

**CULTURAL ASSIMILATION OF BODO IN BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY  
IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**



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## CONCLUSION

*Cultural Assimilation* is the process of any person or group's language and culture reflecting on the ordinary immigrants representing a minority group around the globe. Tendering their values, behaviours, and beliefs must adopt the dominant group's language or cultural group. Therefore, Assimilation could rather be addictive without changing their ancestral cultural identity, besides trying more on the cultural entity. On the other side, 'Acculturation' is the impact of any person or group of language or cultures both on social and psychological well-being. Its Assimilation implies any culture encounter conjunction with another culture makes intimate relations with culture by losing its own identity, and this process of cultural Assimilation is the process of mingling cultures. Therefore, culture in humankind is a so-called cultural trait passed from generation to generation.

Bodo community having the influence of the Hindu neighbours on the onslaught of *Sanskritization* thence has come across several influx swarms around the tribal region where the Bodos are trapped too. Their coming into contact with the Hindu neighbours ultimately germinated Hindu culture among the Bodo community. Such continuous influx polluted the age-old religious beliefs of the Bodos and diluted their traditional rituals, leading to the gradual disintegration of the conventional Bodo society. Moreover, a section of the Bodos assimilated into this mainstream fold of Hindus created differences in family-related economic benefits and the performance of rites and rituals in the society. And as a matter of fact, the Bodo culture and language were identified as Hindu afterwards. It is rather unfortunate for the Bodo community that they have encountered several stages of conversion for ages and thus resulting in the disintegration of the traditional beliefs.

Sanskritization in Assam was part and parcel of a policy of high caste Hindus to increase Hindus; in Assam, the tribals were the majority compared to the Brahmin Hindus. Thus, Sanskritization has affected the socio-economic and cultural values of the aboriginal Bodos in Brahmaputra Valley.

The Bodos have disintegrated from the traditional beliefs with the onslaught of multi-religion in the Bodo society like *Siva* cult or Guru Rupamani, *Brahma* cult, Saibaba cult,

*Satsang* Hindu cult of Sri Anukul Thakur and Christianity, besides few of them too converted to Islam. Moreover, the traditional marriage system of the Bodos like *Swngnanwilainai haba*, *Gwrjia haba*, *Karsonnai haba*, *Bwnanwilainai haba*, *Dwnkharlangnai haba*, *Donkhahabnai haba*, presumably, changed after the onslaught of Sanskritization. As a result, the Bodo community drifted from its traditional practices, beliefs, values, customs, languages, etc. Moreover, with each passing generation, caste conversion impacted the Bodos' monolithic faith by altering the Bodos' functional systems, as defined by the 'Nirmala Basu' acceptance of Hinduism.

Since then, the Bodo people have been the prime believer of Manasa or Siju (Euphorbia Neripholia), also called *Bathou*. Although, initially, the sway of Sanskritization phase among the Bodos, that mixture of the bloodline of different caste from Bodo bloodline to Moran and Austric gradually formed a new caste called 'Moran'. But those kept isolated from that mingling with different caste could still retain their original Bodo bloodline living in the bordering hill in the east as border-lander called Kacharis.

The onslaught of Sanskritization in the sixteen century is termed the most crucial period of degradation in the Bodo society with the contiguity in the northeastern region. Gradually the Bodos have a new aspect in religious practices by converting to neo-Vaishnavite propounded by Srimanta Sankardeva, where the downtrodden tribals enthusiastically embrace the '*Ek Saran*' dharma, where there is no sense of discrimination among themselves, unlike in the main fold Hindu hierarchy society. Rather the converts are simple to adopt *Vaishnavism* only on the pretext of worshipping '*Vishnu*' by chanting '*Kirttan*'. And thus, the Bodo-Kacharis converts gradually changed their surnames, like the exemplary Srijut Bolicharan Basumatary from Mechpara from Basumatary to Choudhury, besides sacrificing his own community identity as Bodo. It can be perceived as higher status in the ordinary society on the virtue of discarding their tribals' practices and could be free from the derogatory remarks of the *Asura*, *Dasas*, and *Mlechhas*. On the other hand, the economic desperation of the downtrodden Bodos for traditional practices, i.e., in their beliefs and sacrificial burden in their rituals.

In the twentieth century, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma made a commendable contribution to the Bodo community that emancipated literate persons were absent. As a result, Bodos are always living isolated and introverted, never trying to encounter the modern world. Instead, they are condemned by the dominant Hindu caste in the Brahmaputra Valley.

To set them free, he (Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma) first contributed to the Bodo community to educate them. He then revolutionized society, awakening the modern virtue of living, politically and socially upgrading the Bodo youths and expelling the evil practices and superstitious beliefs among the Bodo community. Instead, he replaced the traditional beliefs of *Bathouism* with Brahmanic Hindus on '*yajna*' and even allowed the typical converts to write their surnames '*Brahma*'.

