

## CHAPTER: IV

### IMPACTS OF CULTURAL ASSIMILATION IN THE BODO SOCIETY

#### 4.1 Introduction

In Assam, before the advent of the British, members of traditional Bodo society did not place a high value on their dignity, and assimilation was viewed as something of a pipe dream by the general populace. However, the advent of the British administration prompted the Bodos to re-evaluate their traditional way of thinking and become accessible by applying modern scientific education based on social emancipation. As a result, the Brahma Dharma movement triumphed over the Bodo language and education movement; whereas the Christian missionaries took the lead in empowering backward tribals like the Bodo-Kacharis by imparting rational and scientific English education, which made a sea change in Bodos social life and practices.

The impact of massive migration from East Bengal, the Hindu Bengalis made a cauldron with millions of non-Mongoloids in Assam in the first half of the twentieth century. Thus outnumbering the indigenous Bodos and its amalgamated Bodo races like Lalungs, Garos, Sonowals and others with exposure to modern education that they have to retreat into the forests areas to be free from the social and economic onslaught of the foreign intruder. At the same time, the Assamese speaker non-Mongoloid are aware of the plight of Bodos in forest areas. Eventually, they are enthusiastic about converting the Bodos into the Hindu fold and making them speak the Assamese language.<sup>1</sup>

With the advent of the British regime, the administrative arrangement in the hill districts of Assam eventually distributed with the tinny segregation of the political entity within the framework of their ethnopolitical identity. The Bodos Mech, Rabhas are the living example of the suppression and oppression of the minority tribal for non-recognition of Scheduled tribes, which erupt tension most of the time among the tribes and the Government in Assam.<sup>2</sup>

After converting to Christianity, the Bodos significantly changed their socio-economic and religious life, whereas the Bodo-Christian society had abandoned their

traditional beliefs, practices, customs, traditions, rites, and rituals. Instead, the converted Christians sent their children to the English medium school opened by Christian missionaries; those converted Christians were prohibited from consuming liquor or Jou in society and strictly prohibited polygamy and social evil practices. Although, those converted Christians adopted the western lifestyle without renouncing their traditional surnames and dresses like *Dokhana*. Moreover, the converted Bodo Christians follow beliefs and practices that prevail universally in their religious ethics without deserting their mother tongue. The converted Bodos also abandoned traditional festivals or religious festivals, i.e. *Kherai*, *Garja*, *Marai*, *Bwisagu* (spring festival), *Domashi* (*Magw* or post-harvest festival), *Katigasa Saonai* (harvest festival). Instead, the Bodo Christians wholeheartedly observed the Christian festivals, i.e. Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, etc. The converted Bodo Christians assimilated to the mainstream Christian world regarding religious fairs and festivals.<sup>3</sup>

Before the '*Eka-Saran-Nama-Dharma*' propounded by Srimanta Sankardeva, in the fourteenth century, the Bengali Brahmins entered Assam and set up the Varna system in the Kingdoms of Ahom, Kacharis, Mech, and Tripuris, throughout the Sankardeva's preaching '*Eka-Saran-Nama-Dharma*' in Assam was admired by the non-Brahmanic Hindu followed and adopted by the heart of Kacharis, Nagas, Bhutias, Rabhas, Garos and Muslims instrumenting his '*Bhakts*' (followers) and gradually takes refuge at the feet of Krishna regarded them as '*Saranias*' from various clans or tribes to worship as Hindu God by chanting '*Nama-Kirtana*' that is practically sung in the Assamese language, in other word embracing the all sorts of Hindu norms of cultural traits and practices by renouncing their aboriginal tribal attire, culture, and language, in no exception some sections of Bodos they too eagerly embrace Hinduism on the pretext of losing tribal name and identity to represent them as social hierarchy.<sup>4</sup>

In the early twentieth century, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma propounded the Brahma Dharma influenced by Siv Narayan Param Hansa Swami of Calcutta in 1906 A.D. Soon, the Brahma Dharma under Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma started a revolutionary movement. The revolutionary movement led by Kalicharan towards the Bodo society primarily eradicated the evil practices in the Bodo society as a clean society. Before the Brahma Dharma, the Bodos were in grave danger. They confused where most of the Bodos had converted to other religions like Christianity, Hinduism, Sarania adopting Ek Saran Nam Dharma of Sankardev, and some towards Islam. However, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma along with the educated section of the Bodo community could some how persist the tendency of regression of the community while Brahma Dharma could influence thousands of Bodos calling the masses to

