

CHAPTER – V

GOD OF THE BODO'S RELIGION :

A SOCIOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW.

The Bodo's : An Introduction

Bodos are widely accepted as the aboriginal or earliest inhabitants of Assam. Bodos, in the pre-historic age, were known as Kirātas. They were most powerful and built up strong kingdom throughout the whole North-East region of India. In contrast to the Aryans, they were more powerful but less intelligent. The ancient history shows them as powerful rulers not only in North-Eastern India but also in Moran district of Nepal and Rangpur district of Bangladesh also.

The Boro-Kacharis of Assam is generally fall under the great Bodo group of the Indo-Mongoloid family falling within the Assam Burmese linguistic section. In North Bengal and lower ranges of Himalayas coming within the territory of Nepal, they are known as Mech or Meches. In upper Assam they are identified as Sonowal or Thengal Kacharis, while in the western Assam they are popularly known as Boro or Boro-kachari. In Southern part of North Cachar and Cachar they are designated as Dimasas, Barmanas and Hojai. According to S. K. Chatterjee, this group of Bodos assumed their name from the district of Kachar. Now the Bodo population is largely concentrated at Kokrajhar district – under BTC of Assam.

Bodo-kacharis are characteristically Mongoloid in appearance. The Mongoloid physical feature is seen in the physical structure of the Boro-kacharis. Like Mongoloid they have strong cheek bones, slit eyes, a

slight growth of hair in the body and scant beard. They are shorter and more stocky than the Indians of the north-east.

The Bodos are originally falling under the Mongoloid family. The people who lived in Siberia and Mongolia around 2000 B.C. were known as Mongoloid. "The Bodo, a plains Tribal community now inhabiting the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, along with their closely allied other tribes now known by different names and inhabiting south-east Nepal, North Bengal, Garo Hills of Meghalaya, North Cachar Hills and the Cachar plains in south Assam, Tripura and also some adjacent areas of Bangladesh, are the decedents of those early settlers migrating in successive waves from south-east Tibet"¹. According to the history, the Mongoloid people were divided into three groups. One group of them went towards Europe who settled in Turkey and Italy. The second group migrated towards North-America, Mexico and Japan. The third group migrated to south west of China and generally settled in Hoangho Valley and Tibet. From China and Tibet some of them migrated to the foothills of Bhutan. During their course of migration from the foothills of Bhutan they changed their direction towards West and settled in present Cooch-Bihar and Dinajpur district of West-Bengal. A section of them went towards Garohills (Meghalaya), Mymonsingh, Syllet (Bangladesh) and Tripura.

According to the 1971 census, the Bodos are the 8th largest tribal group of India.

Bodo : The Term

Kachari is a generic name of the Bodos. The term Bodo means 'man'. "Kachari is a generic term for a number of groups speaking a more or less common dialect or language and claiming a common

mythical ancestry. E. Gait and others regarded the Kachari as the aborigines, or earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley i.e., the whole of modern Assam, North Bengal and parts of Bangladesh"².

The Bodos were described as the inhabitants of a country which was lying to the north of the Himalayas and west of China. This land was known as 'Bod'. The word 'Bod' is supposed to mean a homeland. The inhabitants of Bod country were known as the Bodo-Ficha or Bodocha or Bodosa ('Bodo' means 'land' and 'Ficha' or Cha means 'children', hence children of the Bod country). In course of time they came to be known as simply Bodo>Boro.

The Bodos of Cachar (Kachar) district (specially North Cachar) call themselves Kacharis. According to S. K. Chatterjee, they assumed their name from the district of Kachar. The meaning of Kachar is lowland or border lands. They are also simply known as Dimasa (Dima = big water, i.e, Brahmaputra, Sa or Cha = son or children, hence, Dimasa = son or children of big water, Brahmaputra).

According to S. K. Chatterjee and Kalaguru Vishnu Prasad Rabha, the word Bodo or Boro was derived from the word "Bod". The meaning of the word 'Kachari' is derived from the word "Khor" and "Hari". "Khor" or "Khare" means head. 'Hari' means clan. From that sense kachari means a ruling clan. "The Mongoloid people of Tibet who lived in the foothills of the Himalayas are called Kakhayat or Kassat in Sanskrit language. From this word Kakhyat or Kassat the word Kachari has come"³.

"The word "Kachari" was used as the racial name by Britishers, Christian Missionaries and the British officers who first created literature in Bodo language. Following them, probably Bodo writers too used the

name kachari in their books"⁴. In the later period, Boro-kachari and Boro were used as the racial name of the Bodos. So, the three names – Kachari, Boro-kachari and Boro are used as the racial name at the same time.

Brian Hodgson was the first author who used the generic name 'Bodo' on the Boros. It is seen that British writer often used the letter 'D' in place of an Indian word 'R' with strong sound. In kachari language the etymological meaning of the term 'Boro' is 'men'.

Religion of the Bodo's:

The prime religion of the Bodos is known as 'Bathou Dhorom' where Bodos believe different gods and goddesses. In Bathou Religion one supreme god in the person of Bathou is believed. Most of the Bodo people are concerned with Bathou religion. It is the traditional religion of the Bodos.

The religion of the Bodo race is commonly called as animistic. The foreign scholars such as S. Endle, Edward Stack, Major Playfair and others have described the religion of the Bodos as animistic with beliefs in ghosts and spirits. But such description is not accepted by the Assamese scholar like Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya. "Boros are not animistic. They are worshippers of Bathou, the Supreme God"⁵.

Besides their traditional religion some Bodo people were converted into Vaishnavism, imitated by 16th century social reformer Sankardeva. They were regarded as the Sarania Bodos. A few number of the Bodo people have been converted into Christianity too. "Christianity among the Boros of the Brahmaputra Valley is a recent phenomenon. It penetrated into the Brahmaputra Valley much later than in the other regions. It influenced mainly the Boros of Assam"⁶. In

between the last part of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century a new wave of conversion has been taken place among the Bodos to the 'Brahma Dharma' preached by Late Kalicharan Brahma. The original propounder of Brahma Dharma was Srimat Siv Narayan param Hangsa of Calcutta. Kalicharan Brahma (Mech) preached the teachings of Srimat Siv Narayan param Hangsa among the Boros. Another sect of Bodos is found which is known as the Śaivism sect or Mani Bathou Śiva Dharma was founded by Guru Rupamoni Devi of Gossaigaon (Basugaon) of Bongaigaon district. According to this religion, Śiva is the Chief god. Another conversion has grown up which has gained good ground among the Bodos, that is, the sat sang religion of Thakur Anukul. One development of Bathou religion was taken into place, that is, the Refined Bathou Dharma (Bhakti cult). It was the old Bathou cult made to worship in new mode. There is also another branch (cult) of Bathou which is known as Bathou (Śiva) Dharma of Swami Nabin Brahmari. A small number of Bodos have been converted to Sai Baba bhakti cult of Hinduism. But their number is quite insignificant and it does not have impact on the Bodo society. Besides these religions a negligible number of Bodos are seen in the Bhakti cult of chaitanya and other cult of Hinduism. Though both Bathouist and the followers of Kalicharan Brahma are different in their religious ideology but culturally both the sections do not differ from its other. "But the religious belief of the traditional Boro-Kacharis differ substantially with that of the 'Brahmans' who institute 'Hom-Yojña' before the sacred fire in all socio-religious obligations following the tenets preached by Guru Kalicharan Brahma. This section (i.e., the Brahmas) Practise vedic rites like other Hindus and do not resort to appeasement of gods and goddesses by sacrificing pig and fowls and also by offering rice-beer"⁷

Religion and Philosophy:

Religion and Philosophy are closely related. The religion cannot run without Philosophy. Philosophy is just like the flower and beauty of a tree and the fruit is the religion. Therefore if we discuss religion then we have to discuss Philosophy. The relation between religion and Philosophy is just like a man's bosom and backside. Every religion in this world has its own Philosophy. Like this the Bathou religion of Bodos has also its own Philosophy.

