

CHAPTER IV

Bodo Society: Change and Continuity

Every human being is a social animal and thus cannot live without forming a society of its own. The societies so formed were once upon a time called primitive societies or tribal societies and were bounded by certain norms and guidelines based upon their customs and traditions under some authority belonging to their community. In those periods, people used to lead a very simple and humble life. All the members of the community used to discharge their share of responsibilities equally, as per set norms for the well being of the society. Like any other primitive societies , the Bodos have been keeping alive many elements of tribal way of living based on their customs, traditions, taboos and rituals in spite of the fact that, the wind of change has intruded in their social life also.¹ Some aspects of the society where changes have taken place and continuity still exists are dealt with in details below.

Dwelling of Houses

Generally the living conditions of the Bodo villages are very simple and compact. Observing the nature and living conditions of Bodos, S. Endle had described

that the villages were more compact than the other neighbouring Hindu villages. He also noted the important features of the traditional Bodo village like in each house either its granary or the outbuildings were surrounded by a ditch and fence. The fencings were generally made of *engkhwr* or reeds and split bamboos. The digging of ditch usually measured three or four feet in depth which surrounded the homestead. The earth taken out by digging for the ditch is thrown inside nearest to the dwelling houses. The earth works of ditch and the reed or bamboo-split fence not only indicates the boundary of the homestead but also prevented the house from outside intruders.² According to the traditional custom the selection of suitable plot is believed to be mandatory for building a new house.³ The traditional main house *Nomano* stands in the north of the compound or homestead and the granary in the east. The main house *Nomano* is divided into three rooms. The first room known as *Khopra*, is used only for parent's sleeping. In fact, except the minor child, the other family members are not allowed to stay in this room. The second, *Akhong* is used only for the purpose of dinning and the third room *Ishing* is used for cooking and the altar of goddess of wealth called *Mainao* or *Mainao Bindw* which is placed beside the end of north wall of *Ishing* room and the earthen pitcher of rice storage called *Maihando* is kept beside the *Mainao Bindw* of south-east direction. In this room no outside family members are allowed to enter and cook. The guest house known as *Choura No* is built in front of the homestead and it is also used as dwelling house for young boys. Generally, the young sons and daughters do not sleep in the same room or house with their parents. Most importantly, the altar of *Bathou* is always placed at north-east corner of the courtyard or in between the corners of the *Ishing* and granary of the homestead. The courtyard of every house is constituted with enough width and breadth in four corners. With a view of threshing the grains like paddy, mustard, sesame, grams and others, the provisions of spacious courtyard is kept in every house. The cowshed called *Mwswo goli* is always situated at the southern side of the homestead. A special mention is to be made that the well was never constituted near the *Ishing* and granary. It was done so that sacred altar of *Bathou* cannot be contaminated by the wastes of the used water.⁴

The above mentioned typical Bodo family became rare, because after the coming of Brahma religion and other religions among the Bodos the use of *Nomano* and its importance changed as the follower of its cult neither set altar nor cook foods in the

main house. In due course of time due to the influence of other religion and cultural elements among the Bodos the process of traditional customs of building of house became obsolete.⁵

Family Life

Since the emergence of civilization in the world family has been the basic unit of any social organization. In the opinion of P.C. Bhattacharya, the Bodos had inherited patriarchal type of family from their ancestors with few elements of matriarchal characteristics.⁶ The family is called *Nokhor* in Bodo language. Usually members live together at home called *Nokhor* or family. A Bodo family or *Nokhor* mainly consists of father and mother, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters etc. Bodos being the follower of patriarchal traits, the father is considered as fountainhead of the family and all other members obey him in various decisions. Society is constituted of both joint and nuclear families among the Bodos.⁷ The complete ownership of property goes to him by virtue of being the sole authority of the family in his lifetime. In various social functions and ceremonies of the village council, he represents his family. In Bodo society along with father the eldest son bears an important responsibility in the family. In fact, in case of absence of father or the premature death the eldest son has to carry the burden of family responsibility.⁸

According to tradition in case of absence of natural heir a couple is allowed to adopt a child either a male or a female. More often, orphan child is adopted by the families. Since the day of adoption the adopted child is treated as a full member of the family and the foster-parents are considered by the community as to have done a highly meritorious act.⁹ The custom of Bodo society allows equal right on parental property to an adopted child. Moreover, according to *Brahma Dharma Pandulipi*, if a couple has been issueless for many years and has already adopted a child and still a child is born of their own blood then under such circumstances both the children equally inherit the movable and immovable property of the parents.¹⁰ A spinster daughter in a family is also given a share of property with her brothers.

Reciprocity and Co-operation

Reciprocity and cooperation had an important value in the society. Generally reciprocity can be 'defined as an act of giving benefits to another in return for benefits received either in the form of direct or indirect ways'.¹¹ From the early past Bodos had been living in the agrarian mode of livelihood. Moral and physical reciprocity and co-operation with each other had been the common feature in the society. In various activities of day to day livelihood, they exchanged their support in the form of labour which had been emphasized both by Bhaben Narzi¹² and Sukumar Basumatary in their works.¹³

(i) **Nangal Jangkra:** The *Nangal Jangkra* is an important part of agricultural activity in the Bodo society since the early ages. The economy of the Bodos is mainly based on agriculture. Rice cultivation is most popular among them. There is an occasion of joint cultivation on the last day of the transplanting of paddy in every village. On this occasion, a particular family invites the village community and arranges for joint cultivation in the paddy field which is known as *nangal jangkra* by them where irrespective of both the sexes the men plough and the women transplant the paddy. In this event together they enjoy and cheer the moment by mocking each other. On this occasion the host family has to arrange a small feast for them by providing meal, meat and drinks.

(ii) **Saori:** In the village life the event of helping with each other in the form of work without any return from the family or individual, is called *saori* in Bodo language. There are two types *saori* namely *saori gwlaio* (*gwlaio*=long) and *saori gusung* (*gusung*=short), the latter is held within one day period. In *saori* the host family arranges a small feast of meat and drinks after the completion of work. This type of co-operative work is done in various ways-

(a) **No Lunai:** Generally, the term *no lunai* is used for building of house in Bodo language. It is in the case of indispensable reasons such as sickness of family head for long time or for destruction of houses in any natural disaster or if the construction of house is left incomplete in a particular family, the village body comes forward together

on the invitation of the family, to complete the building work with full efforts by the means of *saori*.

(b) **Bon Sinnai:** In the same way, the *Bon sinnai* (chopping of the firewood) activity is also done by the means of *saori* from one house to other households, which is very common in the Bodo villages. It was done in various ways with each other at the time of need or before the occasion of marriage and other ceremonies in a family.

(c) **Mai Hanai:** Literally *mai hanai* means reaping of paddy crop in Bodo language. At the event of harvesting season, if a particular family is unable to reap the paddy crop in stipulated period due to shortage of manpower; then the family seeks help from their own villagers. This collective work of reaping is called *mai hanai saori* in Bodo language. Likewise the Lalung (Tiwa), one of the Bodo racial affinity tribes of Assam also practices this type of collective work and they called it *Hauri* in their language.¹⁴

(d) **Gata Janai:** It is the way of joint working among the husbandmen in the village by means of co-plough in the agricultural fields, which is called *Gata janai* in Bodo language. In this process two or more peasants of different family respectively and selflessly help each other by sharing plough in the field on respective days with the purpose of lessening the workload by means of arranging *gata janai*.

(e) **Bon Lainai:** In the occasions of marriage and other ceremonies like religious and seasonal festivals, the villager community collectively gathers firewood by means of arranging *Bon lainai saori* from the jungles and nearest forest. It had been very common among the Bodos.

(f) **Ji-Swngnai:** The Bodo women of every household have the tradition of weaving cloths both for the male and female garments. Likewise, in the event of *ji-swngnai* (yarning of silk) the women in the village help each other to lessen the workload by means of involving *saori*.

Apart from the above discussion, they also involved themselves in other activities of selfless work by organizing *saori* such as hunting and fishing, clearing of weeds in the garden by slashing, earth filling in the house, planting of trees, digging of

ditch surrounding the house etc. On such occasions, they do not see any difference among them which makes social bonding much solid. Furthermore, they have the opportunity to share their feelings of sorrows and joys. Hence, it not only had enriched the reciprocity among the people but also saved the economy of the family and strengthened the feeling of brotherhood in the society.

Co-operation

In a joint family if one of the brothers is unable to discharge his family duties due to his pre-occupation in public service, then he has to provide a worker to perform his activities in the family. The expenses of the worker are to be shouldered by the concerned brother out of his share received from the common earning of the family. Similarly the service holder is required to pay certain amount to the common fund of the family. Income from trade and commerce of a family goes to the family treasury. As per the customs the sons are not eligible to receive any share of the property in the non-nuclear family if they prefer to have their own establishment during the life time of the parents.¹⁵

Change and Continuity in Marriage Tradition

Marriage is one of the important parts of social institution in the human society. It determines the destiny of a woman in greater sense than man. A good or bad chain of marriage life also determines the protection of women.¹⁶ In the passes of time with the view of maintaining standard and harmony in the society different communities formulated different laws of marriages to reduce any hindrance on them.¹⁷

Marriage is an important social institution in any society. According to the traditional marriage, Bhaben Narzi¹⁸, Kameswar Brahma¹⁹, R.N. Mosahary²⁰, Shekar Brahma²¹ and few other scholars have mentioned about six types of marriage system in Bodo society namely *Songnanwi Lanai Haba* (arrange marriage), *Gwrjiya Lakinai Haba* (Yielding or resident son-in-law), *Karsonnai Haba* (marriage without consent), *Dongkha Habnai* (Widow Re-marriage), *Bwnanwi Haba Lanai* (marriage by force) and *Dwnkarnanwi Haba Lanai* (elopement type of marriage). The former four types of marriage were socially most approved among the Bodos and the other two were regarded as unsocial act in the society.²² The legitimate marriages usually performed by

the rites of traditional form of marriage is called *Hathasuni Khurnai*²³, which is most widely followed among the Bodos before the advent of the Brahma religion and other Hindu culture in Bodo society.

In the nineteenth and early decades of twentieth century majority of the Bodos embraced different cults of Hinduism and Christianity. This wave of religious transformation subsequently brought many changes in the social behaviour of the Bodos. Due to the mass conversion of the Bodos into various religious sects, they began to follow different patterns of marriage ceremonies as according to the new religious rites and rituals. As a result of it, the primitive *Hathasuni Khurnai*, the traditional marriage ceremony of the Bodos considerably became obsolete among the Bodo masses because of the influence of the other religious customs and traditions.

