

CHAPTER: VI

CONCLUSION

After having thorough investigation, it is found that Assam has multi-racial and linguistic groups. The Bodo (*Kacharis*) forms a very numerous section of those groups. They are considered to be the earliest settlers of Assam who built powerful kingdoms at various places in different names in entire North-East India. The builders of those kingdoms were all closely allied to the great Bodo Race. The Bodos spread over the Brahmaputra valley, North Bengal and constitute a very important group of Indo-Mongoloid people of East India. The people who lived in hamlets along the foothills of Himalayas and Brahmaputra valley called themselves as Bodos. They are also known as *Kacharis* in the Assam valley. Koches are the converted Hindus from a section of the Bodo tribes who spoke Assamese and considered their status to be higher. In Brahmaputra valley, greater concentration of the Bodo tribe is in the district of Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Darrang, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Goalpara and Nowgaon.

The generic term *Bodo* is applied to all peoples speaking Tibeto-Burman group of languages. The term *Kachari* is also used as a generic term. B.H. Hodgson was the first to coin and popularise the term *Bodo* for the people who dwelt at the sub-montane hills of Bhutan on his essay *The Koche, Bodo and Dhimal tribes* which was published in 1847. The same Bodos of North Bengal and lower part of Assam are still known as *Mech*. Ethnographers expressed divergent views on the origin, derivation and denotation of the word *Mech*. In fact, it was given to the Bodos of North Bengal by their Bengali neighbours. N.N. Vasu argued that Sanskrit word *Mleccha* was abbreviated to the word *Mech*. According to Francis Hermann, the name *Mech* is an original designation, and not a derivation of the Sanskrit word *Mleccha*. They derived it from the Mechi River. Bodos were known as *Mech* in the Western part of the Eastern *Duars*, but in the more Eastern part as *Mech* or *Kachari* and again further East, they were called *Kachari* alone. In the present research work, the appellation *Bodo* for them is used exclusively.

The Bodos are variously described as *Danavas*, *Asuras*, *Kiratas* and *Mlecchas* in ancient times which are found in Hindu scriptures like in the Vedas, Samhitas,

Brahmanas and the Mahabharata. In Sanskrit, the term *Kirata* indicated the wild non-Aryan tribes living in the mountain caves of the Himalayas and in the North-eastern areas of India who were undoubtedly the Indo-Mongoloid people. The Bodos or the *Meches* belong to the Tibeto-Burman groups of people of the great Indo-Mongoloid race. They moulded and shaped the history of Pragjyotishpura and Kamrupa. Linguistically also, the Bodos belong to the speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages. The Bodos have been disintegrated into numerous tribes and sub tribes like the Koch, Kachari, Lalung, Dimasa, Garo, Rabha, Tipra, Chutiya, Moran etc. The Bodo tribes built their colonies near the streams. So, most of the river names in Eastern Assam are of Bodo origin. The Epics and Puranas mentioned *Asura* and *Danava* dynasties. The further research and studies tell us that they (*Asura* and *Danava*) belong to the great Bodo race. The *Salasthamba*, *Pala* and *Burman* dynasties of ancient Kamrupa, Chutiya, Koch, Kachari and Tipperah kingdoms in the medieval period were all different ramifications of the great Bodo race. But all those powerful dynasties and kingdoms are now represented by remnants of Koch kings of Bijni, Mongaldoi, Beltola and Raja of Rani. Since the ascendancy of the Aryan race into Assam, all those kings of *Salasthamba*, *Pala* and *Burman* dynasties and Chutiya, Koch, Kachari and Tipperah kingdoms became the Hinduised caste of *Kshatriya*. The common Bodo tribes were influenced and convinced to embrace the Neo-Vaishnavite religion of Sri Sankardev. After they were being proselytized into the new faith of Sankardeva, they came to be known as *Saranias*. Thus, the Bodo tribes who had taken *saran* or refuge under a Brahman Gossain came to be known as *Sarania Kacharis*.

