with the rise and growth of timber trade, had realised the sorry plights of the Bodos and took recourse to get rid of the prevailing social malice⁵. Their contact with the people of higher social strata in course of timber trading inspired them to aspire for same social status. The prevailing social customs and practices of the Bodos had become unacceptable or unbearable to them. Those social customs and practices created mental anxiety among the Bodo elites class which they perceived, were the root cause for the derogatory treatment that the Bodos had been getting from the neighbouring communities. They did not convert into other established religions, but they were able to save themselves from the conversion and assimilation and were able to arouse ethnicity feelings. The need to reform their society and religion for adapting themselves to the fast-changing world was felt and achieved.

During the first decade of the twentieth century a marked social transformation amongst the Bodos was noticed. With the rise and growth of timber trade, some Bodo people in Parbotjoar area became rich and wealthy⁶. After coming into contact with the people of higher social strata, they aspired for the same social status. The pioneers in the field were Kaularam Mech, Kalicharan Brahma (Mech), Charan Mandal, Mongla Khana, Gesao Brahma, Bisturam Daffadar and many more were rich timber merchants of the scattered villages of Parbotjoar area under the present Kokrajhar district⁷. They became a sort of economic class i.e. class of timber merchant among the Bodos who later on pursued to make the Bodos literate as well as educated and tried to reform the Bodo Society with the Socio-Religious Reformation Movement.

Around 1840s and the 1850s, the term middle class was used to mean the various social groups which occupy an intermediary economic position in the society based on an individual achievement and on birth. In social sciences, scholars have been using the term middle class to refer to social forces⁸. The middle class is essentially an urban concept which had its origin in Western Europe with the decline of the Feudalism, followed by the emergence of industrial and commercial bourgeois in the newly developed towns and cities⁹. But contrary to the Western European model, in India it emerged as a consequence of the changes in the system of law and public administration brought about by the British colonial rule. The growing demand for professional and administrative skills in the British administration created the western educated middle class¹⁰.

The middle class had been the instrumental in acting as a backbone of the nation on whom the common peasantry leaned on for guidance and assistance during the time of crises. The middle class in Assam too proved to be a formidable social force and played a hegemonic role over smaller ethnic groups of Assam to mobilise them into the common platform of Assamese linguistic nationalism¹¹. During the 19th century, in absence of major towns and cities, the peoples of Assam were rural communities. S. Nag in his *Roots of ethnic conflict: Nationality Question in North-East India* referred both Manorama Sharma and Rajen Saikia who argue that the educated middle-class elites in Assam had strong rural roots¹². This rural links was a major factor which allowed the educated middle class to assert their leadership over issues concerning the rural masses

and the rural folks too looked upon them for guidance and help on any issues of their concern¹³.

Among the Bodos who were one of the major communities of Assam witnessed the growth of middle class whose social roots were traced back to early British revenue officers, the *Mouzadars* and the *Jothedars*¹⁴. By their affluence and social importance, they could influence upon the common Bodos to act on what they proposed or wanted. In absence of a class of rich Zamindars, or a class of merchants who had enough money and influence to take advantage of the new colonial set up, the families of the British created high revenue officers like the *Mouzadars* and *Choudhuries* in Goalpara district who had the financial resources took advantages to give Western education to their children so that they could take part in the colonial administration. *Mouzadars* were the revenue collectors and their earnings were impressive which they could spend on the education of their children. Thus, most of the first matriculates came out of the *Mouzadar* family¹⁵.

Apart from the class of *Mouzadars* there were some landed gentry who were wealthy enough to sponsor their children to study at distance places like at Dhubri, Guwahati and Kolkata. In the villages there were some Bodos who were exceptionally talented and intelligent enough and hard working. By virtue of those qualities they could bring vast areas of land in their possession and those landed gentries played the influential role in their respective villages or areas during the first quarter of the twentieth century when the Brahma Movement was in full swing¹⁶.

Notwithstanding the exploitative nature of the Sal timber extraction, a handful of enterprising Bodos entered into the timber trade. The timber trade had created some stable middle class or economic class. They were remembered for their association with the acts of establishing educational institutions to encourage education, cultural and social organisations for safeguarding the Bodo identity. The progress of education in Bodo inhabited areas of Assam was abysmally low until the first quarter of the 20th century. Till the last quarter of the 19th century educational opportunities were limited to high school level because of the absence of college and university in Assam. Only the children from a well to do families could be sent to Dhubri for high school level education and Cotton College, Guwahati for college level education after its

establishment in 1901¹⁷. Cotton College, later, turned into intellectual hub of the tribal students of Assam. They got the intellectual stimulation and strength to make the cotton college the bedrock of the tribal middle class¹⁸. The lone Bodo graduate of Cotton College, Rupnath Brahma went to Kolkata for further studies who could keep himself abreast of the important ideas and institutions there in Bengal and imbibed the spirit of Bengal Renaissance to organise various activities in the sphere of the socio-religious reformation movement among the Bodos¹⁹. Thus, they were able to illustrate a nascent intellectual tradition during the early part of the 20th century in the erstwhile Goalpara district.

The organisations through which the Bodo leaders tried to uphold the distinct Bodo identity were modeled on the line of similar organisations those were found functioning in Bengal. The efforts for the foundation of Lower Primary and Upper Primary or Middle Vernacular schools in many Bodo inhabited areas, the foundation of *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani*, convening of *Boro (Bodo) Mahasanmilani*, the *Ryot Sabha* and the publication of *Bibar* magazine and a plethora of other cultural organisations were based on ideas which were imbibed from the Bengal Renaissance. The children of the Bodo middle class studied in Bengali language. They came to know about achievements of the Bengalis in the sphere of Bengali language and literature which was rightly termed as the Bengal Renaissance. After fully inspired, they tried hard to reinvigorate the Bodo language and literature in line with Bengali language and literature of the Renaissance period which was demonstrated in the publication of *Bibar* magazine. They produced different genres of Bodo literature for the first time and thus contributed a lot towards the Bodo identity crystallization²⁰. The period was termed as the Renaissance of the Bodo language and literature which had far reaching impact on the spheres of education, polity and economy of the Bodos. That phenomenal development facilitated the entry of many Bodo youths into the colonial job market which triggered the advent of a middle class among the Bodos²¹. The forefathers of the emerging middle class belonged to the landed gentry of the rural Assam²².

In the initial phase, the middle class was articulating the Bodo Ethno-Linguistic identity as distinct from the larger Assamese linguistic identity. The growth and evolution of Bodo ethnic consciousness in the first quarter of the 20th century was grounded in a feeling of 'Bodo Unity' based on language, heritage, culture and

traditions²³. There were certain common cultural as well as economic factors which led to the growth of ethnic consciousness during the colonial period and sustain it even at the present times. The cultural foundation of ethnic consciousness was the language of an ethnic group as well as attempts to maintain the distinctiveness and autonomy of the region²⁴.

The British brought about the administrative unification of the country, recognized languages of the major cultural groups which encouraged development of the relatively advanced cultural groups into nationalities²⁵. The consequence was that the backward groups remained ever suppressed and the advance nationalities not only spread their socio-political and economic domination over the backward nationalities, they also sometimes sought to absorb some of those incipient groups into its fold. Those groups indeed had to fight out of the domination, resist absorption and struggle to assert their status²⁶. The nature of the Bodo elite class's ethnicity feeling in the first quarter of the 20th century was defensive in spirit, nourished by a feeling of intense insecurity.

The Bodo Elite Class and Their Role:

It is not required to reiterate that the Bodos were a rural community with their medieval social and religious practices and economy was 'self-sufficient village economy'. Hence, their wants were also limited i.e. from hands to mouth. They could not think of availing the advantages of modern amenities, they were totally illiterate and hence did not know the value of education nor they did have the aspiration for it. Under such circumstances, from amongst the Bodos there grew a sort of middle class or elite class in the early 20th century. Some favourable factors such as availability of cultivable land in possession of the Bodos which was because of the sparse nature of population settlement in areas inhabited by the Bodos, Rabhas and Rajbansis, could be attributed to the growth of Bodo middle class. Another factor of the most vital importance was the opportunity provided by the presence of huge Sal Forest in the vicinities of the Bodo settlements to trade in timber from which the Bodos for the first time got the opportunity to have access to taste the trading²⁷.

The natural habitat of the Sal (*Shorea Robusta*) timber species was the Parbotjoar, Guma, Ripu, Sidli, Cheerang and Kachugaon Reserve Forests in the present district of Kokrajhar where cluster of Bodo settlements could be found. It was but natural

that the Bodos who were the main inhabitants of the area would get advantages of the available opportunities that might come in their way as the Sal trees were within close proximity to their homestead. From the colonial administrative reports, it became crystal clear that the tribes of the Bodos (Meches) and Rabhas were brought from somewhere lower ridges of Bengal to settle them and form the villages in the Kachugaon Reserve Forest in order to create consistency in labour supply for working in Sal Timber extraction from the neighbouring Ripu Reserve Forest²⁸. It was the beginning of the Bodo and Rabha settlements in the deep reserve forest areas of Goalpara district including the Eastern *Duars*.

The most significant event in the history of the Bodos which occurred in the Parbotjoar area was the birth of a great soul 'Srimot Kalicharan Gurudev' in 1860 in the month of April²⁹. In the year 1905, he accepted *Yogyadiksha Swarup Mantra* and *Yogyakriya* from Sibnarayan Paramhansa Swami from Kolkata. In 1906, he for the first time with the help of Charan Mandol offered *Yogyahuti* at village Bonyaguri which was the beginning of his preaching of *Brahma Dharma*³⁰. He appealed all the Bodos to remain united and shown the path to live with distinct national identity. He drew the attention of the unconscious Bodos to socio-religious, political and economic milieu.

The other notable persons, whose names were tagged with their occupations and professions discerning their social positions, took active part in arousing the Bodo consciousness in Parbotjoar area in the initial stage. But, later on, as the votaries of the *Brahma Dharma* of Kalicharan Gurudev roamed along with him from village to village to organize meetings for spreading the messages of *Brahma Dharma*. They also spread the courses of action for reforming the Bodo society throughout undivided Goalpara district and Assam among the Bodos³¹. Some of them were *Jothedars*, *Ejadars*, *Mandols* and others were landed gentry. Kaularam Mech, the father of Kalicharan Brahma was an *Ejadar*, Dabaru Mandol from Duligaon, Amrit Daffadar from Hajodulut, Soniram Daffadar from Naigaon, Charan Mandol from Bonyaguri, Chaburam Mandol from Maltijhora, Mainaram Jothedar from Borshijhora, Soniram Daffadar from Harjhora, Bangkhao Ejadar and Karen Daffadar from Silkikhata, Kartik Daffadar from Dangarkhata. Biswanath Brahma of Naisharbari and Goloram Mech from Duligaon were landed gentry or the rich men and liberal donors. High social elites, wealthy and active *Brahma Dharma* votaries of the Bodos were- Harimahan Brahma from Maltijhora,

Chapin Babu from Borshijhora, Rajen Brahma from Duligaon, Dorbaru Brahma from Naigaon, Garo Meitha from Borsijhora, Bircharan Brahma from Silkikhata, Shigun Garo had seven cowsheds and seven granaries of rice, Sarat Benda Brahma and Tarachand Brahma from Dudumari, Lalmahan Brahma from Chakma, Longshaigwra from Tulshijhora, Upen Brahma from Habrangwja, Haricharan Brahma from Bhumka, Udinarayan Brahma from Panijani, Debendra Brahma of Kajigaon, Sayaram Brahma from Kangkhraibari, Manindra Brahma from Lalmati, Rajaram Brahma from Sindrijhora, Rajani Kanta Brahma from Belguri, Niran Brahma from Goraimari, Jiran Brahma from Goraimari, Kandajati from Daimuguri, Doyalsingh Babu from Samajjhora, Bishnucharan Brahma from Palangshiguri, Basanta Lahary from Baman Kura and Malibar Hajoary from Pandargaon³². All of them were somewhat literates and wealthy persons of Parbotjoar area. They helped Kalicharan Brahma in his efforts to spread the *Brahma Dharma* and various other activities like establishment of schools at different villages and Brahma Boarding at Dhubri. Among them Bircharan Brahma was an expert blacksmith who made Daos, Axes, Knives, Spades, Hoes, etc. Atul Brahma of Kangkhraibari who was nick-named as Badalange was a famous Goldsmith. He made gold ornaments which the Bodo women preferred much. Dabla Brahma of Belguri was an exceptionally strongman. Nalaram Mech of Duligaon was a famous story teller amongst the Bodos. Bindiram Brahma was also the *ustad* in storytelling³³.

