

DR. (MRS.) PREMALATA DEVI.

(A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY)

SOCIAL AND
RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS
OF BOROS

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PREPACE

North-East India is the habitant of many tribes with diverse ethnic origins. Assam is one of the states of the North-East India where many tribes and non-tribes have settled together. Brahmaputra valley is the largest plain in the North-East India where the Boros are considered to be the largest tribe- The Boros in Brahmaputra valley of Assam, intermixed now with the Assamese people, have still preserved their language and traditional socio-religious beliefs and practices at some levels. Like all other tribal groups or North-East India, the Boros also have their traditional religion based on the belief in a number of spirits, benevolent and malevolent. A simple form of Hinduism was introduced among them by a Hindu religious reformer named Guru Deva Kalicharan. In the western part of Assam many Boros became his followers and started to call themselves Brahma. In middle Assam many Boros show the impact of the process of sanskritization and they are in the process of assimilation into the greater Hindu society. In the eastern part of Assam a large number of Boros got themselves converted to Christianity. And in the extreme eastern part, the Sonowal, on the other hand, gave up their traditional life and merged into Hindu religion. Presently, there has been a tendency among all Boros to revive their traditional culture. In the Indian situation religion plays a pivotal role in building up and maintaining identity.

The study starts with the origin of the Boros of the Brahmaputra valley and their geographical extension. God is the ground, guide and goal of man. Different religious groups of the world interpret God as supreme power in different ways. Concept of God in Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity are discussed in Chapter I. The Boro's concept of God is also discussed in this chapter. The ethics of the Boros is discussed in Chapter II. Man is wonderful creature of God. The image of man as presented in the religious tradition of the Boros is described in Chapter III. It also deals with the structure of Boro society and its evolution and progress. Rites, rituals and festivals are the ways of life of any society. Ancestral rites, rites of passage, agricultural rites of Boro are described in Chapter IV. It also deals with the Festivals of Boros, Baisagu, Domasi, Putuli haba are the ways of enjoyment celebrated annually on specific dates. Kherai Puja is the worship of Bathou to get more product from agriculture while Garja puja is performed by traditional Boros -for the welfare of the villagers. Jau (local made rice beer) consumption, the way of enjoyment that Boros love to have almost in all Festivals and on certain occasions is also explained in this chapter.

An elaborate study has been made on Boro religion in Chapter V on the basis of different literature and Folksongs. In the concluding survey, an attempt is made to assess the role of traditional religion in the life of modern Boros.

The present work is an attempt to study the philosophical aspects or the social and religious institutions of the Boros of Brahmaputra Valley. I collected primary information from the persons of different clans of Boros. I am grateful to all informants. Numerous secondary information or published books and journals have been consulted for this work. I offer sincere thanks to late Dr. D-N. Majumdar, an eminent anthropologist or North-East India, who encouraged me to study the religious philosophy of the Boros. I am greatly indebted to my guide, Dr. D.K. Chakravarty, Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy, Gauhati University. It would not have been easy on my part to complete this work without constant inspiration from my husband Dr. S. Sarma, Department of Geography, NEHU. I am thankful to Professor K. Bez who was Abroad for decades and has comprehensive knowledge about various tribes of the world. Finally, I am very grateful to the **Director, T.R.I., Assam, Mr. B.K. Hazarika**, who helps me to get this work in the form of a book through his Grants-in-Aid. I would like to offer my sincere apology to readers for any kind of omission and commission of this book.

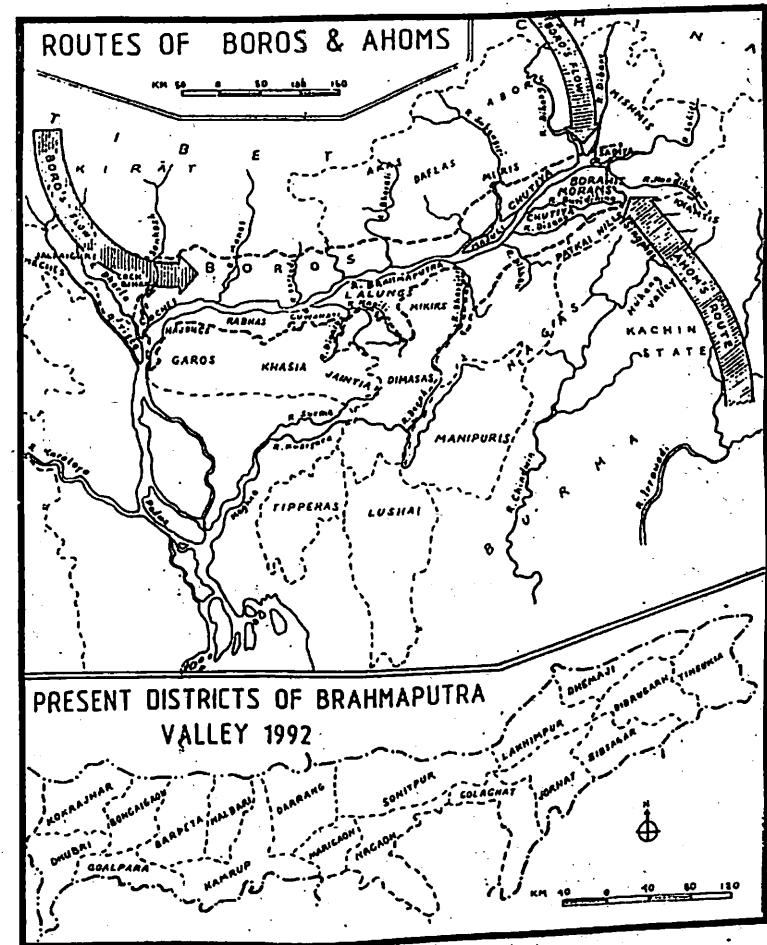
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Dr. (Mrs.) Premalata Devi
State Resource Centre
North-Eastern Hill University
SHILLONG 793 003

INTRODUCTION

The Boros constitute a large group among all other tribes of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. They are the earliest inhabitants of Indo-Mongoloid stock to settle in the valley. The physical features of Indo-Mongoloids of great Mongoloid race are yellow or yellowish brown skin, square set face with broad nose, strong cheek bones, flat nose, almond shaped black or dark brown eyes, black stretches (sometimes wavy) and coarse head hair, scanty beard and moustache. These physical traits are found among the Boro-Kachāris of Brahmaputra valley. With distinct Tibeto-Burmese marks in their language, the Boros started to settle in the plains of Assam since the second millennium B.C. Rev. S. Endle observed in his book *The Kachāri* that the Boros migrated to the valley from their homeland Tibet and China.¹ He pointed out the possibilities of two major migrations from the north and northeast into the rich valley of the Brahmaputra. The first flow was into the western Assam via North-East Bengal through the valley of Tista, Dharla, Sankosh river and it founded the powerful kingdom of Kamrupa. The second flow was through the Subansiri, Dibang and Dihang valley into the eastern Assam and it established a powerful Chutia Kingdom (map 1). The western migrants settled in the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal and Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri, and Goalpara districts of Assam and are known as 'Mech'. It is guessed that the Boro-Kachāri living by the bank of the river 'Michi' flowing through Nepal call themselves Mech or Meche. The same flow of migrants settled in the Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup districts is known as Kachāri. The eastern migrants are known as Chutia, Moran and Borahis. Outside the Brahmaputra valley, Boros are found in the contiguous areas of North Cachar (as Dimasil Kachāri), Tripura (as Tippera or Barman), Garo Hills (as Garo, Hajong) etc. They all belong to the Indo-Mongoloid group, as stated by Anthropologists and Kirātas as mentioned in the Vedas. The term Kirāta was mentioned in Yajurveda (XXX.16) and Atharvaveda (X.4-14). These people were dependent on collection of fruits, roots and tubers. The colour of their skin was yellow (golden). They used fierce weapons, and were cruel. S. K. Chatterji's research work² based

on the Mahabharata and the Ramayana supported the evidences that the Boro-Kachāris belong to Indo-Mongoloid race known as Kirāta. The extensive work on racial elements in Assam by B.M. Das³ and study on



MAP - I

1. Rev. S. Endle, *The Kachari*, 1975, p. 3.
2. S.K. Chatterji, *Kirjita-Jana-Kriti*, The indo-Mongal-loid, 1928.
3. B.M. Das, *The People of Assam*, 1987, p. 37.

Boro language and literature by P.C. Bhattacharya⁴ clarify the fact that the Boros are the descendants of Kirātas later known as Boro-Kachāri. According to P.C. Bhattacharya, Boro is a large linguistic group of Kachāri tribes, closely related to Tiwa (Lalung), Rava, Hajong and Koche languages. He along with Robin Burling find that "Boro and Garo separated from a common ancestral language each other about two thousand years ago". Their "glotto-chronical or lexico-statistic count shows that Boro and Dimāsā separated from each other about one thousand years ago."⁵ Thus, Dimāsā is nearer to Boro than Garo".⁶

Rev. S. Endle compiled a manual of the Kachāri language.* He justified the view that the Kachāris were in earlier days the dominant race of Assam, because almost all river names of then Assam start with Kachāri syllable di (means water). They are Dihang, Dibang, Dikrang, Disang, Dibru, Digaru, Dikhou, Dimu, Digboi etc.

The form of religion practised at Kamakhya of Kamrupa is admitted by Yoginitantra to have Kirāta association. The word Kirāta derives from Sanskrit word Kaksaka⁷ which means a frontier dweller. Bani Kanta Kakati studied the cult of the Mother Goddess. She symbolises a fusion of the Aryan and extra Aryan religious practices. The worship of the Mother Goddess in her fearful aspect with wine and flesh shows the influence of the aboriginal tribes. Worship of Kechāi-khāti, the tutelary deity, with animal sacrifices bears sufficient evidence of tribal religious culture.

From the point of view of origin of the term 'Boro', R.M. Nath says that Boros were the emigrants of 'Bod' country of Tibet. They were known as 'Boddo-Ficha' or Boddo-chā which means children of 'Bod' country and later known as the 'Boddo' or 'Bodo'.⁸ Brian Hodgson⁹ was the first author to confer the generic name 'Bodo' on the Boros or other cognate tribes belonging to the same language family. In Kachāri language, the etymological meaning of the term 'Boro' is 'men' by which 'Bara' or 'Baraphisa' (children of the Bara) could be justified. 'Boro' is a word still prevalent among the non-tribes. The tribe who domesticates pig (Bārā in Assamese) is termed as 'Bara' and is later known as 'Baro'.

4. P.C. Bhattacharya, The Boro Language and Literature, 1992.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

Manual of the Kachāri Language published in 1884 by the Assam Secretariat Press.

7. B.K. Kakati, Assamese, Its Formation and Development, 1972, p. 42.

8. R.M. Nath, The Background of Assamese Culture, 1948, pp. 6-16.

9. Reference from Bijoy Daimary in 'Boro and Bodol, Proceedings of History Association, Kohima, 1987, p. 528.

'Bodo', however, is an anglicised form of 'Boro'. It is seen that British writers often used the letter 'D' in place of an Indian word 'R' with strong sound. For example, the word 'Biri', 'Kannara' are written as 'Bidi' and 'Kannada' in English.¹⁰ Bhaben Narzi,¹¹ being a member of plain tribes rightly used the word Boro-Kachāri in his book Boro-Kachāri Samāj Aru Sānskṛiti. Thus the term 'Boro' refers to all the Tibeto-Burman speaking group of Sino-Tibeto origin.

The geographical area of my study is confined within the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Physiographically, the valley is plain and homogeneous in character. It covers an area of 56,216 square kilometre with the total population of 1,24,56,477 persons.¹² The valley extends from 25°44' north to 27°55' north latitude and from 89°41' east to 96°02' east longitude. The length of the valley from west to east is about 720 kilometres while its width varies from 130 kilometres in the western part to about 80 kilometres in the eastern part. The Brahmaputra valley is surrounded by Arunachal Pradesh in the north and east, by Nagaland, North Cachar hills, Karbi Anglong and Meghalaya in the south and by West Bengal and Bangladesh in the west. The mighty river Brahmaputra flows through the plain with about 725 kilometres to reach the Bay of Bengal. Brahmaputra valley is the natural mosaic of different habitats of tribes and non-tribes. Among all tribes of the valley the Boro speaking tribes form major group. The share of Boro speaking population is 4.99 lakh of total 124.56 lakh. The overall percentage of Boro speaking population is 4.01. The highest percentage of Boros is 26.88 per cent in Kokrajhar district followed by Nalbari district with 10.87 per cent and Darrang district with 9.56 per cent. All other districts of the Brahmaputra valley support less than 5 per cent and significantly the proportion of Boro speaking people in the southern districts of the Brahmaputra is highly insignificant. These are the statistical records taken from the statistical Hand Book of Assam, 1988, (Table 1). Another microlevel study of S. Sarma¹³ indicates that Sidli, Kokrajhar and Udalguri Thana shows the highest Boro speaking population with the percentage of 35.57, 32.28 and 31.57 respectively. Some other Boro speaking pockets may be mentioned with their percentage. They are Barama (24.17%), Bijni

10. Bijoy Doimary, op.cit.

11. Bhaben Narzi, Boro-Kachāri Samāj Aru Sānskṛiti, 1985.

12. Census of India, 1971.

13. S. Sarma, "Distribution Pattern of Boro Population of the Brahmaputra Valley: A Geographical Study", Social Research, 1991, p. 25.

Table 1 - Speakers of Language in the Brahmaputra Valley.

Sl.No.	Districts	Total Population.	Boro	Percentage of Boro	Deuri	Dimasa	Rava	Lalung	Mishing.
1.	Dhubri	8,51,045	13,525	1.59	.	8	5,298	.	.
2.	Kokrajhar	7,10,066	1,90,841	26.88	.	.	6,840	.	6
3.	Goalpara	6,63,992	28,171	4.24	.	.	17,471	.	.
4.	Barpeta	9,71,737	45,897	4.72	.	.	1	.	1
5.	Naibari	6,80,904	74,020	10.87	.	.	930	.	17
6.	Kamrup	12,06,900	19,844	2.66	.	.	1,253	906	.
7.	Darrang	8,34,574	79,761	9.56	.	.	36	.	8,418
8.	Sonitpur	9,01,614	18,068	2.00	.	.	459	1	.
9.	Lakhimpur	7,11,600	18,207	2.56	9,030	.	39	1,012	1,27,597
10.	Dibrugarh	14,11,119	36	0.00	317	.	.	.	3,435
11.	Sibsagar	6,54,336	11	0.00	1,782	2	.	.	4,166
12.	Jorhat	6,46,445	11	0.00	1,060	.	.	.	69,633
13.	Golaghat	5,36,608	1,991	0.37	.	.	1	.	65,558
14.	Nagaon	16,75,537	8,511	0.51	.	1,300	35	1,649	3

Source: Statistical Hand Book, Assam, 1988, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Data Based on Census of India, 1971.