The economic and social conditions of the present Bodos (*Meches*) of the undivided Goalpara district is known from the writings of the colonial ethnographers and historians. Various reports confirmed that the Northern portion of the district of Goalpara was occupied by the Bodos (*Meches*) and other rude tribes and the Southern portion of the tract was chiefly populated by the Koch or the Rajbansis. The Koches were originally a Bodo tribe. In the Brahmaputra valley, *Koch* has become the name of a Hindu caste which admits proselytes from the ranks of the *Kachari* and other aboriginal tribes. The Koches who were regarded as Hindu caste consisted largely of aboriginal elements of the Kacharis, Lalung, Mikir and other tribes who belonged to Mongoloid people. In North Bengal and Goalpara, the term *Koch* had been abandoned in favour of the appellation *Rajbansi*. According to the *Darrang Rajvamsavali*, the progenitor of the Koch kings was

Haria Mandal, a *Mech* tribe. Bisu, the son of Haria Mandal (Mech) was the founder of the Koch Kingdom who assumed the name of Bisva Singha and discarded their old tribal designation. He became the great patron of Hinduism and imported numerous Brahmans from different parts of India. The Brahmans invented suitable genealogy for the Koch kings whose origin was from the obscure or tribal families. It was the usual practice of the kings of those obscure or tribal origin families to legitimatise their power by successfully claiming upper caste *Kshatriya* status. The Brahmans wrote their ancestries in the *Vamsavalis* linking them to Epics or Puranic stories. High caste identity was regarded important in the process of the state formation of the tribal chief or obscure origin families. In the process of seeking legitimacy, an appropriate story of origin often involving the deities and the claim to being of *Kshatriya* status was adopted. In course of the Koch state formation, Bisva Singha, when he became a sovereign ruler, the Brahmans “sought him out”. They made Biswa Singha as *Kshatriya* of Hindu social heirarchy. With the support of the kings, the Brahmans started the process of Aryanisation in Assam or Kamrupa. According to a group of scholars, the Koches were of Mongolian stock. They classed them with the Bodos, Dhimals, Rabhas, Meches, Dimasas, Hojais, Lalungs, Garos, Hajongs and such other tribes within the fold of the great Bodo race. In Koch Behar, the cradle of the Koch community, they adopted the designation of *Rajbansi* in the Census of 1881.

The undivided Goalpara district was situated at the extreme Western part of Assam. Goalpara was created as a separate district in 1822. It was ruled by many dynastic rulers. The Kamata kings ruled over the strip of land for a pretty long time but, they were dethroned by Mohammedan ruler Hussain Shah of Bengal in 1498. It passed under the powerful Koch kingdom which was established by Bisva Singha. In the declining days of the Koch kings, Mohammedan rulers of Bengal occupied the portion of Goalpara district while the Northern part of it remained under the rule of Dev Raja of Punakha (Bhutan) till 1864-65. The Southern portion of the district came under the British East India Company as early as 1765. The undivided Goalpara district was inhabited by the Bodos, Rabhas, Rajbansis and Garos. Other minority Bengali traders and Marwari merchants also settled in the Dhubri, Goalpara, Bilasipara towns of the district. Its natural resources were exploited by the Zamindars and the British authority to fulfill their own interest.

Parbotjoar area was a part of undivided Goalpara with full of trees, shrubs, herbs and vines, birds and animals. Within the deep forests of Parbotjoar, some places of historical importance and stone sculptures are existed but remained disconnected and isolated for centuries. The Bodos, Garos and Rabhas were the peopling of Parbotjoar area. The remnants of the Koch dynastic rulers once ruled the petty states of Bijni, Sidli, Abhayapuri, Chapar, Bagribari, Rupsi, Koch Behar. Although they were kings of the Bodo race, but later on, they came to be known as Koch kings after their Hinduisation.

During Zamindari system, the scattered villages of the Bodos, Garos and Rabhas of Parbotjoar area had fallen under the Zamindari Estates of Bagribari and Rupsi. The Chilai, Joima, Tipkai, Gadadhar etc. were the major rivers flowing through Parbotjoar area along which innumerable traders came in boats to trade in mustard seeds, jute and timbers.

Brahma religion was first preached by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. He was also a social reformer and torch bearer of the development of education who brought unity among the Bodos. Kalicharan had gifted the political and educational consciousness to the Bodos. He was primarily responsible for preventing the Bodo identity from its total obliteration. Kalicharan was born on 18 April 1860 in an affluent family of Kajigaon village in Parbotjoar Estate under the present district of Kokrajhar. His father Kaularam Mech was a timber trader and a landed gentry. He (Kaularam) took Ejadary (taking forest mahal on lease) from the Bagribari Zamindary Estate.