Place of God in Bathou religion:

The Bodos believe Bathou as the Supreme god or chief god in Bathou religion. Bathou is the highest god in the Bodo pantheon. Bathou Dhorom is the prime and traditional religion of the Bodos. Sijou plant (*Euphorbia Splenden*) is the living symbol of Bathou. Bathou is pre-eminently the object of family interest and family honour. "He is never presented in idol form, but is well in evidence through his living symbol, the *siju (hiju)* tree (*Euphorbia Splenden*), which is often to be seen in the Kachari homestead surrounded by a circular fence of split bamboo"⁸. In Bathou religion 'Bathou' is identified with 'Śiva' of Hindu religion. "Their religious philosophy centers round the super power of 'Bathou Barai' or 'Khorai Barai Maharaja' which is analogous to 'Śiva' of the Hindu Trinity"⁹. The chief God is known in different names in Bathou religion. He is known as Annangosai, Chirgiri, Abonglauri, Bathou Brai or Śibrai. According to the Bodos, Bathoubrai is the primitive creator of the Universe.

Mainao is the chief goddess and second important deity of the Bathou religion. She is the consort of Bathou. She is also known as Bathou Buroi, Bulli Buroi, Kharia Buroi or Sw Buroi. She is the "Guardian

of the rice fields" or the "Protectress of the paddy fields". "Only second to Bathou is his good consort, Mainao, though, unlike her husband, she has no special emblem visible to the human eye. Her special function is that of 'Guardian of the rice fields'; and among a purely agricultural community like that of the Kacharis, she is of course held in very high regard"¹⁰. There is a belief regarding Mainao that if she is offered egg in the harvesting period then the deity protects land. The deity protects land and the people and increase production of the rice. They worship her during the period of harvesting the 'Asu' and 'Sali' crops. So, they believe two forms of goddesses 'Asu Mainao' and Sali Mainao' as the forms of 'Lakshimī'. They also worship different forms of Mainao as there are different types of crops. Mainao is the consort of the chief 'Bathou Borai' or 'Sivrai'. She is also called 'Bathou Buri'. She is the chief of the domestic female deities known by various names, such as 'Song Buri' etc. She is the gurdian and the protectress of the household, family wealth and paddy in the field; hence Her name is 'Mainao' ('Mai' means 'Paddy' and 'na' (nao) means 'to keep', 'to watch over'). She is equivalent to the Hindu goddesses Lakshmi. She is symbolized by a bamboo pole decorated with a red cloth and planted on a lump of earth raised in the easternmost part of a house of every traditional Boro.

Besides Bura Bathou and Mainao goddess in Bathou religion, there are many other minor gods and goddesses propitiated by the Bodos. They are Bura Alilong, Bura Kharji, Abla Khungur, Agrang Khoila, Rajputur, Rajkhandra, AliBura, Aidi-Baoli, Manasu, Jaman, Bagh Raja etc.

Over and above these, some other gods and goddesses which are used to propitiate in Bathou religion.

Mainao Gaddesses: - Asu Mainao, Kharma Mainao, Sali Mainao, Basumuti Mainao, Jhul Mainao, Damua Mainao, Josa gosom Mainao, Josa daothu Mainao etc. are the various crop goddesses associated with different varieties of paddy. Mainao has a place in the homestead also.

Garja Gods: - In Bodo 'Garja' means 'god' or 'deity'. The Garjas are propitiated at a place which is away from home. There are many garja gods or deities. The important garja gods are 'Lakhi garja', 'Sew garja', 'Tulsing-Mulsing garja', 'Duramari garja', 'Daoang garja', 'Sindu garja', 'Thong-thongali garja', 'Thia garja', 'Batho garja', 'Soka garja', 'Ihew garja', 'Phew garja', 'Maya garja', 'Shaya garja', 'Dhan kubir garja', 'Borai Raja garja', 'Dano garja' and 'Gola Kata garja'.

Decendants of the Borai Raja: - Borai Raja has many descendants who are also addressed during the time of garja puja. They are 'Borai Choudri', 'Nisan Dhara', 'Phanka Dhara', 'Mech-mechani', 'Koch-Kochani', 'Rabha-Rabhani', 'Hira-Hirani', 'Gongar-Gongarni', etc. (The people of Bhutan are called as Gongar-Gongarni).

Princess Goddess: - Along with the Prince-gods, princess-goddesses are also given seats during the Puja festivals. They are 'Alai khungri', 'Bilai khungri', 'Ish khungri', 'Bish Khungri', 'Maya Khungri', 'Shaya Khungri', 'Daisa Khungri' and 'Laitho Khungri'.

Kubir Gods: - Kubir Gods are regarded as malevolent gods. They are 'Ish Kubir', 'Bish Kubir', 'Akhala Kubir', 'Batana Kubir', 'Kal Kubir', 'Shāyā Kubir', 'Māyā Kubir', 'Hakona Kubir', 'Dhan Kubir', 'Langthia Kubir' and 'Patal Kubir'.

Harsa Garja (Non Bodo Garja): - 'Mahadeo', is the child non-Bodo Garja God. His followers are 'Sila Rai', 'Rupa Rai', 'Bera Bhanga', 'Santha Mara', 'Dhanka Mara' etc.

Bishahari is the Non-Bodo Garja (Goddess). "The Bodos give 'Visahari' a seat during the Garja Puja and the Kherai Puja. They regard 'Visahari' as a non-Bodo goddess and provide a seat in the line of the non-Bodo gods and goddesses"¹¹. The followers of Bishahari are 'Ai Kālī', 'Shāyā Kālī', 'Ai Barmani' etc. 'Garakia Gosai' is the Non-Bodo Garja. The followers of the 'Garakhia (in Assamese 'garakhia' means a 'Cowherd') 'Gosai' are 'Krishna Gosai', 'Madhab Gosai', 'Gadab Gosai', 'Laokhar Gosai' etc. The followers are the 'Chikna Raja', 'Nau Raja', 'Dighla Raja', 'Shai Raja', 'Bai Raja' etc. 'Ai Sati', 'Ai Parbati', 'Ai Durgā', 'Ai Kālī', 'Māyā Kālī', 'Gishong Kālī', 'Phakra Kālī', are the followers of the 'Ai Thakurani goddess.

The kachari deities naturally fall into two classes – (1) Household Gods and (2) Village Gods. The former are worshipped inside the house or in the homestead; the latter are worshipped outside the house, usually near the sacred grove of trees or bamboos or in the thansali, a sacred place.

1) Household Deities: -

'Bathou Brai' or 'Old Bathou', 'Mainao Goddesses', 'Song Raja', 'Song Rani' and 'Bura Bagh Raja' are the Household or Domestic Deities. "Besides Śhiva they also worship other God and Goddess at home such as Mainao Buri, Asu Mainao, Sali Maino, Song Raja, Kumari and Bhandari etc."¹²

Among the household gods, Bathou is pre-eminently the guardian of the family. He is never presented in idol form but in his living symbol, The Sijou tree (*Euphorbia splendens*, a kind of cactus) which is often to be seen in the kachari homestead surrounded by a circular fence of split bamboo. Bathou is worshipped inside the homestead with the help of

plaintains, tamul-nuts, pan-leaves, gazi and with the offerings in the form of heads of goats, pigs, fowls etc.