There were some big landed gentry among the Bodos, the oral information of whom are still current. They were in an advantageous position than average Bodos who could spare a little amount of capital for carrying on small scale trade in timber. By the introduction of the Permanent Settlement of Bengal in 1793 the Southern portion of Goalpara (district) which was a part of the Rangpur district till 1822, came under the Zamindari system³⁴. Since the period of Zamindari System, the extraction of Sal Timber from the Parbotjoar Estate, the natural habitat of the Sal timber (*Shorea Robusta*) species, was carried out by the system of leasing out of the *Sal Mahal*. The person who took the *Mahal* on lease were called the *Ejadar*. In turn, they would employ *Daffadars*, the intermediary class of people who were the supplier of labourers. The labourers engaged in 'Sal Timber Operation' (felling, barking and dragging activities) were called the *Badaris*³⁵ (lumberjacks) by the Bodos and those class of people were also engaged as 'timber rafters', for rafting down the Sal timber logs along the river routes to the sale

points situated at Bagribari, Bilasipara, Saraishor Badri, Sapatgram³⁶. By virtue of engaging themselves in those professions many Bodos became rich and somewhat wealthy who later on came into limelight amongst the Bodos. According to popular lore, Mongla Khana of Binya Khata who owned about five hundred *bighas* of land and elephants and kept a private secretary named Golok to keep records of income and expenditure and his assets. Gesao Brahma was a timber rafter and a rich man. Bisturam was a *Daffadar*, Charan Mech (Mandol) and Kaularam Mech were *Ejadars*. Dhajendra Brahma, the father of Rupnath Brahma of Owabari was a landed gentry and a timber trader who took lease of timber *Mahal* at Durapara of Garo hills district and many others, all of whom were belonged to scattered villages of Parbotjoar area³⁷.

Kaularam Mech took lease of Sal *Mahal* (Block) from the Zamindar of Bagribari (8-Anna part). He dealt in timber and became a rich man. His son Kalicharan carried on father's business and was a successful timber trader. He along with some big timber merchants of Dhubri used to carry timber to Dhaka for selling them there along the Brahmaputra River route³⁸. He was a good friend of the Raja of Gauripur, Prabhat Narayan Baruah and also had many *Marwari*, *Bengali* friends³⁹. The Zaminder of Gauripur and a few others did carry on jungle-elephant catching business. The work of felling and operating timbers from the leased-*Mahals* and the elephant catching were too troublesome in early stage that the businessman from outside district did not take the risk of taking part directly. That single factor gave opportunity to the lower middle class tribal entrepreneurs of Goalpara to trade in timber in the elementary stage involving small capital. At the beginning, the big timber merchants through rich influential people of the Bodo society employed labourers or *Badaris* (lumberjacks) from the community for felling the Sal trees from the deep jungle. Those type of influential people got opportunity to act as intermediaries in timber trades and thereby to amass wealth and capital who later on carried on the timber trade themselves independently⁴⁰.

The *Badaris* (lumberjacks) felled Sal trees and rafted those timber logs down to Sapatgram, Bilasipara and Bogribari along the river routes. According to Ramnath Brahma, one Aisha Brahma and his associate Bandaram were timber traders⁴¹. Another informant Manindra Narzary, told about the timber trade of the Bodos and corroborated the fact that some Bodo people of Parbotjoar area dealt in timber. He stated that most of the Bodos of Parbotjoar were rich because of timber trade and some of them possessed

elephants⁴², at that time possession of an elephant was a status symbol of the rich man. There was a particular place known as Bikri bada at Saraishore Dabri where the timber from Parbotjoar Estate were sold to the rich timber merchants from Dhubri town, the most of whom were *Bengalis* and *Marwaris*. That place had become the meeting point of all Bodo *Dewanis* (intermediaries)⁴³.

The factors of timber trading and the existence of landed gentry among the Bodos as discussed above provided the fertile ground for the growth of middle or the elite class among the Bodos. The instances of the various roles played by the middle or who may be called the bourgeoisie class in the favoured societies in the social upheavals or the revolutions were many in various parts of the world. The Bodo elite class was also not exception to it in leading their society as a whole, particularly in leading the Socio-Religious Reformation Movement among the Bodos in early 20th century. Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was the pioneer among the leaders of the Bodo elite class. He was able to arouse a new spate of consciousness among the Bodos who were reeling under poverty, darkness and backwardness⁴⁴. The Bodos were illiterate at that time. There were very few literate and educated men among them. Rupnath Brahma was a student of Law College at that time. His father Dhajendra Brahma was a rich and wealthy landed gentry as well as a timber merchant. Satish Chandra Basumatary was a student of Cotton College. His father was a *Mouzadar* of Ripu and Chirang⁴⁵. Jagat Chandra Mushahary was himself a *Mouzadar* of Patgaon. Kaularam Mech, the father of Kalicharan Gurudev, was an *Ejadar* under Bagribari Zamindari Estate who was a successful timber trader of Parbotjoar. Sobharam Brahma Choudhury was a rich land owner and a liberal donor. Haladhar Brahma and Modaram Brahma were real representatives of the Bodo middle class⁴⁶. From the South of the Goalpara district Gangacharan Kachari, Madhoram Kachari, the Havildar, Narapati Chandra Kachari, the Inspector, Sibcharan Kachari, the Pundit, Lalchandra Kachari, a rich wealthy person and many more were notable⁴⁷. Many Bodo youths from Parbotjoar area engaged themselves in Timber trade in various capacities like *Ejadar*, *Daffadar*, Bidder and some as *Badaris* (Lumberjacks) who could lead a comfortable life by virtue of their occupations. That small group of Bodo elite controlled a disproportionate amount of wealth and privilege in the society. Their positions and interest became common and united. The educated youths from those wealthy classes worked like harbinger of new ideas among the Bodos. They had played

an important role as self-appointed mediators between their community and ‘mainstream’ Assamese society and also became competitors for establishing ethnic Bodo identity. The neo-educated Bodo youths became successful businessmen, teachers and some acted as journal editor published in the distinct ethnic community language. Thus, they acted as the harbinger of Bodo literature who laid the foundation of written literature in Bodo language by publishing journals like *Bibar* and *Jenthoka*. *Bibar* was the journal of the *Boro* (Bodo) *Chatra Sanmilani* which was started in 1919 at Cotton College, Gauhati. Sobharam Brahma Choudhury and Satish Chandra Basumatary were the President and Secretary of the *Boro* (Bodo) *Chatra Sanmilani*. Other active members were Rupnath Brahma, Joychandra Brahma, Mongal Chandra Brahma, Khagendra Nath Brahma. The first conference of the *Boro* (Bodo) *Chatra Sanmilani* was held at Kokrajhar Upper Primary school. It was in that conference that the decision of publishing *Bibar* was taken. Accordingly, the *Bibar* was first published in 1920 in hand written form. Satish Chandra Basumatary was its editor. Contributors of the magazine were Rupnath Brahma, Modaram Brahma, Satish Chandra Basumatary, Jaladhar Brahma, Parasuram Brahma and Bishnu Charan Basumatary⁴⁸. *Bibar* was the first magazine ever to be published in Bodo. The magazine ushered in a new awakening among the Bodos. It created an atmosphere of zeal, inspiration and enthusiasm among them. It helped to create a new train of enthusiastic writers who devoted themselves whole heartedly to the writing of poetry, prose, story and play. All those articles were written with a definite end in view- that of social reformation by awakening of national consciousness⁴⁹. Closely linked with the activities of awakening and reformation were the nationalistic feelings of the middle class which could never be over emphasized. The common Bodo masses did not possess instinctual awareness of their positions and therefore needed to be enlightened and guided by the elite class. They were able to acquire a more enlightened understanding of their social status by approaching reality from the multiplicity of perspective. Thus, they led the Bodos to recognise that they had a stake in each other’s well-being and from there they did develop ethnic consciousness.

Brahma Dharma:

The *Brahma Dharma* is a monotheistic, the worship of only one Supreme Being identified with *Brahma* (*Obonglaori*), the only God and the Ultimate Reality who manifests Himself in Light emanating from the Sun. In *Brahma* Religion, the Supreme

Being is worshipped in the form of Fire which is the symbolic adoration of Light, the knowledge or the *Brahma*⁵⁰. He is the main force around which lives in the Universe exist which means *Brahma*, the Supreme Being, gives life to the entire beings on earth. *Brahma* is omnipotent, omnipresent or all-pervading and all encompassing. He is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe. *Brahma Dharma* therefore, appears to be Vedic in its ritual and *Upanishodic* in its philosophy⁵¹.

Swami Sibnarayan Paramhansa, the founder of Brahma Religion was originally from Uttar Pradesh. He chose Kolkata to preach his religion. He had huge followers there and amongst others, Suren Karta, the Zamindar of Bagribari was also his disciple. Khaularam Mech, the father of Kalicharan Mech was a Timber trader and had a cordial relationship with the Zamindar of Bagribari as an *Ejadar*. By virtue of his father's profession, Kalicharan Mech also had a close contact with the Zamindar and with his help, in turn, met Swamiji and from him Kalicharan accepted the *Brahma Dharma*⁵².

Yogyahuti was an important aspect of the Brahma Religion. Since the Fire was the symbolic adoration of Light which means all sources of knowledge emanates from the Sun, the Supreme source of energy, which is required for all living or non-living beings for their survival, was worshipped by offering *Yogyahuti* in certain special occasions and also by offering *Nitya Kriya* or daily offering of (personal) *Yogyahuti*⁵³.

Kalicharan could comprehend well the philosophy of *Brahmaism* after he had interacted with Swamiji in their pre-arranged meeting at the residence of the latter at Bhowanipur in the heart of Kolkata along with his three compatriots- Jamadar Mech, Karan Mandal (Mech) and Charan Mandal (Mech). Kalicharan Mech found the religion appropriate for propagating among his Bodo kinsmen. The worship and believing in only one God, the monotheistic worship as against the worship of starry hosts of deities practised in the traditional *Bathou* Religion was considered the most suitable kind of religion for the Bodos. The protagonists perceived that by shunning the evil practices emanating from various religious ceremonies pertaining to *Bathou* Religion and by adopting the ways of the *Brahma* religion, the Bodos could begin a new lease of life. So, after getting conversant with the various aspects of *Brahmaism* Kalicharan was ready to preach the new religion among his people⁵⁴. The prevailing deplorable social and religious conditions of the Bodos perturbed Kalicharan Brahma who felt the need of

fostering unity and the true identity of the people. He thought, it was possible only through a change in the Bodo Society and the change, in his opinion, was possible only through the 'Religious Unity'⁵⁵.