When there was no primary school in and around the Kajigaon village at that time, Kalicharan's father Kaulram Mech gave him the elementary education under a private tutor for two years. Later, he studied at Tipkai primary and Puthimari M.V. school, but Kalicharan abandoned his studies forever after passing class four. The deplorable conditions of the Bodo society had created mental anxiety and perturbation in Kalicharan's young mind. When he gained awareness of the sad conditions of the Bodos, he felt greatly disturbed. This factor was attributed to his abandoning of school education. After leaving his studies he engaged himself in the agricultural works of his parents. At the age of fifteen, he was married to Khamsri Mech. They had three sons and four daughters. His father Kaularam Mech died in 1896. Kalicharan inherited huge landed property including elephants, an enormous number of cattle, a shotgun etc.

Despite his flourishing business, personal prosperity and domestic happiness, he could not get peace in mind. His mind was constantly disturbed by the pathetic social conditions of the Bodos. The social drinking of *Jou* and clumsy marriage system were some of the evil practices of the Bodos society which also disturbed Kalicharan's mind. *Jou* (rice beer) was produced profusely in every household of the Bodo families. It was consumed in large quantity in the slightest pretext of the observance of religious festivals or any other social functions. Some sections of the Bodos had become addicted to intoxicating drinks. They were rendered into sluggish, indolent, lazy and lascivious. It was for all those ill practices, the Bodos got disgraceful treatment from their Hindu neighbours. To escape from the disrespectful and disgraceful treatment many Bodos had converted from the *Bathou* religion to *Ek Saran Nam Dharma* of Srimanta Sankardev, Christianity and Islam. The relinquishing of religion, customs, traditions and culture by the Bodos was too much for Kalicharan to bear. He realised that the *Bathou* religion had been unable to sustain the Bodos spiritually and ethically. It failed to promote unity and integration amongst the Bodos. In 1906, when Kalicharan attained the age of 45, he adopted the Brahma religion from Paramahansa Sibnarayan Swami, the preacher of Brahma religion. In Brahma religion, the God is worshipped in the form of the Fire or the Sun God. Sun God is the main and only God around which lives in the universe exist according to the Brahma Dharma. *Yogyahuti* is an important aspect of the Brahma religion. Swamiji taught Kalicharan the process of performance of the *Yogyahuti*. Kalicharan started to preach the Brahma religion among his community. The basic idea was that by adopting the Brahma religion, the Bodos would be able to begin a new life after shunning the evil practices emanating from the practices of *Bathou* religion. Kalicharan insisted that the adoption of Brahma religion would usher in unity, progress and prosperity. He also hoped that they would be able to keep their national identity intact. The conversion of the Bodo community into the new faith was started. Kalicharan was accepted as their *Guru* and they began to call him as *Gurudev*. Thus, Kalicharan led the Bodos towards the path of progress and unity with his socio-religious reformation movement.

The Bodos' traditional religion is the *Bathou Dharma*. They worship *Bathou Bwrai* and *Bathou Buri*. *Bathou Bwrai* is the Supreme God of the Bodos. Along with it, they also worship various lesser deities by offering pigs, fowls and eggs as oblations. The

main religious festivals are the *Kherainai* and *Garja hwnai*. The musical instruments- *Kham* (Drum), *Siphung* (Flute) and *Zotha* (Cymbals) are used in dancing of *Doudini* in the *Kherainai* festival. When the Christian Missionaries came to Assam along with the colonial administrators, some sections of the Bodos had become the followers of the Christianity and some became the Hindu under the title of Sarania. Thus, the Bodo tribes were scattered into divided houses.

Among the several types of marriage system of the Bodos, the *Bwnai Haba* (forcible abduction marriage) was socially recognised but something unacceptable from the humanitarian point of view. Huge money was required for a 'Negotiated Marriage system' so, the poor parents could not afford it. The excessive drinking of *Zou* (Rice-Beer) in marriage ceremonies and religious festivals were rampant which rendered them to the degraded social position.

Due to the absence of schools in remote villages, the Bodos could not educate themselves. The few schools were found in the town only. In and around the Bodo settlements, there was no bazaar or market for economic activities. They could not modernise themselves in the absence of markets, schools and other modern amenities. The general conditions of the Bodos were degraded life and destitute of all modern amenities. Thus, they had to live a life of hated and pitied by other people of advantages. The Bodos who gained awareness, had perceived shameful of the tribes' social and religious practices. To escape from the belittling treatment, they converted into other religions.