perform *Yajnahauti* chanting *Gayatri Mantra* (as the first ever Vedic religion among the Bodo community) followed their performance consecutively during Laxmi Puja, Maghi Purnima and Mahalaya a similar to that of mainstream Hinduism<sup>5</sup>, on contrary to the eradication of the evil and superstitious beliefs among the Bodos made a hectic resolution on calling every once in a year Mahasanmilan for the Bodos where, they took firm decisions like to educate both boys and girls children, action plan for women, to establish Primary school & Middle school in Bodo dominated areas, total banned of consuming liquor in social ceremonies, abolition of pig rearing, to be tidy and used clean dress, animal sacrifices were prohibited in the religious performance and to embrace Brahma religion for unity and progress among the Bodos in a befitting with simple principle for Brahma Dharma as to believed to only one Brahma who is creator, protector, preserver for living being regarded light of knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

The significant conversion of non-Aryan or non-Hindu tribals in Assam around the turn of the century is substantiated by the 1881 census report.<sup>7</sup> The Report categorized the population of Assam into three distinct groups, i.e. uninfluenced tribals to Hinduism, some sections of the tribal in the process of conversion and those tribals who are fully converted to Hinduism. However, the Bodos have a dwindling impact on the process of fragmentation of its population; despite having converted to Hinduism, they are regarded as low social status and have been assigned a scheduled caste tribe or unclean status with less importance in the social hierarchy. Similarly, Sonowal, Dimasa, Thengal, Rabhas, Lalung, Chutiyas, and others are also treated unclean as Bodo-Kacharis, despite having adopted Hindu culture and identifying as Hindus. Moreover, Sanskritization or Hinduisation of the Bodos in common parlance has disintegrated into smaller communities after the onslaught of inter mingle with the Aryan socio-cultural entices, resulting in drastic fragments of traditional Bodo society.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of the legal status of the Bodos have constitutionally recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in Assam, worshipping the 'Bathou' as prime religion, which is considered a major traditional religion. Still, gradually they have converted to other religions such as Brahma, Christianity, Sangkari, Jayguru, Sanatan, and so on. However, irrespective of various beliefs that prevailed among the Bodos society, they are often guided by the same virtue of customary laws of succession, inheritance, marriage etc. However, the Bodos living in Dudhnoi frantically regard inter-caste marriage as a legal, social status contrary to different religions, castes, sub-caste, or sects as an identical perspective to their Bodo society.

With the onslaught of Sanskritization, the Bodo society has fragmented into a smaller community. In contrast, in contact with Hindus, the Bodo traditional culture got polluted with the Hindu rituals, which compelled some sections of the Bodos to differences in the line of economic benefits and rites and rituals performed in the society<sup>9</sup>. Thus the socio-economic and cultural ethics disgrace the aboriginal Bodos on the onslaught of Sanskritization in Brahmaputra Valley. Moreover, the cultural differentiation among the Bodos can be noticed in the realm of religious practices. For example, the traditional rites and rituals have changed in Bathou marriage, blending with Brahmanic elements, regarding funeral procession have changed from the burial of dead body instead they cremated dead body and consecration Rites for the Bodos are often negated by the modernity.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, an educated section of the Bodos returned to their traditional *Bathou* religion and initiated measures establishing erstwhile Bathouism as the prime religion of the Bodos in the process.

The impact on the social transition of the Bodo society through primary education holds a vital role in shaping every individual's life by changing society's pattern.<sup>11</sup> Rapid urbanization and industrialization accentuated education and changed the course of social and cultural change. Therefore, education brings changes in an individual's behaviour, enabling the everyday society to work further with positive thoughts towards the progressive society of the Bodos; thus, education made an unprecedented change in the Bodos society. Before the British regime in India, the land of Assam was a multi-cultural, multi-racial, and linguistic group with distinct cultures, whereas the Bodos and neighbouring societies were unaware of their dignity and self-pride. The British government has introduced new economic, political, administrative, judiciary, and education norms with a new thought. The participation of commoners is seen as absent at an early stage.<sup>12</sup> The Bodo society at present days has become a multi-religious society<sup>13</sup> thereof disintegration of traditional Bathou religion and become a follower of Siva cult of Guru Rupamani, Brahma cult, Saibaba cult, Satsang cult, Sri Anukul Thakur, and Christianity. The traditional structure of society gradually assimilated in the time. While the migrants sore up in Assam for the rapid growth of tea plantation projects by the British government and also for other purposes i.e., the impact of Sanskritization in the first decade of the twentieth century made fragmentation to the traditional *Bathou* religion and conversely the Christianity venturing side by side in the Bodo society and even traditional believers converted to Islam.

