

## TRADITIONAL RELIGION OF THE BODO: BATHOU

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Religion concerns belief and social institution and maintains the social relationship that exists in society. Individual, family and community life in general are regulated by religion, which influence people's behavior, action, faith for enforcing social norms and ethics. Religion is also responsible for people's foot habit, organization of institution, decision-making, exercise of socio-economic life. Changes in the society and organization are motivated by religion. So the religion is a system of belief as well as an agent of value enforcement and action (Mair, 1972:210).*

**Keyword:** Bathou, Sibrai, Sibrui, Sijou, Maothanshri.

### **BATHOU RELIGION**

The traditional religion of the Boros is known as *Bathou* dharma, which incorporates rites, rituals, social norms, ethics and philosophy of the Boros. Endle describes the Boro religion as "animist and its under-lying principle is characteristically one of the fear and dread" (Endle,1991:33). But P. C. Bhattacharjee and M. Hajowari give different opinion regarding the *Bathou* religion. *Bathou*, the supreme god of Boros and its worship, is related to origin and creation. *Ba* means five and *thou* mean depth. The supreme god is also known as *Sibrai* (Siva in Hindu). He, with the help of his wife *Sibrui*, created the universe, and the first man *Monsins* in. But *Mons ins* in was celibate for life, so *Sibrai* and his wife *Sibrui* created man *Darimuba* and women *Singrimuba* for the propagation of mankind and the *Sijou* tree (*Euphorbia splendens*) was created as an emblem of supreme god at the altar (Bhattacharya,1997:15).

M. Hajowari describes that the Boros worship *Sibrai* or Siva in different names, such as *Bathou Brai*, *Bura Bthou*, *Song Raja*, *Khuria* or *Khoriya Brai* and *Mahadeo* and his wife *Sibrui* or *Parbati* is worshipped with the names- *Mainao*, *Lakhi*, *Songburoy* and *Burli Buray* etc. According to *Bathou* religion Siva or *Sibrai* is not a

deity, but he is above of all deities. He is the supreme god, Almighty and creator of all beings. Every existence is his creation and he nourishes them all but sometimes he is in furious mood to cause destruction. So the Boros worship him for the prosperity of mankind (Hajoary,1998:123). On the other Siva is belief to be the originator of all form of dances, music, play and art. *Jara Pagla* is another name of Nataraja, who is Siva, the Divine-dancer. *Jara Pagla* was an expert dancer and singer who's Character resembles to that of Aryan god Siva (Hajoary,1998:123). Most probably the *Bathou* religion of the Boros long since came into contact with the *Saivism* cult of Hindu as there are many common elements visible in both the religion. Lord Siva performed a cosmic dance known as *Tandava Nritya* and it is said that Jara Pagla in his cosmic dance produced ragas like *Basanta Bhairava*, *Panchamas*, *Megha Parvati* whom the Boros call *Bhurlum Buri* or *Sibraini*.

The origin of the Siva cult cannot be traced. "The newly discovered Indus valley civilization is considered to be the older than the Vedic civilization by a good many modern historian. The relics of that pre-historic age definitely indicate that the Siva cult and the Yoga system were in a sufficiently advanced stage even in that time" (Banerjee, 1967:1). So it can be said that Siva cult existed in India even before the coming of Aryans. Like Sibrai, Siva is also known as Bhutapati, Pasupati, Pretapati, and Ganapati. He is the supreme god, creator and protector of all creatures. Siva does not make any demand upon his worshipper that they may find it difficult to meet. Any man, woman, any caste or race can offer direct worship to him without the help of Brahma priest. Nobody is untouchable to Siva. "It is the place in which all creatures must ultimately refuge" (Banerjee,1967:1). So, it can be said that the *Bathou dharma* and *Siva* cult were identical in one time and must have originated from the same concept.

The principal deities which are propitiated in the Bathou religion are:

1. *Bathou Brai*
2. *Ayleng*
3. *Khaji*
4. *Abla Khungur*
5. *Agrang*
6. *Khoila*
7. *Rajputhur*
8. *Raj Khandra*
9. *Salijomon*
10. *Mosaraja*

11. *Ai Manasu*
12. *Ai Baoli*
13. *Khuber*
14. *Maothanshri (Aikamakhya)*
15. *Songraja*
16. *Burliburi, (Bharali buri), etc.*

The *Bathoubrai* and *Maothanshri* are placed in the main altar and other deities are placed on the extended altars (Narzi,1960:36&37). They are propitiated with sacrifices of pigs, birds and libation. The Boros have no authorized priestly caste to discharge religious function. All religious functions are administered by *Deories* (Priest) and their office is not hereditary. But when emergency arises due to outbreak of plague, pestilence or famine, etc. the service of the *Daodini* (female shaman) is called into action for *Kherai puja*, who propitiates various gods and spirits by performing shamanistic dance around the altar, while she is almost in the state of trance (Endle,1991:34).

