

CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

The study of the concept of God involves the study of the culture of a religion. Any aspect or a part of a society is incomplete beyond the concept of religion. But the present study intends to deal with the concept of God in relating to socio-philosophical aspect with special reference to Bodo's religion. The investigation of my research work will also cover a comparative study among the different concept of God where two important philosophical concept like 'Language game' and 'Family resemblance concept' of Wittgenstein will also be used.

Though God is the matter of philosophy or metaphysics but it is inseparably related to religion. It is the active, living and religious belief. It is the belief of every civilized land and time. Religiously the concept of God is mainly associated with human desires and fears.

Though the concept of God is universal and popular, a few people have a metaphysical or philosophical concept. Religiously it is more popular or familiar. In between the universal, popular and familiar belief there is a metaphysical consideration also. The proofs for the existence of the belief or reality strengthen the philosophical understanding. There are two aspects of God, lived and philosophy of God. Lived god is found in Folk religion. Folk religion is animistic in nature.

God is believed as the creator of the heaven and earth (world). God is regarded as the self-caused. His existence is proved variously in philosophy and also in religion.

We have different conceptions and statements which are found not only in Indian tradition but also in Western philosophy and theology.

God has the sociological root in society. Man and society are inter-dependent. Men constitute society. Individuals nurture their ordinary belief and practices about god in their ordinary activities in society. The nurture of God is also found deeply in various religious societies of the world like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc..

God is said as the 'self-caused'. God is regarded as the first cause by theologians. God is the cause of its own existence. "To say that something is self caused (causa-sui) means only that it exists, not contingently or in dependence upon something else but by its own nature, which is only to say that it is a being which is such that it can neither come into being nor perish"¹.

For the philosophical understanding we much now better concerned with the arguments for the existence of God. "Some theologians maintain that the concept of God is the concept of a most perfect being"².

God stands for a being who is the ultimate reality. "The idea of God is associated with sublimity, ineffable majesty, holiness and transcendence. The Sacred.....the Supernatural, the Self-Existent, the Absolute etc. are all known simply as 'God' "³.

In Indian tradition or mythology the Vedic deities are presented or worshipped in anthropomorphic form. Mythology is the part of the living culture of every level of society. The Vedas are the earliest literary and philosophical documents. The Vedic culture is the main foundation of the Indian civilization. All the religions and philosophies

that we find in India have their root in the Vedas. The term 'Veda' is derived from the root 'Vid' which means to know. Thus etymologically 'Veda' means knowledge. By Vedas we can have the knowledge of ultimate reality. The Upaniṣads form the concluding portions of the Vedas. Hence, they are called the Vedānta and end of the Veda. Upaniṣads contain the essence of the teachings of the Vedas. The views of all important Indian philosophers including the Buddha are rooted in the Upaniṣads. "The Upaniṣads contain philosophic discussions about the nature of the self, creation, ultimate reality, liberation etc."⁴. A great many gods have been mentioned in the Vedic mantras. The word Upaniṣads is derived from the Sanskrit root Upa-ni-ṣad. 'Upa' means near, 'ni' means down and 'ṣad' means to sit. Hence, literally speaking the word Upaniṣad means 'sitting down near'.

Bodos is the largest and important indigeneous tribe of the North-East India. Their basic inhabiting four districts are Kokrajar, Sirang, Baksa and Udalguri which are recently included into BTAD or BTC. Now Bodos are regarded as the great inner power of the North-East India. "The whole of Assam (barring the eastern part inhabited by the Kuki Chins) and North and East of Bengal was the country of the great Bodo people"⁵. They belong to the Tibeto-Burma family of the Mongoloid race. The people who lived in Siberia and Mongolia around 2000 BC are known as Mongoloid. As their physical features, they have yellowish brown skin, square set face with broad nose, strong cheek bones, flat nose, almond shaped black or dark brown eyes and coarse head hair. They have also some other physical features. They certainly are not tall or handsome race. In appearance they have resemblances with the Nepali. In moral characters they are more favourable than others. They bears the Virtues of honesty, truthfulness, straightforwardness etc..

"Kachari is a generic term for a number of groups speaking a more or less common dialect or language and claiming a common mystical ancestry"⁶. China and Tibet are the original homeland of Boro-Kacharis. "According to Endle, the origin of the Kachari race is still very largely a matter of conjecture and inference in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history"⁷.