The population distribution was traditionally redistributed with the bulky migration, almost changing the demography of the Brahmaputra Valley, especially those migrants who started around 1901. Contrary to the census report from 1881, the medieval population composition in the Brahmaputra Valley is 2,249,185 persons; recent migrants are estimated at three lakhs persons.<sup>14</sup> According to Dr Guha, the great miseries the people of Brahmaputra Valley faced in 1883 were the deadly epidemics like *Kalaazar*, *Malaria*, *Small Pox*, and *Cholera*. These epidemics caused a depletion of 18 per cent in the population of the Goalpara subdivision, i.e., some parts of Kamrup district in the Brahmaputra Valley. As a result, the region was opened to migrants. The Census Report of 1921 reports that '*the introduction of East Bengal migrants in the region resulted in outnumbering the traditional inhabitants.*'<sup>15</sup>

**Table No. 4.1: The immigrants' population from Eastern Bengal (Muslims)**

Year	Total Muslims in Assam	Total Percentage
1921	880426	38.86%

**Source:** Abdur Rahman, *Migration of Muslims from Eastern Bengal and Agrarian Change in Assam*, Department of History Hojai College, Hojai, 2004, p.24

Although *Vaisnavism* had a setback in its *satras*, thus, in the sixteen century, Srimanta Sankardeva was hindered by the ruling dynasty *Ahom* and eventually, he was obliged to take shelter in Koch Bihar during the reign of Nara Narayan. The *Ahom's* ruling dynasty was against the preaching of 'Ek-Saran-Nam' Dharma. Basically, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Neo-Vaishnavite movement led by Srimanta Sankardeva had a rejuvenating effect on the section of the Bodos living in the vicinity of the Brahmaputra Valley. The Neo-Vaishnavite religion was practically based on the worship of Vishnu.<sup>16</sup> And their worship begins with chanting hymns. Under the guise of the Koch kingdom, Srimanta Sankardeva's religion fascinated a section of Bodo-Kacharis. The latter was under the influence of Assamese neighbours and had adopted the Neo-Vaishnavite faith, especially in the Darrang and Kamrup districts. The Bodo Kacharis are the initially firm followers of '*Bathouism*'. But after their conversion into the Neo-Vaishnavite religion, they too have changed their surnames in desperation to acquire higher status or to be part of the mainstream Hindu fold and to avoid social disparities.<sup>17</sup> Prof. Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas's reference to the force and willing assimilation is being observed in a particular section of the Bodo community in the Brahmaputra Valley, wherein some individuals were obliged to assimilate and while some willingly accepted assimilation for their interest.<sup>18</sup> While assimilation, the surnames *Sarania*, *Deka*, and *Das* came into

prominence, and more importantly, they renounced their aboriginal customs, religion, language, etc., to mingle into Assamese cultural traits through which ultimately they asserted themselves as an independent community of the Bodo-Kacharis.<sup>19</sup> Hence, they are known by the appellation 'Sarania-Kacharis'. Bakul Chandra Basumatary believes that the appellation 'Sarania' means those who had taken refuge at the feet of Lord Krishna.<sup>20</sup> Saranias are found in the districts of Darrang, Udalguri, Nalbari, Baska, Sonitpur, and Bongaigaon at present times. Chapter II has already discussed details of the Sanskritization of Caste and the religion of the Bodos.

## 4.2 Religion, Social Life, and Beliefs of the Bodos

*Bathouism* is the antique religion of the Bodos, and 'Bathou' is derived from the word 'Ba' and 'Thou', meaning five deep thoughts.<sup>21</sup> The traditional religion of the Bodos incorporates rites, rituals, social norms, ethics, and philosophy of the Bodos.<sup>22</sup> Endle describes the religion of the Bodo as "animist and its underlining principle is characteristically one of the fear and dread".<sup>23</sup> The 'Bathou' worship culminates in Kherai and *Marai* festivals and is the original form of the Bodos religion in the Brahmaputra Valley. Moreover, the Pantheon beliefs of Kachari deities are of two classes, i.e., 1) household gods (*na-nomadic*) 2) village gods (*gami-nimadai*) basically that the formers usually worshipped within house compound and the latter by the whole of the villagers outside the compound to one's own house with fifteen yards from the house known as '*thansali*' of this few deities are known in the Darrang district, i.e., Household gods: *Bathoubrai*, old *Bathou*, *Mainao*, *Asumainao*, *Sali mainao*, *Song Raja*, *Song Barai*, *Bura Bagh Raja* and village gods: *Mero Raja*, *Bura Mahadeo*, *Bura gosain*, *Jal kuber*, *Thal kuber*, *Ihkuber*, *Bihkuber*, *Kuber brai* (masculine), *Kuber brui* (feminine), *Sila Rai*.<sup>24</sup>