Mahini Mahan Brahma in his article, *Religion and philosophical Aspects of the Bodos*, he wrote, "Siva was called *Kharia*, when he assumed angry mood (*Rudra Murti*) to destroy the world. So to protect themselves and their properties men worship *Kharia Brai* with meat, rice and fruits for his propitiation. It was not improbable that the word *Kharia Brai* was shortened as *Kharia*, which was gradually corrupted to *Kherai*." The *Kherai* is associated with beating of *Kham* (long drum), tune of *Sifung* (flute) and *Jatha* (cymbal) and shamanistic dance. It is believed that the Nataraja Siva himself came down to the earth and taught these shamanistic dances and tune of music. It is said that there are eighteen shamanistic dances. They are *Bathou Gidingnai*, *Chotrali*, *Kapri sipnai*, *Khoijoma phonai*, *Gandola banai*, *Chagalawbanai*, *Muphur gelenai*, *Nao bonai*, *Khamao sarkhonai*, *Dao thai longnai*, *Jarapagla*, *Masakhaori mosanai*, *Maoji mengbrang gelenai*, *Thentamali*, *Saramiste* etc. (Brahma,1972:180-82).

The Boros worship *Bathou Brai* or Siva as their supreme god along with other gods and goddesses. Though idol-worship is not prevalent among the Boros, yet, they worship *Sijou* plant (*Euphorbia splendens*) as the symbol of Siva. The *Sijou* plant has peculiar characteristics. Its botanical name is *Nerifolia*, belonging to cactus family. It has five ridges and five depressions. Its thorns grow in pairs, leaves resemble hoods of serpents and the branches grow vertically upwards like the *Trishul* of Siva. It is everlasting. If cut it hardly withers away. If thrown on the ground it survives automatically, on the water it remains for a pretty long time. So it was the best choice of the Boro ancestors to worship it as a symbol of Siva. The *Sijou* is planted on the elevated altar of Siva encircled

with five pairs of bamboo splits in five layers interwoven with sixteen pairs of split bamboo posts. The holy basil and *jatراسي* plant (a kind of shrub) are also planted near *Sijou*. The altar comprising all these materials is termed *Bathou*. Since the *Bathou* is conceived to be an altar of Siva, he is also known as *Bathou Brai* or *Bura Bathou*.

### **KHERAI WORSHIP:**

*Kherai* is an important religious festival of the traditional Boro religion. The *Kherai Puja* is generally performed in the month of *Kartik* and *Aghan*, with a view to getting blessings of *Bathou Brai* and *Mainao Buri* (Lakhimi) for having bumper harvest and for the welfare of the village collectively by the villagers in an open field. Along with the Siva and Parvati all other deities are also worship in *Kherai*. The *Kherai Puja* is performed for the whole night where all the people from the village as well as from neighbouring villages take part in the festive religious occasion. The *Daodini* (female shaman) plays the main role by performing shamanistic dance through whom oblation are offered to the gods and goddesses. She speaks prophecies and advice the villagers to live in righteous and virtuous path.

### **PHILOSOPHY OF BATHOU:**

"*Sijouا siriba, Bathouا bandoba,* " *Sijou* plant has five spines and *Bathou* has five ties (i.e. *Bathou* is surrounded by circular fence of split Bamboo strips which has levels). *Bathou* always believes in five principles. Though *Bathou* the creator is not visible; it can be realized by his five elements or virtues, they are- soil, air, water, fire and sky. These five elements of earth and sky have been tied into five bond union or principles (Boro:1).

1. The first principle IS to save procreation by giving and taking birth.
2. To spread offspring by means of wedding.
3. Life is a mixture of joy and sorrow. People rejoice when they are in joy. It is good to rejoice as it lengthens life. But they must not surpass the limit set by god. So by third principle, the ancient Boro gurus formulated a principle of rejoicing.
4. In the time of sorrow, one should not loss his *or* her patience but he or she should be calm and worship god by performing *Kherai Puja* or *Garja Puja*. In the time of disease or illness, *Oja* (village doctor) should be summoned. This is the fourth principle.
5. In the fifth principle, it is stated that, everybody, becomes old and has to die some day, it is inevitable. In that stage he or she should not think about land, money, property, sons, daughter, or kin. But he or she should be devoted to god. It is called *Udang Janai* or salvation.

A death person should be forgotten peacefully. After the cremation, purification should be done with religious rites (Boro:1,17,24,28).

"*Siphungnia Gorongba; Guruniya Fongba*" The flute of Boros has five holes and Gurus have taught five teachings. The Boros believe in five Gurus; they are- *Aham Guru, Monsinsin Guru, Ena Guru, Thena Guru* and *Photse Guru* (Boro:3).

The Boros have five laws to punish and purify a guilty person, they are:

1. *Agarbad*
2. *Phongslodbad*
3. *Daokibad*
4. *Khaoyalibad* and
5. *Khoulobodbad* (Bhattacharjya,1960).

Thus, the *Bathou* religion and its philosophy is based on *Asarba* or five principles, which have upheld the whole fabrics, social customs, economic institution, beliefs and rites of the Boro society.

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