The materials culture contributes to the Bodo community's socio-economic livelihood, instead of every household having '*tath*' (handloom). Indeed, earlier, their parents taught every girl child about weaving '*Dokhona*'. But, with the onslaught of modernity in the global era, they took less importance and even most of the present-day girl children are absent in weaving knowledge only on the mode of purchasing, which is of machine products with low price.

Among the cookery items, it varies regional basis meat, fish, and the Bodo-Kacharis often consume vegetables; perhaps '*naagwrان*' become most popular among the Bodo community, which is caught mainly from the streams and rivers. From '*naagwrان*', one notable item is prepared from it called '*napam*', which has a highly regarded cuisine in the Bodo society; furthermore, '*ondlakari*' is also a unique item among the Bodo community. Rice is a staple food item. And there is a prejudice against not consuming milk by the Bodo society earlier than the orthodox person. Still, the modern education and special training the Tezpur writers gave on sustaining food have gradually changed the notion of the ignorant Bodos. Vegetables like lai, lapa, maita, cabbage, brinjal, olodot, dinkhia, sibung, sibru, ontai-bajab, ousumai, etc. wild and kitchen vegetables are consumed from the ages to the present days by the Bodos. In earlier days, Bodos used earthenware called '*doi hu*' like pottery, where they also stored rice beer (*Zu*). And most elderly Bodos smokes tobacco without restrictions, either men or women in earthen, wooden and metallic '*hukka*' called '*silim* or *honka*', and the younger smokes '*bidis*', but gradually it has been replaced by cigarette made in the modern factories.

The Bodo community have changed from traditional items to daily items for different reasons, as the social environment compelled them to admire towards Hindu neighbour. Further, the influences made them to improve more advanced and standard food items like tea, ghee, butter and spicy food items that are commonly consumed by the modern and

advanced society on replacing the cooking technique instead of earthen stove '*ogdab* or *daodab*' they cook with gas stove.

The socio-cultural impact of the Bodo society could have evolved due to the primary education imparted to the aspirant Bodo youth, which stimulated the Bodo community. Further education shapes individuals and enables society to be progressive. Thus, the advent of the British regime in Assam made a sea change in the economic policy in the hub of multi-cultural, multi-racial, and linguistic groups in Assam, where the new norms of economic, political, administrative, judiciary and education. Perhaps in the early stage, there were few participants, but in the later stage, the commoners gradually became involved in swaying the British regime's new pattern. While in a matter of time, the traditional religion *Bathou* gradually disintegrated within the followers and probably adapted to different religious sects like *Siva* cult of Guru Rupamani Devi, *Brahma* cult, *Saibaba* cult, *Satsang* cult, Sri Anukul Thakur and Christianity. Moreover, the twentieth century made a sea change towards the traditional believers and let them disintegrate into more minor Hindu cults, including Christianity.

The gigantic immigrants from the outside state have virtually accumulated the structure of the population demography in Assam, which can be seen in the pattern of redistribution of the population around 1901. Further, the census report of 1881 highlighted that the approximate population in medieval Brahmaputra valley was around 2,249,185 persons, out of them were recent migrants. Amalendu Guha states that there were great miseries in Brahmaputra Valley in 1883 where there was a significant loss of human population thereof virulent epidemics like malaria, *Kalaazar*, smallpox and cholera have fully engulfed in some particular regions by depletion of 18 per cent in Goalpara subdivision. Thus, the new migrants were shrouded during the great chaos in Brahmaputra valley.

With the advent of the British regime in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, the British administration hired labourers from outside the state, basically tea labourers in the tea garden. Moreover, the Assamese labourers were less interested in working as tea garden labour. Therefore, the British administration was bound to hire labourers from outside, which also became the main factor of the socio-economic chaos among the indigenous people in Brahmaputra Valley that gradually distorted the cultural affinity among the tribal group. Likewise, in Brahmaputra Valley, the Bodo-Kacharis have fallen into certain conditions where some sections of Bodos are willing to accept Vaishnavite. Instead, some on the pretext

of derogatory remarks made to them by higher caste Hindu neighbours, even the Bodos are treated as polluted and unclean people and are restricted in many social gatherings. Thus, some Bodo is converting to the Vaishnavi cult to retain higher social status in everyday society, unlike traditional *Bathou* believers. It can also be termed as acceptance of religious Assimilation based on Brahmanic Hindu followers, on the virtue of worshipping Vishnu by chanting Kirttan (prayer) hymns. The converts by Sanskritization renounce their traditional beliefs, practices, customs, and language and even renounce their surnames. And in no time, they abandoned their traditional beliefs, practices, and languages. Finally, they discarded their mother tongue and adopted the Sanskritization language, even converting their caste to Saranias, Madahi, Totila (Totlas), Koch, etc. Thus, the Bodo-Kacharis have drastically minimized their population count in different aspects