As G.R Camphor mentioned, the Bodos's social life and beliefs read, *There are pigs in a few bamboo cages in the courtyard, chicken roasting in the trees, cows under thatched roofs of an open shed. The Bodo dwelling is a mere grass hut in which the farmer keeps his few belongings, cooks his food on the ground in a similar hut, and sleeps on the bosom of Mother Earth. His houses and sheds are built in a square around a courtyard, his threshing floor. Somewhere in the yard, he grew his sacred "Shijw" tree at the foot, which he offers cooked rice and other food kinds of stuff to evil spirits. His chief vice is drinking, and he brews it from rice. This vice sent his race not only the deterioration of character but also*

*poverty and ignorance. Hence, he is looked down upon by the Hindus and has become a mere hem of wood and a drawer of water for his mere sober Hindu neighbours*'.<sup>25</sup> W. Robinson also stated that *'The Bodos were not trammelled by the prejudices and useless observances of Hindus, and live freely and fully on animal food and drinks as many spirits as they can afford and were not clean in their habits as Hindus*'.<sup>26</sup> The Kachari society also had a blind belief in evil spirits. The Bodo inhabitants, when they suffered from a malaria fever of virulent type, especially in the Darrang district, usually believed that the evil spirit (*Modai Habnai*) had caught hold of the person<sup>27</sup>. Such type of superstitious beliefs has prevailed among the Bodo community.

According to the census report of 1881, out of the total indigenous population, forty per cent is Bodo-Kachari ethnic group in Brahmaputra Valley. Their livelihood depended on the settled irrigation in the medieval period, and they were more likely to remain a safe distance from inundated areas near the Brahmaputra River. They are known for artificial irrigation and are independent of the seasonal rainfall in Kopili, Jamuna and Dhansri rivers. In comparison, they are more advanced in the technique of farming than to Moran and Borahi tribes. By the thirteen Century, Bodo-Kacharis had perhaps developed a peculiar form of rice cultivation and by the technique of plough instead of hoe through artificial irrigation where there is recorded in *'Deodhai Asam Buranji'* that the Chief of the Borahi tribe complained to Ahom king Sukapha, against Bodo-Kacharis as: *"The Paimali river has emerged out of the mountain. It does not flow since the Kacharis began to wash their cattle and pigs (there)"*.<sup>28</sup> Comparatively present times, the practices of the cultivation in Bodo inhabitant areas where water supply is constantly required for rice cultivation by constructing 'dong' for several miles long to irrigate the wet rice (*Sali*) cultivation, as settled agriculture practised by Bodo-Kacharis of Sidli and Bijni have a contrary example in the year 1809.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, in the early part of the twentieth Century in Brahmaputra Valley, the erstwhile Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma introduced the Brahma religion<sup>30</sup> among the Bodos to convey a structural change into the Bodo society and to erect a new identity against the ancestral socio-cultural identity.<sup>31</sup> Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was influenced by the book *'Saranityakriya'* inspired to spread Brahma Dharma among the Bodos.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma organized a religious gathering called *'Maha Yajna'* at Banyaguri village in 1906 A.D., where thousands of Bodo community personnel accepted Brahma Dharma.<sup>33</sup> The religion introduced by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma has its roots in the Vedic philosophy.

*Sanskritized* the aboriginal rituals and cultures of the Bodos and initiated social versatility with refined culture and practices.<sup>34</sup> Despite conversion into Brahma Dharma, the Bodo converts retained their socio-cultural identity.<sup>35</sup> However, the mainstream Hindu society persistently looked upon the converts and followers of Brahma Dharma as low-grade Hindus. Nor does the mainstream Hindu society acknowledge the converts of Brahma Dharma as a part of the Hindu hierarchy.<sup>36</sup> But in the second decade of the twentieth century, Brahma Dharma gave an impetus to a reformist movement which ultimately created a unity of social progress and, in progress, gave rise to the collective consciousness and aspirations of the Bodos.<sup>37</sup>