At such critical juncture of religious conversion, during 19th and early decades of the 20th centuries, some Bodo people from the Parbotjoar Estates had become rich and wealthy by their engagement in Timber trade and some by joining in the colonial government created professions of *Mouzadar*, *Jathedar* and other services. They emerged as the new elite class among the Bodos. They gained awareness of the sorry plights of the Bodos and had become sensitive to their position in the society. As they were treated lowly by their Hindu neighbours for the degraded social and religious practices, there always had been the general tendency to take recourse to get rid of the prevailing social malice and belittling treatment by changing into the caste Hindus. In course of timber trading, they come into contact with the people of higher social strata

and began to aspire for the same social status. The prevailing social customs and religious practices created mental anxiety among the Bodo elite class. They took recourse to get rid of the prevailing social malice by reforming their society and religion. The Bodo elite class did not proselytize into other religions. But, they saved themselves from the conversion and assimilation. They aroused consciousness among their tribes about their prevailing social, political and economic conditions. They enthused ethnicity feelings among the Bodos. Nevertheless, with regret, it is to be said that the acts of proselytism are continuing.

The Bodos lived on their agricultural products and there was no market for selling their surplus. They kept them in granaries for years together. In absence of bazaar, they bartered everything they required. The barter system was the mode of commercial transaction. The Bodos' requirement of the earthen pots and pitchers, dried fish, salt etc were exchanged with rice (unhusked) from the Hindu traders. The clothes they required were produced in their households from cotton and *Eri*. The Bodo women reared *Eri-Moth* and produced *Eri* clothes which they sold to *Marwari* merchants for cash. They kept pigs and fowls in their homesteads in an unhygienic condition for their own consumption.

To save the Bodos from conversion to *Sarania* or Christianity or even Islam, the *Brahma Faith* was preached by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma which was accepted by most of the Bodos. They found out that the root cause of all those conversions to *Sarania* and Christianity were the medieval social and religious practices. Hence, to eradicate evil practices and to bring unity among the Bodos, Kalicharan Gurudev launched the socio-religious reformation movement. The large chunk of the Bodo populations had become the followers of the *Brahma Dharma*.

The undivided Goalpara district had the separate political, physical and emotional entities since ancient periods. It was principally inhabited by the Bodos (the *Meches*), *Koches* (*Rajbansis*) and *Garos* who were closely allied to great Bodo race. In matter of state formation, Goalpara being in marginal area between the states of Bengal and Assam, many changes had been affected to that region until 1875. The fate and destiny of Goalpara had always been decided by the ruling clique. The sentiments and emotions of the aboriginal inhabitants were disregarded. The inhabitants of undivided

Goalpara were down-trodden agrarian communities, no one came forward to develop their lives. They were subjected to exploitation as revenue paying entities during both the regimes of the Zamindars and of British India. No sufficient schools were opened nor were any industry established by the reigning authorities. The rich forests resources were remorselessly exploited. The tribes of the Bodos and Rabhas were allotted settlements in the reserve forests for which they had to render services as *Beggar Bwinai* (labouring for no wage) and as forest-labourers in the form of the *Badaris* (lumberjacks). The *Badaris* cut and rafted down the Sal logs to various sale depots along river routes or streams for their masters. It was not possible to extract Sal timber from the inaccessible deep forests without human labour. In the process of operations and extractions of Sal Timber, some Bodo people from Parbotjoar area got opportunities to start in timber trading and subsequently became rich and wealthy. The Bodos from that class of people, in a subsequent period, drew their leaderships for arousing consciousness amongst them in the field of education, political, social and economic. The new emerging economic class provided the much-needed guidance to the Bodos.

From the British administrative and Census reports it clear that the people of Assam whether they were the caste Hindus or tribes were averse to hard work. Refrains like ‘a lethargic lot’, ‘lascivious’, ‘indolent’, ‘always hover over intoxication’ (opium and spirituous drinks), ‘disinclined to work hard’ and ‘there was an utter want of an industrious and enterprising spirit’ and ‘a general degeneracy of the province’ were commonly used against the people of Assam. They even expressed wonder how the province of Assam was inhabited by the indolent, lazy, lascivious people in spite of the presence of rich natural resources, blessed with fertile soil and abundance of valuable products of great commercial value. The peasantry of Assam including the Bodos cultivated as much as they required for their own consumption.

The colonial administrators were convinced that until and unless they encourage the population immigration from outside the state, there was no prospect of making Assam prosperous. The huge wasteland was brought under cultivation and the Tea Plantation was expanded with labourers from other parts of India. The natural resources and forest products were exploited and extracted by constructing Railways, portable Tramways and other infrastructures. To fulfill their aim of maximization of collection of revenue, the thorough exploitation of natural resources by the policy of population

immigration was resorted. The colonial administrator's design of swamping Assam with more enterprising people was taken up. It had a direct impact on the local population of Assam especially in the districts of Goalpara and Nowgaon. Bengali being the court language of Assam until 1874, the colonial administrators appointed the Bengalis (Caste Hindu) in administration and other elite professions. Since Bengali was the medium of instruction in the schools, the Bengalis (Caste Hindus) were considered fit to be appointed as the teacher in schools. The agrarian native people of Assam failed to take advantages of the new ventures. The Bodo leaders gave emphasis on education of their children to transform them into human capital and sustain themselves with major jobs doled out by the colonial administration.