The impression that Kalicharan had on *Brahma* Religion was the idea on the unity of God and the simplicity of the process of initiation or conversion and the rituals of worship. Two main aims of acceptance and preaching of the *Brahma Faith* were- (I) to protect their fellow tribesmen from being converted to the religion of the *Brahman Gossains* who were busy converting the Bodos to their religion. In the process of conversion, the Bodo tribes were required to relinquish their own culture, language, tradition, the philosophy of life, the traits of identity and ever to remain under their feet. Moreover, by the process their ethnic identity became at stake. So, to save the Bodos from the imminent peril, acceptance of *Brahma Faith* was preferred better than to accept *Eka Saran Nam Dharma*. That was one of the reasons of acceptance of the *Brahma Faith*. (2) Another reason was that hitherto, the Vedic *Gayatri Mantras* were not allowed to be uttered by any class of people other than from the mouth of the Brahmaans. But, Paramhansa Sibnarayan Swamiji, from whom Kalicharan Gurudev accepted the *Brahma Faith*, had conferred the right to pronounce the Vedic *Gayatri Mantras* by their own words of mouth, the lower caste tongue or the barbaric tongue⁵⁶. Thereby they would get the opportunities to rectify their social evils and could maintain their distinct ethnic identity with language, culture and ethnic philosophy of life and to work for the development of education among the Bodos⁵⁷.

Kalicharan's Propagation of Brahma Faith:

During 1910s & 1920s there was the Socio-Religious Reformation Movement among the Bodos. Kalicharan Gurudev after becoming conversant in the principles of *Brahma* Religion, then took initiative to propagate his new faith among the Bodo kinsmen. He himself became the example in uprooting the Altar of the *Bathou*, parents' religion and had shown his people that no misfortune would befall on him and his family members as a result of uprooting the Altar⁵⁸. In 1906, at village Bonyaguri he arranged for a grand *Yogyahuti* under the *purohitship* of Phani Bhusan Chatterjee of Kolkata in which many distinguished persons from the Bodo society had attended⁵⁹. Among them were Charan Mandol (Jothedar) of Bonyaguri, Chaburam Mandol (Daffadar) of

Maltijhora, Mainaram Brahma (Jothedar) and Saniram Brahma of Borshijhora and Maniram Brahma (*Daffadar*) of Naigaon. His method of initiation to *Brahma Faith* was very simple. Offering *Yogyahuti* after relinquishing the *Bathou* Altar was the most practised method of initiation to new Faith. Astonishing enough, within a very short span of time, he found a lot of followers from amongst his Bodo kinsmen of the villages of Parbotjoar area. He went on offering *Yogyahuti* from village to village in order to initiate village people as a whole, not as person wise and as a result the strength of his votaries and areas he covered increased by lips and bound. He covered the entire Parbotjoar, Binyakhata and Patakata areas within a short period and he also covered Kokrajhar, Haltugaon and Bongaigaon in a sweeping manner⁶⁰. That's why his propagation of *Brahma Faith (Brahma Moth)* was rightly called the *Brahma* Movement. The acceptance of the *Brahma Faith* by the Bodos in such sweeping manner leads one to think that the Bodos were fed up with their traditional religion. The Bodos had got the real panacea to solve all problems plaguing them. He toured far and wide, with a mission to unite all the Bodos (Kacharis) under a single religious umbrella so that they could give a united resistance against destabilizing forces those were working against the interest of preserving the Bodo identity with their own language, customs and traditions. With the help and active support of his protagonists and votaries he toured Dibrugarh in 1914-15, there he got the support of Jadav Khakhlary and Jadunath Das Khakhlary⁶¹. In the North Lakhimpur he met Swami Nigomanand of Kokilamukh with whom he stayed for three months there and preached his religion. He met the famous businessman, Harbilash Agarwala at Tezpur by whom he got Assamese version of the *Sarnitya Kriya* printed out⁶². From there he toured many Bodo villages in Darrang district and got them initiated into the *Brahma Faith*. The most notable achievement he could make was that he got many *Sarania* Kacharis back to his *Brahma Faith*. In the South Goalpara he travelled Dudhnoi, Krishnai, Rangjuli and many villages and there he got the active support of Narapati Kachari Basumatary⁶³. Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma had successfully brought back many of the Bodos of that area who had already converted into Christianity as well as proselytized into *Sarantias* into his New Faith⁶⁴.

The main reason behind getting ready acceptance of Kalicharan's New Faith everywhere he made his tour was that there was simmering tension among the elite sections of the Bodo tribes over their losing ethnic identity by proselytizing into different

Faiths. They were not in favour of compromising their own identity for other identities which were not their own by relinquishing language, customs, traditions and culture. On the state of that tension, they might have thought that the New Faith *the Brahma Dharma* could work as panacea to their problems. So, without hesitation, they accepted Kalicharan Brahma and his Faith as he was from their own Bodo (Kachari) tribe. To speculate another reason than those two may lead one to guess as to how gullible the minds of the Bodos were. It was true to Bodos with three I, i.e. innocent, ignorant and illiterate at that particular period.

The great Religious Preacher and the Social Reformer, Srimot Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma launched a Movement which may be termed as ‘Socio-Religious Reformation Movement’. Gurudev secured the support and appreciation from all sections of the Bodos. He was able to organise the resources and energies available to them into meaningful associations which he manipulated them into constructive works in his favour. By organising the *Boro (Bodo) Mahasanmilani* conferences in various places in every four years, he was able to secure supports of youths in his effort in preaching *Brahma Dharma* and his Reformation Movement. Kalicharan declared that fading social images of the Bodos had to be brought back by appeals or if necessary, by force. Arrangement was also made to impose heavy fine on the people who violates the rules & regulations framed in those successive *Boro (Bodo) Mahasanmilani* Conferences. It became one of the guiding principles of conferences. The direct help of some of the noted Bodo leaders like Jadav Chandra Khakhlary from Dibrugarh, Subedar Bahadur Belbungram Kachari from South Goalpara, Karendra Brahma Mandal, Baburam Brahma Mandal from Parbotjoar etc. were readily available to him whenever Kalicharan Gurudev approached them while preaching his *Dharma*⁶⁵.

During his spreading of the *Brahma Dharma* in the first decade of the 20th century young Kalicharan was an active Timber Trader. By virtue of his quality of leadership, he could exert influences on other fellow timber traders. He kept all his compatriots under his influence which could be testified by the ever first meeting convened at Silkikhata village of Tipkai which was presided over by Kalicharan himself for making efforts to place themselves in a comfortable position while dealing in Timber trade⁶⁶. In the meeting a large number of delegates from far flung areas had participated in which an important idea on mobilizing capital resources of the Bodo timber traders

was mooted. To materialized the idea, a decision to open a *Brahma Company* for carrying out timber trade was taken and the share money of Rs 50/- per share was also proposed to be collected. Out of the total amount, the half was proposed to be spent for carrying out timber trade and other half for establishing schools⁶⁷. In that direction two committees were formed. In one committee Kalicharan himself was the Chairman, Birnarayan (Mwsagwswm) was Manager and Jamadar Brahma as Secretary and other members were Katimal (Mwsagufur), Charan Brahma, Domashuram, Joyram, Dhajendra Narayan, Nakul Chandra, Narayan Chandra, Monglaram Brahma, Hokharam and Balit⁶⁸. The responsibility of carrying out timber trade was vested on Balit Narayan, Lachan Brahma and Biswanath. By the single stroke of that first meeting they also took decision to establish a Minor (M.E.) school, Carpentry school and Weaving school at Tipkai. For that purpose they decided to meet Mr. A.J. Laine, the D.C. of Dhubri who was the Chairman of the Local Board. The reason for establishing such schools were very clearly stated that the Bodo masses were illiterate and too ignorant to understand the principle and value of his Religion. He declared that unless the Bodos understand the principle of his religion, his efforts to ameliorate the deplorable conditions of the Bodos would not help. Kalicharna Brahma and his compatriots felt the necessity of establishing a rest house at Dhubri because the Bodos were not allowed to stay and dine at hotels. It was vividly stated by Jr. Kalicharan Brahma that at that time the Bodos were much hated people and were not allowed to stay at night in the hotels especially by the Hindus. While going to Dhubri, they had to take refuge at the house of a muslim named Abdul Jabbar on condition that whatever articles or goods they needed to buy for their household consumptions, they should buy all those articles from his shop only. The Bodos were termed as *Mech* and while dining in the hotel they had to dine in the courtyard under the scorching sun if the day was clear and under their own umbrella if it was raining. After finishing they had to wash the dishes and glasses and the owner of the hotel would supply a lump of cow dung to rub the place of dining⁶⁹. Such was the treatment meted out to the Bodos at Dhubri.

For the construction of a rest house at Dhubri, a plot of land measuring 6/7 *bighas* was purchased from one Karim Bashkt at Satiantola Charali (crossed road), Police line and Bazar Chowk near the Muslim Girls School which was registered under the Gauripur Zamindar in the name of Brahma Committee Company. The responsibility

of building the house was fell on Jr. Kalicharan Brahma. Upon getting the responsibility, he went to Bikribada of Saraishor dabri for soliciting timber free of cost from the rich Bodo timber traders. Jr. Kalicharan Brahma accomplished the task successfully⁷⁰.

Establishment of Schools:

The holding of second meeting towards making efforts to develop the conditions of the Bodo society was the clear manifestation of Gurudev Kalicharan's inner urge to uplift the Bodos. It was held at a place near Tipkai Railway Station under the shades of the Sal trees (*Shorea robusta*) in which all the followers of *Brahma Dharma*, the literate and the illiterate alike were invited. The response was spontaneous, people from all walk of life thronged in vast number who carried their own ration for the meeting and listened the speech of Srimat Kalicharan Brahma patiently. In his speech Kalicharan Gurudev said that to uplift the Bodos and to improve their living standard they needed education and education could be achieved by establishing schools in various villages. The institutions of Weaving, Carpentry and minor school would be established at Tipkai itself so that the poor villagers could pursue their studies by helping themselves (by collecting firewood and by cooking themselves) and in near future, if almighty desires, they would establish a Barhma or Boro (Bodo) Nagar⁷¹. Kalicharan told the public that for the purpose, soon, he would meet the then D.C. of Dhubri himself which he fulfilled in later days. He submitted a petition and in his verbal explanation he said that the Bodos were the patriots and trustworthy sepoy of the British Raj in India who served in Dacca, Kahima, Nagahill, Lokhra, Lumding, and Kolkata under the guise of Gurkha Regiment, many of whom were Havildar, Subedar, Major Subedar, Captain and some even had the distinction of bagging Victoria Cross Medals. But unfortunately, the patriotic tribes were lagging behind from other advance communities in all aspects especially in education, economy etc. He even expressed the hope that only under the British Raj the Bodos would be able to uplift themselves otherwise no other else regime would help them to stride. At this Mr. A.J. Laine was highly impressed upon which he disclosed that the then Chief Commissioner of Assam Mr. Archdale Earle would visit Dhubri shortly in which Kalicharan would be allowed to talk directly about the proposal of establishing Carpentry, Weaving and Minor (M.E.) Schools at Tipkai for which he would be intimated through a letter about the date of coming of the Chief Commissioner well in advance⁷².