(20.86%), Paneri (19.92%), Tamulpur (15.20%), Patacharkuchi (11.38%), and Sorbhog (10.01%). Out of the total 37 Thanas of Brahmaputra valley, as many as 23 Thanas contain less than 5 per cent Boro population (Map 2) scatteredly settled here and there.

The Boros, once the dominating race of the epic and tantric eras are reducing day by day. They now suffer from fear of losing their traditional identity of religion and culture. The eastern branch of Kachari race of Chutia kingdom had to surrender to the Ahoms, a section of great Shan (Tai) race who crossed the Patkoi Hill from the south and east about 1228 A.D. The Ahoms could not eliminate the cultural identity of Morans, Borahis and other Kachari tribes living near the northern slope of these hills. But during the slow process of invasion of Ahoms for 200 years the indigenous opponents were forced to take refuge in Dimapur on the Dhansiri at the foothills of Nagaland. And in the middle of the 16th century Ahoms succeeded to capture their (Kachari) new capital Dimapur. In 1790, the then Raja Krishna Chandra and his brother Govinda Chandra made a public profession of Brahmanism.

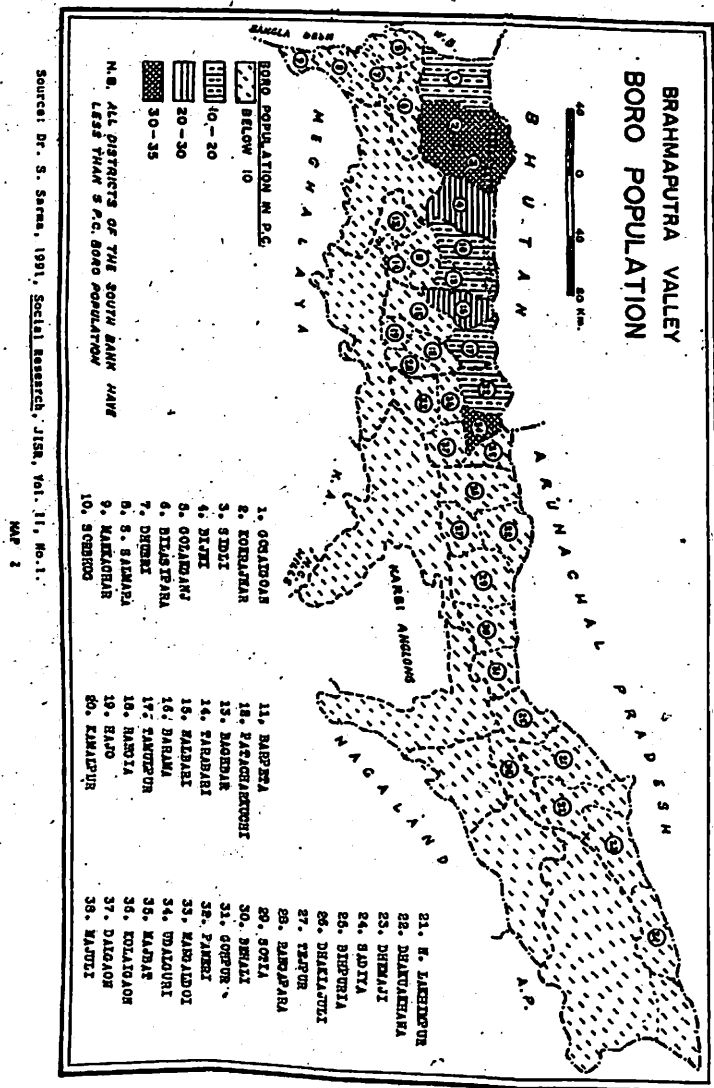
Intrusion of Aryan culture among the Boros from western side of the valley gained momentum in the 7th century. The Varman and the Salasthamba who was originally Mech tribe became Hinduised with close contact of Aryan habitats of Magadha, Vaisali and Mithila. Aryan invasion in the 16th century pushed a section of Boros to settle down along the Mechi river valley of West Bengal. The Hindu influence further penetrated eastward to reach Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon district of Assam. Many of the Koches of these areas, after attaining ritual perfection of Hindu caste called themselves Rajbansi. Kalicharan Mech, the first preacher of Brahma movement (1860), subsequently known as Gurudev Kalicharan Brahmachary had sufficient number of followers. ¹⁴ As a result, many Boros adopted Hindu religion and abandoned some of their aboriginal customs. Christianity, on the other hand, came along with the British administration in 1826, which converted near about 5 per cent of the Boro population of the Brahmaputra valley. ¹⁵ Bathou, the household-God, is believed by the traditional Boro-Kacharis as the guardian of family. Christian converts gave up their belief in Bathou totally while Brahma followers recognised some importance of Bathou worship in their religious life. But both Christian and Brahma followers, now a days, would like to retain sociocultural identity for the survival of the race i.e. Boro.

14. M.M. Chattopadhyaya, et al., Bhraman Brittanta of Srimat Param Hansa Sibnarayan Swami, in Bengali).

15. P. Devi, Christianity and Its Impact Among the Boros of the Bra maputra Valley, 1990.

The Boros are numerically and sociologically one of the most important tribes of North-Eastern India, particularly Assam. J.D. Anderson observed, "The river names of the whole Brahmaputra Valley are Bodo names, and it is demonstrable that the Bodos were the aborigines of the Valley".¹⁶ The Boros are mainly agricultural people. They dwell near rivers. Their religion reveals their mode of life and attitude towards nature. Though rapid changes in their cultural life have been brought about, by modern scientific and technological advancement, social customs and traditions with core values play a significant role in the individual and collective life of the Boros.

16. See 'Introduction' to S. Endle, O.P.Cit., P. XVI.



CHAPTER I

GODS

The idea of God is inseparably related to religion, although there are religions like Buddhism and Jainism which do not start with presupposition about the existence of God. But some supernatural power as the basis of the natural world is admitted by all religious minded people. The idea of 'God' is so remarkable that it cannot be explained without going through a series of myths. Its meaning varies from mind to mind of every human being. Many believe that this fact can be explained only by supposing that every man and woman must be born with this idea in mind. And from this, it is but a small step to the belief, held by many that God Himself must somehow be responsible for the presence of this idea in our mind at birth. But, whether this is so or not, and in what sense, if any, this might be so, is a question which has led to many a lively debate in philosophy both in the East and West.

From the general point of view the word 'God' stands for a being who is the ultimate source of values and power, who is immortal and creator of this world. Ultimately, the destiny of each man and indeed of everything in this world lies in His hands. 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'. He is the creator of this universe. Philosophers, theologians and all other religious people are worried about these different statements about God, - because we cannot prove these kinds of supremacy of the powerful 'God'. Even the great psychologist Sigmund Freud believes that the idea of God itself is a problem to the psychologist in two ways: (a) how the idea of God arose in human mind at all and (b) how it has a hold over the man. Freud thinks that both these questions may have either purely psychological, or psycho-analytical answer. His answer is as follows: For reasons of profound psychological compulsions, the child thinks of his father as all powerful and all knowing, but as he grows older, he soon realizes that his father is far from being an adequate subject of such a description; but his deep psychological need to hold on to the idea of such a being is so great that, rather than give it up, which he rationally should, he projects this idea on to a purely imaginary being, and deceives himself into thinking that this being is not imaginary but real. Thus a belief in God subserves the purpose of giving us a security in the face of helplessness generated

1. Paul Ricoeur (Trans.) by Denis Savage. Freud and Philosophy, 1970, pp. 250-252.

by pitiless working of nature and by hostile acts of fellow men. The same type of approach to the subject of God and of religion is that of Marx. His idea of God was formulated in the process of the continuous struggle between the different classes in society as an instrument of domination by the exploiting class against the exploited. Philosophers and theologians have argued that the world seems to be such a marvel of intelligent design that there must be a designer who fashioned it; and such a designer could only be the supremely powerful being we call God. To Spinoza, God is one alone, i.e., there is none like Him, or in the nature of things only one substance can be granted, and that is absolutely infinite. God is the cause of all things which can be perceived by infinite intellect. He is the cause through himself, and not indeed by accident. God is absolutely the first cause. He acts merely according to His own laws and is compelled by no one.² Still others have thought that the pursuit of virtue would be meaningless unless there was God to guarantee the validity of the moral life. About all these arguments there has been an extremely lively, subtle debate in the history of philosophy and theology.

Anthropologists maintain that religion in the sense of a belief in spirits or powers of some kind is a universal phenomenon.³ There is no race devoid of religion, but there are differences in the degree in which religious ideas are developed among diverse races. As human societies are changing through an evolutionary process from primitive stage, the religious process and beliefs also seem to be changing from primitive to the modern society. The tribal religion was the most primitive form of human religion. The primitive people never believed in one object, they always believed and worshipped natural objects as gods. We do not find any authentic literature about tribal religions, only the hypothetical presumptions can be drawn.

In the period of Vedas, the prayer was directed towards the chief manifestations of natural processes such as sun, moon, wind, fire, rain and others. The worship was through the medium of yagna and prayer with the mantras* Galloway observes,

The Indian Vedas reveal to us a stage of polytheistic religion where the forms of the gods, if no longer primitive, still retain traces of their original connexion with the powers and forces of nature. But as individualities these gods are not drawn in sharp outlines: they are shadowy creations, and one tends to blend with, or to be absorbed by another in the mind of the worshipper. There is one

2. B. Spinoza. Spinoza's Ethics (Tr.), 1970, pp. 15-19.

3. E. B. Tylor. Primitive Culture. 1891, Vol. I, p. 417.

* Mantra is Vedic hymn pronounced by the Rsis.

being and no second: the gods of earlier religion gradually dissolve into floating appearances of the single and ever present soul of things (Atman). Even the distinction of worshipper and worshipped, which seems so essential to the religious attitude, dwindles and fades, till the Hindu thinker, in the act of knowledge recognised that he was one with the All, with Brahma. The very appearance of difference is explained away; it is the product of illusion (Maya). The end of the Vedas, as the Vedanta is termed, is a strict pantheism which proclaims the identity of man with the one and indivisible Being.⁴

When the Aryans came into contact with other tribes, their religion and culture was subjected to considerable pressure. The chief God of the R.g Veda, 'Rudra' was interpreted as the God of anger, the personification of malice and heat. But later 'Rudra' was renamed as 'Shiva', the symbol of patience, sobriety and benevolence, the opposite character of Rudra. During the post-Vedic period the attention of Aryans wandered towards an attempt to merge God into a fresh unity. Subsequently they developed an infrastructure of religious and philosophical sophistication to think of one God as being the supreme force.

The Aryans tried to humanize their Gods but failed miserably, for they could not forget the natural forces that God represented. Yaska has classified Gods into three classes - Gods in human form; Gods without human form and Gods sharing the features of both the former classes. In this manner, by the time of the R.g Veda a God had not been properly humanized, although the personification of the God of the sun had been rather successful. Almost all the Mantras of the R.g Veda are intended as invocation to some God, each God being the controller or the essence of some natural forces.⁵ These types of Gods were like Greek Gods, because these were not separate from an independent of each other. They were conceived as one family. These Vedic gods had no distinct personalities of their own.

The earliest Hinduism was characterized by polytheism. There has been a gradual development of religious thought from anthropomorphic polytheism through henotheism* to monotheism. There are gods and goddesses having different forms, characteristics and nature in Hindu religion. Among the most notable gods as 'Brahma', the deity of creation, Visnu the deity of preservation and Siva, the

4. George Galloway, The Philosophy of Religion, 1948, p.3.

5. R.N. Sharma, Philosophy of Religion, 1988-89, pp-164,165.

* The word 'henotheism' was introduced by Max Muller as a transitional stage from Polytheism to Monotheism.

deity of destruction. Among these Siva and Visnu have been widely worshipped in India giving rise to what are known as 'Saiva cults' and 'Vaisnava cults'. These cults also are further divided into some sub-cults due to the wide variety of distinction in places of worship, forms of idols, modes of worship, beliefs and religious values, places of pilgrimage, religious goals and practices etc. Out of these three gods in Hinduism, Brahma seems to be the least worshipped. He is usually depicted in art as a kingly personage with five heads, riding on a white swan and the originator of the Vedas.

Secondly, Visnu, the preserver, is considered to be a benevolent God, and hence He is very popular among the masses. His devotees assert that he 'comes to the earth' when he is needed as incarnation of God Omnipotent in flesh and blood. Sankardeva accepts this idea when he says that "Brahma was born in Vishnu's lotus-leaf. You assume incarnations from age to age". * Lord Visnu has that capacity to incarnate in other forms to rescue the human society. "He creates the world at first, so we have to pray first to Him, He is the cause of All incarnation."** From the Puranas and the Upanisads one learns that Visnu has appeared in the form of a dwarf to restore heaven and earth to the gods. In the Rāmāyana Visnu appeared as the prince hero Rama, while in Mahābhārata He came as the 'Charioteer' of Arjuna. Visnu appeared as a fish to rescue Manu, the first man, who was being swept away in universal flood; as a tortoise to assist the gods; as a boar to lift with its tusks the sunken earth above the depths of the sea; as a man-lion (Narasimha) to rescue the life of a small child Prahlad from his demon father, King Hiranya Kashipu; as a Br-ahmin-hero (Parasurama) to defeat the Ksatriya caste and establish Brahminic supremacy; as Gautama to establish 'Buddhism', the path of true knowledge. As nine incarnations are over, the tenth avatara (Kalki) is yet to come to the world. This avatara will be a messiah with a sword of flame, riding on a white horse, to save the righteous and destroy the wicked at the end of this world period.

The third member of the Hindu triad is Siva. His followers call him Mahadeva, the Great God. His character has some fascinating aspects, yet it is very complex. Called Rudra in the Vedas, he is "the threatener, the destroyer, the afflicter". He is the "bringer of disease and death". Rudra is considered to be an incarnation of Siva when the Aryans translocated Siva of Dravidians. The personified gods are really mere forms of one Supreme Purusa. The Upanisads develop this Purusa

* Sankaradeva: Ta 'ju nabhi Kamalata Brahma Bhailo jat: Yuge yuge avatar dharil asamkhyt - Kirttan.

** Sankaradeva: Prathame Praniimo Brahm'S Rupe San'Stana Sarva avatarara Karana Narayana - Kirttan.

into Brahman or Atman which is both immanent and transcendent.

The most significant contribution of the Upanishads to the Hindu religion is this idea of the utter oneness of 'Brahman' or 'atman'. The identification of the individual 'self' with the universal 'Self' in a mystical experience establishes the existence of a Reality which is infinite, unlimited, directly perceived and spiritual.⁶

From the philosophical standpoint God is the Absolute Being and nothing can be distinct from Him. Brahman and atman are ultimately one.