The people of Assam were an agrarian community with self-sustenance economy. They had limited populations just enough to employ them in agricultural works. They were in their most favourable climate with the availability of fertile soil suitable for easy cultivation. They required to work only two or three months to produce grains enough to feed his family in a year. It became a natural bend for the peasantry of Assam to be disinclined to produce more than they required. Since there was no market or commercial activity, there was no scope to dispose of their surplus products especially the rice. The peasantry had adopted different methods to dispose of surplus products in the preparation of ethnic rice-beer or *Zou* in Bodo, *Zu* in Lalung, *Apong* in Mishing, *Horlang* in Karbi, *Laopani* in Rabhas and Assamese.

The statement given by colonial administrators, ethnographers and anthropologists that the people of Assam did not have the concept of hard working, producing surplus or commercial production, enterprising attitude etc and they were indolent, lascivious, lazy etc is irrelevant from the angle of that point of time as they were self-sufficient and the self-dependent and there was no need to lead hard working life.

The wholesale and retail trades in which the indigenous people of Assam did not enterprise were under the control of the *Marwaris* from Rajputana of the Western region of India. The items in which the *Marwaris* dealt in were not used when Assam was just opened to outsiders. The indigenous people of Assam had different material culture and traditions with which they were well habituated to and were distinguishable from pan-

Indian culture. The lentils (dals), mustard oil, wheat etc. were not produced in Assam and hence, they were not used. The women of the indigenous people of Assam cooked their curry in *Kharwi* (Alkali) or locally prepared 'alkali' with the addition of green chilies only which they took them with boiled rice. They did not drink tea earlier as the Tea was the discovery of the colonial idea imbibed from China. *Hani Sobai* or *Mati Mah* in Assamese was favourite and widely used for cooking with duck meat. The indigenous people of Assam with material cultures based on natural surroundings were far from being entrepreneurial. The items of whole seller and retailer were not produced and not used at a time when Assam was just opened to outsiders. The pan-Indian culture of using mustard oil, Indian lentils etcetera had been just introduced to the people of Assam by the outsiders.

Factors such as situations, circumstances and climate played their role in shaping the behavioural pattern of all communities of Assam. Without meticulous analysis of the cultural pattern of the people of Assam, drawing conclusion based only on superficial observation by the anthropologists, administrators and ethnographers on the behaviours, attitudes, manners and culture of the people of Assam would entail the misleading conclusion.

Three types of Bodo wealthy class could be observed. First, the class of timber merchant especially from Parbotjoar areas like Kaularam Mech, the father of Kalicharan Brahma (Mech), Charan Mandal and others. Secondly, the British created revenue officers like the *Mouzadars*, *Jothedars* and *Choudhuries* in Goalpara district and the last was the landed gentries who by virtue of their hard labour and talent amassed vast areas of land like Dhajen Brahma, Mongla Khana, Gesao Brahma and others. They became a sort of economic class and their financial resources gave their children modern education to take part in the colonial administration which, later, created middle class among the Bodos. The rural educated middle class asserted their leadership and provided the peasantry the guidance and assistance over issues concerning their tribe. The timber trading and the existence of landed gentry among the Bodos provided the fertile ground for the growth of middle or the elite class among the Bodos. Thus, most of the first matriculate came out of the families of *Mouzadar* and some landed gentries who were wealthy enough to sponsor their children to study at distance places like at Dhubri, Guwahati and Kolkata. The Bodo elites whose social roots can be traced back to early