On receiving the message of arriving of the Chief Commissioner of Assam from the D.C. of Dhubri, Mr. A.J. Laine, Kalicharan Brahma soon rushed to Dhubri along with some of his compatriots. They stayed at the Dhubri high school's Mech Boarding as at that time the Brahma Committee Company constructed Boarding House was yet to be completed. Other compatriots of Kalicharan stayed at the house of Abdul Jabbar Bepari at Dhubri (He was nicknamed as the *Dhaccaiyapati*). The next day the Sahib Mr. Archdale Earle, the Chief Commissioner of Assam had already arrived by his steamer. Some notable persons, who went along with Kalicharan to meet him, were Jr. Kalicharan, Khawaram, Saniram and others. On the slight gesture of D.C. Mr. A.J. Laine, they got into the steamer where the Chief Commissioner was sitting on a chair beside a table. The Chief Commissioner asked them to explain their problem, upon which Gurudev Kalicharan embarked on. He emphatically expressed to convince him to get what they wanted by proving that they were not against the British Raj. He implored him that the Bodo people were trustworthy subjects of the British Raj. The Bodo people served the British Govt. by joining in the military department. They might rightly be termed as the left hand of the British Government⁷³. Since the need of the hour at that time was the development of education among the Bodos, he implored that those unfortunate British subjects were down trodden and they hope to develop educationally under the British regime. He further said that they couldn't hope to develop themselves educationally under no other else regime. Because of that reason, they prayed before his honour that one weaving school, one Minor school and a carpentry school to be set up at Tipkai, for the poor Bodo villagers couldn't afford to go to distance places for their study⁷⁴. After patient hearing of their appeal and after surveying the map of Goalpara district, the Chief Commissioner expressed his opinion to establish schools at Sapatgram. But Kalicharan Brahma refused to accept the proposal and insisted that the schools be set up at Tipkai itself. The Chief Commissioner of Assam concluded that the matter would be conveyed to their D.C. Mr. A.J. Laine who would, in turn, inform them about the decision later. Then they departed each other by shaking their hands⁷⁵.

The Chief Commissioner responded the prayer instantaneously. The reply promptly arrived at Dhubri that the proposed schools would be set up at Tipkai itself and for that purpose an amount of Rs 30,000.00 (Rupees Thirty Thousand) only had been sanctioned in the year 1912, which included the cost of construction of school building,

teacher's quarters, kitchen and furniture. The message was evenly conveyed to Kalicharan Brahma. When they got the financial grant, the season was rainy. As such the D.C. entreated that during rainy season the construction works would not be carried out. So, for the time being, for starting the classes, a temporary arrangement would be made at some convenient place. A weaving Master was brought from Srirampur (Kolkata) and for him a house of Saburam Brahma of Maltijhora was allotted. Some students cum trainees namely Miss Nalini Bala Brahma D/o Kalicharan Gurudev himself, Miss Sikhri Bala Brahma D/o Birnarayan Brahma, Miss Kapeswary Brahma, Sri Phukan Chandra Brahma of Adabari and Naleswari Brahma D/o Saburam Brahma were selected for getting the training imparted in weaving. At the end of the six month the weaving master from Srirampur weaving College had departed back. On his departure, he asked Kalicharan to send Mr. Phukan Chandra Brahma to Srirampur Weaving College for advance training. Kalicharan Gurudev instantly sent him and on completion of his training he was appointed as instructor of the Tipkai Weaving School. Phukan Babu acquired special expertise in weaving after attending 15 days special training at Srirampur Weaving College. He was paid Rs 25/- per month⁷⁶. After the completion of the construction of those buildings for Weaving School, Minor School and Carpentry School, a date for opening of those buildings was fixed where a grand function was organised. Mr. A.J. Laine, the then benevolent D.C. of Dhubri along with his wife was invited as Chief Guest. He promptly attended the function at Tipkai. To encourage the students to pursue education in weaving and carpentry, a stipend of Rs 10/- and Rs 5/- respectively would be provided and Mr. Phukan Chandra Brahma would get Rs 25/- as salary. The arrangements were disclosed by Kalicharan Gurudev himself in the meeting. He also appealed the mass people to be united and co-operative as the beginning of the development among the Bodos had just dawn. The success of the establishment of those schools was a positive gesture towards establishing more and more such schools in different places of the Bodo inhabited areas in near future. The Chief Guest cum President of the meeting thank the people as well as Srimat Kalicharan Brahma for his pioneering works towards establishing those institutions for the down trodden people, for he encouraged the philanthropic works. A *Pathsala* was also established at Tipkai in which junior Kalicharan Brahma was appointed as pundit. He got Rs 17/- per month as

salary and he also acted as the guardians of the girl's students of the Balika Boarding House at Tipkai⁷⁷.

Once the Chief Commissioner of Assam was about to visit Dotma on his way to Kalabari a place near Serfunguri for his hunting excursion. Gurudev Kalicharan along with his compatriots arranged for an exhibition of handloom from the products of Tipkai weaving school. They received the Chief Commissioner at Dotma and welcomed him by garlanding, the act of which aroused jealousy of Rai Sahib Jagat Chandra Mushahary who was a *Mauzadar* of Sidli and Chirang *Mouzas* from 1913 to 1924. Jagat Chandra Mushahary was in conflict with Kalicharan Gurudev because he had already become the follower of the *Brahman Gossain*, Ananta Narayan Dev Goswami of Boithamari⁷⁸. While Gurudev Kalicharan was preaching his religion he found many villages without schools. In a bid to establish schools in many more villages, Srimot Kalicharan Brahma again met Local Board Chairman, Mr. A.J. Laine, the D.C. of Dhubri for entreating him to make generous grant for establishing schools for the sake of expansion of education among the Bodos. He implored for opening more and more primary schools at different places. In reply, Mr. Laine assured him that the Board would grant schools as and when the number of students' enrolment was more than thirty. He insisted Gurudev to enlist the students name and also to keep the number of school going children up. At that time, by a Regulation of 1879, the appointment of a committee in each district to control the expenditure of roads, primary education and the district post was made, providing for the levy of a local rate (of tax). Three years later the district committees were abolished by executive order and replaced by Local Boards which were established in each subdivision. The Deputy Commissioner was the chairman of the local board of the Head Quarters' subdivision. The Local Boards were entrusted with the maintenance of all local roads, local staging, bungalows and dispensaries within their jurisdiction. The supervision of village sanitation, vaccination, and the district post were also entrusted with the Local Boards. They were the in-charge of primary education, subject to the general control of the education department and were empowered to make grants-in-aid to schools of higher grade, subject to certain rules. For those purposes, they had placed at their disposal the rate which was levied under the Assam Local Rates Regulation of 1879, at the tare of one anna per rupee on the annual value of lands, as well as the

surplus income of pounds and ferries and some minor receipts. That income was supplemented by an annual grant from Provincial funds⁷⁹.

Keeping in view the assurance given by the then Local Board Chairman, the D.C. of Goalpara district, Mr. A.J. Laine, Kalicharan persuaded the general Bodo masses to enroll their children so that the condition of 'more than thirty' student could be fulfilled. But to his uttered dismay due to apathy of the parents of the children in many villages students' enrolment could not reach the required figure for which his efforts in many cases failed.

Decision to Change tribe's name and surnames:

In a bid to reform the Bodo Society as well as their social image in the greater social arena, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma himself and his votaries advocated for the change of their tribe's name *Mech* or *Mleccha* to *Jati* (Caste) as Bodo, *Dharma* (Religion) as Bodo and surname as *Brahma* in the official records of the Census of India. It has already been said that the tribe's appellation *Mech* had been perceived as derogatory, the sensitization of which was so firmly entrenched into the minds of the Bodos that they felt humiliated and as such, sometimes got angry if they were called by the name *Mech*. They had firm conception that they got the tribe's appellation *Mech* from their degraded social status which every common Bodo people had firmly internalized. The first move to change the tribe's name was the seeking of consent from their Guru Sibnarayan Swamiji which they secured in 1906⁸⁰. After securing consent from their Guru, a unanimous decision was taken to substitute their tribe's surname *Mech* with *Brahma*. Later they also decided to return their Census Report in the following manner- *Jati* (nation) –Bodo, *Dharma* (Religion) –Bodo and surname- *Brahma*. However, the non-believers would write their surname as *Sargiary*, *Narzihary*, *Basumatary*, *Daimary*, *Khakhlary*, *Mushahary*, *Goyari* etcetera as those were some of the clan names of the Bodos. There are more than twenty such clan names among the Bodos at present. It was a liberal decision and not an imposition upon the unwilling Bodos who were allowed to retain their original surnames. Since then the surname *Brahma* came to stay in the Bodo's life which perhaps because of it, the *Brahma* surname are found as the most popular surname among the Bodos till today⁸¹. But, they thought that the decision to change the surname was not sufficient enough, until and unless official permission to

that effect was granted and also the recognition from people at large obtained. In that regard, Gurudev submitted a petition to the Deputy Commissioner of Dhubri and the Census Commissioner which was granted. But, there a passive resistance from the higher caste Hindus awaited them. The higher caste Hindus thought that if the Bodos were able to raise their social status by that act, they would, in future, even vie for an equal status with them. It was learned that the high caste officers turned a blind eye to the changes those had been made by the government. They continued to refer to the Bodos as *Mech* or *Mleccha* in the official entries and records⁸².

Gurudev Kalicharan learned that preparations were afoot to carry out the Census operation for 1921. He soon convened a meeting of the Bodo elite class in which he apprised that they should enter their surnames as *Brahma, Jati*- Bodo and religion- Bodo in the Census enumeration. However, the non-believers may enter the surnames of *Sargiary, Narzihary* and *Basumatary* etc. He contended that henceforth they would be able to get rid of the hitherto used defamatory surname *Mech*. In earlier occasion they applied for the permission to change the *Mech* surname with that of *Brahma* to the Census Commissioner. There was however, an obstruction from the superintendents of the Census operation, the act of which was supported by Mr. Jagat Chandra Maujadar of Patgaon and Bhattalal Ranger. But that controversial issue was resolved in favour of Srimot Kalicharan Gurudev and his compatriots at the intervention of a *Hakim* (magistrate) who read out the order of the Census Commissioner that the Bodos henceforth were allowed to write their surname as *Brahma, Jati* (nation) as Bodo and *Dharma* (religion) as Bodo in census enumeration⁸³.

For registering protest against such antagonistic attitude, under the leadership of Jamadar Brahma the educated Bodos and the students studying in the Dhubri High School took out a rally at the premises of Dhubri *Brahma* Baording. Through the rally they pledged to consider anti- Bodo to those people who would still use the terms *Mech* and *Mleccha* to refer to the Bodos despite official approval. They even vowed not to tolerate any more those disparaging and offensive behaviors. The protest rally was welcomed by all, the event which was recorded in the October 1924, issue of the *Bibar* magazine edited by Satish Chandra Basumatary⁸⁴.

The staging of protest rally was a significant event. It was organized at a time when large sections of the Bodos were illiterates. A few educated youths supported by rich and wealthy classes of Bodos from the Parbotjoar area, were the brain behind organizing such rally. They had learned to adopt democratic method to register their sentiment against the stance of the higher caste officials who were at the helm of affairs of the administrations. It was a first democratic protest which was borrowed and adopted as a means to fulfill their aspirations of attaining a just social position. Only a few sections were aware of the fact. The larger sections who joined the protest rally didn't know the actual cause of the rally. Notwithstanding anything, it was no doubt, a nascent beginning of political move of the Bodos in their transition from medieval to modern political affairs. In the medieval times, whatever practices those loomed them large and the fate befell on them was then a bygone conclusion. Now they wanted to forget them for good and once for all. When their sentiment and aspirations for change was at its climax any adverse action against it would naturally mean anti and would be treated with antidotes.