Another sect of Saivism that followed the Brahma Dharma or *Mani Bathou* Siva Dharma was founded by Guru Rupamoni Devi of Gossaigaon (Basugaon) of Chirang district in 1973 (Bengali 1380). The sect of Saivism, or *Mani Bathou* came into existence as a conflation of the cumulative ideals of Bathou and Brahma cults along with some elements of Hinduism. As a result, religion has significantly modified the conception and practices of the traditional *Bathou* religion. This religion has many followers throughout Assam and mainly in Kokrajhar, Dhubri, and Bongaigaon districts among the Bodos.<sup>38</sup>

Simultaneously, the Sat Sang of Thakur Anukul has also gained good ground among the Bodos of Assam and other parts of India. The most important aspect of this religion is that it has the most liberal view in drawing the people of various castes, creeds, faiths, and communities towards the prominent Hindu fold to form a different and refined religious society. Moreover, Sat Sang manifests in its philosophy that the basis on which man always lives is religion, and he is Param Purus. Religion is one, it cannot be many, or it does not have any other form. Sat Sang is a monotheist in nature and believes in the incarnation of Purusattam, who incarnates for the welfare of human beings on this earth and is the creator of the whole universe. Sri Anukul Thakur is the Purusattam who incarnates on the earth for religious inculcation.<sup>39</sup>

The Christian missionaries, with the passage of the Charter Act of India in 1813 CE, secured permission to propagate Christianity in India, including Brahmaputra Valley. As a result, various denominations of Christian missionaries, i.e. American Baptist Church, Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and Roman Catholic Church, ventured into the Bodo-Kachari habitat areas of Brahmaputra Valley. On request of the Magistrate of Sylhet, William



Carey deputed Krishna Pal, his earliest convert, to North East India to spread the Gospel; Krishna Pal initially started his missionary work in Goalpara and Kamrup. In 1829 James Rae set up a branch of the mission at Gauhati, under the patronage of David Scott, Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier. In 1841 Nidhi Ram, the first Assamese, was converted to Christianity at Jaipur, followed by Bati Ram, Ram Sing and Kalibar. In 1838 they brought the Gauhati mission into their hand. In 1914 Rev. G.K Camphor was deputed to the Darrang district to work for the American Baptist Mission<sup>40</sup> because it was felt that it would be easier to preach the gospel among the Bodo-Kacharis at the foot of the Bhutan hills in the northern tract of Brahmaputra Valley. Apart from the religious prejudices, the Kacharis at the foot of the hills, north of Kamrup and Darrang districts, were found ready to receive the gospel. Barker is reported to have made several excursions among this tribe and had discussions on the subject with those who came to Gauhati Church. However, American Baptist Church missionaries were the first to come into contact with the Bodo-Kacharis of Brahmaputra Valley.<sup>41</sup>

The erstwhile Guru Ajit Basumatary propagated Sri Muthouor (Ajit Bathou); its philosophy was to usher the *Bathou* religion self-proclaimed as godman of the Bodo community with a particular section of Bodo followers, and he could establish a small portion of missionary's work towards the poor section of the Bodo community by venturing secular educational institution like *Sri Muthou* English School near Runikhata Chirang district at Ashrabari village in BTR Assam<sup>42</sup>, the details of this *Bathou* sect.

The so-called "*Swrjigiri Bathou*" offshoot of the *Bathou* religion, with their stern followers in the zeal for imparting secular education, established institutions in the Bodo-dominated region of Karigaon in Kokrajhar district of Assam in the last part of the twentieth century. They also found a secular school run by *Swrjigiri Bathou Dharma* mission called *Maigong Bathou Poraishali* (school) in 2009. Influence of the materialistic wave of the modern world, the socio-religious stratification led by the *Sanskritization* effects on the Bodo community in the Brahmaputra Valley in the twentieth century.<sup>43</sup>

Like Hinduisation, a similar process of Islamisation also took place among the Bodo community noted by the historian in the nineteen century within the Indian context. In the art of history writing, both the Hindu as well as Muslim writers were busy during the peak hours in the last part of nineteen and the early part of the twentieth century, while the matter of fact

that the Hindu writers were practically head less interest and even ignored the importance of the downtrodden vices of pollution towards the low-class Hindus. Thus it practically leads to the mass conversion of Mech or Bodo into Islam.<sup>44</sup> According to the census report of 1901 that the stratified social position of the Hindu society pushed the low caste like Koch, Mech, Garo, Kachari, Rabha, Hajong, etc. of ancient Kamrup towards Islam, where there is equality and brotherhood, unlike that of Hindu principles of untouchable, inequality, suppression and exploitation<sup>45</sup> made a gradual process like that of colonizers trends people absorbed to Islamisation in Assam, however, the elite class of the society was also converted to Islam in order acquire the political power and economics resource, like Ali Mech from Bodo Chief of Alipur (eastern Bengal) along with his subjects converted to Islam<sup>46</sup> apart from that there is ample living example of converted Bodo individuals from Dotoma Kokrajhar district for no definite reasons to acknowledge themselves as converted Muslims from the Bodo community.

