

## **Chapter 2**

### **Kalicharan Brahma: The Biography**

Kalicharan Brahma was born on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1862 (4<sup>th</sup> Bwisag 1267 according to Bengali year calendar), in his ancestral village Kazigaon. His father was Koula Mech and mother was Rangdini Mech. He was the only child of his parents. So, his birth brought tremendous joy and hope to his family. Before the Kalicharan birth, his mother prayed to God and performed different rituals so that she might be blessed with healthy son who would maintain the lineage. Kalicharan's father Koula Mech was popularly known as Koularam Mech. This name was given by non-Bodo community people of his surroundings because they found it was difficult to pronounce 'Koula'. Koularam was tall, handsome guy of elongated face with a noticeable chin. It was these feature that distinguished him from the rest of his fellow people. He also called 'Ijadar' (respectful) by the villagers. Koularam Mech was a timber trader as well as a land lord. He did timber business under the Zamindar for which he had to pay royalty to the latter. He employed good number of employees and laborers for looking after his trade as well as agricultural field. Koularam Mech had a lot of influence in his village and he was listening by the fellow villagers carefully. His wife Rangdini Mech, like other Bodo woman was a devout housewife and had a great faith in God. So, it can be said that Kalicharan Brahma belongs to an aristocratic family without any pecuniary dirt as to meet the necessities (Ajit Boro, 2005).

#### **Childhood**

Kalicharan lead a bit-different childhood in comparison to the other Bodo child of present days. Being a child of rich trader, he never met hardship or poverty, nor he did hard work for survival. During his childhood days he was very restless and always remained busy with different types of activities like running here and there etc. Because of this nature, his parents called him 'okra' means arrogant. During in his childhood he was much interested in playing with his friends and he always wanted to be the leader of the group. Along with these he also developed a love for God and Goddess of whom he had learned

from his mother. But when he grew adult he became gentle and intelligent. From his childhood, Kalicharan had excellent capacity for comprehension and immense fascination for nature (Ajit Boro, 2010).

## **Education**

Kalicharan's formal education began late because of the paucity of educational institution in the surroundings. By seeing this difficulty his father appointed Mr. Bir Narayan Sarkar (Mech) as private tutor for him. Though Mr. Sarkar was not highly qualified, but he had enough educational knowledge to impart the primary education to Kalicharan. Mr. Sarkar was also an accountant of Kouaram's timber trade and received monthly 3Rs extra as salary for imparting tuition to Kalicharan. Kalicharan studied two year under Bir Narayan Sarkar during this period he learned Bengali alphabet, first step of mathematics, arts, prose, poem etc. Later on he took admission in Putimary M.V School which was situated far from Kazigaon. So, he stayed at Dotma (which is approximately 35 Km. from Kazigaon and 1-2 Km. from putimary) with his cousin Jinaram Mech. He continued his study up to 4<sup>th</sup> standard in that school. As a student Kalicharan soon attracted the attention of teachers and classmates by his exceptional intelligence and talent. After fourth standard, Kalicharan did not continue his study further. There is a controversy among the scholars about the reason of Kalicharan's drop-out from school. Mr. Bidyasagar Narzary and Malabika Mitra (2004) said that Kalicharan left his studies due to sudden death of his father, whereas Mr. Roop Narayan Muchahary (1997) was of the view that Kalicharan left his studies because he was not satisfied with the limited syllabus oriented education. Whatever the reason Kalicharan left his studies after completing primary education. Leaving school education does not mean that he stopped studying literature. His quest for knowledge led him to study different subjects like history, philosophy, religious literature etc. according to his own choice. He was a learner till the end of his life. He craved for knowledge throughout his life (Kameswar Brahma, 1992).