Dreams shattered:

The plan of carrying out timber trade by establishing Brahma Company was shattered. The share money raised @ Rs 50/- per head reached up to thirty thousand only. They spent half of the amount of share money in building Balika Boarding house, Kitchen, and in buying plot of land at Dhubri for the construction of Brahma Committee Company boarding house as per their earlier proposal. They proposed other half of the share money to invest in Timber trade, but neither profit nor principal returned to their copers. They didn't succeed in any of their enterprise. In the meantime, the benevolent D.C. of Dhubri, Mr. A.J. Laine also had already left for Shillong on promotion as Commissioner. On the other hand, Mr. Priyo Nath Sarkar, the head master of Tipkai minor school, with the active connivance of the deputy inspector of schools, Dhubri surreptitiously planned to shift the schools from Tipkai to Sapatgram against the sentiment of the Bodos. The very school established with much effort of the Bodos was eventually shifted to Sapatgram in the year 1923 on the pretext that the atmosphere of Tipkai was unhealthy because of which the pupils always get sick⁸⁵. The heartbreaking news was received by Kalicharan Gurudev when all official procedure and processes had already been accomplished. After getting the news very lately, the founder of those

institutions Srimot Kalicharan Brahma could not do anything except reacting sharply. He lodged complaint vehemently against the shifting of schools from Tipkai to Sapatgram, but no avail. He suggested an alternative place for shifting the schools at Bhaoraguri instead of Sapatgram. The heavy-hearted Bodo leaders from all walks of life and from all corners especially of erstwhile Goalpara district left no stone unturned to register their protest against that unholy action as and when opportunity comes in their way. In the second session of the Goalpara *Ryot Sabha* which was held at Kokrajhar town on 25th Dec/1924, the Bodo leaders lodged complaint against the shifting of schools from Tipkai to Sapatgram and there was the heated discussion on it. Ground was genuine; the moment of complaint was also ripe, because at that meeting the distinguished leaders from Dhubri subdivision who were the Dhubri local board members were present. They turned aside the issue by saying that it was the matter of the Local Board to decide⁸⁶. They couldn't get the justice by begging but the incident had left a scary impression of sincerity of the higher caste officials.

In an article, 'A Few Words to the Bodos' published in *Bibar* magazine, Karindra Narayan Brahma expresses anguish over an incident of shifting the Tipkai Minor School, Weaving school and Carpentry school to Sapatgram. It is recalled here that the Head Master Priyanath Sarkar with the active connivance of the Deputy inspector of Schools, Dhubri had shifted those schools to Sapatgram which were established after spending huge amount of money by the Bodos. The author regretted and expressed shamefulness for their inability to save their property which they lost them forever⁸⁷.

Publication of Bibar Magazine:

The first ever published magazine in Bodo was the *Bibar*. It was brought out by the initiative and patronage of the *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani*⁸⁸. The first conference of the *Sanmilani* was held at Kokrajhar Upper Primary School in 1919 under the Presidentship of Jadav Chandra Khakhlary hailing from Kachari pathar, Dibrugarh. The resolution to bring out the *Bibar* magazine was the most important decision of the first *Bodo Chatra Sanmilani* conference. It was resolved that a news magazine called *Bibar* be brought out by the Bodo Students studying in the high schools and colleges⁸⁹. It also got the blessing of the great Socio-religious reformer Srimot Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma when he was the chief guest of the first session of the *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani*

which was held at Kokrajhar. He implored students to bring out the *Bibar* magazine immediately for facilitating the spread of education among the Bodos⁹⁰. Due to paucity of fund and scarcity of printing press, even after the decision was taken to bring the *Bibar* magazine by the *Boro* (Bodo) *Chatra Sanmilani*, it could not be brought out in printed form till 1924. But it was published in hand written form since 1920. The *Bibar* magazine was brought out in printed form since its first issue of April, 1924⁹¹.

During that period, the socio-economic and religious conditions of the Bodos were deplorable. The Bodos were in deep slumber. They were at the point of extinction from the point of view of the existence with their own separate identity- religion, language, culture and traditions. So, to rescue the Bodos from such a wretched position many efforts were being made to arouse them by forming various organisations such as *the Boro* (Bodo) *Chatra Sanmilani*, *the Boro* (Bodo) *Mahasanmilani*, *Dakshin Kul Sahitya Sabha* etc. The activists of those organisations thought that until and unless a magazine (Patrika) was brought out, their effort to arouse the Bodos would not help. Truly, in addition to the efforts of different organisations to uplift the Bodos, the bringing out the *Bibar* magazine served as a panacea to the Bodos. Hence, that period can rightly be called as the Renaissance of the Bodos⁹² and in the Bodo literary periods, it is reckoned as the *Bibar* Era, the first era in the history of Bodo literature⁹³. The Bodos abound in oral and folk literatures which due to lack of their own script; they never got in the written form, but those were handed down by the words of mouth from generation to generation.

The bringing out of the *Bibar* magazine had got its own significance. It served as a medium for disseminating knowledge of education amongst the Bodos before which they never accustomed to. It also served as a pioneering leadership in bringing out many more magazines, books on prose and poetry in subsequent periods. It was followed by *Konthai-Methai*, *Jenthoka*, *Alongbar*, *Hathorki-Hala*, *Siphung* and *Mushri arw Sanshri* which played a significant role in the later development of Bodo language and literature⁹⁴.

The *Bibar* magazine in its early few issues revealed its achievements in fulfilling the real set goals of its publication. The enthusiastic writers from amongst the Bodos wrote prose, poetry, essays on many vital issues of the Bodos that they were

facing. The most of those writings were of appealing nature, a general appeal to the Bodos to awake up from deep slumber, to become conscious, to give up national habit of preparation and drinking of *Zou* (rice beer), to rise above all social evil practices. Another matter of Bodo national importance was the appeal to send their children to school and to remain united in the most critical period of modern age. It also served as a medium of communication between them for the sole purpose of working together relating to organisational activities. Their organisations grew stronger and stronger as a result of the close contact they could establish between the Bodos of erstwhile Goalpara district and the Bodos of Kamrup, Nowgaon, Dibrugarh, Darrang etcetera through that magazine. The following are some of the appealing articles which are in the form of prose, poetry and essays for the proof of awakening of the Bodos:

*METHAY*⁹⁵

(Garang Serjani Nashina) by-Rupnath Brahma.

Danagar danagar aphafwr aiefwr

Nongswr gaonikhou danagar.

Dathang malainao nwnngswr

Gaonikhou nagar nagar.

Naidw kannanwi boibw-

Sizouni gumurkhon

Nakhinangwn nongswr

Bathouni haramukhou

Jwng ha Mwitha Haji Rangrashi

Dongo Bari Gongtham

Ladw kannanwi Bathouni

Biswr catham pantham.

Habab arwinw jayakhwi

Bathou a bandwba

Sizou a gorongba
Jwnglai cansonw hayakhwi
Dongo jung ha cansonw rwngba
Bikhainw bungw nwngrwrkhau
Dathangswi malainao,
Malaya laya nwngrwrkhau
Pwiphindw gaoni noao.

Free English translation-

SONG (*METHAY*)

Give up not, give up not Fathers and Mothers

You give up not yours own.

Do not go to others you

By giving up yours own.

Think! All of you-

Ideas of Sizou

Must you keep

Culture of *Bathou*

We have Mwitha Haji Rangrashi

All three parts

Conceive *Bathou's*

They all three parts.

Oh! It din't just occur

Bathou has five obstructions (bandiba)

Sizou has five ridges.

We couldn't think over it

We have all if think properly

So, tell you I

Do not go to others.

Others do not accept you

All come back your own home.

The above Methay (Poem) is of general appeal in nature appeared in *Bibar* magazine in Bodo. In the first two stanzas the poet made an indignant expression against mass conversion of the Bodos or the Kacharis into other's religion during 19th and 20th centuries, thereby losing altogether the very identity of the Bodos, the phenomenon which occurred mostly in upper Assam and later gradually spread to lower Assam which threatened the very existence of the Bodos as separate community. In the middle portion of the poem, he tried to console the disgruntled Bodos by saying that if they think properly or understand clearly, they have everything in *Bathou*, the *Mwitha Haji Rangrashi* which means in Hindu Trinity-*Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Maheswar* in one. In the last stanzas he appealed all the Bodos to come back to their own religious fold for others would not accept them and own religion was rich with culture and traditions which they should uphold.

The poet's inner urges for living with distinct identity as a separate cultural community is clearly manifested in the poem. Rupnath Brahma, the first BA from Cotton college and first BL from Calcutta university among the Bodos, was a man of progressive thought and action always ever ready to help his kinsmen as and when situations so demanded. In his political career, as a coalition partner in the Sir Sadullah Ministry he always debated by focusing the Plains tribal interests as the priority.

*METHAY (SONG)*⁹⁶,

By-Yudhistir Hajungsumary.

Mogon keo mogon keo mogon keohe Boroni fisafwr

Keodwng Garo keodwnghe oray jatifwr.

Gwdan lamathing nai honai thangna dong biswr.

Throyani julu Boro reggdwng Dimapur.

Naikhang mogon keose Boroni fisafwr.

Heirambani fisa Boro baogardwng, ma! Nwnswrw.

Nyakhang gase garna thangbai honwi biswrw?

Thikhang thikang gase koro unao jabai jwngfwrw.

Laori bungkhang gasehe jatini befongfwr.

Free English translation-

SONG (*METHAY*)

Open eye open eye open eye oh! Son of Bodos

Garos have opened oh! all other tribes.

Look at, along new path all they gone.

Look at Dimapur, Bodo Heroes shone

Open eyes look, you son of Bodos

Son of Heiramba Boro forgot Oh! You

Look once, left us and gone ahead they

Raise the head once, since left behind we

Swear in name of God, the brothers of own tribe.

The poet has the inner urges to uplift his own tribesmen. He tries to push his fellow kinsmen up by drawing analogy of other tribes and by recalling the Bodo heroic exploits at Dimapur. Poet's fellow feelings and love and affection for his tribesmen is manifested here. He was quite conscious about the tribe's status and hence tries to awaken and infuse enthusiasm to wake up from their slumber.

*GWDAN BWTHWR*⁹⁷,

By- Bishnucharan Basumatary.

Gwjang bwthwra nangbai

Gwdan bwthwra faibai.

Be comao Rana Rohaya

Jeu mwnbai bongfang laifang a.

Daoshri daolay a rongjaywi rongjaywi birbai bai.

Jwmwi a gwdan jeu mwnnanwi

Grum gram grigrim hwnnanwi

Okha hanw hombai.

Okha hanailai honwi

Embu a eb-ong eb-ong hwnnanwi

Gabdwng rongjananwi.

Nayabw dwi mwnnanwi

Rongjalu bajalu ujaibai.

Jatikhou mabar dikhangnw

Malaijwng jor jor thangbainw

Ena enikhou garjlaidw.

Hangjoli lananwi fini

Hatha pitha gwdan bwthwrni

Khamaniao hefajab hwdw.

Free English translation-

GWDAN BWTHWR (NEW SEASON)

Winter has gone

The new season has come.

This time all dried

Trees and shrubs got new lease of life.
 Birds have flown in merrily singing.
 Clouds after getting new lease of life
 Make sounds *grum gram grigrim*.
 And have begun to rain.
 Oh! Look since rain has showered
 Frogs making *eb-ong eb-ong*
 Sound makes merry.
 Fishes too after getting water
 Merrily mating out.
 Quickly to uplift the tribe
 To trod in line with others
 Give up all animosities.
 By taking new breath
 Extend help, heart and soul
 In the works of new season.