### **4.3 Impact of *Sanskritization* and Revival of the Bodo religion on the Bodo Society**

Amalendu Guha in 'Medieval and Early Colonial Assam' furnishes a list of Bodo Tribes uninfluenced by Hinduism and Bodo Tribe in the process of conversion as under:

**Table No. 4.2: Bodo-Kachari Tribe uninfluenced by Hinduism**

Tribe	Population
Kachari	2,65,418
Mech	57,885
Lalung	46,077
Hajong	3,689
Garo (plains)	23,373

**Table No. 4.3: Bodo-Kachari Tribe in the process of conversion**

Tribe	Population
Rabha	56,285
Madahi	13,149
Mahalia	6,198

Sarania	4,718
Totila (Totla)	2,539

**Table No. 4.4: Caste formed of converted Bodo-Kacharis and allied Tribes**

Tribe	Population
Borahi	extinct
Moran	Not reported
Chutiya	59,163
Rajbansi/Koch	3,36,739

**Sources:** All three tables 3.2,3.3 & 3.4 are prepared from Amalendu Guha's, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam*, 1991, p.18

The onslaught of *Sanskritization* and the introduction of a new faith in the erstwhile Bodo Society created fragments in the Bodo society. A particular section of the Bodos on the onslaught of *Sanskritization* tried to recognize themselves with the mainstream Hindu society. The origin of the word 'Totla' is shrouded with mystery. Especially, in the Darrang district of Assam, according to Rev. Sidney Endle, 'Totla' is a nickname for the concerned tribe Rabhas.<sup>47</sup> Besides the tribe, Totlas is also known as DatiyalKachari<sup>48</sup> because they primarily reside in the bordering regions. Rev.Sidney Endle also stated that the tribe is believed to have descended from the Hindu father, who had lost his caste by marrying Kachari women.<sup>49</sup> A few sections of Bodo society, popularly known as Totla, had a definite language of their own, and when they came into contact with Sanskritic languages, their language became inflexional.<sup>50</sup> According to the 'Medieval and Early Colonial Assam' by Amalendu Guha in 1981, the Madahi population in Assam was 13,149.<sup>51</sup> Another section of the Bodo tribe, Madahi, originally a section of the Bodo tribe on the onslaught of Sanskritization, converted themselves into a separate identity, i.e. Koch.<sup>52</sup> The conversion of Madhai is evident from the statement of E.P. Stack, who acknowledged that 'the converts first become Sarania, Madahi or Totla (Totila) and then develop into Koch'.<sup>53</sup> The Madahi were Hindus, but they were addicted to liquor. In the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, the Koch are distinctively recognized into three divisions<sup>54</sup> (i) Kamtali, who abstain both from liquor and pork (ii) Haramia, who abstain only from liquor (iii) Madahi, who are Hindus but consume liquor.

The Madahis and Totlas, when they came under the Neo-Vaishnavite cult, declared themselves as a separate identity from the Bodo community because the Hindu people called out the non-Hindu people with derogatory remarks. Perhaps the Bodos are also designated as 'Mleccha' or 'Mech', and the high caste Brahmins regarded them as untouchable and polluted. Hence, some sections of the Bodo people are obliged to embrace Hinduism to escape derogatory remarks. The census report of 1881 clearly states that the three distinctive ascendancies of tribal people into Hinduism, i.e. influenced by Hinduism, on the verge of conversion into Hinduism and those who are converted.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, the Bodo-Kacharis, albeit of their conversion into Hinduism, are often treated as lowly status and were debarred from taking part in socio-cultural programmes and the appellation so-called 'Mleccha' or 'Asuras' continued to be used for them. Although, in today's world, the trends of cultural differentiation among the Bodo community of Assam can be noticed in the realm of religious practices, educated sections of the Bodo have conversely returned to the traditional practice of worshipping *Bathou*<sup>56</sup> and the effort to establish erstwhile *Bathou* religion as the prime religion of the Bodo is in progress.