In course of time the Mongoloid people divided into three groups and migrated towards different parts of the world. The first group migrated towards Europe where they liked to settle in Italy and Turkey. The second group migrated towards North America and Mexico and settled there. Some of the second group settled in Japan also. The third group migrated from Siberia and Mongolia and settled in the Hoang-ho valley of China and Tibet. After living a several centuries they migrated to the foothills of Bhutan. They were known in Tibet as "Bod". Their country was also known as Bod country. "According to Dr. Sunity Kumar Chatterjee and Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha, the word Bodo or Boro was derived from the word 'Bod' "⁸.

During their course of migration from the foothills of Bhutan they gradually moved towards west and settled one group in Coach Behar, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal, Goalpara and Dhubri district of Assam and Moran district of Nepal. They dwelt in the banks of the river Meche flowing through the Nepal. So, they are popularly known as Mech. This is the first flow through the valley of Tista, Dharla, Sankosh and founded the powerful kingdom of Kamrupa. The second flow was through the Subansiri, Dibang and Dihang valley into the eastern Assam and established a powerful Chutia kingdom. From their second flow some migrants were settled in Kamrupa, Nalbari and Barpeta district of Assam. They are known as Boros. Some of them

moved towards eastern part of Assam where they were identified as Deori, Moran, Chutia, Sonowal Kachari and Thengal Kachari. Some of the migrants were settled at North Cachar hills. There they are known as Kacharis and Dimasa. In Cachar plains they are also known as Barman. "According to S. K. Chatterjee, this group of Bodos assumed their name from the district of Kachar. The meaning of Kachar is lowlands or border lands, and is originated from Sanskrit Kaksavata-Kachada-Kachar"⁹. Some of them migrated to the Rangpur and Maimansing district of Bangladesh and many of them now converted into Islam. Outside the Brahmaputra valley they are now found in the contiguous areas of Tripura (as Tippera or Barman), Garo Hills (as Garo, Hajong), Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh etc..

As stated by Anthropologists, Kīrātas belong to the great Indo-Mongoloid group. We have evidences about Kirātas in Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. According to S. K. Chatterjee, the Kirātas have yellow (golden) skin. They used fierce weapons, and were cruel. "The Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana supported the evidences that the Boro-Kacharis belong to Indo-Mongoloid race known as Kirāta"¹⁰. So, the Boro-Kacharis belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race known as Kirāta. According to Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya, Boros are the descendants of Kirātas later known as Bodo-Kachari. The people who lived during the epic age of Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata in eastern regions of India were mainly Bodo people. At that time they were known as Kirāta. According to some Sanskrit books including the Vedas the Indo-Mongoloid people who were known as Kirāta are also known as Mlecca or Asura.

From the point of view of the term 'Boro', R. M. Nath says that Boros were the emigrates of 'Bod' country of Tibet. They were known

as the 'Bodo-Ficha', or 'Boddo-Cha' which means children of Bod country and later known as the Boddo or Boro. Britishers first used Bodo in stead of Boro. They pronounced 'D' in stead of 'R', e.g., Bidi-Biri, Kanada-Kanara etc.. Brian Hodson was the first British author who confirmed the generic term Bodo on the Boros. The etymological meaning of the term Bodo is 'men' by which the term Bara or Baraphisa (children of the Bara) could be justified. The tribe who domesticates pig (Bara in Assamese) is termed as 'Bara' and later on known as 'Bodo'.

The meaning of the term 'Kachari' is derived from 'Khoror' and 'Hari'. Khoror or Khare means head and Hari means a clan. From that sense Khoror-hari means a ruling clan. There is another proposition for the name of Kachari is that the term Kachari is derived from the name Cachar district. "According to Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rābha, the name 'Kachari (Kosari)' came from the Kuchi river of Kuchi Valley in Nepal"¹¹. The above statement probably mean that the Boros who lived in Kuchi Valley might have given their identity as Kuchiari and later on changed to Kosari and was pronounced as Kochari by non-Bodos. 'Kachari' was used as the racial name by the Britishers and Christian Missionaries in their books and literature. Later on the Bodo writers used Kachari as the racial name in their books. In the later period Boro or Boro-Kochari were used as the racial name of the Boros. As a result it is found that the race has three different racial names like Kochari, Boro-Kochari and Boro.

The Boro or Bodo language is used by the Bodos. The Boro language belongs to Assam-Burma group of the Tibeto-Burma branch of the Sino-Tibeto-Chinese speech family. "As Dr. P. C. Bhattacharya has observed that the Boro (Bodo) language belongs to the branch of British section under Baric division of the Sino-Tibetan family, as per

the classification given by Robert Shafer¹². Their livelihood pattern is mainly based on agricultural occupation and keeping domestic animals like pig, cock etc. The mode of living of the Boro-Kachari is in compact villages and putting barrier all around the homestead is a common sight to see.