According to the Gita, God is purusottama. He is transcendent and immanent. He is eternal Existence. Con-sciousness and Bliss, the Lord of the whole universe, the sustainer of the world, the master of everything. He is the substratum of both perishable and imperishable things. Gita believes in pantheism. God is the absolute, but also the supreme person. He is the ancient Being and beginning-less. He is beyond the universe and yet He is present every- where as self of all. He is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe. He always takes care of his devotees. This supreme truth in Vedantic conception is Brahman. He is very much there, but he has no attributes, no form and beyond all words and philosophical quibbles. As the 'Gita' describes Him:

He is invisible: He cannot be seen. He is far and He is near, He moves and He moves not. He is within all and He is out-side all. He is the Light of all lights which shines beyond all darkness. It is vision, the end of vision, to be reached by vision, dwelling in the heart of all. (xiii, 15-19).

Gita also believes in incarnation. Even though God is eternal, infinite, beginningless and transcendent, He limits His infinity through power of Maya and becomes embodied. The incarnation means the descent of God on human level.

The 'Mother worship' has been an important feature of Hinduism. People worship Siva's and Visnu's consorts 'Shakti' and 'Lakshmi' respectively. Among goddesses, the most important are Durg-a or Maheshwari, Mah-a-Lakshmi, Mahakali and Maha-saraswati.

Judaism is a monotheistic religion. "In the beginning God created the heavens, and the earth", these are the opening words of the Torah. The very essence of Judaism is firmly stated in one sentence. "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one!" It is the first prayer that a Jew learns as a child and it is the last prayer upon his lips before he dies. The Torah represents God as a personal God; not in the sense that he has a physical body, but in that he enters, instructs and directs the life of man.

He is "God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God (Deuteronomy 10:17) who executes justice for the orphan and the widow. Nevertheless, He is a "Jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate him,, but showing steadfast love to thousands who love Him and keep His commandments." (Exodus 20:5).

In ancient Israel the prophetic movement began around the middle of eleventh century B.C., although a few individuals before this time have been referred to as prophets. For instance, the Patriarch Abraham is considered a prophet (Genesis 20:7) in the sense of one who intercedes between God and man. Moses is designated a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15; 34:10), though his place in Judaic tradition is more closely related to the role of leader- a man who speaks on behalf of God in a very special sense.

The main function of the prophets was to mould and shape the religious and moral pattern of ancient Israel. As a matter of fact, they were chiefly responsible for the progress, development and character of Judaism. Through a period of two centuries (eighth to sixth century B. C. they gradually replaced the idea of a tribal, jealous and national God with the idea of a God who was the God of the whole world. Moreover, they were deeply concerned with the social systems, institutions and practices of their time.⁷

Hebrews believe that their God was not a spirit in nature, nor part of nature, but above and distinctively apart from nature. They composed a hymn.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth
When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which thou hast established,
What is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?
Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honour.
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of
thy hands;
Thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep
and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes along the paths of the sea.
O Lord, Our Lord,
how majestic is thy name in all the earth!

7. Ibid., pp. 15-17.

⁶ S.A Nigusian. World Religion. 1975. p. 117.

Neither the stars, nor the moon, nor any other heavenly or earthly phenomenon can be worshipped or thought to have divine characteristics. God alone brought everything into existence. He is the sole creator, preserver and ruler of the universe. This created universe is 'good'; it was created according to God's will and for man's use. No one but God ordained the order of the universe. Thus Judaism emphasizes plurality of attributes of God.

Like Judaism, Islam emphasizes the central doctrine of the oneness of Allah. Allah is a shortened form of alillah, which means 'The God'. Prophet Mohammed accuses the Christians of being polytheists because of their belief in the Trinity. "Praise belongs to God", said he, "who has not taken to Him a son, and who has not any associate in the Kingdom" (Sura 17:110). God is One, and there is no other God except Allah.

The Quran expressed the glory and power of 'Allah' from which are derived the ninety-nine 'beautiful names' of Allah. There are longer passages that attempt to describe the glory and power of Allah.

Allah -

There is no god but He,
the Living, the Everlasting!
Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep;
to Him belongs
all that is in the heavens and the earth.

Who is there that shall intercede with Him
save by His leave?

He knows what lies before them
and what is after them,
and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge
save such as He wills.

His throne comprises the Heavens and the Earth,
the preserving of them oppresses Him not;
He is the All-high, the All-glorious!

- Sura 2: 255-256

Everything comes into existence by God's will and His creative word. "Be!", He commands and it becomes. Allah is the only reality. He alone grants life and death. Men are his creatures and must submit their will to his ways, no matter what he decries. Although Allah is regarded as the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Loving, and the Forgiving towards penitents, he is also the Majestic, the Terrible, the Storm, who punishes all sinners.

Zoroastrianism's influence in ancient times was so great and so widespread that no modern religion has been untouched by it. The ancient Persian religion was similar in many respects to the Vedic religion in India. Many of the gods worshipped in Persia were similar to the gods of Hinduism. The world consists of good and evil, hence, it was very clear to Zoroaster that the world was ruled by two forces: one Good and the other Evil. The Good Force he called Ahura Mazda (literally 'wise Lord'), and the Evil Force he named Angra Mainyu ('Evil Demon'). Due to these two Forces there are night and day, good and evil in this world. Good must always be good and Evil must always be evil. Zoroaster did not, however, abolish all elements of the ancient religion. Long before Zoroaster, the ancient Persians had revered and worshipped Atar (god of fire). Ahura Mazda was like Atar, in that fire is light and light is the symbol of Ahura Mazda.

The ancient Persians recognized different gods, some benevolent, others malevolent. Zoroaster maintained that his God, Ahura Mazda was supreme. Ahura Mazda, the 'Lord of Life and Wisdom', was the 'First and also the Last of all eternity'. He was the Mighty and Holy, the Creator of all, maker of all good and the giver of life. He is Holy, Eternal, Just, Omniscient (All knowing), the Primeval Being. Zoroaster tried to reform the old polytheistic religion by gathering together the various symbolic representations of struggle which lay scattered in the ancient myths of gods, spirits, demons and monsters. and welding them into a single, universal conflict: good versus evil.

Gautam Buddha was a religious reformer of Hinduism. He was so engrossed with the problem of removal of human suffering that he did not delve into metaphysical problems. This shows his extreme pragmatic view of the ideal of religion and philosophy. Salvation for the Buddha and his followers meant cessation of tanha, not the union of 'a-tman-Brahman'. According to him, no one can be released from the cycle of rebirth, except by his own unaided efforts. Therefore, no God or gods are necessary. No worship, no sacrifices, no ritual or prayers will ever attain this goal.

Since the Buddha rejected most of the features commonly associated with religion, many have regarded Buddhism as a sort of 'atheistic' or inon-theistic religion. At best Buddhism may be regarded by some people as the earliest and strictest form of 'humanistic' religion which directs man to find his own salvation.⁸

The story of Christianity is the story of a religion that took root within the framework of Judaism in Palestine. In Christianity the reality of God occupied the central place. The spirit of the religion of Jesus lies

in the total surrender of one's will to that of God in love and humility. "Not what I will, but what thou wilt"* sets the tone of man's relationship with God. Jesus shifts the emphasis from rites to righteousness. His own intimate relationship with God deeply impressed his disciples as he strongly emphasized the fatherhood of God. He regarded every human being as more than just a creature or servant of God-Man was a child of God. With profound assurance he stressed the paternal character of God and taught his followers to address God not in the traditional form of "O God, Our Lord", but as "Our Father". Jesus spoke of "my Father" and "your Father". This personal closeness with the Father was the characteristic feature of Christianity.

India is the cradle of world religions. If there is one place on the face of the earth where all dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when men began to dream of existence, it is India. The Boros, the largest tribal group of Assam, are now being converted into different religions, namely Hinduism and Christianity. The traditional Boro religion has its culmination in monotheism. Though the Boros believe in the plurality of deities, 'Bathou is still worshipped by them as the Supreme God. They worship a kind of thorny plant (Cactus), locally known as 'Sijul (Euphorbia splendens). This is a primitive magical type of worship through which they can realise 'Sibrai'.** They believe in the existence and active participation in the affairs of men of certain invisible spiritual beings who are the authors of sickness, famine, earthquakes etc. B-athou creates the universe from His formless existence. He descended on the Great Void with His human characteristics, viz., five organs of knowledge and five organs of action. In Boro language there is an expression about the Heavenly voice of God.

Laoba laosum, Kaoba Kaosum,
Ada gosom, Doiao barsom.⁹

Here Lao stands for organs of knowledge and Ba means five, therefore, Laoba Laosum refers to five organs of knowledge. Like this Kao means parts or pieces and Ba means five, hence, Kaoba Kaosum means five parts of the body or five organs of action. The literal meaning of Ada is elder brother, but it suggests a deeper meaning, i.e. first, noblest; Gosom means heart, and Doiao means into the river and Barsom means jump.

The underlying meaning of the expression is that the Infinite God

* Mark 14:36.

** Lord Siva.

9. Dhupram Basumataril Boro-Kacharir Sanskritir Kinchit Abhas, pp. 2-3.

with the noblest soul and the purest heart assumed the form of man with all human characteristics and descended on this earth to live a worldly life here below. It implies that the Boundless Deity, though transcendent of the world, is yet immanent in all his manifestations. It also speaks of incarnation of God.

Aham Guru is the infinite God to the Boros. At His first appearance in the universe in the form of man He called Himself Shri Borai. He is also known as Jiw Borai or Siw Borai, which must have subsequently been transformed into Siva by the Hinduism.¹⁰ According to their traditional belief, Shri Borai first created His own wife Shri Buri and then the first man, who is known as Monsing Sing. Aham Guru is the creator of all and Shri Borai is His incarnation.

Some authors like Endle,¹¹ Stack,¹² Gait¹³ and others have opined that Boro religion is 'animistic', whose underlying principle is one of belief in and fear and dread of, the supernatural powers. R.N. Mosahary opposes it, for him "the traditional Boro religion is not 'animistic' but 'B-athouism presided over by Supreme God - Bathou Borai or Bathou Raja."¹⁴ But Bathouism is not recognised as world religion. No doubt, it has a primitive religious character and may be termed as totemistic form of primitive religion. Bathou is a purely local term used by the Boro-Kacharis for Siju plant (Euphorbia splendens) and worshipped as Supreme God accordingly.

Huxley¹⁵ has reiterated the theory of Aristotle that all the primitive religions are monotheistic in their origin. It may be said that the Boro religion is not animistic in nature, but shares the same status with the ancient Rg Vedic religion. Different Boro legends, folklores and rituals have adumbrated the belief of the Boros in one personal God Bithou Borai or Bathou Raja who is the Supreme Lord and the creator of all. Bathou is attributed with five elements of creation, "five best qualities, viz., truth, knowledge, power, beauty and goodness ..."¹⁶

Like the Hindus, the Boros believe in different gods and goddesses. They believe in five traditional gods, such as Ailong (god of earth), -Agrang (god of water), Khoila (god of air), Sanjborle (god of

10. See Ramdas Basumataril, "Some Ideas on Bathoull, in M.R. Mochari. (ed) Bodos-a, BSS Souvenir, 1980, pp. 27ff.

11. S. Endle, The Kacharis, 1975, p. 33.

12. E.H. Pakyntein, Census of India, Assam, Vol. III, Part II, 1961, p. 57.

13. Quoted by M. Neog, Sankaradeva and His Time, p. 81.

14. R.N. Mosahary, "Social History of the Boros of Assam: A Study of Oral History", unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1986, NEHU, Shillong, p. 128.

15. Aldous Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy, 1974, p.1.

16. Moniram Mochari, Lower Mawprem, Shillong.

fire or light) and Rajkumbre (god of. sky). The popular deities are grouped into two classes, i.e. (1) Household deities (na* -ni madai), (2) Village deities' (gami* ni, mad-ai). The household deities are worshipped 'inside' the house, or in the house compound. On the other hand, the village deities are worshipped outside the houses, and usually near the sacred grove of trees or bamboos, often to be seen some fifteen or twenty yards from the village and known as the thansali.

Bathou is the most important God. He is never represented in idol form, but is well in evidence through his living symbol, the plant (Euphorbia splendens), which is often to be seen in the Kachari homestead surrounded by a circular fence of split bamboo. In this respect it has a similarity with Hindu religion, because some of the Hindu people also worship the 'Tulshi plant' in front of the house. Writers who take B-athou as a Forest Deity cannot satisfactorily explain the religious and philosophical significance of the Siju plant as impressed upon the Boros who are worshipping it since time immemorial.

Trees and plants are the direct objects of invocation in the R.g Veda (v-41.8), and the Br-ahmanic law enjoins upon the faithful to sacrifice an offering to the great gods, 'to the waters' and 'to the trees' as is the case in the house-ritual. It is true, however, that the greater veneration due to some trees and plants has a special reason. For example, Tulsi, Asok tree, Siju plant etc. have the medicinal values. on the other hand, a pair of trees namely, a Banyan tree (Ficus indica) as Bride and Peepal (Ficus religiose) or Pakar (Ficus venosa) as groom are closely planted together as sacred plants. This is termed as married couple plants known as 'Bar-Kaina' (Bride, groom). The sprouting leaves of these trees are very essential for many Pujas in the Hindu religion.

The use of Siju plant can cure people from some chronic diseases. Again, the Bathou is associated with the numeral five in His quality and function. The 'Euphorbia splendens' is characterised by five ridges and five depressions, which correspond to five elements of creation and represent truth, knowledge, power, beauty and goodness. This particular plant befittingly symbolises B-athou. The Boros believe that this plant was created first among the vegetations in this universe and men took shelter under its shadow,¹⁷ hence they accept it as an emblem of the Supreme God Bathou.

Archaeological evidence indicates that Boro tribes had the influence of the Chinese culture in the east and the Egyptian and Babylonian culture of the West probably due to their trade relations with

*Na, house (ghar), * Gami, village (gaon).

17. Dhupram Basumatari, Boro-Kach-arir Samskritir Kinchit Abhds, pp. 4-6.

the people of those countries.¹⁸ In religion, they in their original homeland were the worshippers of the symbol of vegetation sprouting in the form of twig of 'Euphorbia splendens' that grows naturally with all its stems sprouting vertically upwards with five ridges and five depressions. 19 M.M. Brahma also holds that the Siju plant has a medicinal value on its every knot of the stem, row of thorns, sprouting leaves etc. Hence Si ju plant is considered to be a symbol of Bathou and worshipped as such.

The second important deity is the 'Mainao' the consort of the B-athou. She is the "Guardian of the rice fields" or "the protectress of the paddy fields". There is a belief in Boro tribes that in harvesting period if they offer eggs to the deity then it will protect the land and the people and increase production of rice. They worship her during the period of harvesting the 'Asu' and 'Sali' crops. So they believe in two goddesses 'Asu Mainao' and 'Sali Mainao' as the forms of 'Lakshmi' Mainao is the as the forms of the consort of the chief 'Bathou Borail o 'Sivr-ail and she is also called bathou Buri. She is the chief of the domestic female deities known by various names, such as M-aoth-ansi, Song Buri etc. She is the guardian and the protectress of the household, family wealth and paddy in the field; hence her name is Main-ao, for 'mai' means 'paddy' and 'na' (nao) means 'to keep, to watch over'. It is equivalent to Hindu goddess Lakshmi. She is symbolised by a bamboo pole decorated with a piece of red cloth and planted on a lump of earth raised in the easternmost part of the main house of every traditional Boro. Whereas the Bathou Raja is symbolised by Siju tree (Euphorbia splendens) and is in every household, B-athou altar is installed at the north-eastern corner of the courtyard.