## **Family life**

Kalicharan's family life began very early at his adolescent age. As he was the only child of his parents so they tried to make him settled as soon as possible. So when Kalicharan attain fifteen or sixteen years of age his parents started to search suitable mate for him and finally they found Khansri of 16 (sixteenth) year of old, living in Kazigaon village. Her father was also a rich person like Koularam. Kalicharan got married with Khansri at the age of eighteen. From Khansri he gets two daughters namely Dhandi and Nalini. They lead a happy conjugal life for a long time. They supported each other in sorrow and joy . But urge of male child from Kalicharan's parents and relative created problem in Kalicharan's marriage life. Because at that time people believed that birth of son and daughter depends upon women. Again, in patriarchal Bodo society property and lineage goes through male line. So, absence of male child means end of lineage. Ultimately due to pressure of parents and relatives, Kalicharan give his consent for second marriage. He was bond in marriage for the second time with Upashi Mech of Kazigaon. From Upashi he gets three sons and two daughters namely Debendra, Chandra Kumar and Kanaklall Mech and his daughters were Khokaisri and Hironi Mech (Manik Kr. Brahma, 2001).

Youth Kalicharan looks strong good built, fair complexioned with a broad chest, a sharp nose and long arms. Bodos believed that a person with longish arms and ears is lucky one. These feature distinguished him from others, added to his personality and bearing and made him stand out in a crowd. Kalicharan was a work worshipper. He was punctual by nature and strict disciplinarian. He always encouraged his friends by saying that everything should be done on time. This temperament continued till the end of his life (Manik Kr. Brahma, 2001).

## **Occupation**

Kalicharan began his carrier by joining his father's business. But after the death of his father, the entire responsibility of business and family goes to him. Under Kalicharan's supervision his family business flourished and it spread beyond Assam. Kalicharan started to export timbers from Bikribada to West Bengal, North Bengal and Bihar and

earned lots of profit. He continued his business till 1930 and after that he handed over it to his elder son Debendra Mech.

Kalicharan had a passion of hunting, stories related to Kalicharan's courageous hunting of tiger and other animals spread throughout the region. Before Bwisagu, Kalicharan always used to go for hunting along with the villagers for collecting meat for community feast in the eve of Bwisagu. In spite of all these the prime concern of Kalicharan was to regenerate the Bodo society which had undergone depravity and degradation (Bidyasagar Narzary & Malabika Mitra, 2004).

### **Friendship with Prabhat Chandra Baruah**

One of the turning points of Kalicharan Brahma's life is his meeting with Prabhat Chandra Baruah the zamindar of Gauripur. Kalicharan first met with Prabhat Chandra Baruah in 1896 in the occasion of celebrating Prabhat Chandra's transformation from minor to an adult where Kalicharan was also a distinguish guest (Bidyasagar Narzary and Malabika Mitra, 2004). This meeting gradually turns into friendship. They gradually came close to each other and shared their view, ideas, thought etc. Though Kalicharan was much elder than Prabhat Chandra but the age gap did not come in the midst of their friendship. They also went for hunting together but after adopting Brahma Dharma as his religious faith Kalicharan give up hunting for ever (Roopnarayan Muchahary, 1997). In later years, though Kalicharan became a preacher and was very busy with different kinds of work then also Kalicharan visited Prabhat Chandra Baruah's residence occasionally. Prabhat Chandra Baruah was a very prominent person during his time and in 1901 the British Government awarded him the title of Raja of Gauripur. Besides this he was a great social worker and had made a significant contribution for the betterment of common people. In 1903 he along with his friend Manik Chandra Baruah established the Assam Association at Dibrugarh. He was the first president of Assam Association. Prabhat Chandra Baruah expired in 1945 (Roopnarayan Muchahary, 1997).

## **Religious Life**

Though Kalicharan was busy with his business and family, he always thought for the betterment of Bodo society. Different types of superstitious beliefs and practices, educational and economic backwardness of his community gave him pain. He was keen to find out solution of these problems. He believed that only liberal religious and normal guidance can remove the problem of Bodo society. Because existing Bathou religion does not have any strict moral guidance, rather in the name of religion different types of superstitious believes and practices prevailed in the society (Sekhar Brahma, 2006).