#### 4.4 Impact on the Bodos: Threat to identity

There is a slight change in the heart of the Bodo community on the verge of the socio-economic and perhaps the religious life of the Bodos on conversing into Christianity, where the converts gradually denounce their traditional beliefs, practices, customs, and traditions, rites, and rituals.<sup>57</sup>

According to the census report of 2001, Christians converts in the Kokrajhar district.<sup>58</sup>

**Table No. 4.5: Christians converts in the Kokrajhar district**

Year	Christian Personals	Population in total
2001 census report	including Santal, Boros, Ravas, and other tribes(both men and women)	90413

Source: Stated in Shekar Brahma's "*Religion of the Boros and their Socio-Cultural Transition A historical perspective.*"

Even the Bodo Christian converts were always eager to send their children to the Christian missionaries' school to pursue English education; gradually, those converted are

legally prohibiting their members not to consume *jou* or liquor in their homes and any social functions. Although there is a stiff resistance made sometimes futile in their converted life in the society for their old habits like drinking and gambling, there is some stray evidence of practising polygamy, which the Bodo Christians strictly prohibited. Moreover, there can be seen in the converted Christian's surname of western style. However, they are still fabricated Christian names like Swmdwn Narzary, John JubrajIslary, James Basumatary, Dergwma Brahma, Chitaranjan Bargayary, etc.<sup>59</sup> The beliefs and practices of the Bodo converts are similar to universal Christian practices, but without skipping their aboriginal mother tongue, which can be seen in their prayer in the Bodo language. In the Bodo society, they do not enjoy the freedom of economic rights in terms of economic activities and choices for occupation and social mobility due to the influence of the divisive caste on political affiliation by the native rulers; however, Christianity made numerous contributions to breach this freedom and mobility in Bodo society<sup>60</sup>. Perhaps the conversion taken to Bodo people is not by a fold of ideals of religion but on the pretext of the economic life, in other words, the necessity of modern life, etc. Instead, the Bodo converts never discarded their traditional belongings by both genders. Although it is to be mentioned that the Bodo Christian women still wear the traditional dress called Dokhona,<sup>61</sup> the converts have never misused the accessory for the well-being of the Bodo society.

Moreover, the Christian missionaries who could expand had very little success in spreading Christianity among the Bodos; the influence of their activities among the Bodos can be seen throughout the twentieth century. The consequences of spreading Christianity among the Bodos have made the Bodo society into a new Bodo-Christian society by denouncing the traditional Bodo society. Moreover, Christians have given up their old customs and rituals without changing the basic norms and values. This division stood as a barrier between the two societies regarding matrimonial relations and socio-religious activities. Moreover, the Bodo-Christians have discarded all traditional festivals, like religious, seasonal, and agricultural, including the most popular *Baisagu* (spring festival) and agricultural festival *Domashi*, the harvest festival of Bodo society.

On the other hand, Bodo Christians, with exceptional pomp and grandeur, observed Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter as Christian festivals in the line of the universal Christian faith. The conversion to Christianity brought about a significant change in the institution of the Bodo marriage. A Christian marriage takes place in the *Girja* (Church) with the help of a

Pastor or Bishop, which is considered the religious union of the two people. They could not dissolve unless either of the two life demises. Unlike traditional marriage, where the choice of the parents and relatives is given priority, in Christian marriage, individual choice or consent is a must. Before they marry in the Church, the girl and the boy must consent to the religious priest and marry each other. But in practice, it is also seen that the Bodo parents or relatives forced their boys and girls to give consent against their will.<sup>62</sup>

Ideally, the advent of Christianity among a section of the Bodo society led to the westernization of their cultures. However, the converted Christians in the Bodo society never gave up their belief in spirits and witchcraft to some extent<sup>63</sup>. Therefore, the primary catalyst of Christian missionaries for preaching their faith among the Bodo-Kacharis was in various charitable activities adopted for their development so that they might be drawn towards the Christian religion. Traditionally, the Bodos were *Bathou* religion. But before the coming of Christianity in their society, most embraced the Hindu religion and thereby adopted the Aryan culture.

Further, there are references to a few members of the society who converted to Islam. Promptly the situation changed from the last decade of the Nineteen Century C.E. when the rapid growth and development of Christianity in the Bodo-dominated areas influenced a large chunk of the innocent Bodo population affecting the authority of the traditional Bodo religion. Surviving solely based on oral history and folk tales, the traditional religion of the Bodos had little chance against the forefront onslaught of the Hindus and Christianity which had more robust religious literature.