Boros are primarily villagers and farmers, so they worship Mainao in the name of every seasonal paddy crops cultivated round the year. The following is one of the incantations chanted for the appeasement of M-ain-ao.

Ayoi Song Buri, Bima Maothansi

Lokhi Mainao, Sali Mainao, Ashu Mainao,

Basomou Mainao.

Nimaha hodo goli din manikhou,

Ishung singao thapoiphindo, Kulumo

Ayoi nongkhou²⁰

(Mother Song Buri, Mother Maothansi, Lokhi Mainao, Sali Mainao, Ashu Mainao, Khorma Mainao, Josa Mainao, Basomati Mainao, forgive us of our sins and faults, come back and stay in the

18. K M Nath, The Background of Assamese Culture, P 16

19. Ibid

20. See R N Mosahary, op.cit., pp 136-138.

innermost. Department of our main house, come back, we pray you, our Mother).

It shows that Song Buri and Mainao (Maothansi) are identical deities. The incantation refers to a number of paddy crops and shows that Mainao is worshipped in the name of every kind of paddy generally cultivated in the paddy field.

Many deities have manifested from Bathou Raja for the purpose of the creation of the universe. Ailong, the god of earth is the body guard of Bathou Raja. Kazi is the Minister of Bathou; Khoild, the god of air. Rajputar is the son of Bathou Raja, Rajkundra, his grandson, Baghrajia or Mosaraja is the Monarch of the woods, Manasu, the goddess of the river Manas, Agrang, the General of Bathou Raja. Al-aikungri and Bil-ai Kungri are Bathou's daughters. Laokhar Gos-ai is the protector of cowherds.²¹ Song Raja is the manifestation of Bathou Raja and is sheltered inside the main house along with M-ain-ao and is symbolised by slightly raised lump of earth. He is worshipped by the women inside the main house during the period of the monthly impurity.²² Bulli buri, the goddess of learning, is the manifestation of Main-ao or M-aoth-ansi, and is equivalent to Hindu goddess Saraswati. At times, Mainao is also worshipped as Kamakhya, Parvati, Durga or Kali under the name of B-alkungri. Many village deities have been adopted from the Hindu pantheon. Names like 'Bura Mahadeo', 'Thal Kuber', 'Bura gosain' etc. prove it.

The folk songs of the Boros indicate that they are monotheists; the plurality of gods is to be treated as manifestation of Supreme God. Different deities are seen to be propitiated with suitable offerings. The following charm proves that they worship a number of other lesser divinities, most of them are elemental:

*Ehem de Bathou borai maharaza Ozon cor cor don? Aylon, Khazi, Ablakhungur don Agrang Khoila, Razphuthur, Razkhandra don Calizomon don, Bagrazadon, Cibraza don Ardon Aymanacu, Ay dibaoli, Khubir Maharaza Ondor moholao cor dono? Maothancri, conraza, Buliburoi dono. De ma Khalambaogon ayphor aphaphor Dinoi nonthan monno buli honay zao.*²³

(Here, Bura Bathou is the great king. Besides, there are Kaji, Aielang, Abra Konwar, Agrang, Kailash, Rajputra, Raj Kandra, Salijaman, Baghrajia, Sibraja, Mother Monah, Mother Di bouli and lord Kuber etc. In the inner quarter there are Mao Thanshri, Songraja, Bulli-Burhi etc.) This charm indicates polytheistic beliefs of the Boros of

21. Bhaben Narzil Boro Kach-arir Samaj aru Sanskriti., pp.245-49.

22. S. Endle, op.cit., p. 37.

23. M.M. Brahma, Folk-songs of the Boros, 1960, pp. 47-48.

Assam. Hodgson²⁴ observes that they are devout worshippers of starry host of deities. Hence, among the traditional Boros, they always worship many gods and goddess except the Brahma followers as well as the Christians, because in the Brahma religion the 'Param Brahma' is the only reality while on the other hand, Christianity always says that God is the only Father, only reality. There are many gods and goddesses who are regularly worshipped by the Boros. While Mainao, the goddess of wealth is propitiated, Borai Raja is worshipped for the general welfare of the village or of the family. "The names of the gods and goddesses differ from area to area. But the major gods and goddesses remain the same. A great difference is found among the river-gods of different areas in the same state and its reason is probably due to different names of the rivers".²⁵ The Boro pantheon is a very extensive one. But many deities are borrowed from their Hindu neighbours.

Boros distinguish between male and female deities. Bathou signifies 'Lord Siva'. He is the Supreme God, He has no specific idol form except that Siju plant. Boros believe in Bathou as the only reality; by His will the universe exists. They believe in the existence and dynamic character of the Supreme Being who is the author of sickness, famine, earthquakes and the other natural calamities. The 'Kalika Purana' and 'Yogini Tantra' reveal that the place of 'Lord Siva' is more important than that of the female deities. In ancient time, the Kiratas of the Kamrupa worshipped 'Lord Siva'. Siva lived with Kiratas. After sometimes on the advice of Lord Vishnu He left the place and from that time onward Kiratas began to worship female deities. According to the 'Yogini Tantral', in ancient Kamrupa the Lord Siva was the only God who ruled over the Kiratas in early period. After that, many of the Kacharis became followers of the Hindu religion and called themselves 'Koches' of the country. Hence, it is very clear that the 'Lord Sival' was the only God among the Boro-Kachiris from the beginning; whom they have been worshipping as Bathou. In course of time Siva or the Bathou Raja created His consort Mainao, the Kamakhya, Parvati, Lakshmi etc.

Although Boro religion appears to be polytheistic, a native bent towards unification is noticeable. All gods and goddesses gradually dissolve into various manifestations of the one Supreme God. What appears to be polytheistic anthropomorphism is found to be a step towards a spiritual monotheism. The ultimate principle is theistically conceived and is symbolised by a plant. The demands of the cultus as well as the growth of reflection have prompted the Boros to recognise all deities as the shifting forms of the formless divinity. These different deities are the reflections of the growing needs of the people but none of them can answer to the highest conception of God. Bathou is not a shadowy Absolute but a determinate Being in determinate relations to the world

and man.

24. Quoted from W.W. Hunter's Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. X, 1849, p. 74.

25 .K. Brahma, Aspects of Social Customs of the Bodos., 1989, p. 78.

1. V.I. Bakshtanovsky et al., Ethics, 1989, p. 5.

CHAPTER 11

ETHICS

The word 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning character, which originally denoted a location, a place where people lived together. 'Ethos' provides an important observation of the customs and characters of men which emerge in the course of their coexistence. Thus, the empirical evidence of 'ethos' or ethics is set on a multidimensional plane and works out to be an integrand of differentiable eco-bio phenomena oriented qualities.

Aristotle coined the adjective 'ethicos' (ethical) based on the meaning of 'ethos' as character (temperament). He used it to designate a definite class of human virtues, specifically, praise-worthy character traits (courage, moderation etc.) which differ from the virtues of reason or from dianoetical virtues.¹ Ethics is the discipline which studies morality.

The word 'morality' derives from the Latin word *imoralis* or 'mores' which means customs or manners. "Morality is a system of certain customs, rules, principles, values and ideals for guiding and regulating man's conduct and his relations with his fellow-beings with a view to ensure human well being. This means that morality is necessarily evolved by mankind"². It is to be identified as a specific, relatively independent form of social consciousness. Ethical or moral is connected with 'good' and 'bad'. When we speak of a person as moral or ethical we usually mean that the person is a good person and when we speak of him as immoral or unethical then we mean that he is a bad person. There is no similarity in human sentiment. Therefore, as human beings change their moral ideals, the standards of morality also change. A survey of the numerous kinds of social changes reveals many new kinds of values and obligations inherent in the changed conditions. When we refer to certain human action as moral, 'ethical, immoral or unethical. we mean that

1. V.I. Bakshtanovsky et al. Ethics 1989, p. 5

2. Ved Prakash Varma, Indian Philosophical Quarterly Vol. XVII, No. 3, July 1990, p. 313.

they are right or wrong actions.

According to Aristotle, a moral individual is one who is not content to drift with the tide but seeks to introduce a measure of purposefulness into his life. He builds a hierarchy of goals and subjects them to the supreme good, which is the goal of goals. Attainment of personal happiness and perfection is thus the individual's goal, and it is ever present in his activity.³

Aristotle defines perfect activity of human beings, i.e., activity conforming to virtue to be the activity of the soul or to be more precise, a certain correlation between its rational and irrational parts. As a social being man becomes a subject of ethical (moral) virtues.

Through the improvement of his character, he can improve the customs, behavioural patterns and family kinship etc. everywhere in the city-state or in the country in a greater sense.

Each person is not only essentially social but also very largely social in his nature and interests. A very large share of his values is social in nature. Human nature is a product of biological evolution, involving adaptations to different environments. Feelings of enjoyment and suffering, originating historically in adaptive responses function as experiences of values and serve as bases for ideas about human rights. As environmental factors contribute to survival and development of human nature, their role should not be overlooked. The forces of evolution which impinge upon man, particularly in the formation of his moral sense must be characterised by two general norms, viz. the 'utilitarian' and 'opportunistic'. These are associative for any discussion of the origins of human nature".

Evolution is utilitarian, because the main directing force of evolutionary change is natural selection. The action of natural selection is usually to maintain or to enhance the adaptedness of life to its environment. Evolution is opportunistic because natural selection lacks a prescience of the future. The evolution of life and of man has not been planned in advance; it is a natural creative process which contains an element of freedom but also a risk of failure.⁴

Many of the 'elementary' things invented by the primitives are being used even today. The things and the world are same with the primitive age, but the process of living, eating, making etc. have some difference due to moral progress and evolution of the knowledge.

Among the major achievements of spiritual culture of that time

3. V.I. Bakshtanovsky et al. OP.Cit., P. 10.

4. Harold H. Titus and Morris T. Keeton, The Range of Ethics, 1972, p. 124.

was the formation and development of the basis of man's moral life. the basic rules of communication, the sense of human community, mutual support and assistance. Later, having become habitual, they were perceived as something utterly natural upon which morality as a whole rested.⁵

In Albert Schweitzer's words, *Neither world - and life - affirmation nor ethics can be founded on what our knowledge of the world can tell us about the world. In the world we can discover nothing of any purposive evolution in which our activities can acquire a meaning. Nor is the ethical to be discovered in any form in the world process. The only advance in knowledge that we can make is to describe more and more minutely the phenomena which make up the world and their implications.*⁶

Although the way of living and the knowledge of human beings have changed, still it seems that there is no progress, no evolution in human morality among the tribal societies, because some immoral acts like head-hunting still exist among some tribes as their customs or the moral laws. They believe, "our fathers did so, it is custom".⁷ This custom is derived from usage, it is semi-religious. Therefore, they cannot throw away this law. Social customs stand for the general good of the people and act as rules binding on the will of the members. Over these customs religion casts its protecting shadow.

*Since the individuals moral consciousness was not developed, emulation acquired tremendous importance in practical matters. Morality became lodged in man's consciousness through legends, myths, songs and rituals, the attitude to life based on artistic images contained a moralistic element, the ethical and the aesthetic were still one.*⁸

In the primitive society, the ways of living were simple. The people were humble to the authorities in their community. The individual is protected, cared for and loved by his own community. They were guided by social laws, rules and regulations customs or manners, which can distinguish them from the animal world. Their customs and group manners unconsciously moulded their conduct. Primitive men accepted the authority's code of morality as the moral standard. At the early stage group morality was governed by custom preceding the personal morality among them. Gradually they passed to the personal morality from the

group morality. When we go back to the primitive people, what we observe is that their language, the early religious ideas, the superstitious practices, the beginning of law and government etc. are all dependent on their own interest. They appeared to have little concern about the rightness or wrongness of conduct. Yet the tendency to pass judgment against the different activities as being right or wrong, good or evil, begins at a very early stage of the development of the human race.⁹

Primitive man's morality was controlled subjectively by customs, traditions, taboos, rituals or religious ceremonies. All members did their share of work and stood in equal relations to the products of labour, relations that were firmly fixed in customs, taboos etc. They were very fond of helping each other of the same community. They never entered into open conflicts, there were no consciousness about 'mine', 'his' in the mind of the primitive people. The life of each person was closely knit together with that of the community through their different rites and rituals. Hence, tribal morality was extremely restricted within the same community. Their rationality was limited within the same tribe group. In every tribal community the traditional laws and customs have an encompassing grasp of every individual. The conformity of laws and customs is frequently taken as a mark of group membership and makes the individual a 'member of the group'. Without this custom and conduct people would not be able to fulfil some of the simplest moral injunctions of life, like - love and respect to the others, commitments and honourable manners etc. He would not know how to be decent and honest, how to avoid hurting the feeling of others. These general requirements of morality transcend every particular group, but they cannot be executed apart from customs. They were influenced by the course of nature in their thoughts and nature as a symbol was interwoven in their socio-religious beliefs and rituals. Primitive people's life was not purely individualistic, their daily lives were necessarily involved with other members of the community. In any religious ceremony or on other occasions they always ate together. For hunting, fishing they always went out together in a group. They needed help to defend their own people from any danger. Moreover, they have to prepare to make wars to save their community. This attractive equality of moral consciousness was lost in later historical ages.

Boros are primarily living in the rural areas and their basic occupations are farming, cultivating etc. They are worshippers of nature, therefore, in a way akin to Vedic Hindus. Rev. S. Endle pointed out some characteristics of Boro-Kach-aris. Boros are intensely clannish being. They have unity among the community like the other tribes. They

9. John S. Mackenzie, *Manual of Ethics*, 1973, pp. 26-27.

5. V.I. Bakshtanovsky, et al., op. cit., p. 62.

6. Albert, Schweitzer, *Civilization and Ethics*, 1955, p.xiv.

7. E. Washburn Hopkins, *Origin and Evolution of Religion*, p. 248.

8. V.I. Bakshtanovsky, et al., op.cit., pp. 63-64.

are endowed with strength of will. They often appear to be obstinate. As Endle observes.