Mainao is the chief household goddess. She is the wife of Bathou. Unlike Her husband, She has no special emblem visible to the human eye. She is the gurdian of the rice-field. She is held in very high regard among the agricultural community like that of kacharis. She is apparently especially worshipped at the period of harvesting the asu and sali crops, so in this regard different Mainao goddesses are worshipped.

'Song Raja' and 'Song Rani' seem to be especial objects of devotion to women of the Bodo race. Here women especially pay their devotions and make offerings, particulars at the monthly period.

Bura Bagh Raja is apparently merely the name of the tiger. He is belived as the king of the forest and is worshipped to get rid of from the danger of the tiger at night.

2) Village Deities:

Village deities are worshipped outside the homestead. They are specially worshipped by the villagers in a field or in a secrod place or thansali or in the banks of the river. All the Garja gods, kubir gods, Descendants of the Borai Raja, princes Godesses are given seats within the village Deities. Specially village deities are worshipped in different pujas or occasions to get rid of some danger or demon. As for example, Morong puja is performed to propitiate the cholera demon. In these pujas offerings are made by goats, flowers, pigeons, fowls, betel nuts etc. In addition to these, flowers, eggs, pounded rice flour etc. are sometimes placed on rafts and set float on a river. By doing this they believe that diseases or demons have floated away. All the Mainao

goddesses, Garja gods, princes goddesses, descendants of the Borai Raja, kubir gods, Harsha garja, Malevolent gods etc. are included within the group of village deities.

Bodos believe the existence of different malevolent gods in the form of spirits, ghosts, witch-craft etc. It is also believed that these super natural elements cause diseases and sufferings to the human beings. The activities of the super natural power can be known with the help of the magical power of the Bodo ojhas.

Bira Modai (Bira god) is generally known as a popular malevolent god. Bira Modais are controlled and used in different ill purposes by the ojhas (Medicine man). Bira Modai can do harm to any person. The Bira Modai can disturb a person in such a way that he cannot live peacefully. Bira Modai throws stones to the houses in the broad daylight also. The stone which is thrown is visible but the thrower is not visible. Bira Modai is believed to take shelter at the bamboos. Sometimes the innocent walker is attacked by the Bira Modai when the person walks in a solitary place full of bamboos. The green bamboos remain fallen across the road and as soon as the man starts crossing it the bamboo stands up alongwith the man who falls down from the top of the bamboo.

According to the Bodo myth, 'Siw Borai' or 'Jew Borai' is the alternative name of Bathou. In Bodo 'Siw' or 'jew' means 'Life' or 'Soul', Borai means old and wise man. There is the phonetic similarity between 'Siw' or 'jew'. Bodos believe Śiva is equivalent to Bathou. In Bodo religion Śiva is known as Gila Dambra, khorā Borai, Sriborai, Bathou borai etc. So Śiva puja is popular among the Bodos.

It is found in the Bodo mythology that Bodos believed Aham Guru as their infinite God. He is believed as their infinite God. He is believed

as the most powerful. His first appearance in the form of man in the Universe is called Himself Sri Borai. He is also known as Jiw Borai or Siw Borai or Síbrai or Bathou. According to the Bodo traditional belief Sri Borai created his wife shri Buri and then the first men known as mon-sin-sin. As Mon-sin-sin remained a lifelong celibate, 'Síbrai' and His wife created 'Darimoba' the male and 'Siring Douba' the female in order to propagate the human population. Bathou created the 'Sijou plant' the first tree which stands as an emblem of the supreme God at the altar. Aham Guru is the creator of all and 'Sri Borai' is His incarnation. That is why in every religious festival of the Bodos He is pronounced at first in the words 'Ahom Swargadew Gosai'.

The place of 'Mon-Sin-Sin' in the Bodo society is found as a wisemen. According to the Bodos, He is the first giver of ethical principles, customs and traditions to human society.

Many deities are believed as manifested from the Bathou Raja for the purpose of the creation of the universe. Ailong is the god of earth and believed as the bodyguard of Bathou Raja. Karzi is believed as the Minister of Bathou. Khoilā is the god of air. Rajputar is the son of Bathou Raja. Rajkundra is the grandson. Bagh Raja is the Monarch of the woods. "The Bodos also worship the tiger-god (Bagh Raja) or the tiger king during the Bihu festival"¹³. Manas is the goddess of the river manas. Agrang is the general of Bathou Raja. At Aikhungri and Bilaikhungri are Bathou's daughters. Laokhar Gosai is the protector of cowherds. Song Raja is the manifestation of bathou Raja and is sheltered inside the main house along with the Mainao and is symbolized by slightly raised lump of earth. He is worshipped by the women inside the main house during the period of the monthly impurity. Bulli Buri is the goddess of learning, the manifestation of

mainao and is equivalent to Hindu goddess Saraswati. Many village deities like 'Bura Mahadeo', 'Thal kubir', 'Bura Gosain' etc. in Bodo pantheon have been adopted from Hindu pantheon.

Hence the Bodo people believe the 'Siw Borai' or 'Jiw Borai' or 'Śiva' is the first incarnation of the God. He is also known as 'Mon-Sin-Sin Borai' who is the ripest of all in knowledge and wisdom.

SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECT OF GOD

The Bodos are sociologically one of the most important tribes of north-eastern India, particularly of Assam. In the Bodo society different types of gods and goddesses are worshipped in different social and religious occasions. In the Bodo society mainly we have two types of religious rites where different types of gods and goddesses are sociologically understood. These are Kherai puja and Garja puja which are also celebrated as festivals. These festivals are associated with Bathou worship. But among the two Kherai is the main religious festivals of the Bodos. Kherai is the prayer institution of 'Bathoubwrai' or 'Śibrai'.

Kherai puja: -

Kherai puja is believed to be the greatest religious festival of the Bodos. It is performed in the month of kartik and Aghon in an open field by the people of a village collectively. Kherai puja is the annual festival of the Bodos. All Bodo people do not perform all the four types of Kherai in a particular place at the same time. Different types of Kherai puja are performed in different Bodo areas.

Bodos perform Kherai puja on some specific occasions. For the welfare of the villagers as a whole they perform kherai puja collectively.

once or twice in a year. For the welfare of the private life, they perform kherai puja individually. Besides welfare of both private and public lives, the kherai puja is performed to the good harvest of crops.

Kherai puja is regarded as a national festival of the Bodos. It is a symbol of hope and desire, which has been prevalent among them since the time of their ancestors. The Bodo kings also were believed to have been depending on the 'kherai puja' for success at the battle. There is an instance that the powerful koch king Naranarayana also had to perform the kherai puja to satisfy 'Mahadeva' (Bathou Borai), with the Bodo dances before starting the battles against the Ahoms.

It is found that Bathou has relation with kherai. 'Bathoubwrai' is sometimes called 'khoribwrai'. The word 'kherai' is born from 'khoribwrai' means the primitive spiritual creator of the universe who first created the universe and living beings. Kherai dance is most important during the kherai puja to satisfy their God.

Bodos are agriculturist and hence their festival has relation with agriculture. So the purpose of kherai festival is to acquire blessings from 'Bathou Barai' (Śiva) and 'Mainao Buri' to have good harvest and for the welfare of the village. They perform this puja on some specific occasion. The kherai is of four types (i) The Darshan kherai, (ii) The Umrao kherai, (iii) The Phalo kherai and (iv) Nowaoni kherai (domestic kherai).