The fragments of *Bathou* religion in the Bodo community in the twentieth century seem to be unending, thus the disintegration of the minor cult within *Bathouism*, '*Swrjigiri Bathou*' like that of *Ajit Bathouor Sri Muthou*, '*Swrjigiri Bathou*' is nothing but the smaller section of the *Bathou* religion where hundreds of followers from the Bodo community adopted it as refined *Bathou* religion, where it can be seen from the sources in the practices of '*Swrjigiri Bathou*' is almost similar to that of traditional *Bathouism*, only a few reformations took place, further they could also establish a missionary school in the year 2009.

Court marriage is not common among the Bodo community, depending on the conditions. Whereby, the modern way of life obliged them to get married in court. However, the Bodo community often advised continuing with the traditional social marriage for the second time, honouring their respective religion like the Hindu or Christian marriage.

However, the dress and ornaments have high regard in the Bodo society like *Dokhona*, *Langa*, *Fasra*, *Jwmgra*, *Gamosa*, etc. among them are *Aronai*, and *Dokhona* occupies a unique position in the society in identifying their traditional dress regarding *Aronai* and *Dokhona* also have a magnificent manner of honouring the elders during the festive season. During wedding time, women have little choice in wearing *Dokhona*, but the men have freedom in every religious marriage; only the *murari* is mandated for both bride and groom for Hindus. In contrast, *Dokhona Thaosi* is considered mandatory to be worn by the bride on her wedding day. The ornaments are expected for the Bodo women like *asan*, *aktam*, and *mala*, all these items are regarded as necessary in the wedding ceremony, and

where any bridegroom fails to offer those items to his new bride, he is regarded as poverty man. Besides, the traditional manner of handing ornaments to the bride's family by the groom's parents is gradually altered due to the modern viewpoint.

The blended Christian Marriage on its dress code as contemporary manners, but without renouncing traditional *Dokhona* for the bride but for the groom they maintain the standard of modernity with delicately coloured dresses on the wedding day groom have decorated with European style having coat suit, tie, trouser pants with boots and the bride have a crown in her head with white gown and regarding the *Dokhona* the Christian bride wears white *Dokhona* instead of *Dokhona Thaosi*.

The *Att Mangal* (Post marriage ceremony) is expected in the Bodo society, which the bride's parents arrange at her house after eight-day of marriage. They come to their maternal house to collect the bride's remaining maiden items in her house and bid farewell to her friends and parents. But this condition only includes *Nainanwi lainai haba* and *bwnanwi lainai haba* but not in the case of *gwrjia haba* and *donkhahabnai haba*. It is observed in both Bodo Hindu and Christian religions in the Bodo society.

The *Mani Bathou* marriage (Saivism sect of Guru Rupamani Devi) is almost similar to the Brahma marriage, performing *yajnahuti* in pre and post-wedding ceremonies. However, *Mani Bathou* is much more ceremonial than *Brahma Dharma*, whereas *Brahma Dharma*, monotheist, is devoting *Param Brahma*. Still, *Mani Bathou* believes in multi gods and goddesses hailing *yajna* in a fire during the wedding. So while the mantras are recited in the Bodo language, the couple alters *yajna* fire seven times and lets him put *sindur* (vermillion) on the bride's forehead. The *purohit* blesses them in marital life after the discourse of marriage.

After conversion to Hinduism and Christianity, the hybrid form of social life among the Bodo community seems to matter with time which has also shifted the cultural pattern of Bodos like the Hinduism on Sanskritization and the European model of Christianity influenced by forming new practices within the Bodo community.

Inter-caste marriage does take place among the Bodo community, but most of the time, it is revolted and disguises the situation under the pretext of modernity; perhaps the

orthodoxy of Bodo people never accepts this form of marriage. But in the global world where sometimes encourage defending the situation on personal ground.

In the modern world, it demands an Invitation card for every event regarding the marriage, functions, or program event. It has urged the pretext of standard measures and maintaining standard protocol inviting guests on a formal letter. Further, the absence of postcards, envelopes, and folded letters is often used in modern times to maintain a standard. Perhaps it is honouring the invitee or guests to solemnize the events. Thus, modernity has secured a new ground in preserving decorum on every occasion.