If they once made up their minds, and they are abundantly capable of doing this, to act in a certain way, it is mere waste of time to attempt to reason them out of their resolution,, for nothing short of absolute and overpowering physical force is of any avail to turn them from the course they have once for all resolved to adopt and act upon.¹⁰

The Boro-Kach-aris have one weakness for a special beverage which is common to any tribes of Sub-Himalayan group. It is known as Madh, Jau, a form of rice beer. They use it in ceremonial occasions, specially at weddings, funerals and Bihu festivals of January and April. Drinking of the rice beer (locally made wine) is neither compulsory at the ceremony nor a part of their customs. Rice beer tempers them in strength temporarily to participate equally and enjoy whole heartedly in the ceremonies. Virtues, honesty, truthfulness, straightforwardness and a general trust-worthiness could be attributed to the Boros. They are simple innocent people. But their innocence is the innocence of ignorance, not the innocence of experience. Therefore, he is free from certain forms of evil, because in his village life he has never come under any temptation to indulge in them. Endle writes,

When contaminated by civilization, e.g., when brought into contact with our civil and criminal courts, much of this innocence must inevitably disappear, and of this sad deterioration of character any man who has been long in the country, and learnt to know the people well, must have experienced many melancholy and painful illustrations.¹¹

The theories which regard happiness or pleasure as the supreme end of life is known as 'Hedonism'. Hedonism reveals that pleasure or hedone is the ultimate standard of morality. It is the highest good, the supreme end of life. The metaphysical assumption of hedonism defines that self is purely sensuous in nature. It has reason, no doubt; but it is not supreme in human nature, but a mere slave of passions. Hedonism has taken many forms, e.g. the psychological Hedonism, Ethical Hedonism, Egoistic Hedonism and universalistic Hedonism etc. The psychological assumption or Hedonism, on the other hand, reveals that man naturally seeks pleasure and avoids pain. It is always the object of desire. Another theory reveals that, each man seeks or ought to seek his own pleasure, while the other view is that, each man seeks or ought to seek the pleasure of all human beings. The former view is known as

10. Rev. Sidney Endle, The Kachiris. 1975. p.2.

11. Ibid., p. 3.

'Egoistic Hedonism', and the latter one is called universalistic Hedonism or the 'utilitarianism'. It is the universal or general happiness, the greatest happiness of the greatest number" which is the ultimate moral standard. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) recognizes only quantitative distinction of pleasures whereas John Stuart Mill (1806-73) advocates their qualitative distinction as well. This theory is called 'utilitarianism', because it judges all actions according to their utility as means for the promotion of general happiness or prevention of general pain. For him happiness is a good, each person's happiness is a good to that person and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons.

From this point of view, the Borols morality resembles the utilitarian view. Because of their tribal nature, Boros are not selfish. they do not like the individualistic life. They seek happiness for whole community. Kant's view 'happiness for others' is very much applicable to the Boro-Kacharis of Assam. In a close knit social life specially of the Boros-Kacharis there is no safe room for egoistic hedonism, but judging from their self-imposed alienation from other groups of societies the term universalistic hedonism could be sustained in a restrained manner. A thing is generally said to be good when it is valuable for some end. When some actions fulfil the desires and give pleasure, then we say that these are good actions. Thus particular kinds of medicine are said to be good when it cured the disease of the sick person. Similarly, when we speak of conduct as good, we may mean that it is serviceable for the end or ideal. The term 'happiness' is customarily employed to describe the substance of the good life for individuals. It is a pleasing term which has many meanings. Every human being wants to be happy in life, free from all misery and sadness, but it is impossible to get real happiness. A man's activity may be good, may be better but never perfect. Because perfect life is impossible for the general human being. The use of the word 'good' necessarily implies a direction which ultimately leads to a real point that conceives of an absolute goodness, i.e. perfection of life. The traditional Boro-Kacharis have a world view which determines principles by which they live happily and peacefully. They always believe in God, B-athou. Every family of the traditional Boros makes an altar of Bathou in the north-eastern corner of inner courtyard. The altar is small raised ground linked with a six foot long and six inch wide spur. It is the altar of the most popular house deity, B-athou. When they shift to a new house in a new locality they worship B-athou and Goddess Kamakhya and a number of other junior Gods and Goddesses. A chicken is also customarily sacrificed in front of the no ma no before they open the door of the house. 12

12. M. Choudhery, op. cit., p.46

The Boro-Kacharis are superstitious in nature. They, therefore, always believe in some peculiar codes. It is believed that the person who is carrying an axe or a hoe should not cross the courtyard through the centre. It signifies that death will occur in the family. The man of the family must not set foot on the uncleaned courtyard early in the morning, otherwise, it shortens their life span. Therefore, women must clean up the courtyard even before the menfolk get up. The main house no ma no, where Boro-Kacharis take shelter is highly valued. If a dove sits on its roof and coos, the family must offer food to the cowherds'. If a pink-neck vulture sits and vomits on the roof, it predicts windfall. The family must offer pujas to God Bathou. The other belief is that if a cow strays inside the no ma no, then it signifies that some relative has died somewhere. Hence, they take care of no ma no according to their customs, as no ma no is the centre of good living.

Shamanism is also prevalent among the Boro-Kacharis for example,

If some one is seriously ill, it is the shaman who knives a chicken and ascertain which spirit is responsible for the illness. An evil spirit can be warded off by offering a puja at a road crossing or by chanting mantras along with the beating with a tuft of poisonous ferns. If a powerful and malignant god is involved, chanting mantras with the pinches of a boar-tooth may be necessary. For common childhood ailments, a magic twine tied on the neck is enough as the remedy.¹³

The Boro covets good life. He is aware of his place in the vast scheme of the universe. This makes him humble. He has obligation to each and everything and being around him. The signs of good and bad, the omens are part of beliefs of early agrarian societies. Thus the selection of the bride is guided by some traditional beliefs about good and bad signs. If the members of the selection party see that the bride is busy in drying and husking paddy at the courtyard, it is believed that the bride is fortunate one. If the bride is busy either in cleaning courtyard or combing her hair, it is believed that bride will spend long life. And if the bride is going inside the main house (no ma no) by putting her left foot at the door, it is believed that she would be ideal and wealthy housewife (Lakhi) and would be loyal to her husband. Beside these, there are some bad signs that the Boro-Kacharis try to avoid in order to endure good life. If the members of the bride selection party hear the thunder or see the mongoose or a snake cross the road from left to right or notice a dead body on the way the party should try to avoid proceeding with the marriage proposal. The selection party should not witness the sight of

13. M. Choudhury, op.cit., p. 51.

cutting of bamboo or working with spade just after reaching the bride's house. No widows or widowers are allowed to take part in marriage ceremony from beginning to the end. The ethical idea behind it is to ensure a good marital life. A duty is something owed. It denotes a particular action that one ought to perform. The ultimate basis of a man's duty is the intrinsic values embodied in his world view and the possibilities for optimizing those values. Duties to self, duties to others and duties to God, perhaps are universally accepted by all. Love for God without love for self and others is futile and unproductive. Likewise the cruelty to animals and being rude to nature (plants etc.) are not proper manifestations of duties to God. Boros have a strong moral sense of duty. They consider that the prime duty is to the community rather than to the self. Kherai puja and Garja puja are performed for the welfare of the community. The worshipping of Siju (Bathou puja), worshipping of paddy (Mainao puja) are the symbolic examples of respect to plants. At the very first day of Baisagu, Boros show respect to cattle (Masau Thukhainai) by washing them and replacing the old rope by a new one. The Baglari clan, on the other hand, think it a duty to show respect to their totem (the tiger) by formally going into mourning whenever they learn that one of these animals has died in the immediate vicinity of their village. The period of mourning is indeed but a short one, seldom exceeding twenty-four hours, but during this brief period the sorrowing would seem to be very real, and no little material loss is sometime involved. No solid food whatever it is, must be taken even if the mourner is inflected with hunger and appetite.

At the end of the mourning the floor and walls of each house must be carefully smeared with a freshly prepared compost of mud and cow-dung, a work usually carried out by the women. All articles of clothing, as well as all household utensils made of brass, must be thoroughly cleansed in running water, whilst all earthen ware vessels except those which are quite new and have never yet been used for cooking purposes, must be broken up and thrown away. Then one of the elder members of the community acting as Deori (minister) solemnly distributes the 'water of peace (santi-Jal) to be drunk by all in turn; and the Buildings themselves and all articles of clothing, etc. are freely sprinkled with this preparation. The service is finally consummated by the sacrifice of a fowl or pig, to be partaken of by all in common: after which relations of ordinary social intercourse with the neighbours may be quietly resumed.¹⁴*

*'Santi-Jal'. Water of Peace (reconciliation), usually prepared by immersing in water leaves of the Tulsi plant. Dub grass, rice, cow-dung etc.

14. S. Fadle, op.cit., pp. 28-29.

The Boros often examine whether their village is free from evils or not and perform the Garja puja. One night ahead of the puja, the altar is cleaned in the evening. A pair of holy basil leaves, nine grains of rice are placed together on a plaintain leaf on the altar and are covered with a bamboo basket. If the articles are found alright in the next morning, it is believed that the village is free from evil. But if the articles are found scattered or some are lost, it is suspected that some villagers are involved in immoral activities. The guilty persons are compelled to apologise before the gods of the Garja puja. Thus, the Boros believe that social development consists in harmonious development of the constituent members of the society. The dedication to society is evident among the Boros when during the harvesting of the cold weather rice crop in December and January each year, the owner of the field summons his neighbours to help him in his work. And the summons often meets with a happy response. Endle remarks,

This whole system of mutual help in time of pressure is a marked feature of Kachari social and domestic life, and tends in no small degree to develop and strengthen that clannish temperament of which it may be considered to be in some sense the natural outcome.¹⁵

Human life is not simple. In course of life, a man consciously or unconsciously, under particular circumstances becomes the subject of evil deed. The violation of duties results in vice. It sometimes leads to overt deeds called sins and crimes. Sin is either commission of wrong actions or omissions of right actions. Crime is regarded as social offence. But all sins are not crimes. For example, ingratitude is a sin, and cannot be punished by law. It could only condemn by the society. All crimes, on the other hand, ought to be punished by law. Murder, lying and theft are the demonic activities when moral character is degraded.

Boros of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam believe that if a person does evil work, he has committed sin, for which he ought to get punishment and God must never forgive him. Man can hide his sins and evil deeds from other's eyes, but he cannot hide it from God. Therefore, if any one is involved in illegal sexual intercourse, it is considered to be a sin. He must confess it to God for relieving him from sin. The Boro-Kacharis respect the female person. Teasing a girl, as a rule, is not allowed in any case.

Outraging a girls modesty is deemed to be a serious crime against the community. One has to keep oneself at a distance from the younger brother's wife of the wife's elder sister. All respected women are treated like mother.¹⁶

15. Rev. S. Endle, op.cit., p. 14.

16. Medini Choudhury, op.cit., p. 40.

The place of women in the Boro society is very high. The husband treats his wife with love and respect and regards her as a companion in life's journey. The freedom enjoyed by a Boro woman is very rarely abused for evil purposes. Rev. Endle was so charmed by the pleasing feature of the social and domestic life of the Boros that he had no hesitation to observe, "It is probably for the most part far sounder and more wholesome than the life of great cities whether in Asia or Europe."¹⁷

The Boro-Kachari's domestic life is kept comparatively pure. Therefore, the standards of chastity among them, both male and female have no difference. As a rule, the young people of the Boros specially in the rural society, lead pure lives before their marriage. If, in any case a girl has violated the law of chastity and also if she has many sisters, then she has to be purified through their traditional religious custom. As such, they purify the other sisters too. On the other hand, if it happens to a boy he is penalised with a fine by cash (rupees) etc. But whenever pregnancy follows offences against the law of chastity, marriage becomes absolutely compulsory. Sometimes the seducer might get the physical punishment at the time of trial which generally takes place at the house of the village headman (Gaonburah). The illegal commuter has to feel that he has brought disgrace upon the village, and is distinctly under a cloud. It is a sort of reformatory punishment. The theory of reformatory punishment reveals that a criminal should be punished adequately to vindicate the authority of the moral law. Punishment convinces them of the righteousness of punishment: it makes them repent for their misdeed and reform themselves accordingly. It prevents them and others from the committing social crimes. Law is the guardian of human society. The law provides a legal code or system of do's and don'ts - to guide humans in their behaviour and to protect them from harm to their persons and property. The law of command of the society is the standard of right and wrong. An action is right if it conforms to the social law and it is wrong if it violates the social law. No societies of the world could exist without law. If, of course, varies with the stages of civilization.

The laws of Boro-Kacharis are framed for the welfare of the society. Though, these kinds of laws continued orally over few centuries, now a days, these are published with slight amendment whenever they feel it necessary. The Boro Kacharis constitute a committee (sanmellan) to frame laws for the Boro dominated pockets of the Assam. This kind of information is referred to 'Boro-Kachari Samaj Aru Sanskriti'.¹⁸ There are seven Boro dominated areas where committee made laws for welfare of the Boro society. Out of the seven Boro dominated areas, six

17. Rev. S. Endle, op.cit., p. 23.

18. Bhaben Narzi, op.cit., p. 96.

areas are functionally demarcated for Brahmaputra valley alone, while seventh one is demarcated for Cachar district. The six law binding areas (Alekas) of Brahmaputra valley of Assam are as follows:

1. **Manuscript Law of North Goalpara*** The jurisdiction of the area covered by this law includes the Boro dominated areas of Dhubri 1 Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, district and Lakhipur thana area of Goalpara district.
2. **Manuscript Law of Northern Kamrup**** This law covers the northern part of Boro dominated areas of Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup districts.
3. **Manuscript Law of Guwahati Thana** - It covers the Guwahati Police Thana area.
4. **Manuscript Law of Boko Thana Area** - This manuscript law covers the areas of Boro pockets of the Boko Police Station of Kamrup district. The area is situated in the south bank of the Brahmaputra.
5. **Manuscript Law of Darrang district.***** All Boro dominated areas of Sonitpur and Darrang districts Odalguri Sub-Division in the Centre fall under the jurisdiction of this law.
6. **Manuscript Law of Goalpara** - This law has been formed by Boro-Bordole in the form of manuscript. The eastern part of present Goalpara district has been ruled by this manuscript law.

The manuscripts of the Boro-Kacharis of the Brahmaputra valley, significantly, were written in Assamese language, while the manuscripts of Dimasa Kach-aris of Cachar were written in Bengali. These laws of Boro Kacharis, now a days, have been written in their own language.

Deuri is the highest authority to punish a guilty person by their traditional law. Deuri has been selected in each Boro villages for the welfare of their fellow persons. He is a respectable person because he serves for rites, rituals, ceremonies performed time to time by the Boro-Kacharis. In the eastern part of Goalpara district, southern part of Kamrup district and in the Nowgaon district, there is a peculiar system of Boro-Kachari law. There is a chief appointed as the judge for twelve Boro-Kachari villages. The chief judge is called Hadengoura. Under him a Hashungoura, the subordinate lawyer has been selected from each twelve

* It means the northern bank of old Goalpara district (1971 Census). The Goalpara district divided into four districts (1991 Census). They are Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon.