(i) Darshan kherai: - The Darshan kherai is performed during the first week of the month of 'kati' or 'kārtik' to worship Lakshimī, the goddess of wealth and welfare. So, it is also called as the "Lokhi kherai". It is also known as the 'Sali kherai' since it is concerned with the Sali or winter crop.

(ii) Umrao kherai: - Umrao kherai is performed during the month of 'Ashara' at the end of the 'Amoti Sua' (the unclear period) for the welfare of the villagers as well as of the crops. This kherai is also known as the 'Ashu kherai' ('Asu' is a kind of paddy of rainy season).

(iii) Phalo kherai: - The phalo kherai is performed during the month of Magha (As Assamese month), specially on the day of 'Maghi purnima' or the full moon of the month of 'Magha'. This kherai is also known as the 'Danshrang kherai', as it is performed during the full Moon of the month Magha (Danshrang is bright night of the full moon).

(iv) Nowani or Domestic or Family kherai: - Nowani or Domestic or Family kherai is performed to propitiate different gods and goddesses by the family when it deems necessary. The Bodo people believed that all the bad intentions of different gods and goddesses can be controlled by performing this kherai puja. It is mainly performed for the welfare of the people at all times. It is limited within the family only.

Origin of the term 'kherai'

Various writers and scholars are of different opinion regarding the origin of the word 'kherai'. "According to Dr. S.K. Chatterjee, there is similarity between the Ker Puja of the Tripuris and the Kherai Puja of the Bodos"¹⁴. The word 'kherai' has relation with Bathou, the chief God who is also known as 'kherai Borai' or 'khuria Borai' means 'latent old man'. The Bodos call him as 'kherai'. So, according to some, kherai puja is performed in his name. There is another explanation about the origin of the term 'kherai'. Sacrifice of animals and birds is essential for the 'kherai puja'. The sound 'khe' is produced when a goat or pig is sacrificed before the 'Bathou' by cutting the neck of the sacrificed animals with a particular 'dao' at a stroke. The worshippers believe that

the word 'kherai' originates from the sound 'khe' and is added with the word 'rai' which means puja or enchanting formula before the chief god 'Bathou'. So, it is believed that the 'kherai' is derived from a combination like 'khe-rai'. The Bodos believe and worship many gods and goddesses during the kherai puja'. Different gods and goddesses possess different position and received sacrifices according to their position. They are also worshipped during the puja by offering different materials.

God in the kherai puja: -

'Bathou Borai' or 'kherai Borai' is the god-in-chief of the Bodos. He is given the highest position among the gods. Bathou Borai and other gods and goddesses are propitiated by offering different materials and also with the sacrifices. "It is intended to propitiate 'Bathou' and 'Mainao' – the two primary deities of their adoration along with hosts of other gods and goddesses"¹⁵.

It is found that the chief god of the Bodos is identified with the Aryan god 'Śiva' or 'Mahadeva'. The Aryan worshippers used to worship 'Śiva', the god of the Bodos with animal sacrifice. The Boro kings also had to perform Kherai Puja to satisfy gods and goddesses to defeat enemies at the battle. "There is an instance that the powerful Koch King Naranarayana also had to perform the 'Kherai Puja' to satisfy 'Mahadeva' (Bathou Borai) with the Boro dancers before starting the battles against the Ahoms"¹⁶. Śiva worship is done with the help of Kherai puja.

To propitiate god sacrifice is must during the kherai puja. Specially they (Bodos) sacrifice birds and animals in the name of different gods and goddesses. Generally cocks, goats and pigs are

selected for sacrifices to the god-in-chief 'Bura Bathou' and other gods and goddesses. Along with the sacrifice the worshippers also offer 'jau' (rice bear) to the gods and goddesses. The worshippers believed that god-in-chief 'Bura Bathou' and other gods remain satisfied while they are offered 'jau' (rice bear) and sacrifice during the puja. Pigeons are also essential to be sacrificed during the 'kherai puja'.

To propitiate the chief god along with areca nuts and betel leaves, a pig is sacrificed in his name. The head of the sacrificed are placed together on the altar. Aileng is the body-guard of the 'Bathou Borai'. A cock is sacrificed to Him. 'Kherai' is the messenger of the god-in-chief, a cock is sacrificed to Him. 'Karji' is the follower of 'Bura Bathou', a pig is given to him. 'Raj khandra' is also a follower of 'Bura Bathou' a pig is given to Him. 'Song Raja' is the owner of the wild animals and a follower of the 'Bura Bathou'. The hunters propitiate Him before entering into the jungle for hunting. He is given a red cock. His consort is 'Song Rani'. Both are worshipped during the kherai puja. 'Alai khungri' is the princess goddess and She is a follower of the 'Bathou Bura' or 'kharlia Buri'. She is given a pig. 'Bhandari' is the owner of the store of the foodstuffs. She is given a red cock. 'Ranchandri' or 'Ranphagli' is known as the god of war. Before starting for the battle field she is believed to be propitiated with a sacrifice of the cocks. 'Bulli Buri' is regarded as the owner of the fish. She must be propitiated before starting for fishing. She is also regarded as the goddess of medicine and 'Mantra'. She is also given a pig as sacrifice. 'Laokhar Gossai' is the god of the cowherds. He is also known as 'Garakhia Gossai'. This god is identified as the 'Lord Krishna'. A pair of pigeons are freed in the name of this god. 'Nobab Badsha' (Muslim god) is also given a seat during the pujas. A cock is sacrificed in the name of this god. Sometimes the peer Saheb is also given a seat during the pujas.

Doudini: -

Doudini has important role to propitiate gods and goddesses in the 'Kherai puja'. 'Doudini' is the female key dancer during the 'Kherai puja'. All the three days and nights Kherai dances are performed by the Doudini to please the holy Bathou Borai and other gods and goddesses. All the items of the Kherai puja are performed by Doudini while she is helped by the 'Douri' and 'Ojha' with different musical instruments. " While the Shaman concerns himself with past, the daudini is concerned mainly with the future and is the chief functionary of the Kherai Puja dance of the Boro Kacharis"¹⁷. In the puja Doudini is found like a spiritual being. In this stage she tell the tales of the gods and goddesses in His voices. She moves the Bathou and sprinkles holy water from a pot and dances while the 'drums', 'flutes' and 'cymbles' are played on. The worshippers also may join in the circle of dancing with Doudini. In the dances she changes her mood and assimilates herself with gods and goddesses. She also imitates the nature of different gods and goddesses. The Doudini extends her valuable services to the priest during the time of worship even by offering sacrifices to the deities.

Ojha: -

The ojha has important role during the kherai puja. He instructs the worshippers and co-workers of the puja to help Doudhini in performing the puja smoothly. Ojha is that person who enchants 'mantras' or 'formulas' at the time of pujas. It is believed that the ojha is able to understand the motives of the gods at the time of the pujas. He enchants the mantras or formulas in such a way that the gods and goddesses become pleased easily. During the 'kherai puja' the prayer is offered by the 'ojha' to the gods and goddesses through Doudhini.

At the end of the kherai puja Doudhini performs a role of 'Mainao', the goddess of wealth. In the puja, the worshippers rescue the 'Mainao' from the earth through the 'Doudhini'. In that case, the Doudhini sits on the ground in front of the altar of the Bathou Borai without any movement. At that situation the ojha declares the reason of the position of the Doudhini to the worshippers. The ojha declares that the Doudhini is possessed by the Mainao. So, to satisfy the goddess, a pig is sacrificed to the goddess of wealth. The body, head and the blood of the pig are placed together before the altar of the Mainao while the flute, the drums and the cymbals are played on and produce a melodious tune. At that time the ojha enchants the formula to propitiate the Mainao.