The fair and festival are an integral part of every society in the world. Thus, Bodo society observes many festivals like *Baisagu*, *Domasi*, *Kherai*, *Garza*, etc. Moreover, similar to the neighbouring caste community, the Bodo people also celebrate seasonal festivals. But adding to the traditional festivals on the onslaught of Sanskritization, Bodos observed in many festivals like the Hindu festival like *Dipawali*, *Saraswati Puja*, etc. Besides, the Christian converts mainly attend universal festivals like Christmas, New Year, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.

Since primitive times the Bodo community has had the art of handicrafts like *Don*, *Duli*, *Sandri*, *Songrai*, *Mwi*, *Dokhona*, *Aronai*, *Jwmgra*, *Phali*, etc., made from forest products; moreover, the women are mainly proficient in handloom products, but the male member of the family mainly produces the artefacts. But due to modernity, the machine-made products with low prices hampered the cottage industries, like the weaving in handloom products, and metallic items gradually subsided the bamboo products.

The food habits of the Bodos have slight changes due to modernity by transforming their traditional food habits, and some of the Bodos probably adjusted their habits of consuming different items from non-tribal communities. They are obliged to consume with a new outlook like butter, ghee, fried food items, and spicy foods consumed mainly through modern society. However, the Bodo community has also changed their technique in cooking food items on modern electric appliances rather than the traditional method persisted in the Bodo domain, like cooking on a firewood stove (*daodab* or *ogdab*). On the onslaught of Sanskritization, the Bodo community could somehow alter rice-beer (*Zu*) to tea culture on the



stiff provocation of the Brahma Dharma by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma along with that the Christian converts have legally avoided rice-beer (*Zu*) from their Christian society.

The socio-cultural profile of the Bodos of the Brahmaputra Valley underwent considerable changes. The development and establishment of industries brought about fundamental changes in the Bodo society. The Bodo people are often attracted to the *Brahma Dharma* and thus follow the virtue of *Brahmanic* Hindus. Finally, of course, the worth mentioning may be made, and the final credit goes to Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, who acknowledged the Bodo society and emancipated the illiterate, social reformation and beginning of new faith in the Bodo society. This is because of the isolated and introverted nature of the Bodos, whereby by educating them, they could eradicate the evil practices among the Bodo community.

Although, many Bodo converted to different religions like Christianity, Brahma dharma and other Hindu sects, including Islam, which radically changed the traditional Bodo society. And most of the followers of those cults adopted many new customs, traditions, behaviour, rituals, norms, ideas and values, etc., which greatly affected the core of their culture to some extent. The conversion of the Bodos into different religions and their assimilations to other societies and cultures led to the disintegration of the age-old social fabric of the Bodos. However, those Bodos who have converted to Brahma Dharma or the other sect of the Hindu are not discarded the traditional beliefs and practices of the Bodos; for example, they also observed ceremonies like birth, marriage and death, etc. in the same way as the conventional followers act upon. But only the converted Christians are kept away from the traditional beliefs and practices of the Bodos.

Therefore, the investigation carried out by the present project work had limitations on time, resources and personnel. Thus, the result is not up to the mark. Moreover, the nature of the work has been exploratory rather than research-based. But the findings, it may be held, are substantive. If further investigation is carried out on each of the items spelt out in this work, more unknown factors of the social dynamics may emerge and give us directions in which priority for development should be provided for removing regional imbalances and eradicating the social tensions.

## **Finding of the Study**

These findings imply that there may be as much cultural diversity within an ethnic group as there is between groups. One potential source of intra-ethnic diversity is variation within groups in the degree of cultural Assimilation. This variation has implications not only for recreational behaviour but also for environmental attitudes.

Firstly, the study shows that an orthodox religious orientation of the second-generation migrants hindered the integration in the cultural domain and, thereby, the broader society in the Brahmaputra Valley.

Secondly, it is found out that socio-economic aspects of integration in the Bodo society play only a limited role in understanding cultural Assimilation. Cultural Assimilation seems more likely when there is more social mixing and not so much when migrants achieve economic success. Subsequently, it is also found that the most favourable opportunities to reduce the cultural difference between groups lie in social integration patterns in a receiving society.

Thirdly, the study found that Assimilation is associated positively with psychological well-being; further, there is weak evidence for ethnic groups where assimilating has detrimental or beneficial effect on particular outcome for some groups related to immigrants compared to its outcome to that of natives. However, regarding the assimilation with neighbouring Hindus due to the effects of Sanskritization and Colonial regime the Bodos adopted hybrid culture in education, language, costumes, food items, beliefs and practices by discarding traditional beliefs and customs.

Finally, it is found that Assimilation of the Bodos towards immigrants was either positive or negative. Albeit, of this there is no sign of rejection; instead, there is more understanding of Assimilation with different effects for different outcomes. Which is rooted deeply in classical theory and emphasizes a process in which other groups i.e., Bodos gradually declined, rather than a simple trajectory of improving outcomes for immigrants.