** It means northern bank of the old Kamrup district (1971 Census). Kamrup district has been divided into three districts (1991 Census). They are Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup district.

*** The old Darrang district (1971) has been divided into two districts (1991) viz. Sonitpur and Darrang District.

villages. Hadengoura and Hashungoura are governed by the Anehalic Parishad (Council) or Mahkuma Parishad (Sub-Divisional Council) of Boro-Kacharis.¹⁹

Their court of law is convened in the form of meeting. The convenor of the meeting has to deposit some money in the meeting where it takes place. The deposited money is called Shabri Taka by the Boros. The prosecutor should also deposit double amount of the convenor. Whosoever is found guilty by the judges will not get money back and has been punished by their framed law. In addition, a guilty person becomes the subject of atonement. The atonement is considered as religious penalty based on belief. After the court meeting is over, the Sh-abri T-ak-a has been divided into two parts. One part of the Sh-abri is distributed to the public present there and the other half of the Shabri is kept for their village fund which they generally spend for social institutions.

Hadengoura and Deuri are honorary posts. No salaries are paid to them. But a part of hunted meat and each part of ritual feast are given to them as a mark of moral obligation and respect to them. The Selfless service has its roots in pure love and fellow feeling. This shows that human civilization has been a march from egoistic struggle to altruistic existence.

19. Boro-Kachari does not have any autonomous district council like Karbis.

CHAPTER III MAN AND SOCIETY

Any religious account of the universe is no account at all if it does not consider human hopes and fears, efforts and endeavours. Human nature, in its richness and variety, is at once an attractive and baffling study. In his books, *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*, Charles Robert Darwin formulated the evolutionary hypothesis that man evolved from his animal ancestors by 'natural selection' in the 'struggle for existence' and deduced the law of 'survival of the fittest'.¹ According to Darwin, the underlying factors in the evolution of animals and men are heredity and natural selection, i.e., the power of adjustment by the species with the existing environment. By gradual development of his mental powers man has been able to prove himself as a potential and significant being in the universe.

Though there are no historical evidences about the origin of man in Boro thought, still some of the traditional folklores of Boros give a little clue of origin of man in their beliefs. The folktales of Boros provide enough materials for the Darwinian evolution of life, by revealing the role of the egg, fish and birds leading to the formation of man.² This shows how unicellular cell evolved through different multicellular stages to homo sapiens. One of the folktales of Boros on man's creation is stated as follows:

Aham Guru, the primal God of Boro-Kacharis first created a couple of birds to lay eggs for creation. The birds laid three eggs. Aham Guru sent a heavenly message (Daiva-Bani) to the female bird that various lives would appear after hatching of these three eggs. Millenia passed with these eggs without any change. The curious mother bird broke an egg to open it. It remained as it was. Aham Guru intervened to tell the bird not to break other two. He told her to disperse widely all the particles of the broken eggs all around. From these particles, the ghosts, the witches, the ants, the flies, the plants and many other living creatures emerged except men. The folktale is linked with stories about creation of earth (as clay) which was carried by magur fish from the nether world. Thus the earth was created as Aham Guru desired.

After the creation of earth, several millenia passed and men were created out of the two eggs. The first human being emerged as Mansing Sing (a couple of old man and old woman) from one of the two eggs.

1. D.D. Runes (ed.), *The Dictionary of Philosophy*, 1956, pp. 73, 206-7, 302.

2. Bhabendra Narzi, *Boro-Kacharir Sam-aj' -aur Sanskriti* (in Assamese), 1985, pp. 6-7.

Another couple of Abangbrai and Abongbri hatched out from the last egg. After their birth, all of them wished to go back to the heaven. Aham Guru allowed them with a condition that they should not turn their head backward, otherwise he or she would be sent back to the earth. On way to heaven other creatures raised uproar from the earth for which the Abong couple looked back in midway and slipped back to the earth. Now Aham Guru consoled them not to lose heart and ordained that the children of the Mansing Sing couple would also return to the earth to live with them.³

The scientific philosophy behind this folktale may be interpreted as that there was an evolutionary process of life leading to man. Further it points to the concept of ecological balance among Boros in olden days. Aham Guru sent back men to the earth with a view to keeping ecological equilibrium with other living creatures like ants, flies, animals, trees etc.

The Boros of the northern bank of the Brahmaputra valley narrate their origin of creation in relation to the worship of Bathou-.... He is also known as Sibrax (Siva). Bathou or Sibray with his wife (Sibury) created this-universe and the first man, Monsinsin. As Monsinsin remained a lifelong celibate, Sibray and his wife created Darimoba, the male, and Siring Dowba, the female in order to propagate the human population (mansoy).⁴

There is another legend which depicts the origin of the Boros from the Lord Siva of Hindu Trinity. The national name 'Boro' means 'man' as supported by the allied Tipra language. Thus the theory of the divine origin of man is a remarkable feature of the religious philosophy of the Boros.

Like many-hill tribes on this frontier, Boros possess "many simple virtues of great price, i.e., honesty, truthfulness, straightforwardness and a general trustworthiness deserving of all honour."⁵

Despite their innocence, simple virtues and honesty, Boros are fearless in nature. Their heroic character is reflected in their folksong. They can face any other danger without any fear. The following folk song is significant:

Zoholao Zalia gothophor zon,
Zoholao zalia gothophor zon
Zonlay raokhoubo gia gia.

3. Ibid.

4. P. Bhattacharjee, a preface written in English to Bhabendra Narzi, op.cit., p. xv.

5. S. Endle, op.cit., pp. Z-3.

Dahal thungriano zonni gelegra mua mua
Zoholao ... gia gia
Corba cuthura gaglap phoiba zonni raizoao
Dangon cugon gaogon
Zonlay raokhaubo gia gia

(Inf.: Dwardendra Basumatary,
Dihira, Kamrup 14.11.57)

The English rendering of the song is as follows:

We are the sons of heroes
We know not fear, we know not fear
The shield and the sword
Are our play things our toys
Should any enemy invade our place,
He will be cut to pieces and be killed.
We have no fear and we do not pause.⁶

Some of the folksongs of Boros clearly indicate women participation in the heroic battle.

Another folksong reveals the same. Here women folk encouraged heroes Bachiram and Daoharam to fight against enemy. The Boros of Kokrajhar; Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup districts considered Bhütia as their enemy, because Bhutan is the neighbouring country of these districts. The folksong is as follows:

Phoi oi Boro phicaphor noncoro phoi,
Daoha nanno thiandini
Dahal thungri lananoi bikha phordan nanoi
Ducmon phorkhou hocodini
Ada Baciram zoholao
Nonlay goraya dabray lando,
Akhra bugdao nanoi nono hoco lando,
Nayhor honoi nayhor ducmon phralay,
Haylado huilado phoilay gou,
nana nana nan laygon hazo gophayao
thoya thoilay gou docmona,
Derha laygon zon Boro phora.
Dagi ada Baciram zoholao dagi nono,
Zoholaoni phica, birni phica nonlay utliri hagon.
Ada Daohoram zoholao nonbo daoga lando,
Nonbo lamayao benco hoido.

(Inf.: R.N. Brahma, Shillong, 26.3.56)

6. M.M. Brahma, Folk Songs of Bodos, 1960, p. 131.

The English rendering of the song of women is given below:

Come, Oh you sons of Bodos,
Come your out, sword and shield in hand.
Let us go and rout the enemy.
Brother Bachiram, ride forward,
Pursue the enemy hard,
See, there he comes in all strength
Let the fight be in cave
Kill the soldiers of the enemy
We, the Bodos will win the game,
Fear not, Bachiram, fear not,
You are born of heroic loins,
Victory will surely be yours,
And you, brother Daoharam,
Go you forth on the elephants back,⁷
Sword in hand to meet the foes on the way.

The term 'society' is defined by sociologists and anthropologists with their own connotation of specialised field. George Simmel, one of the founders of modern sociology, defined a society to be "a number of individuals⁸ connected by interaction". Ralph Linton, an anthropologist defined society as "any group of people who have lived and worked together long enough to get themselves organised and to think of themselves a social unit with well-defined limits."⁹ Gladys Bryson has said, "Society deals with life of human beings in groups."¹⁰ To sum up all these definitions, 'society' could be defined as a system of action in operation that involves a plurality of interacting individuals of a given species (or group of species). The species may include birds, fishes and even insects. But here in this chapter by 'given species' we specifically consider homo-sapiens (man) and his society as distinguished from non-homo-sapiens of lower animals. One can say that society is a form of organisation involving a relatively high degree of interdependence among the members (e.g., Ant Colony). But high degree of autonomy is found in case of human society only.

Man is essentially a social and rational being by his nature. Due to this nature he likes to live in a group and makes a society. "He cannot be happy in isolation and has also to fulfil many obligations towards the

7. Ibid., p. 132.

8. Reference from Ely Chinoy, Society, 1967, p. 25. (George Simmel, Sociology, trans. by Ku@t' H. Wolff. New York, Free Press, 1950, p.10).

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., p. 24 (Gladys Bryson, Man and Soci Princeton Un-lversity Press, 1945).

society he lives in. But no society is static; it changes according to nature of challenges it has to meet with from time to time."¹¹

George Gaylord Simpson points out that,

*Man has essential attributes other than those of the animals. He is an entirely new kind of animal in ways altogether fundamental for understanding of his nature. It is important to realise that man is an animal, but it is even more important to realise that the essence of his unique nature lies precisely in those characteristics that are not shared with any other animal.*¹²

Man cannot survive with a lonely life, without any other person. He is dependent on society for protection, comfort, nurture, education, equipment, opportunity and the multitude of definite services which society can provide. He is always dependent on society for the thoughts, dreams, aspirations, even many of his maladies of mind and body. Birth in society brings the absolute needs of society with itself. No man is free of the need of society, for a normal man must have social relationship to make his life livable.

Therefore, there is a necessary interrelationship between individual and society. Man and society go hand in hand.

Some philosophers have viewed 'society' as a contrivance deliberately set up by men for certain ends. Thomas Hobbes¹³ in the 17th century points out that society is a means for the protection of men against the consequences of their own untrammelled natures. John Locke points out that the natural societies which are formed by animals or primeval people are associations.¹⁴ The individualists maintained that man was born 'free and equal'. For the protection of his life he always needed the help of others. So men made social contract between themselves, thus society was created by them in the beginning. They established a social order to protect their property, their rights or their lives or some other essential and good things. Individual was subordinated to society.¹⁵

Society is an organic unity of interdependent parts. Individuals are part and parcel of society, they are social by nature. There is an

11. S.P. Ruhela, Human Values and Education, 1990, p. 51.

12. Gerhard Lenski and Jean Lenski, - Human Societies, 1974, p. 8. See also George Gaylord Simpson, The Meaning of Evolution, 1951, pp. 283-284.

13. See Hobbes' Leviathan, Chaps. XIII & XVII.

14. Gordon Graham, Contemporary Social Philosophy, 1988, p. g.

15. Benjamin Kidd, Social Evolution. New Ed. 1920, and Principles of Western Civilization. 19023, (Quoted from R.M. MacIver, Society, 1974, p. 48).

inseparable relation between the two. Man outside society is no longer a man and society without man is absurd. The history of human society is the history of human struggle in which he tries to secure his freedom, equality and justice so that he may develop himself towards perfection. Every individual belongs to a society. Therefore, society is an organisation of free self-conscious spirits which live in cooperation with one another.

Various sociologists have laid stress on evolution. Thus Durkheim has insisted on the pre-eminent importance of the social division of labour as a criterion of social development.¹⁶ Other writers have taken various aspects together and sought to show that society passes through a definite series of evolutionary stages.¹⁷ An optimistic note was struck by the majority of the social evolutionists of the 19th century, from Comte to Herbert Spencer and Lester Ward.¹⁸ For them social evolution was, in effect, social progress. The rapid technological and industrial advancement of the 19th century was another aspect that led many philosophers, sociologists and historians to the position that the major trends of social phenomena indicate social progress.

People lived in simple hunting and gathering societies which began to appear 20,000 years ago,¹⁹ probably the starting point of human history. It was continued till about 10,000 B.C. A new kind of fishing society can also be traced back into upper paleolithic age. Invention of fish-hooks, nets, traps, boats and paddles in the Mesolithic was a good stage of evolution to make the shift from stone made handaxe. Horticultural societies, probably, came next to appear first in the middle east (7000 B.C.).²⁰ The plough seems to be adopted by societies in Mesopotamia and Egypt by 3000 B.C. which could be justified as agrarian societies. Though we cannot say when herding societies emerge, still evidence of animal domestication suggests the period about 9000 B.C. Maritime societies date from the end of the third millennium B.C. The last major societal type is the industrial.

Present stage of man is attained through a long process of genetic evolution of 'Homo sapiens'. Hence, it is highly arbitrary to say that human history began at any particular point.

There are still large number of hunting and gathering societies in both the New World and Australia, and smaller number of them in South West Africa, parts of the rain forest in central Africa, certain remote

16. G. Simpson, The Division of Labour in Society, 1933.

17. M. Ginsberg, Studies of Sociology, 1932, Chapter V.

18. See R.M. MacIver and Charles H. Page, Society, 1974, p. 528.

19. John E. Pfeiffer, The Emergence of Man, 1969, pp. 210-212.

20. See G. Laski & J. Lenski, Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology, 1914, p. 100.

areas in South East Asia and neighbouring islands (Andaman & Nicobar Islands) and in Arctic Asia.²¹ Even Boro-Kacharis of lower Assam are seen to be practising hunting (though occasionally) in the jungles of plain areas. This, of course, may be categorized under transitional stage of hunting and agrarian societies.

All tribes of Assam, gradually are being assimilated with the Aryans. Boro society is not an exception. It is seen that participation of Boros in the politics of Assam is progressively increasing. But still there are some imbalances observed in the societies of Boros of Assam. Despite all possible help rendered by the Government the societies at the lowest level remain undeveloped. Economic disparity is the ailment of Indian society, this is true also of Boros. How it happened, why their development become sluggish that prima facie makes a case for serious microlevel analysis. Although economic inequity exists in almost all the societies but in India it has reached a catastrophic height. We expect all macro-societies to be rational but we cannot tolerate equitable distribution of prosperity. Not only the Boros but also many other micro-societies are pushed into giant leap forward of industrialization before they were being prepared mentally.

Like the other tribal societies of India, the Boros of Assam have hierarchical structure. Dumont has criticised contemporary anthropologists for their cultural bias towards equality which, in his view, has made them incapable of understanding the nature of hierarchy.²² The term 'hierarchy' is culture-specific. Anthropologists usually present the order of castes in their village in a vertically-ranked series. Among the Boros, the image of the hierarchy is not a ladder-like construction but a circle with some sects in the centre and others in the surrounding rings. The implication of this model is that of moral universe with a sacred centre.