At last at the request of the worshippers the Mainao becomes satisfied and agrees to stay at the houses of the worshippers. She expresses her willingness to go with them on condition. She says, "Let us go my dear children, you will keep me with great care, I will stay at year houses; you will worship me everyday, your wealth will increase day by day"¹⁸. After expressing her willingness to go the Doudhini stands up from her seat and starts at that position.

(B) Garja puja: -

Garja puja another important religious festival of the Bodos. There is difference of opinion among the Bodo scholars regarding the word 'garja'. Some like to give the meaning of the word 'Garja' as 'God'. 'God' are called in Bodo as 'Modai'. Again some scholars define the meaning of the word as a way of making ones free from danger. "In the words of Bhaben Narzi, a Boro scholar, 'Garja' means 'niskriti' in Assamese"¹⁹. Here also the meaning is not clear but probably bears the meaning of expulsion or discharging. During the 'Garja puja' some evil

gods are expelled or discharged from the area of a village. This system of Garja puja where evil gods are expelled is called 'bhasani' (floating away in the river or a stream). It is also noted that all the gods and goddesses are not expelled publicly. Generally harmful gods and goddesses who create diseases are expelled from a certain village or area by performing the Garja Puja.

The Bodos perform Garja Puja to purify by themselves and the village after any seasonal festival like 'Baisagu' etc. They believe that in the festival people become impure due to the free mixing with each other, walking one's house to another. So in order to purify themselves villagers collectively perform Garja Puja.

If some epidemic appears in a certain family or village then the villagers perform Garja Puja to protect themselves from the evil. In case of wrong activity, the villagers compell the wrong doer to arrange Garja Puja to satisfy gods and goddesses as well as to purify himself.

The Bodos believe that the flood also carries diseases to the villagers. So in order to keep the villagers free from danger they perform Garja Puja. It is found in some parts of Bodo areas that after heavy flood they perform Garja Puja.

Harsa Garja Gods (Non-Bodo Garja Gods): -

Along with the Boro Gods some non-Boro gods are also given seat during the Garja puja. 'Mahadeo' or 'Mahadeva' is the chief non-Boro Garja god. Though 'Bathou' is believed as equivalent or same to 'Siva' or 'Mohadeva' but He is also addressed seperately at the time of Garja puja as the non-Bodo Hindu god. The followers of Mahadeo are addressed at the time of the puja. They are 'Sila Rai', 'Rupa Rai', 'Bera Bhanga', 'Santha Mara', 'Dhamka Mara' etc.

'Bishahari' is another important non Boro Garja God. The 'Garakhia Gosai' or 'Laokhar Gosai' (Sri Krishna in Assamese) is also non-Boro Garja god. The followers of him are 'Madhab Gosai', 'Gadab Gosai', 'Baro Gopal', 'Baro Gopini', 'Langthia Gosai' etc. All of them are nurtured at the time of the Puja. The gods and goddesses are different from area to area but the major gods and goddesses remain the same.

Time of the Garja Puja: -

Generally Garja Puja is performed two times in a year. The first Garja Puja is performed during the Assamese month Jeth and Ahar after the seasonal festival Baisagu held at Bahag (Assamese month). This Garja is also known as 'Phojaonai' or 'Bhasani Garja'. 'Bhasani' means something floated away in the river. During this puja the materials and sacrificed are kept on a 'Bhel' made of plaintain trees and then let it floating. "By doing this the worshippers believe that the diseases may leave the village after the evil-gods are being expelled from the village"²⁰. The second Garja Puja is performed during the month of 'Kati' and 'Aghana' (Assamese month). This Garja Puja is known as or called as 'Lakhi' or 'Lakshmi Garja'. With the help of the Garja puja the Boros welcome the goddess of wealth, 'Mainao' to the village and worship her for better prosperity.

Place of God in different ceremonies and festivals:

Bodos believe and worship different gods and goddesses in different social ceremonies and festivals like Baisagu and Marriage ceremony etc. The sociological status of God is not found only in religious ceremonies but also found in different social functions.

Baisagu: The 'Baisagu' is the new years festival of the Boro-kacharis. "By far the most important occasion of marry-making in social

life of the Boro-Kacharis is the celebration of 'Baisagu' in the month of Baisakh (Mid April). It is also known as Bishu (or Bihu in Assamese).²¹ They also celebrate two other Bihus known as 'Domashi' (Bhogali Bihu in Assamese) and 'Katrigacha' (Kangali Bihu in Assamese) but none of them are important then the Baisagu from the point of view of merriment. In the festival the supreme deity 'Bathou' is worshipped by offering chicken and rice-beer. On that day the householder worship the Sijou plant as the symbol of Bathou.

Mrriage Ceremony: In the traditional system of marriage ceremony Bodos used to pray or worship gods and goddesses in different way. 'Hathasuni' khurnai' is the earliest and traditional form of marriage. This form of marriage is very simple. At this marriage ceremony the bride offers meal to the bridegroom at a function. After taking a little portion of the food the bridegroom rises from the seat and pray to god 'Bathou Borai' to grant them a peaceful conjugal life.

The place of god is deeply seen during the marriage 'Hathasuni khurnai' where the bride and bridegroom have to address seperatly the God-in-chief, 'Bathou Borai' and other gods and goddesses. It is clear that in traditional Boro society no marriage ceremony was possible without the concept and belief of gods and goddesses.

Putuli Haba (Doll Marriage): In some parts of Assam, the Bodos perform a putuli haba (doll marriage) on the seventh day of the Baisagu festival. This festival is performed at the place of worship of the village jointly. They make dolls of straw in the name of Diba Borai and Dibi Buroi or Raona and Raoni who are believed to be deities of wind and rain. They worship them with the hope of sufficient rain for cultivation. They believe that if the deities of rain and wind like Diba Borai and Dibi Buroi become satisfied then there would be sufficient rain in the earth.

God in Boro dances:

Boro dances are of five classes. In fact, the dances of the Boros are originated from kherai institution. The kherai is nothing but a prayer institution of 'Bathou'.

Five classes of Bodo dances are –

- (a) Kherai dance,
- (b) Habajanai dance,
- (c) Bagaroumba dance,
- (d) Bwisagu dance and
- (e) Raijw janai dance.

In between the five dances, the Kherai and Bagaroumba dances has some sort of links with the God which has deep influences in the Bodo culture. It has already mentioned that the kherai institution is the prayer institution of 'Bathou Borai' or 'Sibrai'. Kherai dances are therefore, no doubt, the prayer dances of 'Sibrai'.

There are sixteen types of kherai dances which indicates sixteen deities. These are called primary kherai dances.

'Bagaroumba dance' (Kherai dance) is the most beautiful and associated with merry making and gossips exclusively by the fairsex. Now we see the meaning of the word 'Bagaroumba'. The word 'Bagaroumba' consists of the following words – Ba+Ega+Roumba = Bagroumba. The details of the meaning –

'Ba' means to carry a responsibility, 'Ega' means 'to come out', 'Rou' means 'heaven', high place of God'. In Bodo 'Ba' means 'five' also.

So, the underlying meaning of Bagroumba is the dance created for the need of carrying the Bathou, the supreme God of Bathouists.

who is the origin of five spiritual elements from highland i.e. from heaven.

In 'kherai' more than 16 dance recitals are instituted through which ethnic and cultural identity of the tribe manifest fully. In 'kherai' at the end a ritualistic, a common prayer is offered. The usual time for holding the kherai festival is the month of kartic (in Assamese 'kati') when plantation is over but the seedlings are still in the process of growing. But it is now performed in different times found in different Boro areas.

PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECT OF GOD

The Bodos believe supreme god in the person of 'Bathou'. The 'Bathou' is called himself as 'Jiw Borai' or 'Siw Borai'. In Bodô 'Jiw' or 'Siw' means 'life' or 'soul'. Borai means 'old' and 'wise man'. So, the 'Bathou' or 'jiw' or 'siw' means 'the latent old and wise spiritual person'. 'Sijou' (Euphorbia Splander) is the living symbol of Bathou. Efforts to identify Bathou with Śiva of Hindu have been found in Bodo religion. Bathou is the highest god of the Bodo pantheon. The prime religion of the Bodos is the Bathou dhoram which incorporates the philosophy of the Bodos. The philosophy indicates the symbolic meaning beyond its literal meaning. According to the philosophical interpretation 'Ba' means 'five' and 'thou' means 'deep. Hence, 'Bathou' means 'five deep spiritual entity. It is a peculiar thing that the Bodo religion or philosophy is intimately concerned with the numerical 'five' or it can be said that the Bathou religion is based on the 'philosophy of Five' or the 'principle of Five'.

The philosophy of Five:

In Bathou religion the numerical 'five' has deep philosophical significance. Some components of Bathou religion has connection with 'Five'. In Bathou philosophy, we can see some examples of philosophical connection with 'Five'. The 'ou' fruit (*dillenia indica*) which is used in worshipping Bathou has five ridges; the siphung (the long bamboo flute) which is used as the musical instrument in prayer has five holes; the Bathou (the altar of the bathou) has five knots (of bamboo strips); the 'Boro Borai' (the Bodo elders) have five moral preachings; the Boros have five principles on which their social customs are based, viz, (1) Agarbad, (2) Phongalothbad, (3) Daokhibad, (4) Khoulabad and (5) Khaoalibad. The five spiritual principles are Ong, Hring, khling, Fwt and Che.

It can be said that in older times the Bodo had five main gods, viz., (1) Ailong (the god of earth), (2) Agrang (the god of water), (3) Khoila (the god of air), (4) Sanja Borai (the goddess of light) and (5) Rajkhungri (the goddess of sky). The original numbers were also found as five, viz., (1) Se (one), (2) Nwi (two), (3) Tham (three), (4) Brwi (four) and (5) Ba (five).

The five spiritual things are, according to them Kshiti, Apa, Teja, Marut and Boum. These are called the five spiritual base of 'Bathou'.

Fivefold preachings are found in different traditional slokas, verses, stories and tales related to the religious rites of Bathou, viz.,

(A) Five spiritual principles -

(a) Meditative prayer to God.

(b) Conversing Religious and spiritual matters,

- (c) Making charitable gifts to the poor,
- (d) Loving the fellow beings and
- (e) Doing things unitedly.

(B) Five senses of Love –

- (a) Love to Anan Gosai,
- (b) Love to fellow beings,
- (c) Love to the wife and children,
- (d) Love to other lower animals and objects of nature and
- (e) Love to one's mother land and the world.

(C) Hatred for the five sinners –

- (a) Hatred for the murder,
- (b) Hatred for the thief,
- (c) Hatred for the liar,
- (d) Hatred for that one indulging in illicit and unnatural intercourses and
- (e) Hatred for the association with a man of guilty of offences.

(D) Five musical tone –

Sa, Re, Ga, Pa, and Dha

(E) Five musical instruments –

Kham (Madal), Chifung (Flute), Serenja, Jotha and Gagana.

(F) Five findings of life –

birth, pleasure, suffering, marriage, old age and death.

(G) Five holy realisation –

- (a) Realisation of the 'Sijou', the supreme soul,
- (b) Linking up the jiwma (human soul) with the 'Sijou', the supreme being,
- (c) Realisation of Mainao (Lakshmi),
- (d) Realization of the five great elements, viz., earth, water, air, fire and ether and their relation to five great gods – Ailong, Agrang, Khoila, Sanja – Borli and Raj khungri and
- (e) Realisation of the need of worldly affairs.

Meaning of Altar:

The altar of Bathou religion is a place or centre where the worship is done. It is also called the 'Bathou Bindo'. Every Bodo family of Bathou religion has a Bathou altar. It is divided into three parts – (a) The first part which is fenced by bamboo strips is the principal altar. In this part, the supreme God of the Bathouists is prayed, (b) a part of the altar which is extended spur like from the parent altar to the northern direction. In this part the 'Noni Mwdai' (The sub ordinate deities of 'Bathou') are prayed while (c) the 'Hagrani Mwdai' (the deities not belong to the Bathou family) are prayed in the similar extended part to the southern direction. "The 'Hagrani Mwdai' are though not belonged to the family of Bathou, yet Bodos believe them to be important for worshipping."²² However, in the first part of the altar, a white piece of cloth is hung up above the ground in the front side of the same. This indicates the formless (Nirakar) existence of the Almighty. In the middle of the principal altar, a Sijou tree (Euphorbia splendens) is planted, just before going to plant the same an egg of hen and a stone are buried under the 'Sijou' tree. Bodos believe that these are the origin of the

creation of the universe. The stone stands for truth and longevity while the egg stands for reproduction and primitive stage of the universe. After that a full blown small branch of Sijou tree is cut down from the parent plant as per religious customs and is made it fresh by spraying holy water either with 'Tulosi' (occimum sanctum) or yatrachi branch (justica Assamica Clarke). In upper region of the branch five curl is made by a white fresh thread (Ewa suta in Assamese). Bodos believe this to be worldly illusion and affection (attraction) since the creation.

The 'Sijou' tree is surrounded by a round fence of small bamboo strips woven by five other bits symbolising the religious and spiritual principles of Bathou. The fence is erected by eighteen pairs of bamboo strips which are planted in vertical direction. Three pairs of the strips in the front side are twisted in traditional style and it is called 'Daothu Bikha Helenai'. This Daotho Bikha stands for the threefold power of Bathou, viz., creation, nutrition and dissolution. At the altar a banana leaflet is laid down on which a pair of betel nut and betel leaf, a bunch of banana fruits, resin and incense and a lamp wick are placed. During the set up of 'Sibrai' and 'Sibrui' Bathouists worship their eternal God Bathou.

The lamp wick is placed under the sijou tree means the symbol of spritual knowledge. Flower is the symbol of softness and beautiness. Fruit symbolizes the result of the action. Dhup and Dhuna (resign) means religious component to worship God. Altar is the realization between Atman and Paramatman. It symbolizes a holy road from earth to the heaven. The ideal of philosophy here indicates a holy link between the God and heaven and the human beings of earth created by Him. The member of the family worship the 'Bathou Borai' regularly.

everybody in the evening lighting a lamp at the altar. The Bodos also believe the sijou tree as the supreme soul.

The Eighteen pairs of the altar and Significance:

The Bathou altar is made by 18 pairs of bamboo strips. The strips are planted in vertical direction. These means puruṣa and prakṛiti or ancient guru and wife. The vertical position means the love between the purusa and prakṛiti. Their vertical direction is also mean a relation between male and female. Male and female are not the same. They are not born and die at the same time. According to some Bathouists, 16 pairs of strips are used in the Bathou Bindo. It is specially found in some parts of Baska district of Assam. The topmost part of the bamboo strip is shaped as 'V' which is called in Bodo a 'Faranga Langai', 'Faranga' means 'bird' and 'Langai' means 'tail'. Here we mean 'V' as 'victory'. One can have victory, joy, happiness, boom etc.