During the colonial period the emergence of different sects of religion especially the Brahma *Dharma* (religion) in the Bodo society under the guidance of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma had a larger impact on the society with great numbers of followers which brought about significant changes in the traditional system of marriage. The Brahma marriage is usually performed with some elements Vedic rites and with slight modification of the traditional customs and rituals of the early Bodo marriage system. The major changes in the marriage traditions are given below:

(i) The influence of Hindu marriage custom, *Asura Vivah* is observed in the traditional marriage features of the Bodos. In this kind of marriage the husband is entailed to pay a reasonable bride price to knot the marriage relationship. In Hindu society the idea of bride price was initiated so that it would not disgrace the girl and her family status and also with the thought that she was not given in marriage for nothing.²⁴ The realization of *Phon Thaka* (Bride price) was very high and was a compulsory tradition in the early Bodo society. More often it exceeded more than one thousand rupees. After the influence of Brahma religion in the Bodo society and under the initiative of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, the rate has been abridged and fixed at rupees one hundred and five only. Gradually, the system of *Phon Thaka* has been discouraged and it has become nominal in the present Bodo society. There was no subsisting of dowry system in the society as it subsisted among the other Hindu Aryan races of India.²⁵

(ii) As per the traditional custom, there are six types of marriage among the Bodos. However, according to the Brahma *Dharma Pandulipi*²⁶ with the coming of new faith, the followers began to recognize only three types of marriages, which are *sangnanwi lanai* (through negotiations), *gwrja tanai* (resident son-in-law) and giving away by holding the hands of both the bride and the groom.²⁷

(iii) As stated above, in the traditional marriage the custom of marrying outside the community is strictly forbidden. However, among the Brahma *Dharma* followers a woman belonging to the outside community is allowed to marry a Brahma religion follower by converting and accepting the Brahma religion.²⁸

(iv) In the early Bodo society the traditional marriages usually used to hold in the house of groom by means of *hathasuni kurnai* system. Other than any form of religious marriage they only legalized the *hathasuni* form of marriage in the society. However, due to the influence of other religious customs, the marriage function of the Brahma *Dharma* followers is even performed in the house of bride by Vedic rites. The Brahma *Dharma* followers perform the *Yajnahuti* in the main marriage rites by uttering Sanskrit *mantras* and few lines of translated verse of Sanskrit *mantra* in Bodo language.²⁹

(v) In traditional marriage, guidelines for fixing date and months to be solemnized for the auspicious occasion did not exist. However, except in the Assamese month of *Magh* (December-January) and *Chaitra* (March-April) they usually solemnize marriage ceremony in the rest of months. In case of any exceptional situation the marriage ceremony is being solemnized in the month of *Magh* also. In regard to the day, except Saturday and Tuesday, they considerably chose Sunday as the most preferable for solemnizing marriage ceremony. In the present Bodo society this beliefs of day and month has been influenced in some extent. The Brahma *Dharma* followers with the help of *gyotishi* or astrologer determine the specific *tithis*, *lognas* and person's horoscopes for solemnizing the auspicious marriage ceremony.³⁰ Generally, according to the traditional belief they prefer the Assamese month of *Phagun* (February-March) mostly for solemnizing marriage ceremony.³¹

(vi) The Dowry system is absolutely unknown among the Bodos through the ages. However, in the present day society the rich parents of the bride voluntarily give away valuable assets along with their daughter in the form of gifts such as furniture, gold ornaments, refrigerator, T.V., vehicle and even a plot of land for the construction of house as a token of love and affection.³²

(vii) Both in the traditional and present marriage system the *Biban langnai*³³, is considered as the most important pre-marriage ceremony in the society. In this occasion the role of *Barlangpha* and *Bwirathi* is most indispensable and they must not be *Khoro-Gojo* (widow or widower). In the traditional the system, the *biban* consists of *zou* (rice-beer), *oma bedor* (pork), *goi* (areca nuts), *pathwi* (betel leaf).³⁴ However, in the present Brahma *dharma* tradition the *biban* consists of the commodities like tea, sugar, milk, areca-nut, betel leaves, rice and coins instead of *zou* and *oma bedor*.³⁵

(viii) In the traditional marriage irrespective of sex both man and women, young and old enjoyed together by singing and dancing using the traditional musical instruments like *serja* (four string violin), *siphung* (flute), *kham* (drum), *jotha* (cymbal) and *gangana* (jew's harp). They also performed *thakripalla*, the event of singing and dancing competition for a night among the participants of the marriage ceremony.³⁶ In the place of traditional music and dance they now follow the new 'Band Party' for entertaining and welcoming the marriage party in the marriage ceremony.³⁷ In the present marriage ceremonies the use of traditional music has become obsolete.

(ix) In the traditional marriage the ceremonial function continued for three to seven days. On this occasion *zou* or rice-beer and pork was the main item and it was supplied in abundance.³⁸ However, the introduction of the Brahma *Dharma* among the Bodos had forbidden from brewing the rice beer and consuming it.³⁹ Subsequently, they brought some changes in the pre and post marriage ceremonies by disbanding the use of liquor and pork especially on the day of wedding and it was replaced by tea and *muri* (puff rice). The use of *zou* and pork in the day of wedding is still voluntary in some of the Bodo villages.

(x) In the marriage proper as well as in the Brahma marriage of the Bodos, the role of the *Bwirathi* along with *Barlangpha* is very significant. To complete the rituals

of marriage ceremony two ladies are selected by the parents of bride as service girls and the *barlangpha* is selected from the side of bridegroom by the parents or village elders. In the meantime, they must not be a widow or widower. The widow or widower is not allowed to perform any auspicious task during the marriage ceremony as the Bodos called them *Koro Gojo* (widow or widower).⁴⁰

The influence of Christianity among the Bodos in the colonial period requires substantial attention to draw aspects of changes in the society. A considerable numbers of Bodo people converted into the Christianity and they have forgone some of the traditional traits in traditional Bodo marriage rituals and have adopted some new elements instead. In the Census of 1931, Bodo Christian populations recorded total numbers of 6000 out of 15,716 Christians. Similarly, in the Goalpara district out of the 18,536 Christians there were total number of 2,500 Bodo Christians. The Goalpara district recorded largest number of Christian population in the Brahmaputra valley.⁴¹ The followers of Christianity in the society brought significant changes in the marriage custom. The doctrines of religion play an important role in the Bodo Christian marriages than the social customs. Usually Christian marriage is performed in the *girja* or church. Other than Catholic denomination, the Baptist or Lutheran Pastors performs the main function of the marriage ceremony in the church. In the Christian marriage, the consent of both bride and groom is much required before the religious priest. But, in the traditional marriage system of the Bodos more occasionally the parents and relatives fix the marriage ties. The system of polygamy and polyandry are not allowed among Bodo Christianity.⁴²

Levirate and Sororate

The custom approves both the levirate and sororate types of marriage equally in the Bodo society. Generally, in levirate custom, the younger brother is permitted to marry his brother's widow and in the sororate type of marriage a widower or husband is allowed to marry with the deceased wife's younger sister. This system is followed in the Bodo society with social restrictions. For an instance, the law allows a widower to re-marry his deceased wife's younger sister, but not the elder sister whom he is obliged conventionally to regard in the light of a mother. Likewise, a widow may re-marry her deceased husband's younger brother, but is not allowed to re-marry the elder brother of

her deceased husband.⁴³ These systems of marriage were perhaps allowed by custom among the Bodos with the view of ensuring safeguard in the future life of widow and her progeny. This type of marriage is still persisting in the society based on unavoidable demands of the situation. No religious dogmas of the Bodos restrict this type of marriage.

Exogamy and Polygamy

Traditionally, Bodo custom does not allow exogamy in the society. But, in this regard S. Endle had mentioned the evidence of Bodo boys getting married to the girl of cognate tribes such as Rabhas, Koches and Saranias. In such cases, the bridegroom had to make settlement with the co-villagers peacefully and arranged for grand feast by providing *zou* (rice-beer) and pork. Children born out of this mix marriage entail to become the full member of the descent of the Bodo father. Bodos are strictly monogamous race and thus the custom does not approve polygamy in the society. But during the colonial period, in some cases invariably the higher positioned in the society like the rich, *Mauzadars* and *Mandals* married more than one wife. However, on the circumstances of childlessness to the first wife the custom sanctioned the husband to marry second wife with the view to maintain the posterity of the father's lineage. On the other hand, polyandry had been absolutely forbidden by the custom in the Bodo society.⁴⁴

Divorce

The customs of both the traditional Bathou *Dharma* and Brahma *Dharma* followers sanctions the act of divorce on some valid grounds. There are some formalities of divorce in Bodo society which has been described by Endle in his work. Divorce may takes place on mutual consent of husband and wife by appearing before the village elders without affecting certain formalities. After concluding the matter in the presence of village elders, the divorce ceremony is performed by tearing the betel-leaf into two pieces which is called in Bodo '*Pathwi lai bisinai*' or *Pan-chira* in Assamese.⁴⁵ One of the racial affinities of the great Bodo group of family known as Rabha tribe of Assam also follows the same method of divorce by tearing betel-leaf which they call it '*Panchira*'.⁴⁶ This symbolic act indicates that torn leaf can never

reunite, so their married life is severed forever. If a husband divorces his wife for some inadequate reasons which seem to the village elders inadequate or capricious, he forfeits all claim for reimbursement of his marriage expenses, and even when the divorce is approved, he must pay a certain small sum amount (Rs. 5 to Rs. 10) for his freedom, the amount being divided between the village panchayat and the divorced woman. Without any reasonable ground if a husband divorces his wife then he is to bear the responsibility of her livelihood for a certain period. On the other hand, if the woman is divorced for just and sufficient reasons e.g. for unfaithfulness to her marriage obligations, the injured husband is entitled to recover whatever he may have expended at his marriage, a sum of rupees amounting Rs. 140 or Rs. 200 from the parents of woman. As soon as after fulfilling the condition the divorced woman is fully at liberty to live with a second husband.⁴⁷