There are different sects among the Boros. They call it Mahari. The Boro Mahari (clan) system is based on totemism. It bears prefixing names of animals, trees, or some material objects, and is suffixed by arol, roi or auri, the patronymic commonly used by them in naming their clan or sect.²³ Examples are Swarga-Sroi and Basumatiaroi, Mosa-āroi, Khangkhlo-aroi, Narze-aroi, Doima-roi. Many of their prefix names are Aryanised which are derived from Sanskrit. The word 'Swarga-aroi', for instance, is derived from Swarga (heaven). Heaven-folks are considered to be the highest in status among all clans of Boros. No

21. Ibid., p. 133.

22. See L. Dumont. *Homo Hierarchicus*, Trans. M. Sainsbury, 1970, Introduction.

23. G.A. Grierson. *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. III, 1967, p. I.

members of this clan ever worked as cultivators. Deoris, Ojhas belong to this clan who involve themselves in religious ceremonials. 'Basumati-aroi' on the other hand, is derived from Sanskrit word Basumati (earth). It stands for earth-folk and can be described as landlord. This proves that the Vedic Hindus have largely influenced the traditional Boro society. Thus Mosā-āroi, (Mosa = tiger) also termed as Baghl āroi is sanskritised form of Bagha (tiger) and denotes tiger folk.

The clan's name was given according to the occupation of the Boro tribes. These were Nārze - āroi (Narze jute), the jute folk; Doimāroi (Doima large river), the river folk, in olden times known as fisherman; Goi-bāri-āroi (goi = the areca palm) the areca-folk, 'Brahma-aroi, Brahma folk, said to be a quasi-priestly class. The word aroi (people, folk) is applied by the Boros almost to every clan's name and its use is hereditary.

The Boro families in early days were composed from defence point of view. These were termed as compact families. Families of Boros are, now a days, reduced to a small size from economic point of view. The large or extended family, on the other hand, can be identified on an occasion like 'Kherāi puḷā' as people have to take meal together on that particular festival. There is a popular Boro saying Borai Buri zob zob. meaning husband and wife.²⁴ It means that only husband and wife can live together to spend conjugal life. Descent of a Boro family is the important factor to be discussed. There is no doubt that the Boros of Brahmaputra valley remain patriarchal. Father is the sole authority of the family. The head of the family is called Nophing.²⁵ The property of the family is accordingly divested in the son. Father, being the head of the family, represents his family in the village council or any other social function at the community level. Significantly, eldest son occupies an important place in the family.²⁶ There are some matriarchal characteristics seen in the patriarchal Boro society.²⁷ The widow marriage system is practised in certain cases among the Boros. This system is called Dhoka. In this case a man comes to live with the widow in her first husband's establishment.²⁸ Hence, the widow wife becomes

24. R.N. Mushahari, "Social History of the Boros of Assam: A Study of Oral History", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1986y NEHU, Shillong, p. 97.

25. Ibid.

26. S.M. Dube, *Family, Marriage and Social Change on the Indian Fringe*, 1980.

27. P.C. Bhattacharya, *A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language*, 1977, p. 16.

28. Bhaben Narzi, op.cit., p. 22.

sole authority of the family and accordingly property descends to the children.

Marriage is an important institution from the social point of view. It creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the spouses and their families. It is called *Hābā* by the Boros. *Ha* means soil or earth and *bā* means to bear something on the back. *Ha ba*, therefore, signifies 'to bear the soil or the responsibility of the earth on the back'. It is interesting to observe that the Sanskrit word for marriage 'bivaha' also has the same etymological meaning.

There are different systems of marriage among the Boros, which are akin to the Aryan systems of the Asura marriage, the Paisasa marriage and the Brahma marriage.

In Asura marriage a reasonable price is paid for the bride. It proves that the bridegroom pays respects to the bride and her family. In early period it was compulsory in Boro society, but people now-a-days are gradually changing their societal rules and regulations, customs and cultures. The paisā - sā marriage system is still practised in Boro society, where bride is physically overpowered by the bridegroom in order to make her yield to his passion. When the father of the bride selects his son-in-law and keeps him in his house it is called the Brahma marriage. This system is called *Garjiā Lakhināi* in Boro. The bride-groom is to stay in the father-in-law's house even after his marriage. This system, in fact, is rarely seen among the present day Boros of Assam.

Sāngnānoi lāināi hābā (marriage according to standard practice) is solemnised when the bride is selected by the parents of the bridegroom and the marriage is settled after negotiation. This is a regular marriage which is now-a-days performed at the house of the bride. Bride price is not compulsory. According to *Khārsonnāi hābā*, the bride enters into the house of the bridegroom before the settlement of marriage through mutual understanding. In this irregular marriage the consent of the parents of the bride is not taken into serious consideration. Sometimes marriage by elopement of both bride and bridegroom takes place. This is called *Donkharlangnai hābā* which is akin to the Gandharva system of marriage among the Aryans. *Bonāoilāināi hābā* is similar to the Paisāsa marriage of the Aryans. If a man lives in the house of a widow as her husband, their marriage is called *Dongkhā hābnāi*. *Garjiā Lakhināi* system, on the other hand, indicates matriarchal characteristics of Boros, where a boy marries a girl to stay with her parents. And accordingly husband identifies himself as the member of his wife's family. In this case, property is owned by his wife.³⁰ However this system of marriage

29. K. Brahma, op.cit., p. 16.

30. Ibid., p. 21.

is rare in the present Boro society.

Boros do not have any specific generic term to denote the kin group which is ordinarily described as kin from wife's side. But a common term, *Kurma*³¹ is used for the relatives from wife's side. Likewise the term *Bhāgi*³² has been used for relatives from the father's side, Boros have words for uncles, brothers and sisters. This type of family relationship comprises individual social group, called *khell*. The individual *khell* is so strong among the Boros that they are bound by social customs and laws.

In the Boro's social life, they have some living principles. Their community in village, is a well knit unit. There are two very old and important institutions namely, *Sanguri* or *hāduli* and village cooperative. The former is still continued but the latter has become very rare at present among the Boros due to the diversification of economic problem.

*Whenever someone has a big job in hand or has to do something in a hurry to meet a deadline he calls a sanguri. For instance, when somebody wants to reconstruct his dwelling house before the rains or to complete transplantation of paddy on the last acre before it is too late he calls for assistance of the villagers (women if it is a case of transplantation of paddy). The villagers come and collectively complete the job over a bout of drink, plus also a noon day meal if the job takes a full day. Money is not a consideration in any case.*³³

Boros are generally endogamous. In their custom they have eighty clans, out of these forty are known as men's clans (*sengfang*) and forty as women's (*Zulu*). All members of these different clans eat and drink together freely. The royal clan, known as *Ha-chum-sa* the black earth folk is inclined sometimes to the exogamous.

In early times, the marriage had some restrictions, because of the strictly endogamous nature Boros of all sub-tribes freely ate and drank together but intermarriage between them was absolutely forbidden. Now a days such restrictions have passed away.

There is no formal hypergamy, though occasionally Boros marry from the cognate tribes known as 'Rabhas' (*Totlās*), 'Koches' (*Madāhis*) and 'Saraniyas' etc.

But such alliances are as a rule not looked upon with favour, and the bridegroom in such cases has generally to make his peace with his fellow-villagers by providing them with a feast in

31. H. Wlvorsrud and M. Mosahary, Boro-English Dictionary.

32. Ibid.

33. M. Choudhuri. op.cit., p. 41.

which rice-beer (ju) and pork are certain to take a prominent place. Children born of such mixed marriages become in all cases members of the father's sub-division of the Bodo race.³⁴

There are some exceptional cases of marriage relationship which does not fall under the purview of law but generally society allows those cases. A widower may marry his deceased wife's younger sister, but not the elder, whom he is taught to regard conventionally in the light of a mother. Same principle may apply in the case of the widow's re-marriage, which is permitted by the society. But one restriction is there that widow may marry her deceased husband's younger brother, not the elder.

Polygamy is strictly prohibited among the Boros. They allow a man to marry only one and in rare case two, if the first wife is childless. Polyandry is absolutely prohibited, though the system prevails in neighbouring Bhutan and Tibet. Adoption system is acceptable to the Boro society. Orphans are occasionally adopted usually by near relatives or even by absolute strangers. The children so adopted are treated as full members of the family. As family is the lowermost stratum of the society, one should know the structure of the household or family how they live customarily in the society. A typical Boro-Kachari household generally consists of four houses, on four sides of a seklā (inner yard) and a Kh-āntā i.e. front yard in front of the southern house. According to the rank of occupants they have big house on the north which is called no ma no. The seniormost couple of the family reside here. This house comprises three rooms. The eastern room is called Ising i.e. kitchen. There are strict restrictions for the outsider. Here they have a seat for the goddess of prosperity. Therefore, they never allow other persons to enter the kitchen. The oven where they cook is by the side of the eastern wall of the ising while near the northern wall are two mole-hill type foundations. On the tip of each an egg, alternatively a pebble, is kept. This is called Māināo Bindou i.e. the house goddess of prosperity. Near the western wall the cooking utensils are kept and washing is done inside.³⁵

There is a special guest and discussion room. Important family matters are discussed in the middle room which is known as nā khong. The westernmost room, khapra is the sleeping room for the elder couple of the family. They arrange every essential things of the daily life from eastern side to western side accordingly.

The granary or the bhākri and cattle-shed indicate the economic condition of the family. The cattle shed is constructed on the east of the

34. S. Endle, op.cit., p. 29.

35. Medini Choudhury, op.cit., p. 45

granary.³⁶ The weaving looms, on the other hand, are installed either in the backyard or in the inner yard by the side of the verandah. The weaving of cotton and silk cloth with fine embroidery is the excellent craftsmanship of the Boro women. Every household of a traditional Boro-Kachari keeps an altar of Bathou, the Supreme God. It is the expression of religious mind of traditional Boros.

The Boro tribe was originally casteless. In process of time, a segment of Boro tribe was converted into Hindus to adopt Brahma religion under the influence of Kalicharan (Mech) Brahmachari, the first preacher of the Brahma movement.³⁷ A segment of their tribes was influenced by Christian missionary. Another section of the Boro tribes remains unchanged and far from influence of either religions. This section of traditional Boro or Kacharis is the actual representative of their tribes. A traditional Boro-Kachari is a smiling beauty which attracts any outsider. He has pleasing manners. He lives a simple life and envies none. This kind of traditional society, therefore, can be guided properly to uplift their social status, so that they can cope with the modern civilised society.

One would be astonished to know about the art, craft and weaving skill of traditional Boro-Kacharis. For example, a kind of ariā pāchārā, made of endi thread which gets from eri worm still has a great demand among the people of Assam. But with the advent of modern textile technology their primitive weaving process is being swept away. Now a days, many Boros are attracted towards the power loom. So far as agricultural economy is concerned, it is difficult to ascertain the era of traditional hoe cultivation (jhum cultivation) of the Boros. Many scholars opine that the whole process of transition from the traditional hoe cultivation to the plough cultivation took about a century. Amalendu Guha stated that since the days of Bhagadatta of the Purānic Age, the

36. "The importance of a storehouse and a cowshed for the family is illustrated in the following lines of a folk-song sung by a marriageable maiden addressing her father:

O my godly father!
Don't send me to a house
where a crow enters and a kite enters.
Please give me in marriage to a family
where you find a store-house full of grain
and a cow-shed full of cows."

(P.C. Bhattacharya, "Introduction" to B. Narzil O.P.Cit., p. 13).

37. M.C. Saikia, "The Brahma Movement among the Bodo-Kacharis of Goalpara District and Its Impact on their Social Transformation", District Research Officer, Guwahati, Assam.

plough cultivation was practised by a negligible number of people other than the Boros. Boros learnt their plough cultivation from Hinduised Boros known as the Koches and Rajbanshis, whom they employed in their field.³⁸ Fishing implements of traditional Boros were Zekhāi., Polo, Kokka-, Cheppā, Shohrā etc. All are made of locally available bamboos. Fishing net is also used. A fish-catching expedition is looked upon as a village holiday. The entire population takes an active part in it.

Some conflicts among the Boros, and sometimes between the Boros and non-Boros have cropped up in the social lives of the Brahmaputra valley. These are partly due to economic imbalances which still exist specially among the Boros. The Boros claim to be oldest inhabitants of Assam. They had been using land of Assam as nomadic people in primitive age. The Aryans with superior culture and advantage conquered the area and dominated the tribes of Assam. The forest, the Boros used for wood is now protected by the Government act to desist Boros from encroaching into reserve forests. This hurts their sentiment as well as their economy. Most of the agricultural lands of Boros are either purchased or misappropriated by non-Boros taking advantage of their innocence and simplicity. Accordingly a psyche developed among the Boros in such a way that they are unhappy with the non-Boros of Assam. In rural areas of the Boros, the formal education reached quite late. Boro society in Assam still has a long way to go towards progress in comparison to the non-tribes of the state. Their society, is now on the threshold of progress due to special attention paid by the government. If this special attention continues for considerable period, the gap of imbalance would surely narrow down.

38. A. Guha, Zomindarkalin Zillar Artha Samajik Awastha, pp. 31-38.

CHAPTER IV RITES, RITUALS AND FESTIVALS OF BOROS RITES, RITUALS AND FESTIVALS

Religion is man's faith in a power beyond himself which he expresses in acts of worship and service. The ritual is such type of formal action of rites performed in the form of ceremony. Ritual is so pervasive and significant in human culture as a whole and in religion in particular that neither can be adequately understood without considering it in some details.¹ Thus ritual has been defined as "the formal acting out of a ceremony, usually repeated in exactly the same way on specified occasions".² The rites and rituals are observed almost in each and every society of the world. To the Boros the distinctive features of their culture are inseparably connected with their religious activities. The life of a Boro is full of rites and rituals from birth to death. Some of the rites as observed now are influenced by Hinduism in many respects, yet they have not lost their Boro character.

(a) Birth Rituals

Birth is the beginning of human lives. There are special rites or ceremonies connected with child birth in the Boro society. When a child is born the umbilical is cut with a sharp edged hard strip of bamboo (ow-a themal). The detached cord (uthumāi) is tied around by a cotton or muga thread. The male baby's cord is tied five times while female baby's cord is tied six or seven times. This kind of rite is believed to be done by a woman of 'bitter hand'* so that the cut wound will dry soon. Significantly, no widow or widower is allowed to cut cord. Afterwards the placenta is buried usually at the front of the main house (nomāno) or away from the house.

The mother of newly delivered child bathes or a woman present the baby with tepid water (doi dungbrud).³ Then baby is sprinkled with 'holy water' (doi gothar).** The following charm is pronounced by the woman:

1. W.R. Comstock, et al., Religion and Man: An Introduction, 1971, p. 31.

2. Ralph Ross, Symbols and Civilization, 1957, p. 182.

* If the vegetables or the betel leaves cease to grow after being touched by a particular man or woman, he or she is called 'bitter hand'.

3. K. Brahma, op.cit., p. 4.

** Holy water is the water in which a gold ring, some 'dub grass' (dubri hagra), and a few holy basil leaves are placed. It is termed as Santi-Jal' in Assamese.