The socio-cultural life of the present Bodos is a selfless effort contributed by the Christian missionaries and also mentioned as the Brahma movement led by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma.<sup>64</sup> The religion propounded by the Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma has its roots in the Vedic philosophy; the process of Sanskritization changed the rituals and cultures of the Bodos.<sup>65</sup> Thus in the first decade of the twentieth Century, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma revolutionized the Brahma Dharma with Sanskritization among the Bodos and perhaps modernized the society by emancipating higher western education, which led to germinate students organization in 1919 as BoroChatraSanmilian and thus awake the development of education for both genders among the Bodos unifying the Bodos to some extent around parts of the country including mainland Assam. Besides, there is also some

Boro organizations developed among the Bodo community, like Boro Sahitya Sabha on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1952 at Basugaon with the priority of preserving the Bodo language, culture, and identity, further those organizations made numerous contribution to withstand various movement to usher the aspirations of the downtrodden Bodos like Bodoland movement led by ABSU in 1980.

Moreover, the religious movement led by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma made a novel perspective to enlightened education, literature, language and socio-cultural among the Bodo society in the plains of Assam. Thus, the influence of further education in the Bodo society changed their institutional levels in marriage, customs, traditions rearing pigs, and more evil practices among the Bodo society<sup>66</sup>. In the nineteenth century, on the arrival of the Christian missionaries, they played a vital role in uplifting the backward tribal-dominated areas by changing their pattern of life, customs, beliefs, habits, values and superstitions and to some extent, the Christian missionaries imparted western values and culture among the Bodo people thereof transform them from traditional to modernity. Among them were the American Baptist missionaries who encountered the Bodo people. Consecutively in 1840, the Australian Baptist missionaries venturing educational institutions in the region of Bodos and Garos. The Baptist missionaries made immense contributions to the Bodos in education.<sup>67</sup> They gradually preached the Christian values that have attracted and motivated Bodo people in a more scientific mode of living.

Moreover, the British regime made more reliable in the cause of educating more personals in western education by upgrading the monetary policy by replacing barter systems and job security to the downtrodden in equal status regardless of religion, position and improvement of communications and transportation mode. Therefore, western education plays a vital role in reasoning, scientifically and contrary to religion. Whereas the vital role is to emphasize their democratic values of getting liberty, equality, justice and fraternity among the Bodo society; thus, education encourages them to liberalize by eradicating untouchables and inequality from the mindset of the Bodo people.<sup>68</sup>

The arrival of Christian missionaries, reformist and religious movement leaders and youth organizations advocating the cause of the Bodos, without denying the western education which transformed their traditional superstitious beliefs and way of living to a modernized one in the process of time phase of those changes could be seen in the Bodo

progressive community. It is also rightly stated by Shekar Brahma that the traditional Bodo society disintegrated different cultures and societies since from the twentieth century, the changes took place in various institutional areas like economics, marriage, customs, and their position, status for both men and women, dress, food habits and some parts of life. However, every change took place in the course of westernization, the process of Sanskritization and modernization to some extent thereof evolution and spread of modern education and the development of science and technology.<sup>69</sup> Though there are no more Christian missionaries in the present Bodo-dominated region, their legacy missionary works are still can be seen active among Bodos with benevolent works carried out by imparting western education and helping the needy persons by providing medical facilities in the hospital and other services which includes spreading the Christian gospel in the hearts of Bodo dominated areas.<sup>70</sup>

However, the conversion process is still active in the Bodo-dominated areas at a snail's pace towards Christianity. Thus, the erstwhile traditional *Bathou* religion withstands the product of disintegrated cults whereby Christianity also made a benevolent move in venturing their religious values, witnessing the disintegration of the traditional *Bathouism* made gradually recall their perseverance to their orthodoxy beliefs and made some new changes like reformation within *Bathouism*.

The onslaught of *Sanskritization* created fragments in the Bodo society after they came into contact with the Hindus and ultimately germinated Hindu culture among the Bodo community. The age-old religious beliefs of the Bodos in the process polluted with the rituals of the Hindus, bringing a gradual disintegration of the traditional Bodo society. Moreover, a section of the Bodo community who had assimilated into the mainstream fold of Hinduism created differences in a line of family-related economic benefits and the performance of rites and rituals in the society. However, *Sanskritization* in Assam was part and parcel policy of the high caste Hindus to increase the fold of Hindus because, in Assam, the tribals were in the majority compared to the Brahmins Hindus. Today the trends of cultural differentiation among the Bodo community of Assam can be noticed in the realms of religious practices, educated sections of the Bodo have returned to the age-old practice of worshipping *Bathou*, and the effort to establish the erstwhile *Bathou* religion as the prime religion of the Bodo is in the process.



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