According to the customary laws of *Pandulipi* of Brahma *Dharma* followers, if a husband for any reason leaves his wife for the period of more than five years then the wife if she felt helpless can choose to remarry after granting court's permission. The second husband bears the responsibility of the children of previous marriage. If the first husband returns all of a sudden and claims to get back his own children then he can only get back on the payment of expenditure spent on the children for maintenance by the second husband in his absence. But the first husband cannot claim any reparation.⁴⁸

Dress and Ornaments

Bodo people have their own traditional dresses. In this regard, women played an important role in preserving this rich culture among them. Observing the dressing manner of the Bodo women, Bhaben Narzee had classified it into two parts- *Dokona* and *Mekela* woven by them. Women of the Jalpaiguri (West Bengal), Dhubri, Kokrajhar subdivision of Goalpara district and the western part of Assam primarily wore *dokona*. On the other hand, the women of old Kamrup district and other plain areas Bodo women wore *mekela*.⁴⁹ Moreover, Indramalati Narzary also mentioned the proper *dokona* as *langa dokona* which is most commonly worn on special occasions and festivals by the women, and the other *ogrong dokona* worn in the time of household workings by the women. The *ogrong dokona* is most rarely used at the present day.⁵⁰ In the matter of portraying design and colours on the cloth, the women are very far excelled. Among the

various kinds of *dokonas* with multiple *agor* or design commonly wore by them are *dokona taosi*, *daotu godo*, *parou megon*, *salamata* and *agorgubwi* which are generally 5 *muh* in length. *Muh* is the traditional measurement system of length by hand in Bodos, here, one *muh* is equivalent of 18 to 22 inches. Various kinds of *jwmgra* also known as *alon*, a piece of cloth or shawl which is portrayed with colourful designs and decorations are also most commonly worn by the women along with the *dokona*. Generally, orange and yellow-brown colours of *dokonas* are favourably prepared by women and in the case of *alon* or shawl they like most the black and sky blue colour. Apart from this, they also worn various colours of cloth availed from the nature⁵¹ such as *besor bibar*, *kantalmada* or *gwmwbwrai*, *kwirw gab*, *phantao gab*, *batogang gab* or *tiya gab*, *gwmwjati*, *gswm*, *gwja*, *gupur* and many others. Among the other *agor* or designs portrayed on the *dokona* and *jwmgra* are *mokordoma*, *pahar agor*, *leoa agor*, *taigir bibar*, *bwigri bibar*, *thaka agor*, *paisa agor*, *lao agor*, *dril agor* and *bwiragi agor*.⁵²

Generally, since the early days Bodo men most commonly wore the traditional dress called *gamcha*, *phalli* for head gearing and *si-sakanai* or *si-jwmnai*. The elderly people in the society simply wear *gamcha* up to their knees and in some cases continue to wear like *lingthi* or *saramai tebnai*⁵³ which is wore prominently at the event of working and other religious and social occasions. *Si-sakanai* a type of wearing commonly displays the wrapping of cloth on the body in various ways. But due to the various socio-cultural transitions in the society, men began to wear shirts and long-pants of the other cultural attire.⁵⁴

The indigenous type of wooden sandal known as *korom* or *foita* was used as the foot wear by the common Bodo people. The strap of bi-cycle tyre was used as the substitute to the wooden knob. The *foita* has also some similarities with the *korom*. Apart from *korom* or *foita* they also wore the sandal made of crude motor tyres as foot wear.⁵⁵

Ornaments: In the history of civilization, ornaments have been the most essential part of women. According to Bhaben Narzi Bodo women used both gold and silver ornaments on their four different body parts such as ear, nose, neck and hand (finger and wrist). These are mentioned as below⁵⁶:

For Ear: *Khera* or *kheru*, *jabkhring*, *thaling lora* are commonly used as ear ring ornaments by the Bodo women.

For Nose: *Boli* or *nakapul*, *boula*

For Neck: *Chandra har*, *Bisahar*

For Hands (wrist and finger): On the wrist the Bodo women wore *ashan muti*, *bala ashan* and designs of ring at finger.

Social Division

The evolution of the idea of the caste system in the society can be drawn from the Vedic corpus, since it comprises the earliest literary sources. For an instance, the Vedic texts describe the Brahmanical view of caste and position of *varna* which remained unchanged in the society.⁵⁷ In the history of origin and development of castes, sub-castes and social classes in India, both the Aryans and non-Aryans had considerable contribution. The emergence of large number of new classes in India since three thousand years took place as a result of ethnic fusion, economic pursuits, religious, ecological impact, and adoption of new profession and for other reasons. Since the North-East and Assam is predominantly inhabited by the Indo-Mongoloid people, it reflects the image of liberalized caste hierarchy. Unlike the other parts of India, in the matter of social dealings there had been absence of rigid and watertight different stratum among the people of this region.⁵⁸ In the beginning the Aryan culture could not intrude among the Bodos as even those staying with them had to become more liberal on the social, customs and practices. In fact, in some cases the Aryans had to give up some of their rigid social customs too and tried to adjust themselves with the indigenous people, which made them more liberal in their food, drink, dress, customs and manners.⁵⁹

Due to the absence of historical evidence, it is difficult to ascertain social divisions among the Bodos. For an instance, it was only from the nature of occupation and totemistic basis, Bodos can be traced into various social groups as stated by many writers and scholars such as S. Endle⁶⁰, Kameswar Brahma and R.N. Mosahary in their

works. These were of *ari*-folk origin as the suffix in their surname indicates such as *Swargiari, Basumatari, Musahari, Narzari, Daimari, Gayari, Bargayari, Wary* etc.

Games and Amusements

Since agriculture is the primary occupation of the Bodos, they have busy schedules throughout the day in the fields and in other household activities, hence they hardly find any regular time for the leisure except towards the end of the day. Some of the popular outdoor games among the Bodos which were pursued by youths were *Bata, Ha-du-du, Gila, Shilla, Dom* or *badua, gor, pita homnai, Achou bichou*⁶¹, *abwilw gw, daola sowlainai* (cock-fighting), *ainal, songrai kundi, khilabari* and many others.⁶² But due to the lack of exposure and trends of materialistic living condition of the people, most of the games have disappeared and became obsolete.

Though hunting and fishing are primarily based on economic motivation, it was treated as another part of amusement by the Bodos.⁶³ They had acquired skillful knowledge of hunting by distinguishing feces and foot prints of various animals such as tiger, lion, bear, deer, pig, elephant and others. They had belief and faith on the proprietor deity or owner of the forest and therefore before embarking for hunting in the beginning of the year, they always performed worship to appease the *Jwnwm Jwla* (*songraja*) and *Jwnwm Burwi* (*songrani*), the proprietors of forest. In the time of worship they offered *jou* (liquor wine) of one jar, fowl and chick to the *Jwnwm Jwla* and *Jwnwm Burwi* respectively and in the meantime they also acknowledged before the deity about total anticipated hunting of animals for a year.⁶⁴ For hunting they gathered essential tools like nets for trapping the animal, iron spears fitted with wooden handle and wooden logs.⁶⁵

Fishing had been persisted as the part of occupation and amusement of the Bodos. As mentioned by S. Endle, the principal tools used by Bodos for fishing are *palha* and *zekhai*. The *palha* is made of split bamboo by fastening it together, which is about 4 or 4 ½ feet in height and 3 feet in diameter at the base. *Zekhai* has been the most primitive tool for fishing activities used by the Bodos. They also used small pointed metallic spearhead attached to the handle of bamboo logs for fishing purposes.⁶⁶

Besides that some other primitive fishing tools used by them are *folo*, *Kokka*, *burung* (*cheppa*) etc.

Role and Status of Bodo Women

In a tribal community, the role of women is not less in the society by the way of substantial contribution in the economy. But the establishment of the colonial rule in the 19th century produced profound effects and it set in motion a chain of events that brought radical changes in political, social and economic scenario of the nation.

In this post modern society, there is virtually no difference between man and woman except that of the biological difference. Many of the women throughout the globe have excelled in different fields. However in true sense it is limited to few numbers only due to lack of exposure in many walks of life.⁶⁷ It is an undeniable fact that women are in key positions in social, economic as well as family lives of any society. Therefore, the status of women in a society is the index of the standard of its social organizations. The standard of a society varies due to the rise and fall of the status of women. It differs from one to another society in the respective periods of time.

Women play a key role in the society. Without honour and dignity of women in a society, it cannot be perceived its desire goal. Equal empowerment of both men and women leads to prosperity of a nation. Therefore women must get equal opportunity to act and develop simultaneously in the society.⁶⁸

There is a thin matrilineal link in the Bodo society when the widow becomes the owner of all properties belonging to her husband.⁶⁹ The widow may agree to become the wife of a widower following the '*Dhongkha*' or *Dhokaa* system which is socially approved. On premature death of a husband a widow can re-marry and the man lives in the house of a widow as her husband. However, the process is regularized according to the social custom called *Dongkha Habnai*.⁷⁰ The man who wants to marry a widow comes to an agreement and as a token he gives a silver coin to her. It is known as *gongkhon honai*. In the event of becoming a '*Dhonkha*', a widower delinks all connections with his original family and comes to live with the widow permanently. In this marriage, the man is deprived of his paternal property to enjoy his wife's property.⁷¹ If however the widower dies after the marriage, the widow's property goes neither to

him nor can his original family claim any share of the widow's property. The property goes either to the former husbands close relatives or to his sons.⁷²

Inheritance of Widow

(i) After the death of her husband the widow becomes the owner of all the properties belonging to her husband. Judging from that point of view few elements of matrilineal link can be illustrated in the Bodo society.⁷³

(ii) If a widow re-marries second time with a man who is usually unknown to her then she loses the authority on the property of her deceased husband. Sometimes, it is known that the widow is allowed to take the female child of her deceased husband along with her to the house of new husband.⁷⁴

(iii) According to the *Pandulipi* of Brahma *dharma* an issueless widow if not re-married inherits the property of her deceased husband and can live either together with the husband's family or by constructing new house nearby. However, if she re-marries then she is no longer entitled to enjoy the property. Then the property is divided into three parts- one part goes to issueless widow and the rest of the part is divided among the relatives of the deceased or in-laws. However, if the deceased has no relatives then the widow retains all the property.⁷⁵

(iv) As per the tradition of Brahma *dharma*, if any widow remarries then there will be no such types of common feast of food for the villagers.⁷⁶

(v) According to the Brahma *dharma* tradition, if the widow of a joint family remarries then she can claim half of the property that she had received from her relatives during her first marriage.⁷⁷ The property may be movable or immovable.