To find out suitable religious faith he had gone through number of religious texts like Geeta, Ramanaya and Mahabharat etc. During this time he was acquainted with a book named 'Saranitya Kriya' written by Swami Shivnarayan Paramhangsa (1936). This book depicts the basic philosophy of Brahma religion, related rituals and also gave detailed description about Swami Shivnarayan Paramhangsa's life, works and philosophy. Brahma religion is a monotheistic one, it consider, Brahma as the creator of the universe and human being. It preaches for equality of human being and goes against the caste hierarchy of Hindu society. Brahma religion or Brahma Samaj movement first began in Bengal under the leadership of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. It mostly occurred as reform movement with a view to uplift the condition of women, spread of education, removes supremacy of Brahmin, complexity of religious rituals etc. Brahma religion is also against idol worship. The core idea of Brahma religion is that Brahma is the omnipotent, omniscient, shapeless creator of the universe. People can worship Param Brahma by prayer, song and chanting his name only (Ajit Boro, 2010).

By reading 'Saranitya Kriya' Kalicharan was influenced because from this book he got the answer of those questions which occurs in his mind for a long time. A desire also grew in his mind to meet Swami Shivnarayan Paramhangsa. He discussed the matter with Mr. Suren Karta, the zamindar of Bagribari. Mr. Suren Karta himself was a disciple of Swami Shivnarayan Paramhangsa and arranged a meeting for Kalicharan with his guru Swami Shivnarayan Paramhangsa. Kalicharan along with his friends namely Mr. Jamadar Mech, Mr. Karan Mondal and Mr. Charan Mondal left for Kolkata with a hope to meet Swami Shivnarayan Paramhangsa in 1905. Much is not known about Swami Shivnarayan

Paramhangsa. It is said that Swamiji was originally from Uttar Pradesh but he made Kolkata as a centre for preaching his religious idea. Kalicharan and his friends met Swamiji at his Bhobanipur residence, Kolkata in the year 1905. Kalicharan stayed at Kolkata for 6 (six) month where he closely watched comparatively advanced, modern Bengali society. He also spent few days with Swamiji and tried to find out unsolved questions which grew in his mind since childhood. After prolong discussion with Swamiji, Kalicharan was totally influenced and expressed his desire to be a disciple of Swamiji. By listening this, Swamiji agreed and make Kalicharan as one of his disciple. Because Swamiji was also attracted towards Kalicharan because of his intelligence, desire for work, spirit and fervent zeal. Swamiji thought that Kalicharan may be the source for spreading Brahma dharma among Bodo community. Accordingly in 1906 Kalicharan and his friends adopted Brahma religion formally and with the permission of Swamiji adopted 'Brahma' as surname by giving up 'Mech' the ancestral surname. Latter, follower of Kalicharan also adopts 'Braham' as their surname (Bidyasagar Narzary & Malabika Mitra, 2004).

After returning from Kolkata, Kalicharan decided to introduce Brahma religion as a new religious movement in Bodo society. In this regard Swamiji suggest him how to explain Brahma religion in a simple and lucid way to the innocent people, how to introduce it effectively. Kalicharan believed that with the introduction of Brahma religion, Bodo society will start to reform.

Kalicharan, after adopting Brahma religion returned to his native village Kazigaon with strong zeal of introducing Brahma religion in Bodo society. But when he practically started to work in this regard, he found difficulties in introducing it within illiterate, backward and superstitious Bodo society. So, he discussed the matter with close friends but no result came out. Then he decided to meet his guru Swami Shivnarayan Paramhangsa again and departed to Kolkata for second time in 1906. His second meeting with Swamiji became more effective. He stayed for 3 (three) months and discuss with Swamiji about possible ways of introducing Brahma religion in Bodo dominated area. Kalicharan returned with strong confidence and determination of introducing Brahma religion in his society. After returning Kazigaon, Kalicharan first demolished the Bathou

alter and uprooted the Sijou plant from his residence. By doing this, he faced dissatisfaction and was criticized by the villagers, but he did not give up his mission. Rather he tried to explain the need of removing age old superstitious beliefs and practices for the sake of betterment of the society. He also started to preach Brahma religion and tried to convince people for adopting it. Kalicharan propagated that there is only one God-Brahma. Lifeless ceremonies and meaningless dogmas unnecessarily control the religious life of the Bodos. Kalicharan was against animal sacrifices, offering wine and other foods item to God in the name of worship (Kameswar Brahma, 1992).