To awaken the Bodo tribe, the poet draws a pen picture of the natural phenomenon especially of the onset of the new season, and along with it the other natural objects also play in merry moods. And thus, he appeals the Bodos to give all animosities up and with new breath try to extend helping hand in the works to uplift the Bodos. The poet's love and affection for his tribesmen are manifested in the appeal, in which he encourages to learn from nature for taking up a new step to uplift the tribe with renewed fervour and enthusiasm.

*UNDWI (LITTLE)*⁹⁸

By-Parashuram Brahma.

Honwi undwi undwi Bibara
Mol mol mwnamnai a,
Habab boikhoubw rongjahwdwng.
Honwi jwngblao jwngshi
Undwi undwi hathorkhi,
Nai swrgwao jwngbai thadwng.
Fisa fisa dwifralai,
Lwgg laywi laywi nai,
Mwnse gidir dwi jadwng.
Bebadi undwijung undwi
Jo lwgg lajlainanwi
Jebw gidir mua onkhardwng.
Jwngbws w boybw greng greng
Lwgg lananwi sreng sreng
Bebaidi janw hagwn.
Canfwrwmbw jaujwng,
Dumshujwng khugajwng
Jabai thabla hamajagwn.
Jau lwngnanwi sop sop
Jabai thananwi gob thop thop
Sanjou langbai sana naidw.
Sikhardw boibw aphafwr,
Naikhangdw nwnswr phiphafwr,
Fisha fisoukhon lekha fwrwngdw.
Pwidw boibw phongbai godai

Sikhri mansi ergarnai
Nwngswr phiphani batra ladw,
Boibw de do de rongja baja
Akhai homwi homwi girja girja
Lekhakhou foraiwidw.
Danagar danagar phongbaifwr,
Undwiao swlwngnanwi nwngswr
Jatikhou thikhangnw lama ladw.
Malaini un daja,
Nwngswr jwhwlaoni fisa gwja,
Undwi malai ma- de dangdw.

Free English translation-

LITTLE (*UNDWI*)
 Look little flowers
 With fragrance smells,
 Oh! giving merry minds to all.
 Look twinkling
 Little stars,
 Look shining bright in heaven.
 Small rivers,
 Look they meet each other,
 To form a big river.
 Like these all little things
 Meeting together

To produce every big thing.
 We too all in matching form
 Trode to gather in lines
 We can become like this.
 With wine every day
 With mouth and dumshu
 Be like that, would be harmful.
 After drinking wine
 Sitting idle in hapless posture
 The sun has gone up noon.
 Rise up all oh! Fathers
 Look back you parents,
 Teach children to educate.
 Come to all young brothers
 Get rid of influence of evil spirits
 Listen you all Father's word.
 All let us make merry
 Holding by the hands each other
 Come and learn from books.
 Give up not give up not young brothers
 Learn young you
 Take the path to uplift tribe.
 Not be trodden behind others
 You all sons of Heroes,
 Little may you be, matters not- go do.

The poem shows how every little thing by joining or getting together create grandiose things. The poet compares those petty things with the Bodos. The Bodos as the down trodden tribe too may uplift like little flowers, little stars and small rivers. Little flowers jointly can produce fragrance smell enough to give pleasant mind, little stars jointly can give bright shining in the sky and small rivers after meeting each other can create a mighty river. Likewise, they too can do grandiose things to uplift the tribe since they were the sons of the Heroes. The poet warns that if they spent time in idleness after drinking wine all time they will be left behind by the time.

*GASA SAONAI*⁹⁹

-By Kirti Bhusan Brahma.

Hakhor sing khwmshiao

Thadwng jwng Borohari

Jwngni ashar bishar

Jwbdwng pari pari.

Boroni gejerao

Gwi a orni Gasa.

Bini thakhai nonglia jebw

Dania gamsha romsha

Dasw ese Boro sengrafwra

Lagaidwng Or.

Laswinw Boroni fishaha

Habsigwn bwr.

Biswr majwng thadwng

Apha gidir niao gabw.

Jwngni gejerao gwswkhoubw

Swlaihwarthwng thab.

Free English translation-

GASA SAONAI (LIGHTING OF LAMP)

In the deep gorge of darkness

Living we Bodos

Our customs traditions

Have vanished one by one

Amongst the Bodos

There is no light.

For that no matter

Now gorgeously

Now a few Boro youngsters

Have lit the light

Slowly the sons of the Bodos

Will be blessed with a boon.

How they are living

Pray to the great Almighty.

Amongst us let the minds too

Be led by Him quickly.

The poet lamented the sad scene of the social position of the Bodos who were still living in deep darkness. He said that now only some Bodo youngsters have begun education and they soon get boon from Almighty. The poet also appeals all of the Bodos to surrender Him so that He may lead us to the path of progress.

AHBAN¹⁰⁰

By - Bishnu Charan Basumatary.

1. *Ronot othol, prabol pratap-*

*Jujile satrudaman Ahom sange
Mairango nagarat bijoy sinh
Rakhile veer tejor boli monor range.*

Free English translation-

Determined for war, powerful enough-
Satrudaman fought against Ahom
In the Mairongo Nagar the sign of victory
Had left Heroic blood in merry mind.

*Sidinor katha karile smoron
Kandi ute pran, akulita mon
Anole prabesi kimba bish bhakhi
Kimba sanmuk kripane naso I jibon.*

Free English translation-

Tales of those days if recalled
Heart whimpers, unbridled mind (feels like)
Jumping into fire or consuming poison
Or in frontal fire wipe out this life.

2. *Hay! hay! hay! e-khi hol aji
Kangalini bese 'Boro' O mata-
Molin boson nai, nai sinh bhusan
Shirnokai hay! Jiban mrita.*

Free English translation-

Oh! oh! oh! What's happened today,
In the guise of destitute the Boro's mother.

No descent dress, no sign of ornaments
 Meanest oh! Life in the last stage.

Haba khi bhabile sidinor katha

Jogot hoise paribortanshil

E be swajatir lupto gaurav hokhe

Pranpon chesta kora vatri sakol.

Free English translation-

What would happen if we think of past?
 The world is dynamic
 For own tribe's decayed glories
 Try heart and soul, you all brothers.

The poem cites the happy moment of joy when the Kachari King Sutrudaman fought against the powerful Ahoms and left the sign of heroic victory in the city of Marango. But that Heroic tribe have lost everything, now the Bodo Mother does not have even a decent dress and ornaments. The poet realizes that there was no point of recalling those decayed past glories and appeals all young to give up mutual jealousies, hatred and selfishness and to try heart and soul to progress upward. Then only we can be able to bring back the past national glories.

1. Hinsha, desh aru shartha parihari

Sabe milijuli natun utshahe,

Kora chesta jatiya unnatir hokhe

Uvatiba jatiya gaurav tehe.

Free English translation-

Give up jealousy, hatred and selfishness
 All together with new fervour

Try hard for tribe's upliftment
Nation's past glory would be back then.

*JAKHANGDW BOROFWR*¹⁰¹

By -Modaram Brahma.

Jakhangdw Borofwr Jakhangdw Borofwr

Jakhangdw nwngrswr.

Nonglia undunai bwthwr jakhang nangsigwn nwngrswr.

Sikhangdw borofwr.

Jug pithinainw sana naihor jabwgau ja ja

Nangbai sandunga nwngrswrni mwdwmao

Dabwnw undunanwi thabwla hamajagwn nwngrswrha

Khangrangwn nangnanwi masni phao.

Boro fishafwrkhou ajwla nunanwi

Boro bimaya mwdwi hugarnanwi

Ongkharbwbai honwi pathalao.

Pwjahordwngrswi bimaya nwngrswrkhou mugwi jaira.

Dathaswi emao jananwi gwlae

Bimaya bungdwngrswi borofwr nainw bajaranai hangwbwr

Sikhangdw fisafwr sikhangdw

Labwdwng honwi bimaya dernaini mwjang gosla.

Boibw nwngrswr gankhangdw.

Free English translation-

JAKHANGDW BOROFWR (WAKE UP BODOS)

Wake up Bodos wake up Bodos

Wake up you

Not the time for sleeping wake up you now

Wake up Bodos.

Age changing sun become red, look

Rays of sun has fallen onto your body

Till now if you keep sleeping will not be good for you.

You will tumble up with people's gesture.

Seeing the innocent sons

Bodo's mother rubbing tears of sorrow

Has come down onto pathal (Netherworld).

Mother is calling to wake up you hated chaps.

Do not lay prostrate any longer on the bed.

Mother is calling allergic, unbearable and unacceptable Bodos.

Wake up sons wake up.

Look mother has brought good shirts for growth

You all put on and wake up.

The poet asks the sons of the Bodos to wake up from deep slumber through his metaphors of rising Sun, good shirts and the mother as a signifier of tribe's creator. The Bodos because of idleness, lascivious character and due to lack of decency in manners, the high caste communities treat them as allergic to be accepted with them and for that, the mother has brought good shirts for changing into decent manners which all the Bodos should embrace.

Rupnath Brahma acclaimed the *Bibar* who said that their pride *Bibar* was only and the first Magazine of the Bodos¹⁰². He said that the development of the Bodos depended much on the magazine. He also compiled an applauding statement regarding

the circulation and acceptance of the *Bibar* magazine by all sections of the society. He acclaimed that it was their great luck, the *Bibar* had been able to draw the attention of all communities and gained acceptance across many districts of Assam, Jalpaiguri and upto Dhaka. It was circulated in all those places¹⁰³.

Rupnath Brahma, while writing an article in 1924 in the *Bibar* (The Flower) gave the Assamese Nationality protagonists a thought-provoking appeal. Rupnath Brahma asked them to embrace all small tribal communities like the Bodos with due recognition to their language, culture and traditions while trying to build a Greater Assamese National Identity. He precisely thought that the Bodos or the Kacharis were the part and parcel of the Assamese society and would continue to be so. As such, within the greater Assamese National Identity, he wanted a small niche for the Bodo identity or other Kachari tribes. Of course, he was totally against any move to assimilate the tribes of Assam into greater Assamese society by the process of conversion and the change of one's tribal identity. In his essay, "A Little Appeal" (*Kinchit Nibedon*), he said that until and unless the Bodos with their past glories and historical pride were given 'language in their mouth', the dream of formation of the greater Assamese nationality by the modern Assamese youths and the cries of the intellectuals would never be fulfilled. They never tried to know or pretended that they did not know what they to do for the Bodos. From among the protagonists of the greater Assamese Nationality or anyone from Assamese brothers ever went to their villages to instill the sense of the value of education or to arouse enthusiasm for education? They could boldly proclaim that by the so-called honourable Assamese nationality protagonists, from their heart, never was there any efforts made to educate the Bodo tribes¹⁰⁴.

In July (Shravan) 1924, Satish Chandra Basumatary in his writing as editor of *Bibar* lamented the mistake the Bodos had committed by identifying themselves as Hindu in the census enumerations. The Bodo's identification as Hindu dubbed them nowhere in the greater Hindu society and as a result, they got no privilege and no advantage. He wrote that they had been cheated themselves by identifying as Hindu. The Bodos were a self-denigrated tribe, who had been dubbed under the influential waves of others' civilization. When there was work they were used, but soon after the work was accomplished they were thrown away as a turbulent tribe, without getting anything in return. After the reforms of 1919 two council's elections were held where two

candidates contested but only to be defeated by the second position. He empathically entreated that due to lack of education, the Bodos didn't succeed in their contestation with other communities to send their representatives. That's why for the next so that they could send at least a general member, for it, it was necessary that they made frantic efforts¹⁰⁵.