Impurity

As far as impurity if woman is concern, strict system of segregation is unknown in the traditional Bodo society during the time of new baby born. However, According to the *Pandulipi* of Brahma *dharma* the women in case of menstrual cycle period and in the post-delivery period are not required to cook or engage in any household work till she attains recovery completely.⁷⁸

Female Chastity

According to custom both the young male and female in the Bodo society are bound to lead pure lives before the conjugal life, which uphold the faithful marriage vows in life. For an instance, in a family having many unmarried daughters if anyone of them is suspected violating the law of chastity then the following process for detecting the offender is adopted. To reveal offender the whole family gathers around the sacred *Sijou* tree (*Euphorbia splendens*) in the evening and at the foot of this venerated tree, a quantity of uncooked rice is formally buried and kept for a night. In the next early morning that rice is carefully unearthed and a certain quantity is given to each matured girl to be chewed. On doing so, the offender under pressure of fear of detection is unable to chew the portion of rice given to her. Out of disgrace, the girl is made to disclose the name of her paramour. Accordingly the paramour is compelled to marry the girl with heavy bride price as compensation to the girl's parents for defaming honour of the family in the society.⁷⁹

Woman and Social Organization

In the early decades of twentieth century, the wave of Gurudev Kalicharan's social reformation movement through the Brahma religion brought social awareness among the Bodos. With the objective of empowering women in the society various social organizations were formed such as *Gram Hiteishi Samity* in 1925 at Parbatjowar⁸⁰ and *Mahila Samity*. These organizations initiated comprehensive actions to bring equal development of women in fields of social, education and economic status.⁸¹

Role of Woman in the Economy

Agriculture has been the backbone of economy as well as occupation of the Bodos of Brahmaputra valley through the ages. It is a notable fact that Bodo womenfolk profusely supported men in agricultural fields. They engaged themselves in different agricultural activities. In the harvesting season, Bodo women also participated in reaping the corns. They also have the knowledge of cultivating various types of kitchen garden vegetables, which rendered not only for the consumption purpose but also brought considerable income for daily necessities.⁸²

Apart from the agricultural activity, in the field of animal husbandry, women played an important role in procuring sources of income in the family. They had a significant contribution on rearing pigs, goats and fowls which were used for food purposes as well as for religious purpose. It also helped in supporting the economic necessity of the family. The Bodo womenfolk have lots of contribution behind this economic enterprise in sustaining of the family.

Bodo women also preserved the culture of Bodo society by the activity of weaving cloths. They are expert and self sufficient in producing various kinds of cloths both for men and women. They are expert in portraying different *Agars* or designs on the cloths. They weave *dokona*, *gamsa*, *fasra*, *aronai* etc. in various colours and designs. By selling of that item of cloths the Bodo women earned handsome money, which in greater sense immensely supported the economic milieu of the family.⁸³

Women in Religion

One may determine the status of an individual in a society from the religious point of view. The social status of an individual vitally guided and accorded by its rites and rituals. Religious privileges enjoyed by women in the society throw light on their position in the society. In early history, the Aryans regarded woman as untouchable during her occurrence of menstrual cycle. In Vedic period women enjoyed all religious rights and privileges equally with males. In the religious rites and ceremonies the presence and co-operation of woman was absolutely essential and it literally increased her religious value in the society⁸⁴. By nature women are more religious and devotional than men. During the performance of religious rites Bodo women delivered their role in various ways in the occasion of *Kherai Puja* as *daudini* (female shaman).

Trends of Religious Change and Continuity

Religion is one of the important elements of the society. Both society and religion are inter-related. Various social institutions of a community solely depend on the nature of customs and religion. Religion may influence the belief and faith, social behaviour and various ethics in a particular society. Due to various religious forces in the society, changes may take place in the field of socio-economic and cultural behavior of the people.

Bathou Religion

Bathou is the primitive and traditional religion of the Bodos. S. Endle had explained the religion of the Bodos as ‘distinctly animistic and of which underlying principal is characteristically one of fear and dread’⁸⁵. Regarding the religious nature of the Bodos, in the Census of Assam, 1931, based on the reports of the Sub-Deputy Collectors of Gossaigaon and Sidli circles under the undivided Goalpara district, C.S. Mullan stated that ‘*Bodos* or *Meches* writes *Boro* after their name as surname. They do not follow the Hindu rites and do not follow the gods and goddesses of the Hindus. They perform one *puja* at harvest time every year and sacrifices goats, pigs, fowls, pigeons, etc., to please their gods. They believe that their gods take possession of a woman whom they place before the offerings and it is through the expression of this possessed woman that they know of the desire of their gods’. The report also stated that the Bodos and the Mech are the same and they practice the same form of religion and have the same habits, manners and customs. According to the report the Bodos are Animists in religion and there was no any existing difference between the Bodos and Meches.⁸⁶

Bodos principally worshipped the Lord Siva in the form of *Bathou Bwrai* who is known in different names such as *Gila Dambra*, *Khwria Bwrai*, *Sri-Bwrai* or *Sibrai* and *Bathou Bwrai*.⁸⁷ P.C. Bhattacharya mentioned the *Bathou* as the supreme god among the Bodos and linked it to the five elements of creation. According to the myths of the Bodos, the *Sibrai* with the help of his wife *Sibrui* or *Siburwi* created this universe and *Mwnsinsin* as the first man on the earth. However, *Mwnsinsin* remained as celibacy for whole life and therefore, *Sibrai* and his wife created *Darimuba* as male and *Singridowba* as female with the objective to propagate human population on the earth. Along with this *Bathou (sibrai)* created *Sijou* (*Euphorbia splendens*) plant as the first tree and emblem of the Supreme God at the altar.⁸⁸ Formally the origin of the term *Bathou* comprises as following:

$Mwnba + Gwthou = Ba + thou = Bathou$ from *Ba-Thou*. Here, the *mwnba* means ‘five numbers’ and *gwthou* means ‘deep’ in Bodo language, which thus explains the ‘five deep spiritual things’ or ‘the Religion of five philosophies’.⁸⁹ It also closely related with the five elements of creation of nature such as soil, water, fire, air and sky or space.

Likewise, the Bodos believe on the five supreme ‘*Gurus*’ who taught the principles of *Bathou* worship among the Bodos since the immemorial period. The teachings of the five supreme *gurus* in the society are⁹⁰:

Aham Guru: This *guru* taught about the rites and rituals about the *puja* and also the essential requirements during the *puja*. It is therefore very obvious that during the initial chanting of *mantras* in the *Bathou* religion, the *pujari* (priest) always utter ‘*Aham*’ for saluting the gods and goddesses.

Mwnsinsin Guru: It is believed that *Mwnsinsin Guru* had taught five social laws among the Bodos which hitherto continued as traditional laws amongst them to punish and purify the offenders in the society. These are – *Agarbad, Phongslotbad, Daokibad, Khaoyalibad* and *Khoulobodbad*.

Aena Guru: This *guru* taught about the rites and rituals for performing various duties during the birth of a baby child.

Kena Guru: The *Kena guru* is believed to have taught regarding the ritual of traditional marriage to the Bodos.

Phwdse Guru: This *guru* taught about the principles of sanctifying to various unchastes in the society.

Kherai Puja: *The Kherai puja* is the greatest religious festival of the traditional *Bathou* religion of the Bodos. *Kherai puja* is an important part of *Bathou* religion and both are incomplete without each other. Therefore it can be termed as the two sides of the same coin. The main purpose of the celebration of this *puja* is both for private or individual and public life for the welfare of the villagers. The *pujas* is held once or twice in a year collectively. The *Kherai* is also performed before and after the cultivation to propitiate different gods and goddesses for the success of agriculture. Kameswar Brahma divided *Kherai puja* into four kinds. These were *Darshan Kherai* or *Mainao Kherai*, *Umrao Kherai* or *Ashu kherai*, *Phalo Kherai* or *Danswrang Kherai* and *Noaoni Kherai* or *family Kherai*.⁹¹

Trends of Reformation Movement in Colonial Period

Till the beginning of the nineteenth century before the introduction of the Brahma religion among the Bodos the social and cultural traditions of the Bodos were almost in an entangled state due to the undue elements of religious beliefs and illiteracy. At that period bulk of Bodo community were all followers of *Bathouism*, a primitive traditional religion of the Bodos. As a tradition, while worshipping they offered *zou* and even sacrificed fowls and animals to the gods and goddesses in the name of religion. In the name of festival, they consumed lots of liquor *zou* and meats.⁹² It was somewhat of a kind of un-cultured way of social living when people belonging to other community at the same time lived far better than them. The social customs and rituals were quite unreasonable and demanding compared to other sects and religions followed during that time. In that period due to the lack of proper education and good leaders among the Bodos certain social ills had infected the society. The dominating odd cultures hindered the development of the society. The excessive use of liquor, forceful marriage of girls, large scale of going of womenfolk to market and *melas*, acceptance of high rate of *Phon Thaka* (bride price) in lieu of a daughter's marriage were nuisances that constituted the customs and cultures of the community. To draw the whole picture it was really in a pity state of affairs. It was perhaps due to this reason that the upper caste more particularly the Hindu neighbours called them as *Mlechch* and treated them as much as untouchables and with much hatred. The consequence was again more serious. Some Bodos sensed the truth that the ways they were adapting themselves to were all nothing but worthless. Apparently they were induced by advanced factors of the other social groups.⁹³

Consequently, under such deplorable condition some Bodo people started to convert into various religions. The educated and well to do Bodo families were also looked down upon and treated disparagingly. To hide from these sorts of disrespectful and disgraceful manner bulk of the Bodo people had converted from the traditional Bathou religion to Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Ek Charan Namadharma of Sankardeva.⁹⁴ Immediately a large section of the Bodos adapted and converted to any of these three religions. The Bodo inhabitants of Panbari area of the district of Goalpara converted to Islam. It was absolutely a kind of social aggression of the Bodos by the

other social groups which lead to a complete loss of self identity. In the early part of the twentieth century Vaishnavism rapidly spread in the interior tribal areas of Assam. The descendants of Sankari *gossains* followed the Christian missionary model to spread their religion among the tribal people of Assam. Thus, a large section of the Bodo people in the Brahmaputra valley adapted *ek-saran* during that period.⁹⁵

In the matter of social change religion primitively occupies an important place. Likewise the Bodo society also could not escape from it. The traditional religion of the Bodos could not remain isolated from it for a long time which later came under the influence of the Hindu cult and Christianity.⁹⁶

Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma as a Socio-Economic Reformer

At this critical juncture a dynamic leader was required in the society to guide the people towards the right direction. The emergence of Kalicharan Mech, who later came to be known as Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was in the right call of the time as a messiah. He brought a new epoch in the history of Bodos. From the very beginning, he was aware of the condition of the Bodo society as he observed all these happenings and events of the society that he lived in. In such a situation he resolved to find a way to safeguard the Bodo society from the gradual aggression by other religious groups. Although, he was not against the philosophy of any other religions namely, Vaishnavism, Christianity, Islam and Bathou; he did not support in full the way of practices within the latter. He could well understand that reformation was required in the traditional thoughts of the people and their cultural practices as well. At the same time, he also felt that it was impossible to root out all the evils at the same time. It was because the people were extremely conservative and any direct reformative measure against conventional religion and beliefs would be disastrous. People were also adverse to others interfering on their beliefs and faith. Therefore, he sincerely contemplated to convince the people under his influence. He brilliantly analyzed logically on the different aspects of possible changes in the society. To his observation, he could identify the leading social factors which would be working against any reformative actions. The excessive use of liquor was the main factor that resulted in the indulgence and negligence of people from the work culture. Secondly, the undue charity functions through the *Kherai* dances in the name of worshipping *sibrai* had dithered the children

from going to schools for education. Thirdly, believing and worshipping of so many gods and goddesses paved the way for various misbeliefs and superstitions in the mind of the young groups as well as the productive adults. Above all, the lack of education and illiteracy was the sole cause of the reality.⁹⁷ Excessive use of *Zuo* (rice beer) was in vogue as because it had been produced by the every Bodo household indigenously. As a consequence it had a bad impact on their society and made them indolent.⁹⁸

To eradicate the social evils which existed within the society he determined to find a better alternative with a hope to make a refined society. Even though, he was a little learned, he was wise to think that it was the time to usher up the scientific outlook and ignore the unworthy celebrities of traditions which blighted the community; captivating its people in the realm of mistaken domains. He believed that animism coherent with various superstitious beliefs in the name of pleasing gods in Bathou worship was nonetheless the root of all barriers of social development. In fact, Kalicharan found that a renaissance was a must to uphold their nationality. He thought to beget a new ideology that could be cultivated in the minds of fellow creatures to make a basis and bring a sea change in their socio-cultural behaviour. Moreover, he was wisely aware that there were some fundamental customs and practices in tradition, which in any terms of circumstances could not be totally denied to conservation. Eventually to bring reformation in the society, he adapted the philosophy of the 'religion' as one of the single competitive mediums to cover all social phenomena for security, progress and development of the community.⁹⁹

Kalicharan was in search of a religion that would help him embrace all aspects of the present day needs for development. He was able to note the branches of philosophy-faith, education, economics and lastly politics. These were the firm basis for development of a nation. The absence of knowledge on any one of the said branches would certainly be a setback for a society or a nation. Accordingly, he was tempted to find his most expected religion soon. He read and went through the religious books such as *Geeta*, *the Bible*, *the Quoran* and the others. But none of these could satisfy him. He was also aware that religious transformation would mean work for the cultural extinction and the rest only in the name of the God. There must be retention of the rich cultural values as well as the language of the Bodos. It should never be a kind of all and

all diversion from ethnicity or self identity. So he avoided the said name of the religion as there were such possibilities. The philosophy of Hindu religious cult of *Brahmanism* also could not convince him. The question which religion would be suitable for the Bodos, was itching all the time in his mind. He felt the need of a religion which had the scope to retain the necessary elements of the Bodo culture without any harm. The necessary elements were the art and crafts, the language, the customary laws, traditional festivals, any attractive and valuable cultures and such that had social merits. He wanted his way of religion to be very simple and easily manageable by anybody from all walks of life but there were all the essentials of divinity. His intentions were blessed by God. Once on a certain day in 1903,¹⁰⁰ it happened in house of his close friend, Charan Mandal. On that hot and sunny day he was traveling to Bikribada which was located on the banks of the river Chilai, on some work that was related to his timber business. However, due to a daylong walk which was somewhat tiring, he decided to rest for a while at his friend's camp. Incidentally, on that fateful day, Charan Mandal was away from his camp. He was on the way to Calcutta for his business purpose. Kalicharan nonetheless, decided to lie down and take some rest at Charan Mandal's camp. However, at the same time his attention was drawn to a book that was underneath the pillow, and suddenly Kalicharan's curious mind would not be satisfied without browsing through it. This was the first encounter with the Brahma religion. The book was none other than the '*Saranritya Kriya*' written by Mohini Mohan Chattopadhyaya in Bengali. This book was based on the Brahmaism and carried the preaching of Swami Sivanarayan Paramahanmsa, the founder of the Brahma religion.¹⁰¹ This book was a description of the philosophy of Brahma and a theory on the creation of the universe along with the fundamentals of religion and the doctrine of oneness of God. He read the book thoroughly and was fully satisfied with the subject matter of the full text of the book. He found that the contents were very logical and felt that he had got what he searched for a long time.¹⁰²

The truth, Kalicharan wanted to discover for a long time was really now at his hand. He found there the actual means to worship the God and attain him. He had firm belief on the monotheism instead of worshipping many gods and goddesses. The book *Saranritya Kriya* also tells that only 'light' (the Surjya) the *Surjya Narayan*, is the Almighty, the creator of the world and all beings on the earth or elsewhere.

Understanding the theory and the principle of the book, he finally decided to follow it. He was sure that the most respected doctrine of religion was *Brahma-ism*. It was the most practicable and the easiest way to follow and had the scientific outlook for the practical utility of social or individual life of men, women and children from all walks of life. He believed and was confident that religion would help the Bodos to come out from the intriguing mesh of social evils. He consulted the theory and the practices to be done for that *dharma* and the philosophy of the book with other fellows in the camp. They also understood the acceptability as well as the utility of the principle.¹⁰³

When Charan Mandal returned to his camp, he was surprised to find his friend there and even more surprised, to find him bombarded with questions about the book and the Brahma religion. To Kalicharan's enquiry he answered, that he had procured the book from Calcutta during the stay with a zamindar, Suren Karta, when he had been there for his treatment. Charan Mandal confessed that the book had a strong impact on him. Therefore, he had already adopted the Brahma religion of Swami Sibnarayan Paramahansa. *Saranriya Kriya* had a tremendous impact on Kalicharan too. After having heard from Charan Mandal, within a very short time he too decided to become a follower of Swami Sibnarayan Paramahansa and convert to the Brahma religion.¹⁰⁴ Swami Sibnarayan Paramahansa, the founder of Brahma religion was originally from Uttar Pradesh, but he made Calcutta as the centre of preaching his religion.

Kalicharan was very eager to meet the Swami. So he found a way through Suren Karta, the then *Zamindar* of Bagaribari who had a close relationship with Khoula Mech, father of Kalicharan and was also the disciple of Swami. Kalicharan became an *Ijadar* after his father's demise and continued to maintain close business ties with the *Zamindar*. Thus, he had no difficulty in requesting *Zamindar* Suren Karta to arrange for a meeting between him and Swamiji. Messages were dispatched by the *Zamindar* and a meeting accordingly was arranged between Kalicharan and Swamiji. Kalicharan along with three other friends named Jamadar Mech, Karan Mandal, and Charan Mandal set out on their journey to meet the Swami. Swami was expecting Kalicharan and when he arrived, he was given a warm welcome at his residence in Bhowanipur, a place in the heart of Calcutta. Kalicharan did not disappoint Swamiji's expectations and the latter instantly took a liking for him. Kalicharan's calm spirit, passionate nature, fervent zeal,

strength of personality, intelligence, a sense of deep comprehension and knowledge, immediately found favour with him. After all, Swami with great interest and care started to teach and explain to him the principles of Brahmanism and made Kalicharan come under his wings. The basic ideology of Brahmanism on which the religion was based was that there is only one Supreme God, and it was He who must be worshipped. The worship of this omnipotent and omnipresent God is necessary to sustain us spiritually, ethically, aesthetically and emotionally and would enable us to achieve our goals in life.¹⁰⁵

In Brahma religion, God is worshipped in the form of fire or the Sun God. He is the main force around which life in this universe exists. Thus the worship of the almighty, in the form of fire is of primordial importance. *Ogni Mukhe dewa khadonti*, that is, fire is Brahma and Brahma gives life to the entire earth and all its beings. Brahma is universal, endless and encompassing. Where there is Brahma there is *Satya* or truth. Brahma is fire; he is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of this universe.

Yogyahuti or *Yajnahuti* is an important aspect of the Brahma religion, for the smoke that emanates from it while performing the religious ceremony is supposed to be purifying. The smoke cleanses and purifies the environment and as it rises up, it takes the shape of clouds in the sky and sheds rain to give lives in the earth. It brings about renewal, rejuvenation and life in plants, animal and humans alike. Moreover, the *Yogyahuti* purges the human mind and instills in men a greater inner strength and confidence.¹⁰⁶

Thus, it was with this reformation attitude in mind that he started to propagate the Brahma religion among the Bodos, which he felt was most suitable for their community and could successfully erase away the evil practices inherited in the old tradition. Kalicharan with an utmost zeal, dedication and a sense of purpose carried the message of the Brahma religion far and wide among the people. On the efforts of Kalicharan, the conversion became easy, as hundreds and thousands of Bodos accepted the new thought of religion. They accepted Kalicharan as their Guru and henceforth, addressed him as Gurudev. Kalicharan came to be known as Gurudev to his people, since he guided them spiritually, religiously and otherwise towards the path of progress and reformation.

There are six ideological teachings in the *Brahma Dharma*. These are as follows¹⁰⁷:

- (i) *Atma* and *Param atma* (The Universe) should be kept clean.
- (ii) *Ahimsa* should be followed to all living things.
- (iii) *Yajnahuti* should be performed with full devotion and pure mind.
- (iv) The eyes and mind should be centrally focused on the fire altar of *yajnahuti* with full respect.
- (v) One should recall and dedicate the name of The *Param Brahma* by reciting *Omkar Mantra*.
- (vi) One should be attached to 'Complete' (Omnipresent), the supreme almighty God.