British revenue officers, the *Mouzadars*, *Jothedars* and the landed gentries could influence the common Bodos to act on what they proposed. They played the influential role in their respective villages when the Brahma Movement was in full swing. For safeguarding the Bodo identity and to encourage education among the Bodos, they formed associations, cultural and social organisations. They founded many schools in Bodo inhabited areas. They also founded many Bodo organisations such as the *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani*, the *Boro (Bodo) Mahasanmilani*, the *Ryot Sabha* and a plethora of other cultural organizations. The elite class of the Bodos published the *Bibar* magazine by which they were able to illustrate a nascent intellectual tradition during the early part of the 20th century in the erstwhile Goalpara district. The children of the Bodo middle class studied in the Bengali language and imbibed inspirations from the achievements of the Bengalis in the sphere of language and literature. They tried to enliven the Bodo language and literature in line with Bengali language and literature of the Renaissance period. The published articles in the *Bibar* magazine demonstrated the endeavours of the Bodo elite class towards the development of Bodo language and literature. They produced different genres of Bodo literature for the first time and thus contributed a lot towards the Bodo identity crystallization. The publication of *Bibar* magazine acted as the harbinger of Bodo literature by laying the foundation of written literature in Bodo language. It helped to create a new train of enthusiastic writers who wrote prose, poetry, story and play. All those articles were written with a definite aim in view. The reformation of the society and awakening of national consciousness were their chief objectives.

In the initial phase, the middle class had articulated 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 traditions. 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 Bodo ethnic groups fought out the domination and resisted absorption and struggled to reassert their identity. 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 most significant event in the history of the modern Bodos which occurred in the Parbotjoar area was the birth of a great soul Srimot Kalicharan Gurudev in 1860. In the year 1905, he accepted *Yogyadiksha Swarup Mantra* and *Yogyakriya* from Sibnarayan Paramhansa Swami from Kolkata. From 1906 onward, he preached *Brahma Dharma* and appealed all the Bodos to remain united and shown the Bodos the path to live with distinct national identity. 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. In the beginning, in Parbotjoar area, some notable persons took active part in arousing Bodo national consciousness. They, later, as the votaries of the *Brahma Dharma* of Kalicharan Gurudev roamed from village to village to organise meetings for spreading the messages of *Brahma Dharma*. They took active role in the social reformation movement among the Bodos throughout Assam.

The *Brahma Dharma* is a monotheistic religion, the worship of only one Supreme Being, identified with Brahma (*Obonglaori*). *Yogyahuti* was the main aspect of the Brahma Religion. The Bodos accepted the *Brahma* faith in a sweeping manner probably, because the *Bathou* religion could not hold the Bodos united. The Bodos hoped that with the acceptance of Brahma faith they would be able to remain united to preserve their national identity. For retrieving the social status, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma and his votaries changed the tribe's name from *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.

The *Bibar*, the mouthpiece of the *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani*, was the first ever published magazine in Bodo. Srimot Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma implored students to bring out the *Bibar* magazine. When the magazine was brought out, it served as a medium of disseminating knowledge among the Bodos. It also bridged the communication gap between the Bodos living in various parts of Assam and Bengal for the purpose of working together in organizational activities. Rupnath Brahma, Satish Chandra Basumatary, Jadunath Kakhlyar Das and others used the *Bibar* magazine for arousing Bodo national consciousness by contributing articles in the form of prose, poetry and dramas.

In the Southern part of Goalpara district, the *Boroni Phisa O Ayen* a socio-religious and ritual book of Bodos was published in 1915. It was the first ever published book in Bodo language in the history of the Bodo language and literature. It throws light on the prevailing social, religious and economic conditions of the Bodos of the Southern part of Goalpara district. The author of the book was Gangacharan Das Kachari. His book also reveals the efforts made by many Bodo elite class of that area to eradicate medieval social practices like the massive drinking of *Jou* (rice beer) in marriages, religious festivals and ceremonies. 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. Through the magazine and the book, the Bodo leaders enthused enthusiasm and fervour to start afresh their modern life after giving up medieval thoughts and practices.

Many Bodo middle-class leaders associated themselves with the activities of various social organizations like the *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani*, *Boro (Bodo) Mahasanmilani*, *Purba Goalpara Yubok Sanmilani*, *Goalpara Krishak Sanmilani Habraghat Boro (Bodo) Sanmilani* etc. Those Bodo elite class leaders, who could read and write in Bengali, imbibed inspirations from Bengali nationalism and their programme of national service was the protection of the Bodo identity from obliteration. For retrieving their lost ethnic identity, they ameliorated some of the social evils, spread education among the Bodos and to some extent raised their social status. They understood the meaning of the religion which in turn stopped 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.