The main residential area of Bodos is confined within the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. It covers an area of 56,216 square Kilometer. The length of the valley from West to East is about 720 kilometer. In this valley the Bodo is the main tribal group. Now the total Bodo population in Assam is 1502147 where 811154 is male and 690993 is female. Total literacy percentage of Bodo population is 34.68% (According to the census of 2001).

Religion is the mirror of a society where culture and tradition of a race is reflected. Bodo race is culturally very rich. Bodo religion reflects all the cultural modes of the race including social institution and behaviour. From primitive age to the modern life the Bodo religion played an important role in the socio-cultural life. Social institutions of the Bodos are closely associated with religion. "Every sphere of life of men and women of Bodos are guided by the rites and rituals of the religion. Religion has also played a dominant role in changing their social pattern and status, economy, mode of living and way of thinking and it has led to achieving higher education and modernization of their society"¹³.

Bathou is the traditional religion of the Bodos which is also known as Bathou dharma or dharam. Bathou religion incorporates rites, rituals, social norms, ethics and philosophy of the Bodos. "The religion of the kachari race is distinctly of the type commonly known as "animistic", and its underlying principle is characteristically one of the

fear and dread"¹⁴. Bathou is the supreme or chief God of Bodos. The supreme God is also known as Sibrai (Śiva in Hindu). Mainao is the wife of Bathou. Though Bathou religion is independent and autonomous but it is a part and type of Hindu religion or Hinduism. It is the part of the evolution of the spirit of Hinduism. According to Dr. P. C. Bhattacharya and Mangalsing Hajowari, Sibrai created the universe with the help of Siburi and Mon-sin-sin is the first man. "But Mon-sin-sin was celibate for life, so Sibrai and his wife Siburi created man Darimuba and women Singrimuba for the propagation of mankind and the Sijou tree (Euphorbia Splenden) was created as an emblem of supreme god at the altar"¹⁵. Sijou tree is worshipped by the Bodos as the living symbol of Bathou or Siva. "It has five ridges and five depressions. Its thorns grow in pairs leaves resemble hoods of serpents and the branches grow vertically upward like the Trisul of Śiva"¹⁶.

Kherai Puja and Garja Puja are two main religious festival of the Bodos. Kherai Puja is performed in the month of Kartik or Aghon by the villagers collectively in an open field for the welfare of the villagers and also to worship Mainoburi for having bumper harvest. Garja puja is another religious ceremony of Bathou religion. There are difference of opinion regarding the meaning of the word 'Garja'. According to some the meaning of Garja is 'God'. According to some scholars the word means a way of making oneself free from danger. "In the words of Bhaben Narzi, a Boro scholar Garja means 'niskriti' in Assamese"¹⁷. It probably means the way of discharging anything. In the Garja Puja evil gods and goddesses are discharged and floated away in the river or stream. This puja is performed for the welfare of the villagers. It also performed to purify the villagers. It is performed within a family or by collectively.

In the history of Bodo religion many new religious activities and revive the traditional Bathou religion. In course of time new religious group or sect is evolved among the Bodos. In the history of Bodo religion a wave of conversion was taken place. Many Bodo people were converted from their traditional religion to Vaisnavism (Ek Saran Nam Dharma) initiated by 16th century social reformer Sankardeva. They became Sarania Bodo and assumed the title of Koch-Rajbansi, Das, Deka, Mondal, Karji etc.. Many Bodos were converted into Christianity also. Christian Missionaries have a significant role among the tribes to change their religious, socio-economic and cultural lives. Christian Missionaries spread Christianity among the Bodos in the early part of 19th century. American Baptist Missionaries were the first to contact with the Bodo-Kacharies. In the villages of Panbari and Alamganj of present Dhubri district of Assam, some Bodo people were converted into Islam.

On the eve of the 20th century Bodo society faced critical stages and lost their original identity and culture by adopting conversion to other sect. In that critical period Kalicharan Brahma appeared as a messiah of the Bodo society. He born in 1862 at Kajigaon, Dhubri district of Assam. "His conversion to the Brahma cult paved the way to bring the larger sections of his followers to the wider fold of the Vedic Sanatan dharma and it was possible to carry out a social revolution among the Bodo-Kacharis residing in and around the district of Goalpara with epicenter at Kajigaon in Dhubri sub-division (Dhubri sub-division was then comprised of the present Kokrajhar district as well)"¹⁸.