Introduction of Pandulipi

The Bodo society by and large in course of time due to social intercourse with the people of diverse cultural background had undergone material as well as psychological changes.¹⁰⁸ Gurudev Kalicharan played an important role in the task of reformation of the Bodo society. Besides preaching the Brahma religion among the masses, he encouraged them to accept new social changes and adopt a new way of life.¹⁰⁹ In order to challenge the complex social situation arising out of social- economic intercourse it was felt necessary to bring certain changes in the prevailing customs and practices. Hence, basing on traditional laws of the community, he initiated compiling of a written standard Code of Laws known as '*Pandulipi*' or *Boroni Pandulipi* with the help of his close associates.¹¹⁰ It is a social law book which deals with guiding the people in their day to day activities and on social matters. Gurudev felt that the standardized social laws and practices to be followed which the *Pandulipi* endorsed would be fruitful in establishing sense of oneness among the Bodos.¹¹¹ After long days of hardships in compilation of *Pandulipi*, it was finally placed before the masses in 1934, at the Fourth Bodo Mahasanmilani which was held at Kajigaon the native village of Gurudev. In the history of Bodo the introduction of the *Pandulipi* is an important

landmark. It for the first time being established the common code of conduct among the Bodos. It proved to be the base for unity, integrity and brotherhood among the Bodo community.¹¹² The villagers began to abide by the rules of the *Pandulipi* which contained the rights and duties of the members, do's and don'ts and atonement proceedings etc. In short it is said as 'Code of Customary Laws' of the Bodos. Since the *Pandulipis* are not coordinated homogenous sets of law, they differ in context and application from area to area. However, the basic issues pertaining to inheritance of property, succession to offices of socio-religious and socio-political nature and liability of atonement on committing unnatural and unsocial offences, are more or less identical.¹¹³

Describing the place of Bodo women in the Bodo society K. Brahma stated "Although the social structure of the Bodos is based on the patrilineal system, the place of women in the Bodo society is high. If there is no male child in the family then the property is distributed among the daughters. They can enjoy such properties even after their marriages."¹¹⁴ Further, he added that if there is a single female child in the family where there is no male child, then the entire property is owned by her after the death of the father. Apart from these general rules of inheritance, the Bodos follow certain rules in passing their property considering situation.

Gurudev and Sanmilanis

It is well mentioned that the Bodos are the numerous and important section of the non-Aryan people among the tribes of Assam and later on due to the engulfing process of conversion to Hinduism, discarding even their language, culture and titles, their number is found decreasing horribly in Assam; rather a great bulk of them have been completely assimilated into the fold of Assamese. The Bodos who were known as the great race reigned the so called Mlechcha kingdom in the prehistoric period for a long time and later on the Ahoms and the Britishers had snatched away their entire kingdoms by way of political hypocrisy and through wars. Of late, under the tumult of the politics of self-restoration of the high-caste Hindus and the Muslims in the pre-independent India which bustled this North-Eastern region, the indigenous tribal leaders were somehow awakened and formed 'The All Assam Tribal League' on April 17, 1933, at Roha of the then Nagaon District, under the president ship of Jadav Chandra

Khakhlary and Bhimbar Deuri as its Secretary. But it is to be mentioned here that the Bodos of the southern bank of the Brahmaputra of the erstwhile Goalpara district gave birth to a social organization '*Habraghat Boro Sanmiloni*' in the year 1912. They also formed another literary organization named '*Dakshinkul Boro Sahitya Sanmiloni*' in 1918. Meanwhile the Bodo students of that time formed '*Boro Satra Sanmilani*', a Bodo students' organization with Sobharam Brahma as president and Satish Chandra Basumatary as secretary in 1919. This *Bodo Satra Sanmilani* exalted vigorous literary revolution amongst the Bodos by publishing many magazines, books and dramas etc. Thus those Bodo organizations brought awakening to a great extent amongst the Bodos for their right of survival since 1912.¹¹⁵

Early 20th century colonial period shows the landmark of trends of social reformation among the Bodos. Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma's place is of primordial importance in the Bodo history. Today the Bodo society rests not only on his role as a preacher of the Brahma religion but also as one of the greatest and earliest reformers of the Bodo society. It may be mentioned here that owing to several ills and unhygienic practices, the Bodos were disliked by other communities and were treated like untouchables. They were generally treated like the pariahs of the society.¹¹⁶ The *Mahasanimilani* played an important role in the social reformation of the Bodos. The *Mahasanimilanis* convened four conferences in successive period of time. Through these *Mahasanimilanis*, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma visioned to foster unity and reformation in the society which was the need of the hour. Accordingly first *Mahasanimilani* was held in 1921 at Bhaoraguri of the then Goalpara district under Jadav Chandra Khakhlary and Rupnath Brahma as President and Secretary respectively.

The Bodo *Mahasanimilani* for the first time provided a platform where the problems plaguing the Bodo society were taken up for discussion and a comprehensive declaration was adopted for the upliftment of the society and to do way with the social ills. As a stepping stone towards this direction, the Boro *Mahasanimilani* was a considerable success. In this congregation, which talked at length about the then situations, problems, resolutions and prospects of this community, some action plans that would be able to address these issues and work towards the greater interest of the people were adopted.¹¹⁷ On the success of the first Boro *Mahasanimilani*, Gurudev

Kalicharan was much satisfied and felt that the adoption of such meaningful resolutions would go long way towards eliminating the social evils of the society and take it towards progress.¹¹⁸ They also felt that on the continuous practice of the resolutions they adopted the Bodos would command respect from the other community. However, Gurudev clearly perceived that the Bodos have remained a stagnant society, and have so far not accepted the changes of time, which have contributed to their backwardness, ignorance, negligence, and decay, which also explain why they have still clung to the redundant social customs, manners and traditions. Therefore, second Boro *Mahasanmilani* was held in 1925 at Rangia with objectives to resolve equal educational rights to both boys and girls, rearing of pigs be banned and Brahma religion be one and all to be followed by the Bodos.¹¹⁹ The third Bodo *Mahasanmilani* was convened in 1929 at Roumari near Bongaigaon aiming to ban consumption of liquor, to prevent Bodo women from going to places and melas and to ban animal sacrifices in the name of religion and also to abolish the use of traditional musical instruments such as *Kham*, *Siphung* and *Jotha*.¹²⁰ Similarly, the fourth Bodo *Mahasanmilani* was convened in 1934 at Kajigaon, the native place of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. In this session some important agendas were also discussed. Among them the *Bodoni Pandulipi*, social laws book for Bodos with a view to guide the society in right direction.¹²¹

Some of the proposals were well accepted while there were some points which did not go well with the participants. The banning of the use of traditional musical instruments of the *Kham*, *Siphung* and *Jotha* raised a furor among the people and majority of them staunchly rejected such a view. Ultimately the proposal was abandoned.¹²²

Apart from the *Mahasanmilanis*, under the initiative of Gurudev some other social *sanmilanies* were also organized such as *Danguri Jubak Sanmilani* in 1920, *Purba Goalpara Jubak Sanmilani* in 1922 and *Kamrup Bodo Unnati Sadhini Sabha* on 25th December, 1925.¹²³

Ryot Sabhas

Gurudev with his inspiring zeal for the wellbeing of the village people encouraged to establish Ryot Sabhas in the Bodo villages. He enrolled the farmers of

the respective villages as its member and he himself became the President of the Sabha. The main objective of the Sabha was to help the needy and poor farmers and to protect them from the clutches of money lenders. Its members held discussions with the farmers on different issues and problems faced by them. Besides improving the cause of the farmers this organization in the long run also played a role to serve nation building and instill a sense of common togetherness in the village.¹²⁴

Mahila Samity

The Bodo society from the ancestral period follows patriarchal line with a few elements of matriarchal characteristics.¹²⁵ During the time of Gurudev Kalicharan the condition of women in Bodo society was pathetic one. They were subjected to forceful marriage, had no share in the family property and treated as inferior to men. Gurudev observed that without empowering them the reformation of the society would be stagnant, and therefore to get rid of from this he made up an idea to form women's organization to look after women's welfare and right. Thus, the *Mahila Samiti* was established in the Bodo dominated villages and many women became its member. They gathered and took up discussions on different problems faced by the women and tried to find out the definite solution of it.¹²⁶

The *Mahila Samity* also convened annual conference. In this convention, the women representatives from different villages attended. This *Samity* emphasized education for the female child and asked all the Bodo mothers to send their daughters to the school for the greater interest of the society. This *Samity* also focused on the need and importance of hygiene and cleanliness.

Economic Reforms

Till the early 20th century, the economic condition of the Bodo was considerably very poor compared to the other neighbourhood communities. They were somewhat ignorant in the fields of trade and business. There was lack of educated people to make the common people aware in the society. Because of these sorts of backwardness they were kept aloof from better opportunities. Kalicharan Brahma from the beginning with the idea of preaching the *Brahma Dharma*, determined to rescue the acute socio-economic impediments in Bodo society. With the objective of economic reform in the

society, Kalicharan Brahma established various social foundations and organizations. Such as:

Brahma Company Foundation

In 1912 Kalicharan Brahma instituted a Bodo traders association known as 'Brahma Company' at Dhubri for maintaining the timber trade. Bir Narayan Brahma was appointed as the first President of this company. The main objective of this company was to encourage timber trade among the Bodos and to render financial help to the traders. They dealt in trade of valuable timbers such as *Sal* and *non-Sal* from the Parbotjowar by attaining Government clearance of royalties. They supplied them to Calcutta, Dacca and Bihar state. Undoubtedly, with the help of this company many of the new traders got access in trade and commerce and contributed to improve economic condition of the society.

Gram Hiteishi Samity

This organization was constituted in 1925 under the Parbatjhora estate of Goalpara district. The main objective of the Samity was to develop health, education and economic condition in the villages¹²⁷. Gurudev from the very beginning was aware of the backwardness of the Bodo villages. With this intention to eradicate the economic disparity, The *Gram Hiteishi Samity* was formed with the vision of village economic development. The Samity rendered financial help to the farmers to purchase important agricultural equipments, livestock, seeds etc. Further they helped the peasants to fetch their agricultural products at the market at suitable prices. The volunteers of the organization visited villages to educate and equip knowledge on the methods of farming the farmers on agriculture and different seasonal crops.¹²⁸

In order to help the womenfolk, they encouraged and imparted trainings on weaving through this Samity. In addition, it successfully set- up weaving centre in the village of Banyaguri. This became its central office. Harimahan Brahma and Shibnath Marak happened to be its office bearers for the first time. In simple words, this Samity under the guidance of Gurudev played the role of co-operative society for the wellbeing of the poor Bodo village farmers.¹²⁹

Opening of Weaving Center

With the objective of enriching economic and cultural development among the Bodos, Kalicharan Brahma encouraged many women by establishing weaving centre in 1925. Many Bodo women got engaged in this weaving center and got the opportunity to earn economy by selling wove cloths. Apart from this, many of the new weavers got the opportunity to learn the skill of weaving. With help of this weaving center many of the Bodo women established new weaving centers in different villages.