The formation of the *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani* (Boro Students' Union) was a landmark in the history of the Bodos. It was given birth by the initiative of a few Bodo educated elite class. They became vibrant with the new ideas of the modern education. They fostered unity and fellow feeling among the Bodos and stressed much on the need for development of education. They conceived the idea that education was necessary ingredient for fostering unity and fellow-feeling among them which they achieved to some extent. They recollected historical pride and glories achieved by their ancestors and introduced them to their laymen through their writings. The creation of opportunities

for meeting and knowing each other for discussion on social, political, economic and religious issues of the Bodos living in various places of Assam and Bengal was accomplished by the publication of a periodical magazine, the *Bibar*. It was brought out in 1924. The published articles in the form of prose, poetry and essay in the *Bibar* magazine were with the zeal of reformation and urges to improve the social, political and economic condition of the Bodo tribes. The common Bodo masses were impressed by their articles in Bodo language and could attract a large number of Bodo people towards them.

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

Kalicharan's aspiration to organise the *Boro (Bodo) Mahasanmilani* Conference was fulfilled. Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma aspired to uplift the Bodo society for saving the identity of the Bodos from obliteration. He took an active role in organising all those successive *Mahasanmilani* conferences. The basic principle was forging unity and guiding spirit behind organising such conferences was to meet together. They were able to foster unity among the Bodos. They garnered support and enthusiasm of the literate and illiterate Bodos alike for eradicating evil social practices.

The Brahma movement leaders held four successive *Bodo Mahasanmilani* conferences. First at Bhaoraguri in 1921, the second at Rangia in 1925, the third at Roumari Jyoti Ashram near Bongaigaon in 1929. Resolutions on some common issues like banning of the public drinking of *Zou* (rice beer), shunning the rearing of pigs and banning the visit of Hindu festivals and *Pujas* by women were adopted in each successive *Mahasanmilani* conferences. The fourth *Boro (Bodo) Mahasanmilani* Conference was held at Kajigaon in 1934 in which the *Boro Samajni Pandulipi eba Ayen*, the social codes or the customary laws of the Bodos was adopted. The *Pandulipi* is still extant as social codes or customary laws.

A national convention of Assam *Kachari Yubok Sanmilani* was convened on 12 August 1928 at Titabor to discuss the issues and problems plugging the Kacharis (Bodos) of Assam. The main purpose of convening the conference was to sort out various issues and problems of the Kacharis (Bodos) and to find out the best points of memorandum to be submitted to the Simon Commission for their redressal. The *Kachari Yubok Sanmilani* submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1928. Kalicharan Gurudev and his compatriots on behalf of the Goalpara *Boro (Bodo) Yubok Sanmilani* also submitted Memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929 separately.

In the Southern part of Goalpara district, the Habraghat *Boro (Bodo) Sanmilani* was formed as early as in 1911-12. On the occasion of its Annual conference the *Boroni phisa O Ayen* edited by Sri Gangacharan Das was published in 1915. It was the first printed book in Bodo. The book deals with the prevailing social, religious, economic conditions of the Bodos of the Southern part of Goalpara district. The transformation of the Bodos into another caste by giving up their own religion, language and culture was stopped by persuasions and appeals. Through the book, the Habraghat *Boro (Bodo) Sanmilani* conferences circulated appeals for not to relinquish their own religion and traditions and the own tribe (*Jati*). The expansion of education was stressed. The Bodo elite class of that part of the district were educated in the few schools established by the British colonizers after 1822. They were employed in government jobs and became elite class. They involved themselves in *Habraghat Boro (Bodo) Sanmilani* activities and also came over the North bank of the Brahmaputra to participate in various organizational activities.

Over and above discussed organisations, there were other localised organisations which worked for arousing consciousness among the Bodos. After following Gurudev's religion and advice, the *Brahma-Dharma* protagonists in their respective localities organised meetings or formed local organisations. The *Purba Goalpara Yubak Sanmilani*, *Dangori Bodo (Kachari) Yubok Sanmilani* and *Goalpara Ryot Sabha* were such organizations.

The ethnic consciousness among the ethnic tribes of Assam was manifested in the activities of various active youth organisations. The emergence of a common political platform like the Tribal League in 1933 can be attributed to the- (1) indomitable urges for self-assertion, (2) urges for representation of grievances at the appropriate political level for their redressal and (3) for securing political and job opportunities provided by the colonial government. The tribal leaders organised a convention of all the plains tribal communities at Raha of Nowgaon on 17th April 1933. It gave birth to *the Assam Tribal League*. The convention selected Bhimbar Deuri as President and Jadav Chandra Khakhlary, as its Convener for leading the organisation. It was a common political platform of all Tribal groups of Assam. It secured concessions and privileges for tribal of Assam. Thus, before India's independence conspicuous political consolidation took shape among the plain tribes of Assam. They started to participate in the process of modern politics. The Tribal League played a positive role in the Legislative Council politics of the colonial state and its presence brought about an intimate involvement of the tribal peoples in the state politics of Assam.