Eighteen pairs of strips symbolizes the eighteen pairs of gods and goddesses or the representatives of the Bathou. The names of gods and goddesses (According of the Bodo scholar, Basuram Basumatary) are mentioned below –

1) Mon-Sing-Sing Bowrai	-	Mon-Sing-Sing Buroi
2) Siw Bowrai	-	Siw Buroi
3) Ahen Bowrai	-	Ahen Buroi
4) Khourai Bowrai	-	Khourai Buroi
5) Ehen Bowrai	-	Ehen Buroi
6) Zwmon Bowrai	-	Khoil Buroi
7) Aham Bowrai	-	Aham Buroi
8) Khoila Bowrai	-	Khoila Buroi
9) Deva Bowrai	-	Deva Buroi

10) Mainow Bowrai	-	Mainow Buroi
11) Song Bowrai	-	Song Buroi
12) Kharmai Bowrai	-	Garmai Buroi
13) Amao Bowrai	-	Amao Buroi
14) Hailung Bowrai	-	Hailung Buroi
15) Agrang Bowrai	-	Agrang Buroi
16) Rajkhandra Bowrai	-	Rajkhandra Buroi
17) Bourli Bowrai	-	Bourli Buroi
18) Alai khungur Bowrai	-	Alai khungur Buroi

The explanation of Bamboo five-fold sheet:

The Bathou altar is made with the help of bamboo five-fold sheet. They bear different philosophical significance. It is explained in this way—

- a) The lower one is believed as earth,
- b) The second upper means water,
- c) The third upper means air,
- d) The fourth upper means sun and
- e) The last upper means sky.

The last upper bamboo sheet contains three fold of bamboo sheets which are believed as the cycling order of a life including birth and death of the living beings.

In another way it is explained as –

- a) The lower one means embryo,
- b) The second upper means birth,
- c) The third upper means adulthood,

- d) The fourth upper means marriage and
- e) The last upper means death.

The Sijou:

'Sijou' is a plant of cactus type. The Botanical name of 'Sijou' is Euphorbia splendens. 'Sijou' is the living symbol of 'Bathou'. It is the holy and true symbol of truth in Bathou religion. So, Bodos worship the 'Sijou' tree as the symbol of duty. 'Sijou' is the first plant which stands as an emblem of the supreme God at the altar.

The meaning of the 'Sijou' is 'paramatman'. 'Si' means 'Ātman', 'jou' means 'elder', 'param'. The different parts of the 'Sijou' indicates in these ways –

- a) Root indicates formless God.
- b) Body of the tree indicates one God (EK Īśvara).
- c) Branches indicates things and beings.
- d) Leaf and flower indicates Mainao.
- e) Five ridges indicates sun, vacuum, air, earth and water or indicate truth, knowledge, power, beauty and goodness.
- f) Pair of sting indicates male and female and
- g) Three flowers indicate Swarga, Mairta and Patal.

Creation theory in Bathou Philosophy: -

Bodos believe that there was absolute vacuum before creation of the universe. When there was only the vacuum the Almighty Anan Gosai (The Eternal God) became tired of his formless existence and so He desired Himself by taking a form of flesh and blood. Soon the following spiritual words are surged in His consciousness

“Laoba Laoswm

Khaoba Khaoswm

Ada Gwswm

Dwiao barswm

The versa means – “Oh mind the great! take to you the five organs of perception and control the five organ of action to jump into the worldly ocean” In the reference ‘Lao’ means ‘organs of perception’ and ‘Ba’ means ‘five’, i.e. ‘Laoba’ means “Five organs of perception”. Similarly, ‘Khaoba’ means “Five organs of action”, ‘Khaoswm’ means ‘to tie with’. Hence ‘khaoba khaoswm’ means ‘to tie or control the five organs of action’. ‘Ada’ means ‘elder brother’ or ‘the great’ and ‘Gwswm’ means ‘mind’, hence the mind is elderly addressed to tie or control the five organs of action”²³. We can signify now the verse that what is called ‘purus’ in philosophy can never create alone with soul only without having mind, five organs of perception and five organs of action.

The concept of trinity is also found in Bathou Philosophy. These are, viz.,

- a) Mansinsin is the creator. As he is creator, he can be said as equal to Vishṇu in Hinduism.
- b) Mainao Buri – She is placed left to the Man sin sinbrai. She is Lakshṁī. She can be said as equal to Brahmā in Hinduism.
- c) ‘Sibrai’ who is placed right to the ‘Man-sin sin-brai’, a destroyer, equal to Hindu ‘Śiva’.

The religious philosophy of the Boro kachari tribe centre round the super power of ‘Bathou Borai’. or ‘Khorai Borai’ or ‘Śiva’ of the Hindu.

Trinity. He is also known as 'Śiw Borai' or Jew 'Borai'. In Bodo 'Śiw or 'Jew' means 'life' or 'soul' and 'Borai' means old and 'wise man'

It is observed that the god of the Bodos, 'Bura Bathou' is identified as the Aryan god 'Śiva' or 'Mahadeva' Later on, the Aryan worshippers also used to worship 'Śiva', the chief god of the Bodos with animal sacrifice.

God and other Sect of the Bodos

In Brahma Dharma Brahmā is believed as the supreme being, who is the ultimate reality, Param Brahmā. "Brahmā is by nature eternal and absolute blissful. He is eternally self-realised, self-perfect and self-enjoying. He also possesses the unique power of creating from within himself or manifesting himself as the phenomenal world of divinity without the least prejudice to the perfect unity of his self existence"²⁴. In this religion Brahmā is the only God.

In Brahma Dharma 'individual self' is identified with Brahman and a part of it. Here the performance of Hoom Yajña by reciting Gayatri Mantram is essential to lead oneself to Brahman. To realise the truth or Brahman is the ultimate goal of this religion.

To propitiate Brahman yajñāhuti is must by the devotees. 'Om' is pronounced by the purohit and the devotees at first when they set fire in the centre of yajña kunda. The purohit chants the mantras and he is followed by other devotees, present at yajñāhuti. Prasad is must for the devotees to nurture the Brahman which is prepared by fruits, milk, sweets, ghee, corns, scents, chandan, aguru, which are offered in the burning fire dedicating to Brahmā by chanting mantras.

Brahma religion is a monotheist and believes only in eternal Almighty. Brahmā who is omnipresent and owner of all creation, existence and destruction. In Hindu religion, there is the sacrifice of life which is performed by the Brahmins at the time of yajña. Such type of sacrifice is not prescribed by Srimat Siv Narayan param Hansa. He prescribed three types of yojna in the name of param Ātma Brahmā. They are, (i) Karma yojña, (ii) Jnan yojña and (iii) Upasana yojña. According to him, Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa can be attained by following the path of yojña. In yajñāhuti there is no restriction about caste and sex. Rites and rituals of Brahma Dharma is very liberal.

Mani Bathou Śiva Dharma or Saivism sect is one of the important sects of the religions of the Bodos. Mani Bathou Śiva Dharma or Saivism sect was founded by Guru Rupamoñi Devi of Gossaigaon (Basugaon) of Bongaigaon district of Assam. The Saivism sect or Mani Bathou Śiva Dharma came into being as a refined cult of traditional Bathou religion. It is the cult of cumulative ideals of Bathou and Brahma cults along with some elements of Hinduism. This religion has made a major modification of the traditional Bathou religion. This cult does not offer any sacrifice of animals or libation to the deities. This is the basic feature of the cult.