Farmer's Organization

Since the early days Bodo farmers had been following the traditional methods of farming. They lacked adopting new scientific methods. Many of the fertile lands were left uncultivated in the villages. In 1923 with the aim to encourage the farmers and improving their conditions, Kalicharan Brahma gathered a public meeting at Goalpara and established a 'Abadari Afat' or 'Farmer's Association'. In the meeting various economic hurdles of the farmers were widely discussed and they also discussed the way to overcome from it. The main objective of the establishment of this association was to make the farmers aware about the advancement in cultivation techniques and strengthen the economic condition in the society. In this meeting Gurudev Kalicharan delivered his lectures as –

*“Gao gaoni deha, no-bang, si-jwm, tursi-lota sakwn-sikwn lakinagou. Mai gorsekou, Mwsou masekou, takha taisekou jwtnw lakinagou. Goti-goti bahainanwi janagou. Gaobw mahariao mabwrwi jougahwnw hanw sannanwi lanagou”.*¹³⁰

(Free English translation of the above statement: One should maintain self health and household articles ever safe and clean. One should take care about a piece of paddy, a cow, and even a rupee. One should learn to utilize a meager. One should also learn how he/she could contribute for the development of community).

Changes in the Religious Beliefs and Practices

With the intervention of new faith and belief among the Bodos, the traditional practices of the Bathou religion have been overridden by various new systems of

customs and traditions. As stated by S. Brahma, the refined form of traditional *Bathou Dharma* followers began to perform the *Yajnahuti* in the wedding function as well as in the other ceremonies.¹³¹ It has already been stated that after the introduction of the *Brahma Dharma*, a new era had started in the society by launching reformation movement in education, socio-culture and economic fields. As a result, belief and practices underwent changes in the field of religion. These can be mentioned as below –

(i) As stated above, in the traditional *Bathou Dharma*, people are completely animist and the followers principally worship *Bathou Bwrai* or *Sibrai* as the supreme God as well as they believe on existence of many gods and goddesses. However, the *Brahma dharma* is completely monotheist and they worship the *Param Brahma* as supreme god.¹³² According to the *Pandulipi* of *Brahma dharma* followers if someone is found worshipping more gods and goddesses then the person is being imposed a fine of Rs. 5 or can perform *Yajnahuti* by inviting *purohit* (priest).¹³³

(ii) In the traditional *Bathou Dharma* to propitiate the gods and goddesses, the followers offer birds and animal sacrifice as homage in *puja* and festivals. However, in the *Brahma dharma* custom at the time of performing any religious rites, the followers offer *prasads* of various types of corn and other commodities consisting of sweets, milks ghee, scents, chandan, aguru in the mid of the burning flame of *Yajnahuti* dedicating to the *Brahma* by chanting Sanskrit *mantras*.¹³⁴ Because they believe that killing and victimizing of other's life in the name of god would not be right way to appease the supreme god.

(iii) In the traditional *Bathou dharma*, the main *pujas* except the *garja*¹³⁵ *puja* is usually performed at the altar of the *Bathou* in the courtyard of homestead without performing *yajnahuti*. The concept of a separate shrine for worshipping the *Bathou* was unknown. However, according to *Brahma dharma*, it is believed that *Brahma* is eternally self-realized, self-perfect and self-enjoying. Hence, the performance of *Hom-Yajana* by reciting *Gayatri Mantram* is taught as the most important to lead oneself to the *Brahma* in this religion.¹³⁶ Usually the *Brahma dharma* followers perform *hom-yajana* at the courtyard of homestead for the family *yajana* and for the whole villager at the respective *mandir* or shrines.

(iv) As mentioned above, the Bathou *dharma* followers usually perform various types of seasonal as well as family *Kherai pujas* in a year to propitiate gods and goddesses for the welfare of the family and village. Similarly, the Brahma *dharma* followers usually perform *yajnahuti* at the conclusion of paddy harvesting, *Bwisagu* (New Year festival of Bodo), *Mahalaya*, *Maghw Purnima* (full moon of Assamese month Magh), *Dol Purnima* (Full moon at the Doljatra Festival of Hindu).¹³⁷ Apart from this the followers also perform *yajnahuti* by inviting *purohit* (priest) for the welfare of the family.

(v) Any hard and fast customs regarding abstaining on consuming of meat and liquor during the occasion of *pujas* and festivals among the traditional Bathou *dharma* followers is unknown. However, among the *Brahma dharma* followers, the religious custom forbids one to consume meat and rice-beer on such occasions of *yajnahuti*. Instead of it tea, lime juice, *fitha* (rice cake), *sithao* (folded cake of pounded rice), milk, fruits, and vegetarian *ondlakari* (curry of rice powder adding soda) and dal are commonly allowed to partake on that occasion.¹³⁸

Somaj Udrainai arw Saja Hwnai

There are substantial customary laws among the Bodos to mollify various judicial matters through the village council since the ancient past. It has already been mentioned that the Bodos had been traditionally following five customary laws, which was laid down by *Mwnsinsin guru* one of the prophet of law giver of Bathou *dharma*. Hence, the *Somaj udrainai arw saja hwnai* is the process of punishing and purifying the offenders through these set of laws in the Bodo society. However, the transformation of traditional religion due to intervention of various cults of Hindu religion in the Bodo society considerably affected the traditional laws and customs, because a large section of the Bodo society embraced the new thoughts propagated by other religions. More significantly the emergence of Brahma *dharma* and its social reformation movement in the society brought many changes in elements of customary laws, which had been refined by retaining some elements of the former. Most of the customary laws enacted among the followers of Brahma *dharma* are almost alike with the traditional law of the

Bathou *dharma*. The elements of change and continuity of the customary laws in the society are highlighted below:

(i) As per the *Pandulipi* of Brahma *dharma* in the event of killing a cow by a person, the offender has to purify himself by performing *yajnahuti* and has to pay a fine of Rs.25.50 to the villagers.¹³⁹ In such a case both the Brahma and Bathou followers adopted *Agorbad*¹⁴⁰ rule for purifying the offender.

(ii) In the Brahma *dharma*, if a person indulges in perverted relationships with any animals like cow, buffalo, horse, goat or birds then the offender has to perform *yajnahuti* to purify and offer meal to the villagers as an act of penance. In addition to that the offender has to pay a fine of Rs. 25.50 to the villagers as per the *Agorbad* rule.¹⁴¹ This penance of *Agorbad* law is in vogue among both the Bathou and Brahma *dharma* followers.

(iii) In case of any perverted relationship of any person with the nearest blood relatives, then both the customary laws of Brahma and Bathou *dharma* follow the *Agorbad* system of rules to give penance to the offender. However, in Brahma *dharma* it had been implied with slight modification. For instance, if anyone has an illicit relation with his close blood relative whether she is an aunt, a stepmother, a sister, a sister-in-law etc. then the offender has to perform *yajnahuti* and at the same time, he has to provide food to the villagers as an act of contrition. In addition to that he is imposed a fine of Rs. 25.50 by the villagers as per the *Agorbad* law.¹⁴²

(iv) *Phongslothbad*¹⁴³ system of traditional Bathou customary laws is also followed by Brahma *dharma* followers with slight modification in their manner of rites. For instance, if a person indulges in any kind of illicit relationship with a girl or a woman with whom he is not related to by blood then the offender initially has to perform *yajnahuti* to purify him and has to provide foods to the villagers as an act of repentance. Apart from this, he has to pay a fine of Rs. 10.50 to the villager as per the *Phongslothbad* law.¹⁴⁴

(v) Regarding the disposal of dead body, the earliest Bodo society mostly preferred the ancient method of either burying or leaving aside openly at the village

graveyard field for the wild animals. The cremation of dead body was seldom known in the earliest Bodo society. In some cases, even the alive people wished their way of disposal before the demise¹⁴⁵. However, after the intervention of the Brahma *dharma* in the society the followers adopted the method of either cremation or burying the dead body at the village cremation ground. But in the case of death of a child below two years of age, the Brahma followers usually prefer for burial method instead of cremation.¹⁴⁶ The Christian religion follower among the Bodo also usually follow the burial method at the event of disposal of dead body.

(vi) The Brahma *dharma* followers also retained the *Khaoyalibad*¹⁴⁷ system of customary law in their society with slight modification. As per the custom, the personal belongings of the dead person should be burnt or destroyed. For an instance, if someone is found retaining the belongings of dead person then the person should undergo the purification process by performing *yajnahuti*. In addition to that the accused person has to pay a considerable fine as per the *Khaoyalibad* law.¹⁴⁸

(vii) In the traditional Bodo society, as per the custom on the completion of the disposal of the dead body, the persons attending it must purify themselves by chewing *narzi gwrn* (dried leaves of jute) for few moments and throw it by uttering ‘*tu tu alai-phalai*’, which is called *narzi orgarnai* in Bodo language. Thus, it literally means that they have been separated physically with the departed soul forever. However, among the followers of Brahma *dharma*, as per the *Pandulipi* on the occasion of the same, they perform purification through fumigating or *dhuna*.¹⁴⁹ Whatsoever the case, in some places more occasionally, the Brahma *dharma* followers still perform the traditional system of the former.

(viii) Traditionally the laws do not sanction extra marital affairs strictly in the Bodo society. According to the Brahma *dharma* followers, one cannot marry a married woman before her divorce. If someone violates the social law and marries a woman before attaining her divorce then the man has to pay a fine of Rs. 120 to her ex-husband for marring his wife. In addition to that he also has to forfeit a fine of Rs. 10 to the village authority as an act of penance.¹⁵⁰ Though the above forfeited fines are meager but it was high value for realizing by the common people in those days.

(ix) In the traditional Bodo society most of the penances are mainly determined by the six customary laws. However, there are some other penances which do not constitute the six customary laws. In this regard, Indramalati Narzary has asserted that there are three systems of laws through which the penances are determined by the village governing authority. These are (a) *Absa hwnai* (b) *Giyasthi Aerkonai* (c) *Hwkharnai*.