On the basis of above findings, it may be concluded that from ancient times to the ascendancy of the British into Assam, the ancestors of the Bodos wielded power which are the historical facts. The wielding of power by Narak Asura of Pragjyotishpura, Gobinda Chandra of Cachar and others were glorious historical antecedents which were presented in the discourses of consciousness of their tribe by the elite class. They gazed back their national histories, traditions, language and culture which they got them printed in their periodical magazine, the *Bibar* published from 1924 onwards. In the most of their writings, they drew a comparison of the ancient glories achieved by the ancestors with that of present deplorable conditions. They retrieved the knowledge of the past glories of the Bodos from history books. Besides, there are many historical ballads, legends and narratives among the Bodos in the form of oral history and oral traditions which are still

current. Through the formation of various literary and cultural associations, the growth of consciousness of Bodo ethnic nationalism became clear in the early part of the 20th century. Some of the Bodo youths took active role in arousing national consciousness through their writings in the *Bibar* magazine. In their writings, the discourses of the past glories, rich cultural traditions, rich literature etc. were time and again freely discussed deliberately in order to infuse enthusiasm for ethnicity feeling and ethnic identity formation against the idea of assimilation to the greater Assamese society. In the most cases of the colonizer's ethnographic, anthropological and administrative reports, the various tribes were demarcated from the mainstream Assamese. They delineated that the tribes of Assam had their own separate culture, traditions, language and they were quite different from that of Hindu India. The facts and figures, to a great extent, encouraged many tribes to preserve and maintain their ethnic identities. Many linguistic and anthropological surveys were published in the early part of the 20th century which gave them impetus for clamouring separate status and identities for their own tribe. With the occupation of Assam by the British in 1826, the myth of the monopoly of higher caste privilege to education faced steeped challenges from the establishments of educational institutions by the Missionaries in the second half of the 19th century. In those schools many girls and boys of the Bodo tribes were admitted and were given free (from prejudice) and liberal education. The classifications between various classes of people were inherent in the higher caste social system since ancient times. The colonizer's writings only sparked the situations in volcanic dimension.

The efforts to awaken and to arouse ethnicity feelings among the Bodos sprang up from within their own population. Some sections of the Bodos received elementary education during colonial period and some gained economic advantages by involving themselves in Sal timber (*Shorea Robusta*) trade. Those classes of the Bodos became aware of the social, religious and economic conditions. They reorganised the social system in modern fashion by discarding some of the medieval practices. They tried to replace the old *Bathou* religion with *Brahma* faith to a great extent. However, it does not mean that *Bathouism* had completely disappeared from the scene. A good number of the Bodos continued to be upholder of traditional religion i.e. *Bathouism*.

The new elite class perceived that the excessive drinking of *Zou* (Rice-Beer), rearing of pigs in an unhygienic condition, taking bride price and unsolicited marriage

practices etc. were actually the source of mental anxiety for the educated Bodo elites. So, the setting up of schools in Bodo inhabited areas for bringing the children to school, the spreading of Brahma faith of Srimot Kalicharan Gurudev, the launching of socio-religious reformation movement by the Brahma protagonists came spontaneously from within the Bodos. As there was none to help them at the Local Boards in getting schools granted, they felt the necessity for political representation. Hence, they were hastened to form associations like the *Boro (Bodo) Chatra Sanmilani*, the *Boro (Bodo) Mahasanmilani* and the Tribal League (the incipient political organization) in the early part of the 20th century. Through such organisations, the activists took up the course of socio-religious reformations movement and spread the education among the Bodos in ever-expanding horizon. They reasserted the ethnic identity by giving safeguard to their language, culture, traditions and religion. The leaders and educated Bodos had given assurance to the masses that there would not be any ill-treatment to them if they followed *Brahma Dharma*. It was a promise made by the Bodo leaders for safety and security of the Bodo people against social hatred for the medieval practices. The clear sign of ethnic awakening in their identity formation politics was magnified in the early part of the 20th century.

Meanwhile, the British government policy to provide special privileges to the tribal people of Assam by the government of India Act of 1919, led to the formation of a united political organisation of all the plain tribes of Assam. The Tribal League was formed in 1933 which was followed by the formation of another political party with the name of Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) in later period. The tribal leaders used the strong political platform of the Tribal League to articulate their political aspirations. They played a key role in colonial Assam's legislative politics.

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