Brahma Samaj movement that took place in Bengal was a liberal movement; it devoted its energy for women's upliftment, removing superstition, spread mass education etc. Similarly Kalicharan also wanted to bring reformation in Bodo society through the implementation of Brahma religion.

### **From Kalicharan to Gurudev**

As a result of Kalicharan Brahma's effort, Bodo community started to convert themselves into Brahmanism. Kalicharan's magical speech, strong logic, shakes the existing Bodo believes and practices. Along with this his simple living, speaking truth, punctuality, reading habit etc. also attract the attention of people. As a result conversion became more and more frequent as hundreds and thousands of Bodos adopted this new religion. Kalicharan become the spiritual guide and philosopher of the people, they started to call him as Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma.

As spiritual guide and philosopher he devoted more and more time and gradually became detach from family life. For devoting all time and energy to Bodo society's well being and preaching Brahma religion, Kalicharan handed over the responsibility of his family and business to his eldest son Debendra Brahma in 1905 (Bidyasagar Narzary & Malabika Mitra, 2004).

Kalicharan visited Kolkata for the third time in 1906 and spent sometimes with his guru Swami Shivnarayan Paramhangsa and improved his spiritual knowledge.

Kalicharan Brahma preaches Brahma religion in different parts of Assam like Ouwabari, Adabari, Kagrabari, Bonorgami, Dhemaji, Golaghat, Sonitpur, Nogaon, North Laghimpur, Kamrup and some parts of West Bengal (Roopnarayan Muchahary, 1997).



Plate 2.01. Kalicharan Brahma

### **Kalicharan's Contribution to Bodo Society**

Kalicharan Brahma contributed a lot for the overall development of Bodo society. In this regard, most significant contribution is the drafting of Bodo customary law by the name of Bodoni Pandulipi. He established school, vocational training centre and hostel for Bodo students, Brahma Company to help poor people of his society. He also contributed in political development. Details of his contribution will be discussed in chapter 4 of the thesis.



## **Towards the End**

Kalicharan exhausted by doing excessive mental and physical work. In the last years of his life Kalicharan along with his close disciples travelled from one village to another for preaching religion. During his last visit he told the followers that he would not survive for long. Kalicharan visited the house of Chakramani Brahma at Bhatarmari, where he stayed for two nights. Chakramani Brahma is one of the most favorite disciples of Kalicharan Brahma. Kalicharan asked him to stay with him because he knew everything regarding Brahma religion. His old body started to give up his company but he did not dampen the spirit of work. Gradually he started to feel ill due to old age and expressed his eagerness to meet with near and dear ones. Few days before death Kalicharan suddenly lost his voice but he wanted to convey some message to his eldest son Debendra. Kalicharan made some signs by using hands and eyes to convey the message, but unfortunately Debendra failed to understand. On 25<sup>th</sup> April 1938, his soul left the body to meet with Param Brahma at the age of 78. He left behind two wife, three son, four daughter, son-in-laws, daughter-in-law, relatives and huge number of followers. Soon after the spread of the news that gurudev Kalicharan Brahma passed away, his friends, followers, well wishers reached his home to pay homage towards departed soul. His Body was cremated according to Brahma Dharma rituals in his own village Kazigaon on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1938. A large number of followers, family members, friends, and co-workers were present. In the cremation side a monument was built by his family member and followers (Bidyasagar Narzary & Malabika Mitra, 2004).