The Growth of Education at Kamalsingh:

There was no denying the fact that the illiterate Bodo parents were apathetic to education for their children. In such situation, enrolments of the children in schools were not forthcoming unless some catalytic agents were put to force the illiterate parents to send their children to schools. To prove the fact, a noble arrangement for the growth of consciousness towards education at Kamalsingh can be cited as example. It was stated in the *Bibar* magazine that the Bodo brothers of Kamalsingh under Sidli, part V had shown special interest in the matter of education. At the same people's initiative, the *Kamalsingh Brahma Dharma Community and Education Samiti* was established and registered. In the documents of the *Samiti* (institution) the declared objectives of arousing consciousness of the parents to send their children to schools were found great and important. In that direction, they were able to successfully send all girls and boys child to primary schools¹⁰⁶. It happened in all cases of the illiterate classes of people of the society that the parents were reluctant to send their children to schools. The declaration of incentives or awards and sometimes in the form of promise of the bright future of children, could lure them away to agree upon for which they were not at all prepared. There were some local areas among the Bodo villages where some enthusiastic youths took leadership in organising *Samitis* or institutions with some definite aims either for creating awareness for education or for eradicating unsolicited social practices in the localised jurisdictions. Though they were localised and uncoordinated efforts, still such practices achieved successes in their respective areas which later proved to be a harbinger in matters of educational progress. Kamalsingh was such a place where the presence of an M.V. School was rewarded by the production of early educated Bodo youths which excelled all other areas among the Bodos.

Since illiteracy loomed the Bodos large, many individual literate personalities from many Bodo villages had struggled hard to arouse consciousness for education and

for the eradication of medieval social practices in a solitary manner due to lack of compatriots in the locality. Such personalities expressed their opinions in writing in the form of essays and poems which were published in the *Bibar* magazine from 1924 onwards. Karindra Narayan Brahma while writing about the general conditions of the Bodos in his essay, “A Few Words to the Bodos”, throws some scathing attack on the Bodos. He said that if the Bodos were not educated, they couldn’t understand the principles of religion and in turn if they didn’t understand the principles of religion they couldn’t form a good society; there would be no difference between man and animal. The tribes who didn’t have their good society, how could they expect to develop themselves. Because of illiteracy, religious sentiments were not taken into deep rooted. That’s why, in matters of social formation, physical and spiritual development they failed in all front to acquaint themselves with those qualities¹⁰⁷.

Again, in the same essay, Karindra Narayan Brahma identified reasons for the failure of the Bodos to develop themselves. He suggested to work unitedly so that they could make progress. He also said that it was a matter of great regret and shamefulness that the Bodos had failed to identify the path of progress. The reason was lack of enthusiasm for education because of which the greater number of their (Jatis) tribes were ignorant, stupid, without mental strength and remained inexperienced. Due to lack of mental strength, they could not judge what was good or bad. They did whatever they liked without any proper justification. The tribe who didn’t have the feelings of unity, couldn’t progress. Every nation of the world had achieved development through the strength of mental faculties and unity only. Likewise, if they bind together themselves with the principle of unity and worked in lines with developed nations then only they should be able to achieve progress¹⁰⁸.

Some writer or the contributor of articles through their writings expressed anguish over some evil social practices which ought to be immediately stopped. Such was the writing of Sri Dorbaru Narayan Brahma about the sorry state of affairs of the Bodo Social outlook. He said that some parents often got their sons married at an early age of 15/16 against their interest in education and also despite being good in studies. Such a practice was really very harmful to the Bodo Society¹⁰⁹. So many such individual persons wrote many articles through which they were able to create public opinion and

later on they came together to form various much-needed organisations among the Bodos.

Jadunath Das Kachari who was the president of the first *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani* conference held at Kokrajhar Upper Primary School premises published his presidential speech in the *Bibar* magazine. He expressed his inability to agree with the contention that the Bodos lacked man with leadership qualities and with aspiration to develop their own people. He claimed that among the Bodos there were people who made efforts to uplift their society and promote education among their people. But they failed to secure the support and enthusiasm of the masses. He said that it was only because of the illiteracy and sheer neglect to the value of education the Bodo masses were indifferent towards their efforts¹¹⁰. The portion of his speech clearly showed the anguish and lamentation over the indifferent attitude of the Bodo masses in supporting the efforts of the Bodo leaders to uplift their tribes. It was again, he contended that because of their illiteracy the Bodos were not in a position to do as the Bodo leaders wanted.

Satish Chandra Basumatary, the first editor of the *Bibar* magazine, circulated the proceedings of the meeting of the Goalpara Ryot Sabha in a contracted form as a message to the Bodos in an attempt to show that they had a separate identity with separate issues. He reported that in the meeting of the Goalpara *Ryot Sabha* presided over by Prathomnath Chakravorty 11 resolutions were adopted unanimously out of 13 proposed. The two proposals which couldn't be adopted were regarding shifting of Tipkai Minor School to Sapatgram and proposal for merger of the Goalpara *Krishak Sanmilani* with that of the Goalpara *Ryot Sabha*. It might be recalled here that Priyonath Sarkar, the Head Master with the active connivance of the Inspector of schools, Dhubri surreptitiously had already shifted the Minor School from Tipkai to Sapatgram. That was vehemently protested in the rank and file of the Bodo leadership and in that meeting of the Goalpara *Ryot Sabha* they took advantage of the attendance of most of the Local Board members in the meeting for protest. Proposal for the adoption of a resolution for re-shifting the school from Sapatgram to Bhouraguri was moved by the Bodo members from within the *Goalpara Ryot Sabha*. However, the proposal for adoption of a resolution in that regard was turned aside saying that it was the matter of the Dhubri Local Board to decide. Another resolution which could not be adopted was the merger of

the *Goalpara Krishak Sanmilani* with that of *Goalpara Ryot Sabha*, the leadership of *Sanmilani* was mostly from the Bodo community and that move was also turned aside due to opposition from the leadership of the *Krishak Sanmilani*¹¹¹.

The *Bibar* magazine also published some messages of individual achievements of some Bodos. The deliberate publications of such messages were to take pride of the achievements that their own fellow tribe had made. They were used purportedly to enthuse enthusiasm among the young Bodos to take up the task which they too would be able to achieve. The published Message was that Decca Eastern Frontier Rifles Battalion's Major Subedar Sjut. Dagaram Kachari won the distinction of 'Sardar Bahadur' title on the occasion of New Year in January 1925. He was a great donor and sympathizer of his own tribe. It was said that under his patronage many Bodo students were studying in schools and colleges. He also donated Rs 50.00 to the *Boro Chatra Sanmilani* for its welfare works. It was also said that in honour of such donor and sympathizer the beloved British Raj had shown gratefulness to the humble Bodo tribe¹¹².

The article "Late Bhimbor Deuri" written by Rabi Chandra Kachari appeared in Jogendra Hazarika edited *Nayak* (1950), a magazine in Assamese. The speciality of that article was that till 1925 the Bodos or the other Kachari tribes were treated lowly even at the higher education centre like Cotton College. Even the British liberalism of education could not deter them from showing a discriminatory attitude which was in vogue among them since ancient days. Debobrata Bora quoted Bishnu Prasad Rabha from his article, 'Siphung Bahir Sur' published in the magazine *Nayak* lambasting the attitudes of the high caste Hindus towards the Kachari tribes by saying "if the Brahman-Kayasthas hate you, just say that they were not hating the Kacharis but themselves..... ... if the Kacharis die, the Assamese also die and immediately the name of Asom also will vanish from the world.....the Kacharis are the real Assamese"¹¹³. A person of low origin or the Bodo (the Kachari) tribes, after getting admitted into the college had to stay at *Ditio Mess* (Second Mess). Young generation might misunderstand what Second Mess meant. 'Second Mess meant not 'No.2 Mess' that meant one who didn't have seat at 'First Mess' had to stay at second Mess. In other words, if it was called the 'untouchable Mess' it would not be an exaggeration. That meant, Kachari, Miri, Lalung, Deori, Rabha etcetera all tribal origin students didn't have seat at the Mess of the *Varna Hindu* or touchable. That's why, the *Saranias* or Sonowal Kacharis of upper Assam, protested it

as to why they wouldn't be allowed to dine at *Varna* Hindu Mess despite they were initiated into *Gossain's Dharma* and because of thir protest they got seat there.

Sjut. Mitharam Bora and Sjut. Lombodhar Saikia who had for the first time came at Guwahati for college education but failed to secure a seat at 'Touchable Mess', they were required to obtain a certificate from the *Auni Ati Satradhikar Gossain* certifying that they were the *Sarania Kacharis*. By the grace of the Almighty Sri Sri Parameswar, the Kacharis of upper Assam stopped identifying themselves as Kacharis and got the chance to freely dine along with the *Varna Hindus* at Dining Hall. Both Bora and Saikia opened the gate; the Kacharis of upper Assam deserted our friendship too. Satish Chandra Basumatary (then the Secretary of *Tribal League*), Late Mongol Chandra Brahma, Bir Chandra Miri, Joychandra all since 1919 after their admission had been staying at 'Second Mess'. Bonbasu Kachari, Mongol Chandra Brahma, Sobharam Brahma, Manik Garo, Late Dwarika Nath Das all were allotted seat at 'Untouchable Mess' along with Surjya Narayan Brahma and Dhruba Narayan Kachari¹¹⁴.

The discriminatory attitude and treatment meted out to the tribes of Assam aroused protest and anger in the young minds. All Deori, Lalung, Miri, Kachari, Rabha, Mech, Garo had discussed together such issues and became more determined that 'Second Dining Hall' should go. M R Lahary wrote that the students of the *Bibar Era* at such treatment which was meted out to them, got agitated in their minds and became more determined to fight against such injustices¹¹⁵. Their programmes of protest were not the direct one but to ameliorate the conditions of the Bodos from all sides. To encourage the Bodo tribes to march ahead, to form students' organisation, to organise meetings at different places in order to arouse enthusiasm for education, ethnicity feelings and cultural awakening among the Bodos were openly taken up. No one could be cowed down by lowly treatment, but there were manifestations of reaction in the form of passive resistance with more vehemence and determination¹¹⁶. Those students who passed out from the Cotton College, almost all of them turned poets, analysts and dramatists. They were able to arouse ethnic sentiment, enthusiasm for national literature and education through their writings of poems, dramas etc. Rupnath Brahma and Modaram Brahma jointly brought out the *Konthai-Methai* in 1923. It was the first book of poetry in Bodo. In 1926 Modaram Brahma again brought out his *Boroni Gudi Sibsa Arw Araj*. In 1924, *Bibar* magazine edited by Satish Chandra Basumatary came

out¹¹⁷. The students of *Bibar age* wrote different literary genres with the zeal of reforming the Bodo society, religion and culture. After completing their education, they engaged themselves in voluntary services, as per their capacities to serve the Bodos. Many of them had become famous as poets, prose writers, dramatists, social reformers and political leaders. That is why they might rightly be called ‘the Galaxy of Stars’ of the Bodos.