According to this cult, Śiva is the chief god. He is believed as the chief of all things and beings. Everything comes out of him and ends in him. He is worshipped in the form of Bathou. He is known as the Borai Bathou (Old Bathou). "Śiva has neither beginning nor end, he is the older of olds known as Borai Bathou and he is the beginning of all clans and gurus. Śiva is the owner of heaven, earth and hell"²⁵. Śiva is depicted as having three aspects. He is the union of the three. He is the owner of three virtues – Satva, Rajo and Tama. So to propitiate him

three types of worship like satvic, Rajosic and Tamosic are necessary. According to this religion, spirit or ghost or daityas are worshipped as Maheswara, the associate of Śiva.

Rajosic puja is performed by the villagers or community at the open field (bank of river, forest area or reserved grass land is preferable) by arranging a temporary altar. It is the mass worship where all the people good or bad take part in the prayer. So this puja is considered as the less secret than the Satvic puja.

Tamosic puja is performed by the villages specially near the bank of the river where spirits, ghosts, giants or associates of Śiva are propitiated. This puja is considered as impure. At the end of the puja the worshipper have to take bath. They sprinkle holy water by themselves to become pure.

Here Satvic puja is believed as the true way to have Infinite, eternal and Absolute spirit Śiva for Salvation. Śiva is everywhere in this universe. 'Jotoi Jiva Totoi Śiva' is the theme of this religion.

The object of performance of puja and yojña are different. Puja is performed in the less important occasion by offering prasād and flower to deities where no Brahmin purohit is recommended. But in important occasion to propitiate gods and goddesses yajña is performed with the help of purohits and Rishis. The main object of this worship is to live as ideal life through the worship and to purify the universe by 'yajñāhuti' Another object is to have salvation or mukti and to become one with the supreme Almighty Śiva. To get rid of the influences of evil spirits, diseases, planets, distress etc. is the main object of this religion.

Under this sect every household has four types of altar to worship gods and goddesses. These are as follows -

(i) Borai Bathou Śiva Altar: - This is the main altar of the family. This is the altar of Borai Bathou. This altar is built on the north east corner of the courtyard. In this altar a Sijou tree is planted and a Trisul (Trident) is erected in the middle of the altar. A Jatrasee plant (a kind of shrub) in the eastward and a holy basil in the south ward are planted in the altar. Bhagawati, Indra, Swarswatī and Lakshmī are also seated with the chief god Śiva in the altar.

(ii) Bisahari Bathou Altar: This altar is constructed separately at north – east corner of the compound outside the courtyard. Here the altar provides for Ganesh and Biswakrma with the goddess.

(iii) Mainao Bindu or Lakshmī Altar: This altar is placed in the innermost room of the mainhouse (Nomano). Here two earthen big jar are placed, one for rice and other for paddy in the north and south of the altar respectively. In the altar three goddesses like Lakshmī Devī, Sawarswatī Devi and Gangā Devi are placed from north to south respectively.

(iv) Maindangshri Bathou or Gandeswari Altar: This is the altar of goddess Gandeswari placed in front of the door of granary. Besides Gandeswari Laokhar Gossai or Garakhia Gossai (cowherd god or Krishna) and Kartika are also placed in a same row from north to south.

To propitiate gods and goddesses, besides daily prayer they also use to pray on some special day like purnima (day of full moon), omabashya (new moon), Ekadashi (eleventh day after purnima) etc. In the prayer they offer prasada (mixture of edible things) and flowers and by burning incense in each of gods and goddesses. Specially red flowers are offered to the gods and white flowers are offered to the goddesses.

On some special occasion and serious matter they perform yajnahuti with the help of a Rishi or purohit which is attained by the members of the household devotee. The mode of performance of yojñāhuti is similar with Brahma dharma though they conceptually differ regarding the existence of god. In this sect after yojñāhuti to honour a small amount of money is given to purohit as Dakshina or token of honour.

Sat sang religion of Anukul Thakur has good ground among the Boros. Param purus is the basis and philosophy of sat sang religion. Sat Sang is the monotheist religion on nature and believes only one supreme authority Puruṣottam as God. They believe this Puruṣottam incarnates for the welfare of human being on this earth. Puruṣottam is the creator of whole universe. Incarnation comes to fulfill desires of the beings not to destroy. Anukul Thakur is the incarnation who is the puruṣottam. Sat Sang is a religion and man making institution for moral and spiritual upliftment and to find the way for unification with god.

Every devotee of Sat Sang obey rites and rituals everyday from morning till night. Every morning after taking bath they go for prayer and offer a certain amount of coins in the name of Iṣṭa Guru. In the evening also they sing hymn and offer same kind of Iṣṭa Guru Dan. The accumulated amount of money from daily prayer is sent to Sat Sang center at Deoghar every month for the welfare of religious activities.

So far the Sat Sang Boros are fully concerned with Sat Sang way of Salvation. When they meet each other they exchange their salutes or good wishes with the word Joy Guru. The Boros are closely concerned with the other communities of the same faith in performing socio-religious function either at home or in public place. Very often they arrange community prayer.

Refined Bathou Dharma (Bhakti cult) is one of the modified and refined cult of traditional Bathou religion. The main exponent of this cult was Dr. Mangalsing Hazowary. This cult of Bathou had been influenced and inspired by Bhakti cult of vaishnavism in the forms of kīrtana (singing), Archana (worshipping), vandana (bowing) etc. In this cult the worshipping mode of traditional Bathou religion is modified. In this cult all the gods and goddesses of Bathou religion are worshipped by placing them at the Bathou altar in the courtyard and planting a Sijou tree in the eastern end of the Bathou altar. Like Bathou religion all the rites and rituals are performed, but unlike Bathou religion they are debarred from any life sacrifice. In stead of this they use to pray by singing devotional songs dedicating to Bathou Brai (Śiva) and Mainao Brui (goddess of wealth) and offer prasada (mixture of edible things) to deities. This faith is most popular among those people who protest against the killing of animals to worship deities. According to them, the mercy and love of god can be attained by singing devotional songs to praise his goodness not by killing living beings. To nurture gods and goddesses they also use traditional musical instruments with the devotional songs. Though this cult does not oppose to the original concept of Bathou or Śiva but this cult makes some modifications in practice or rituals and social norms to suit the present condition.

Bathou (Śiva) Dharma is another refined branch of Bathou religion professed by Swami Nabin Brahmari. He established Arya Brahma Gyan mat or Baba Sidhya Yogashram at Uttapani of Kokrajhar district near Bhutan border. According to this cult 'Śiva' is the chief god. Śiva has created the Bathou religion for the Boros. The concept of Śiva, ultimate reality, of this religion is completely derived from the Hindu scriptures like Upaniṣad, Purāna or the Vedas etc. and this idea or concept of reality is adopted for the Bathou religion.

Like Bathou religion in Bathou (Śiva) Dharma the Bathou altar is constructed in the courtyard with a circular fence of bamboo splits to worship gods and goddesses. The altar of this cult indicates the earth is round. The circular fence contains ten vertical posts of bamboo splits which indicates ten directions of the world, Viz., East, West, North, South, North-East Corner, North-West Corner, South-East Corner, South-West Corner, Upward and Downward. The five horizontal bamboo splits which criss cross the vertical posts indicates the five basic elements of the world, viz., earth, ether, fire, air and water and also indicates the five human senses, viz., eye (seeing), nose (smell), ear (hearing), skin (feeling) and tongue (taste). According to them, every man can realise the truth by observing the faith and meaning of the Bathou.

In spite of these cults, there is a section of Boro people in the urban areas who are not within the fold of any cult but they worship Hindu deities in their own way and follow Hindu rites and rituals.

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