(a) Absa Hwnai: Literally the *Absa hwnai* defines the purification of a person directly without performing any of the six customary laws. For instance, if a person inhabits in a distant place from his home for long period of time and there he/she had mingled up with outside the community by exchanging foods and commits sins unconditionally, then the person has to perform the purification process by the method of *Absa hwnai*. On that occasion of purification the *dauri* also must not be impure. On the event of purification, it is completed by the rites of offering *prasads* and sacrifice of fowls.

(b) Giyasthi Aerkhonai: If a person or a family of a village violates or disobeys the rules and regulations of the village then a person or a family may be isolated from the village by the villager, which is called *giyasthi aerkhonai* in Bodo language. The isolated family cannot take part in any activities of the village or society from that day onwards; even the villagers are also fined if they caught maintaining contact to that family. The isolation may be two types- one is short term and another is long term and the last one may be for lifetime. However, there are ways of reinstating in the village again until and unless an isolated person or a family confesses their guilt to the villager and also declare themselves to abide by the rules and regulation of the village concerned. To complete the process of reinstating a person or a family, they have to arrange a small feast by providing food to the villagers and thus regain the full membership of the village.

(c) Hwkharnai: On the basis of nature of offence the *hwkharnai* or expulsion of a person or a family from the village had been one of the strict laws of penance to the offender in Bodo society. For instance, if a person is caught with evidence on the event of relating to evil spirit or witchcraft activities and provoking harm to any person then the villager or society decides to adopt the method of expulsion of the offender on the

ground of unsocial activities from the village. They followed two types of penance- one moral and the other physical. In case of physical penance, they followed severe punishment by giving physical torture or by whipping with bamboo sticks which is the most atrocious kind of penance. In the moral type of penance, they followed the method of feeding feces of vulture and other animals, because by following this awful act they believed that the evil spirits of the offender will vanish. After imposing these two methods of penances to the offender, the villager finally expels the accused person from the village.¹⁵¹

From the above discussion, it has been made clear that Bodo society during colonial period was more stagnant. But different forces came into being which brought about changes in the society. Emergence of Brahma religion and the advent of Christianity gave rise to reforms in various aspects of Bodo social life.

Endnotes

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- ⁷ Sekhar Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 18.
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- ¹³ Sukumar Basumatary, *Khuga Thunlaini Oja Sukumar Basumataryni Swrji Bihung, Part-I*, Bodo Publication Board, BSS, 2011, p.16-17
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- ¹⁸ Bhaben Narzi, *op.cit.*, pp. 77-82.
- ¹⁹ Dr. Kameswar Brahma , *A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*, Bina Library, Guwahati, 2009, pp. 65-67.
- ²⁰ Rabindra Nath Mosahary, *op.cit.*, pp. 91-92.
- ²¹ Sekhar Brahma, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-23.
- ²² Bhaben Narzi, *op.cit.*, p. 61.
- ²³ *Hathasuni Khurnai* is the traditional form of marriage ceremony among the traditional *Bathou* religion follower Bodos. Without this system the traditional marriage considered incomplete.
- ²⁴ A.S. Altekar, *op.cit.*, p. 39.
- ²⁵ Sekhar Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 26.
- ²⁶ *Pandulipi* is the Social Law of the Bodos specially codified for the Followers of the Brahma religion in 1934 by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma.
- ²⁷ Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 9.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ²⁹ Bhaben Narzi, *op.cit.*, p. 69.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 71.
- ³¹ Kameswar Brahma, *A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*, Bina Library, Guwahati, 2009, p.79.
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- ³³ *Biban langnai* means carrying bundle of essential commodities at the pre-marriage ceremony in the house of bride as described by Kameswar Brahma, in ‘A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros’ Bina Library, Guwahati, 2009, p. 76.

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- ⁴⁴ S. Endle, *op.cit.*, pp. 29-30.
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- ⁴⁶ B.N. Bordoloi, et.al., *op.cit.*, p. 145.
- ⁴⁷ S. Endle, *op.cit.*, pp.31-32.
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- ⁴⁹ Bhaben Narzi, *op.cit.*, p.134.
- ⁵⁰ Indramalati Narzary, “Boropwrni Hariyari Gannai-Jwmnai: Mwnse Bijirnai” in *Mainao Borainai*, N.L. Publicatios, Guwahati, 2015, p. 57.
- ⁵¹ Bhaben Narzi, *op.cit.*, pp.135-136.
- ⁵² Meghnath Mosahary, *op.cit.*, p. 23.
- ⁵³ A type wearing of the *gamcha* by fastening one or both the end rim of *gamcha* in between the thighs and put attach ends at the rim of back waist.
- ⁵⁴ Indramalati Narzary, *op.cit.*, p.56.
- ⁵⁵ Robindra Nath Mosahary, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

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- ⁵⁸ S.N. Sarma, *A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam*, Bina Library, Guwahati, 2001, p.51.
- ⁵⁹ Sekhar Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 20.
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- ⁶³ Rabindra Nath Mosahary, *op.cit.*, p. 284.
- ⁶⁴ Bhaben Narzi, *op.cit.*, pp.105-111.
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- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- ⁷⁴ Kameswar Brahma, (2009), *op.cit.*, pp. 101-102.
- ⁷⁵ Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 10.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

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- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.
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- ⁸² Ajanta Brahma (2011) *op.cit.*, p. 33.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ⁸⁴ A.S. Altekar, *op.cit.*, pp. 194-197.
- ⁸⁵ S. Endle, p. 33.
- ⁸⁶ C.S. Mullan, *Census of India, 1931, Volume III, Assam, Part I – Report*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 1992, p. 193.
- ⁸⁷ Bhaben Narzi, *op.cit.*, p. 142.
- ⁸⁸ P.C. Bhattacharya, *op.cit.*, p. 15.
- ⁸⁹ Liladhar Brahma, “Gods and Goddesses”, in *Basiram Jwhwlaol*, Souvenir, 50th Annual Conference, BSS, Odalguri, 2011, p. 47.
- ⁹⁰ Meghnath Mosahary, *op.cit.*, pp. 47-48.
- ⁹¹ Kameswar Brahma (2008), *op.cit.*, pp. 62-65.
- ⁹² Manik Kr. Brahma , *op.cit.*, pp.6-7.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp.7-8.
- ⁹⁴ Bidyasagar.Narzary, “Bodo Society, Gurudev and Brahma Religion” in *The Bodo*, Mouthpiece 41st issue, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, 2016, pp, 182-183.
- ⁹⁵ Manik Kr. Brahma, *op.cit.*, pp. 7-9.
- ⁹⁶ Sekhar Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 63.
- ⁹⁷ Manik Kr. Brahma, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-10.
- ⁹⁸ Bidyasagar Narzary (2016), *op.cit.*, P.182.

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- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.12.
- ¹⁰¹ B. Narzary, & M. Mitra, *Journey towards Enlightenment, Gurudev and Bodo Society*, G.B.D. Publishers, Guwahati, 2004, p.15.
- ¹⁰² Manik Kr. Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 13.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
- ¹⁰⁴ B. Narzary (2004), *op.cit.*, p. 16.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.17.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁷ Sekhar Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 72.
- ¹⁰⁸ G.C. Sarmah Thakur, *op.cit.*, p.166.
- ¹⁰⁹ B. Narzary (2004), *op.cit.*, p. 45.
- ¹¹⁰ G.C. Sarmah Thakur, *op.cit.*, p.166.
- ¹¹¹ B. Narzary (2004), *op.cit.*, p. 45.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp.46-47.
- ¹¹³ G.C. Sarmah Thakur, *op.cit.*, p. 166.
- ¹¹⁴ Kameswar Brahma (2009), *op. cit.*, p. 26.
- ¹¹⁵ P. Mochahary, “The Glimpse of Socio-Political Awakening among the Bodos and their Destiny” in *The Bodo*, Mouthpiece, 40th issue, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, 2015, P.145.
- ¹¹⁶ B. Narzary, “Boro Mahasanmilani and Gurudev”, in *The Bodo*, Mouthpiece, 34th issue, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, 2009, p. 22.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.22.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

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- ¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ¹²³ Manik Kr. Brahma, *op.cit.*, pp. 55-56.
- ¹²⁴ B. Narzary (2004), *op.cit.*, p. 57.
- ¹²⁵ P.C. Bhattacharjya, (2007), *op.cit.* p. 16.
- ¹²⁶ B. Narzary (2004), *op.cit.*, pp. 57-58.
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- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- ¹³⁰ Ronsai Basumatary, “Boropwrni Rangkanti Halwd arw Gurudev”, in *The Bodo*, Moutpiece, BSS, 39th Issue, 2014, pp. 93-94.
- ¹³¹ Sekhar Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 26.
- ¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ¹³³ Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 3.
- ¹³⁴ Sekhar Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 72.
- ¹³⁵ According to Kameswar Brahma *Garja* or *garnai* or *garjanai* means expulsion or discharging in Bodo language. Hence, *garja puja* is usually performed to discharge or expel the evil gods and goddesses from the area of village by means of propitiating and offering birds and animal sacrifice. P. 127 (2009).
- ¹³⁶ Sekhar Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 71.
- ¹³⁷ Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, *op.cit.*, pp. 4, 14.
- ¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- ¹⁴⁰ *Agorbad* is one kind of the customary laws of the traditional Bathou *dharma* followers. According to Bhaben Narzi this law is also applied to purify the offender

in case killing the cow by performing penance under ‘nine bows’ method of the traditional society.

¹⁴¹ Gurudev Kalicharan Brama, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Phongslothbad* is one of the customary laws of the traditional Bathou religion followers. According to Bhaben Narzi this system had been implied at the event of indulging illicit relationships between the matured boy and girl or woman to give penance offenders as per the method of ‘seven bows’ of customary law.

¹⁴⁴ Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁵ Bhaben Narzi, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁶ Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷ *Khaoyalibad* is also one of the traditional customary laws of the Bodo society. According to Bhaben Narzi if someone found retaining or using the personal belongings of the dead person then the society as per this law give penance to the accused person and purifies by the method of ‘three bow’ law. This law also applied in the case if a parson re-sells the cow by gaining profit within a year then the person considered as offender in the society.

¹⁴⁸ Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, *op.cit.*, p. 16

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁵¹ Indramalati Narzary, *op.cit.*, pp. 37-39.