The *Bibar* was the mouthpiece of the *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani*. The litterateurs, literary patrons, social reformers of that age were all students. Some of them were high school students and some were college students. They were- 1. Rupnath Brahma 2. Modaram Brahma 3. Satish Chandra Basumatary 4. Tarendra Nath Brahma 5. Sita Nath Brahma Choudhury 6. Bishnu Charan Basumatary 7. Baroda Kanta Basumatary 8. Kali Kumar Lahary 9. Kagendra Narayan Brahma 10. Promad Chandra Brahma 11. Ishan Mushahary 12. Maniram Sumphramary 13. Surjya Narayan Brahma 14. Jogendra Nath Brahma 15. Joychandra Brahma 16. Jinaram Narzary 17. Sobharam Brahma Choudhury 18. Jaladhar Brahma 19. Parsuram Brahma 20. Moniram Islary 21. Brajendra Nath Islary 22. Jogendra Nath Kachari¹¹⁸. All of them were contemporaries. Many of them studied at Dhubri High School and after getting through the matriculation examination some of them joined Cotton college of Gauhati, some studied at Rangpur and some at Kolkata. From Goalpara district the students who joined Cotton College were Satish Chandra Basumatary, Rupnath Brahma, Modaram Brahma, Mongol Chandra Brahma and Joychandra Brahma. At that time the so-called Assamese High caste hated the tribes of the Bodo, Garo, Mishing, Rabha, Deori, Mikhir, Lalung of Assam and hence they were being denigrated as inferior and were not allotted hostel seats. Even if they were allotted that was in the separate hostel¹¹⁹.

The age of Bodo literary awakening followed the age of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma’s Socio-Religious Reformation Movement among the Bodos. In the reformation of the Bodo Society and of religion and culture, the students of the *Bibar Age* extended their helping hands to Gurudev's efforts inappreciable degree. The *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani* formed by the students of *Bibar Age* organized meetings and sessions in various places of the undivided Goalpara district. Students of the *Bibar Age* also formed the *Purba Goalpara Yubok Sanmilani* which organised meetings in various places for social and educational awareness among the Bodos. They encouraged the Bodo masses

to march ahead with education, language, culture and religion of their own. Taking cognizance of all those endeavours and achievements that the particular period had made, the era is called the 'Renaissance' of the Bodos¹²⁰.

Publication of Boroni Phisa O Ayen:

The book *Boroni Phisa O Ayen*, a socio-religious and ritual book of Bodo's published in 1915 which was the first ever book to be published in Bodo language by the Bodos of the South Goalpara¹²¹ throws light on the prevailing social, religious and economic conditions of the Bodos of the area. The author of the book, Gangacharan Das Kachari in his writing presented a long genealogical list of the Kachari kings starting from Ghotokoch, Meghavarman (Jimiyung) to the last two kings- Krishna Chandra and Gabinda Chandra who under the influence of the Brahmans became Hindu and obtained recognition as *Kshatriya Varna* and by virtue of the Kachari kings, the Kachari subjects too thus claim *Kshatriya status*¹²². By that piece of writing, he tried to justify that the Kachari tribes were *Kshatriyas*, the process through which he hoped to uplift the status of his tribe. The early Bodo elite class had occupied the centre stage of controversy in their attempts to move upward through the processes of social mobility i.e., by way of conversions and transformation. Since the medieval period, the *Brahman Gossains* had been instrumental in concocting stories of antecedents and origins of many non-Aryan kings of obscure or humble origin for assigning them the *Kshatriya* status or elevated them to that position. Sjut. Gangacharan Kachari was the true representative of the Bodo elite class trying to escape the medieval social practices of the common Bodo tribe by claiming himself and for his tribe the *Kshatriya* status. He wrote that apart from Krishna Chandra and Gabinda Chandra, many Bodo (Kachari) ancestors of Lakhmichandra were the followers of Hinduism and many ample evidence proved that they were recognised as *Kshatriyas*. That is why, it was observed that the present Kacharis (Bodos) were also the descendants of *Kshatriya*, there was no doubt about it. But due to lack of education and living as a degraded tribe, the educated *jatis* (Caste) were able to keep that down-trodden tribe under their feet. Due to lack of suitable education, they failed to become aware of the fact and could not wake up or even if they had become aware they could not rise up. The writer appealed his fellow brothers to become conscious with renewed vigour and zeal and to save the pride and glories of their ancestors. They shouldn't spoil valuable time sleeping in deep slumber. The lack of education had wrought misfortune upon the

Bodo tribe. That is why, so that education was expanded amongst the Bodos, a needful step had become a sacred duty¹²³.

Gangacharan Kachari's book also revealed the efforts made by many Bodo elite class of that area for eradicating medieval social practices especially of the rampant drinking of *jou* (rice beer) in marriages and other religious festivals and ceremonies. Narapati Chandra Kachari (an Inspector), Madhoram Kachari (a Havildar), Kamala Kanta Kachari (a Tahsildar), Sibcharan Kachari (a pundit) and many more were involved in various social organisations which aimed at arousing consciousness of their social and economic positions and urged the tribes to wake up from such degraded positions. To uplift the tribe, the leadership conceived, the development and expansion of education were looked as the only means and that the Bodos must educate themselves. He further wrote that the basis of a true education was the knowledge of writing and reading. By getting the true education, one could earn honour, money and become a proud owner of the good character. Apart from that, there was no second path to dream for development. Without education at any given time and any *jati* or any person was able to succeed. At present what they were seeing – the ships, steamers, engines, tramways and other factories or as they astonished at the intelligence and techniques of the Englishmen, were all centred around the knowledge of education. Without the education, they would not have progressed so much¹²⁴.

In the same long essay, he brought to the notice of the readers that the education could throw a revolutionary impact on the progress or development of *Jatis* (nations) and without it, no one could make any progress. According to him, all *jatis* had of late realised that without education it was impossible to make progress. All were trying to spread education or so as they tried to spread education, so they reaped the harvest. He appealed that Bodo Brothers should come and try hard and soul for the sake of the spread of education¹²⁵. He also appealed to remain united to move along the path of progress. He, for drawing analogy of developments between the Bodos and other neighbouring tribes, introduced the perspective of the level of civilization of various tribes of the region. The Garos earlier treated as the most uncivilized tribe was able to develop themselves after coming under the influences of the Christianity, but the Kacharis (Bodo) tribe, he alleged, till that day was sleeping in laziness. He said that despite having their eyes, they could not see the just means to rise from the darkness, their real happiness was

thrown into disarray and were sleeping the slaves of laziness. They remained as the persons of hatred in the hands of advanced communities. The Bodos had failed to understand the dignity of their tribes, failed to understand the meaning of society and failed to feel the tastes of the dignity of labour and value of unity¹²⁶.

The total illiteracy of the Bodos was held responsible for their wretched conditions and because of which, it was alleged, they were hated and denigrated as the low origin. The leaders of the early Bodo associations perceive education as the only ways and means to uplift their tribes and hence expansion of education among their tribes was much stressed. Education was looked as the elevator to higher social strata. The aims of the early associations of the Bodos therefore, centred around the establishment of schools and in that direction, they tried to secure their schools granted by the Local Boards. The organisations of meetings and conferences in various places in different times were aimed at arousing awareness for educating their children and to awaken their people from the state of unconsciousness of their social status in the greater social arena. The organizational activities of the period of the early 20th century was a clear sign of the growth of national consciousness among the Bodos. The publications of the *Bibar* magazine and the book *Boroni Phisa O Ayen* were able to act as the harbinger of the Bodo national consciousness in the pick period when the Bodos were illiterate, ignorant about what was going on the other sides of the globe and through those magazines the leaders enthused enthusiasm and fervour to start afresh their modern life after giving up medieval thoughts and practices.

The Acceptance of the *Brahma Faith* by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma paved the way for bringing the larger sections of his kinsmen to his side and it became possible to carry out a social revolution among the Bodos residing in the undivided Goalpara district with epicentre at Kazigaon in the present Kokrajhar district¹²⁷. The Brahma Movement, in its form and content, was more than a religious upheaval. The movement brought about a total change of outlook of the Bodos in social, religious, political, economic and educational fields. In all his efforts Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma got sufficient backing from his contemporaries¹²⁸. The roles of the converted section (Brahma) of the Bodos in propagating, in trying to spread education and social reforms such as changes in marriage customs, shunning the use of *Zou* and pig rearing were praiseworthy steps¹²⁹. The *Brahmas* among the Bodos became educationally and culturally more advanced than their

unconverted brethren and took the leadership of the socio-political life of the Bodos. The later trend of higher education since grown among the Bodos created a band of the social elite among the Bodos who prospered in more rapid strides and also, they led the tribe. The hitherto unwritten Bodo literature which was in the form of folk-songs, folk-tales, ballads, proverbs etcetera first emerged as written literature in the wake of the Brahma Movement among the Bodos¹³⁰. The social works done by the middle class were really pioneering. It was indeed a turning point from where the Bodos restarted their journey towards modern world and were greatly enlightened. Many of their names were found associated with various organisations like the *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani*, *Boro (Bodo) Mahasanmilani*, *Purba Goalpara Yubok Sanmilani*, *Goalpara Krishak Sanmilani* etcetera at the same period i.e. first two decades of the 20th century. The name 'Rupnath Brahma' occurred the most, almost everywhere. He was the first BA and first BL who was an advocate at Dhubri. He associated with *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani* in the capacity of the Secretary, *Boro (Bodo) Mahasanmilan*. He proved himself as a successful poet and a good prose writer and a regular contributor of articles in *Bibar* magazine since its inception in 1924. He proved himself as the seasoned politician. He was associated with the *Tribal League* formed in 1933 and became the member of the Legislative Council in 1937. Later he became minister from *Tribal League* in the coalition Governments of both Sir Sadullah and Gopinath Bordoloi ministries. His patriotic and his nationalist feeling was knowing no bounds. He felt for his fellow tribe for their three I (Innocence, ignorance and illiteracy). He was credited with the architect of ethnicity feeling and the politics of identity formation. He was a volunteer in the Kalicharan Gurudev's programme of putting a stop to the conversion of the Bodos into other religious Faiths, the process which assimilates the tribe (*jatis*) and a leader in the politics of identity formation. He openly opposed the categorisation of the plains tribal as Hindu including the Bodos in the census reports and was instrumental in shaping a separate political category of the plains tribes in the legislative politics of the colonial state. He as a political leader deliberately kept away the tribes from joining national mainstream politics; did not join the All India Congress Committee (AICC) and instead formed their own separate conspicuous political organisation known as *Tribal League*. Rupnath Brahma's ideal of creating separate political entity for the Bodos, was later followed and carried forward to the logical conclusion of the formation of Plains Tribal Council of

Assam (PTCA) with its agendum, the creation of separate state for the Plains Tribal of Assam.

Other persons whose names are found in association with various organisations were Satish Chandra Basumatary, Sabharam Brahma Choudhury, Modaram Brahma, Narapati Kachari Basumatary, Jadav Chandra Khakhlari, Jadunath Das, Charan Modal, Jagat Chandra Mushahary etc. Those Bodo elite class leaders, who could read and write in Bengali, imbibed inspirations from Bengali nationalism and tried to give as much as they could to the innocent, ignorant and illiterate Bodos which necessitated them to run from pillar to post for eradicating social evil practices, for giving them education, for shunning them from conversion to other religion so as to keep their identity unobliterated. Their programme of national service was the protection of the Bodos from the obliteration of their customs, traditions, language and culture. The eradication of social evils was looked as the remedies for retrieving their lost ethnic image; education was looked as the only means to raise their social status and understanding the meaning of the religion which in turn would stop them from being converted to other religious faiths. The previous century experienced the huge loss of the Kachari or the Bodo populations due to conversion to *Ek Saran Nam Dharma* and change of tribe into Hindu caste population, the Koch.

Endnotes:

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- ⁷² *Ibid.*
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- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*
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