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Earlier he was known as Kalicharan Mech. He was unsatisfied with the traditional religious practices and rituals with the help of animal sacrifice and libation and felt as meaningless and discreditable by the

neighbouring Hindus. He felt traditional Bathou, Christianity, Islam and Ek Saran Nam Dharma would not protect their actual identity. He learnt about Brahma dharma under Swamiji Siv Narayan ParamHansa at Calcutta and preached Brahma dharma among the Bodos specially in Goalpara and Dhubri district of Assam and later on spread many parts of Assam. The religious movement led by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma in the beginning of 20th century brought the process of Sanskritization. The entire movement of Kalicharan Brahma developed the education and self-awareness of the Bodos. "The traditional near-animistic belief that continued to guide the religious philosophy of the Boro-Kacharis began to change by the preachings of Guru Kalicharan Brahma who was inducted to the Brahma faith by Srimat Paramhangsa Sibnarayan Swami of Calcutta"¹⁹.

Brahma religion is a monotheistic religion based on the concept of the existence of one supreme Being called Brahma or God. The tenets of this religion was corrupted from the Vedic and Upanisadic Brahman. In this religion Hom-Yajña or Yajñahuti was used with the help of purohit. "Burning of Ahuti is sufficient for the realization of his self. Burning of Ahuti is occasionally followed by sprinkling of ghee, rice, frank incense etc. in the fire"²⁰.

In the hands of Guru Kalicharan Brahma a religious movement was grown up among the Bodos. Guru Rupamani contributed in the religious movement and founded Saivism sect or Mani Bathou Siva Dharma. Guru Rupamani Devi of Gossaigaon of Assam is still alive. She made a modification of the conception and practices of the traditional Bathou religion. The sect adopted the main features from Hinduism and Brahma dharma. "Saivism sect or Mani Bathou came into being as a conflation of the cumulative ideals of Bathou and Brahma cults along

with some elements of Hinduism"²¹. In Mani Bathou Śiva Dharma, like Brahma Dharma and Hinduism, puja with the help of prasad and flower, and yajna with the help of purohit are performed. Unlike Brahma Dharma, here different gods and goddesses are believed. According to this sect, Śiva is the Supreme god. He is known as 'Borai' Bathou.

Satsang religion of Guru Anukul Thakur has good ground in the religious movement among the Bodos. The liberal view of this religion united the various castes and communities to form a separate and refined religious society, giving them a high religious position. This religion is one. The main philosophy of Satsang is based on the concept of Param Purusa. Satsang is the monotheist religion believes the incarnation of Purusattama. Purusattama incarnates on the earth for the welfare of human being. Sri Sri Anukul Thakur is the Purusattama who incarnates on the earth. There are several thousands of Bodo devotees in Satsang in whole of Assam. The process of Sanskritization was accelerated by the Satsang Bodo where rites and rituals are the Aryan culture. The Satsang Bodos perform all religious rites and rituals of the Satsang religion and also they maintain very close relation with other communities in different socio-religious function.

In the religious movement a Bhakti Cult (Refined Bathou dharma) was established. Dr. Mangalsing Hazowari was one of the exponents of the cult. In the cult the traditional system of Bathou worship is made in new mode. They believe different gods and goddesses of traditional Bathou religion with a Sijou Plant. They almost use all rites and rituals. But, in stead of offering animal sacrifice and libation, they worship Bathou and other gods and goddesses with devotional songs, prasad and by offering flowers.

Another refined cult of Bathou dharma was established by Swami Nabin Brahmari. The cult is known as Bathou (Śiva) dharma. To preach this religion he established Arya Brahma Gyan Mat or Baba Sidhya Yogashram at Ultapani of Kokrajarh district near Bhutan Border. According to this sect, Śiva is the ultimate reality. The concept of Siva is drawn from the Hindu scriptures like Upaniṣads, Puranas or Vedas. "This sect believes that Śiva has created the Bathou religion solely for Boros and the spiritual life of the Boros can be culminated only through this religion"²². Like Bathou religion they have also constructed Bathou altar in courtyard with a circular fence of bamboo splits. In the religious movement a small number of Bodos were also converted into the Sai Baba Bhakti Cult of Hinduism which does not impact the Boro society.

In the religious movement a very small but important influence was seen in regard to Vaisnavite movement or Ek Saran Nam Dharma of Sri Sankardeva. The predominance of Brahma dharma returned thousands of devotees of Ek Saran Nam Dharma to the Bhakti cult.

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