Oi gotho?
Nongha godo mamón,
Bangal na jungal,
Garo na Gangar
Harsha no Mephal mon?
Dinoimi phai Boro jabai.⁴

"Whoever you were? Whether you were a Muslimil a Garo, a Bhutia or a Non-Boro (Harsha) or a Nepali, you have become a Boro from today".

It seems that the Boros believe in transmigration of soul. Soul is immortal, it transmigrates from one body to another. With this philosophy, the Boros, therefore, 'sprinkle holy water on the new born baby and claim it to be their own.

Under certain circumstances the Boros have a peculiar system of selling out the new born baby. If the Boro parents lose their children at a young age regularly, for the sake of change of guardianship they sell the baby out at a very nominal price. They believe that evil spirit will not attack the baby. Hence the 'purchased child' is believed to live long.⁵ This ceremony is performed by the parents by offering rice-beer (jau) to the villagers assembled for ceremony.

(b) Puberty Rites

Celebration of 'puberty' rite among the Boros is generally observed at the mother's house in a secret manner. The information of attaining girl's puberty is confined within the family members. But there is a change of dress. A new garment (dokhna) is put on, covering chest to ankle. The girl keeps herself away from mixing up with any boy. Though this kind of rite is performed in Kokrajhar district, it is observed in some parts of Upper Assam also. The parents of the girl arrange a feast in this ceremony. On this occasion a banana plant is placed where the girl takes bath. The reasons behind it are - (i) On many occasions babies die before puberty due to lack of medical facilities, (ii) girls who survive should be blessed with fertility to preserve the race, and (iii) a kind of notice is circulated among the clan in the name of ceremony. This kind of rites and rituals is still found among the many tribes of the world. In India, specially, the tribes of Assam including Boros practise puberty rites till date.

(c) Marriage

Marriage is an important transition in life and status of the individual in society. It is accompanied by different rites and ceremonies. It includes various observances to protect the new couple from the evil

spirit or the evil eyes to secure and enhance the safety and prosperity of the new couple. The proceedings of marriage ceremony, according to the Boro custom, could be divided into three stages: (i) pre-marriage, (ii) marriage proper, and (iii) post-marriage. But significantly, all three stages of proceedings of marriage of the Boros vary from district to district within the Brahmaputra valley itself. It also seems to vary from the traditional Boro to the Brahma religion and seems to be absent among Christian Boros.

i) Pre-marriage ceremony is a kind of negotiation between the bride and bridegroom's house towards the settlement of marriage. It is observed as compulsory in ceremonial pattern till the final settlement takes place. After considering preliminary inquiries of marriage criteria like physical beauty and economic condition, health and character in both proposed bride and bridegroom, the parents of the bridegroom visit the house of bride with a Gatakdar.* The members of the bridegroom party carry bundles of areca nuts and betel leaves to the bride's house. This ceremony is known as Goikhāonāi (cutting of areca nuts). The villagers of the bride are entertained with areca nuts and rice beer (jau) in abundance. The Boros of Nalbari, Barpeta, Kamrup, Sonitpur and Darrang districts usually bring two bottles of rice-beer to the bride's house and leave them. Sufficient quantity of rice-beer brought to the bride's house to entertain her parents, relatives and villagers. The idea behind it is to show the desire of the parents of the bridegroom to get the girl of the house as a bride. If this step of idea goes well, it is followed by Bibān lāngnāi ceremony and is performed compulsorily by the bridegroom party. For this, two earthen pitchers (hāni thinkli gongnoi) full of rice-beer, arecanuts and betel leaves (goi aro piithoi) are carried to the house of the bride. The signs of the sun and the moon are painted on the two pitchers. The bibān consists of rice-beer, arecanut-betel leaf and pork (omā bedor). The bibān (in Boro) or the bhār (in Assamese) is placed by the barlangpha ** in front of the main house (nomano). On this occasion of bibān langnai a pig is cut equally into two parts, one part is given to the bride's parents while the other is kept for bride-groom's house. The persons invited to this ceremony are entertained with betelnut, rice beer etc. The goikhāonāi and bibān lāngnāi, are repeatedly held at the house of bride for several times till the proper marriage ceremony takes place. This indicates the honour to the bride. on the day of making final settlement for marriage the bridegroom has to entertain the villagers

* Gatakdar means middleman for marriage. Hindus also engage Ghatak at the time of settlement of marriage.

** Barlangpha the person who carries the two pitchers on his shoulder keeping balance with the help of a piece of bamboo (Bānka).

4. Bhaben Narzil Boro-Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti, 1966, p. 145.

of the bridels village with betelnut and pork etc. The skins of the areca nuts are usually thrown on the roof of the main house to remain there till the proper marriage ceremony takes place. This ceremony is known as *Goi-khithou garkhonāi*. The last stage of pre-marriage ceremony is the assemblance of parents of bride and bridegroom at the house of bride to fix a suitable date of the marriage proper. On this occasion too the parents of the bridegroom along with elderly persons go to the bride's house with areca nut, betel leaves and rice beer. The ceremony is known as *Khābira longnāi*. The date of marriage proper is fixed mutually at a convenient day, preferably Sunday, Saturday and Tuesday are avoided.

ii) Marriage proper is performed on the fixed day. The parents of the bridegroom with the help of their villagers and relatives go to the house of the bride to bring her for marriage. This is known as *Hinjāo godān lāino thāng nāi* or bringing the new bride. The bridegroom party consist of *barlāngphā*, two *bairāthis*,* few girls, women and some elderly persons. The *bibān* or the *bhār* is carried by *barlāngphā*. The *bibān* consists of the two jars of rice beer, one pig, areca nut and betel leaves in abundance. The *bairā* this serve betel leaves to the bridels villagers and try to satisfy them with other edible items like rice beer, rice, pork etc. The *barjāngphā* and *bairāthis* perform dances at the house of the bride. The bride is dressed up with the new *dakhanā āgar* (special female garment), *sonā* (earring) *āshansuri* (bracelet) presented by the bridegroom. When the bride is about to be taken away from the house of her parents the old women and relatives console the bride with the following song:

Mano gabdon ayoi mano gabdon
Dagabcoi ayoi dagabcoi.
Mephal houano horakhoi,
Harca houano horakhoi.
Raizo zanocaoboro houano hordon ayoi hordon.⁶
(In.: Risav Brahma, Vill., Katikusi, Kamrup, 27.11.56)

Why do you weep, dear?
Don't you weep, girlie.
You have been married not to an outcast
But to a right and Boro youth proper,
To lead a proper family life.

Thereafter they take the bride along with bridegroom party and *barlāngphās* sing and dance all the way back to the groom's house where

* Two *Bair-athis* are two girls or ladies (not widows) who cut areca nuts and perform other rites, starting from the pre-marriage ceremony.

6. M.M. Brahma, *Folksongs of the Bodos*, 1960, p. 28.

actual marriage has to be performed. An interesting feature which indicates the real meaning of marriage in Boro language is *hābā* i.e., earth carried on the back. When the bride comes to the groom's house, a load of sods of earth is hung on a sling on her back. This clearly indicates the agrarian nature of Boro society. On the very day of arrival of the bride at the house of the bridegroom the proper marriage ceremony is performed. The most important part of the ceremonials is called *Hāthā suni Khurnāi*, without which the bride does not acquire the right to enter the kitchen of her new home. The main function of this *Hāthā suni Khurnāi* is feast giving ceremony. The bride offers meal to the bridegroom. After taking a little portion of the food they pray to God *B-Bāthou Borai* to bless them for peaceful conjugal life. Equally a *deuri* pronounces the mantra, in front of the altar of the deities where couple kneel down, to introduce the bride to the gods and goddesses. Like the bridegroom, the bride also prays before the gods and goddesses and promises that she will not accept any other person than this husband. She wishes through the mantra that they will lead a conjugal life with this husband till death. After pronouncing this she bows down in front of father *Bāthou Rājā* and mother *Ai Lakshmi*, *Saraswati* and other gods, goddesses as witnesses. This mantra is as follows:

He, aphaphor aiphor khanasong khansong danai ang (amuk) gamini Manao geder (amukhni) phisajla gider ba gibi manao geder (umuk) khou ang haba labai; bini thakhai apha Bathou raja nang Biphaya sakhi thada; ai bima lakhi. ai bima sarasatia sakhi thabai,- danai nangthang mankhauba aro munusu maya, thanphang laiphang, pakhi phodom pharkhouba sakhi dannanoi Bathou makhangao jannoi Somay layo ang. Saithi saithi tini saithi sat balate prante marat, samai labai ang; ang judi be hauajong haba lananoiba malai hawakhou barai baobla angkhon jobra jantha khalamno hagaon, khuria buthia khalamno hagon, ang thoisa thangsa be hawajangna rajja jagan ang, khuluma, aiphor aphaphor.

The English rendering is as follows:

O, fathers and mothers you will please hear, today I have married Shri so and so, eldest or youngest son of Shri so and so (name of the father of the bridegroom), of village such and such (name of the village of the bridegroom), for this, you father Bathou Raja, ai (mother) Lakshmi, Saraswat other gods and goddesses will stand as witness, keeping you all in my front, all the human beings, birds and creatures, plant and trees as witnesses, sitting in front of the Bathou altar I promise that if I accept any other person

*than this husband, you will be able to charge me, curse me to be attacked by diseases like leprosy, etc. I will lead a conjugal life with this husband till death, I bow and salute you, mothers and fathers.*⁷

The meal prepared for Hāthāsuni Khurnāi is served by the bride to the bridegroom first and then served to the villagers present at the marriage ceremony. Significantly they do not use dishes of high value; instead they use the leaves of wild plants known as the lāihulāi.⁸ Jau (rice beer) is prepared locally few days ahead and distributed as much as invitees consume it. During the feast men and women, old and young dance together with their indigenous musical instruments. The merry-makers do not sleep during the night. The latter part of this marriage ceremony is a festive one rather than ritual.

iii) Athmangal is the post marriage ceremony of Boros. It is observed among the Hindu neighbours also. It is performed on the eighth day of the marriage ceremony at the house of bride's parents. Only a few selected persons and relatives are invited in this brief ceremony. Thus the marriage ceremony of traditional Boros comes to an end.

The 'Brahmas' of the Boro Kacharis have given up the old traditional tribal customs. They embraced the Brahmanical rites including performance of yajna and other religious processes observed by Hindus, but their priest belongs to the Boro-Kacliari tribe. The rite of marriage in Brahma Dharma is performed in reformed manner though the traditional system is not given up, the marriage ceremony slightly differs in Brahma religion. One basic difference is the discouragement of rice beer (jau) and pork (oma bedor) during ceremony. Tea replaced the rice beer, and 'band party' is seen to be preferred in their marriage ceremony. The marriage rites of Brahma religion are almost similar to those of the neighbouring Hindus. The bride and bridegroom are taken to the altar (mandap) for the yajna. They sit in front of the blazing fire (Agni) to perform yajnahuti pronouncing the mantra of the Brahma Gayatri through priest (purohit). Here the father of bride offers his daughter (Kanyā Sampradān) in front of Agni as witness. Ghee, banana and prasad (mixed corn) are offered to God. When all the performances are over, both bride and bridegroom receive blessing, called Ashirbād. Thus the marriage rite comes to an end.

(d) Death Rituals

'Death' is the last passage of human life. When death occurs, the corpse is taken out immediately from the house and kept in the middle of the courtyard. The dead body is treated as holy. Hence the place where it is

to be kept is made clean with cowdung and water. Then the dead body is washed with water, head anointed with oil to comb hair. After this the whole body is covered with new cloth. Some favourite food is prepared and placed close by the deceased's head. In order to carry the dead body for cremation, a kind of trellis is made up of raw bamboo. The dead body, generally, is carried by the sons and relatives. The funeral procession is accompanied by deuri or oja. The deuri leaves back small pieces of yarn on the way from the house of the dead person to the cremation ground. It is believed that the soul of the dead will see the yarn and go to the cremation ground. At least one male member of each family of the village voluntarily goes to the cremation ground. There are two recognised ways of disposing of the dead, i.e. Burial and Cremation. The latter is looked upon as more respectable, though from economic point of view the former is more common.

At the time of burial the dead body is covered with a white sheet of cloth and slowly lowered into the grave with the head to the south. A few coins and cowrie shells are also buried along with the dead body. It is believed that these will be necessary for the soul to pay the fare to the boat man to cross the river or to buy some food during the journey. At the time of cremation all persons present offer the dead body a little water with the help of the leaves of the Indian fig tree and utter the words, "No longdo amokha, donoinphrai nong ba nong, jong ba jong soil". It means, "O, you take this water. From today you will remain as yourself and we shall remain as our-selves". A piece of red thread is placed on the lips of the dead body. It is believed that when he will be reborn, he will have red lips.

On the eleventh day from the day of the death of a person the traditional Boros perform the Sārādu* ceremony with prayer before the altar of the Bāthou. The villagers and relatives of the dead person are entertained with rice beer (Jau) abundantly. Serving meat is common in the Sārādu ceremony. It follows Dan sarnāi where uncooked rice and coins are given to all present at the ceremony. A bullock is set free in some special case in the name of dead person, it is called Māsau saran Hogarnāi. The eldest son has to perform some specific duties for removing of impurity. After the feast is over, the son has to throw uncleaned leaf-plates. This process is called Suā Garnāi. This kind of Sar-adu ceremony is an essential rite of the traditional Boros. Dāhā Garnāi is a pre-sārādu ceremony performed one day ahead of the Sārādu ceremony, i.e. on tenth day of deceased. This ceremony is meant for offering favourite foods to the dead person. The death rite is conducted by priest (deuri or oja). The followers of Brahma Dharma perform Ahuti during the Sārādu

* The word S-ar-adu came from the Sanskrit Sradha.

7. K. Brahma, op.cit., p. 34.

8. Ibid v n. 32.

ceremony.

Death of a person means the separation of the soul from its temporary dwelling place. The soul, therefore, free from the bondage. Suā Garnāi is the process by which family members of dead person remove impurity of life. On the other hand, the Boros believed in immortality of soul and the existence of the other world. Daha Garnai ceremony of offering favourite foods to the dead person points to the belief of the Boros that a person even after death does not lose his individuality.

(e) Ancestral Rites

Worship of the ancestors among the Boro-Kachilri tribes is prevalent from ancient times. It is a common practice to worship a deceased person of the Boro family. The theory of Sir Edward Burnett Tylor is that "Primitive people dreamed of their departed family and friends and therefore, assumed that they were not truly dead or gone but simply living in another realm".⁹ This theory applies to Boro-Kachāris of Assam, because when they dream of the dead, particularly outstanding members of their society, they believe that the dead are not really dead, or at least they continue to exist in some other form. On the basis of their visions of the dead in their dreams, Boro people believe in the existence of souls or spirits that continue to exist after physical death. These spirits could be help-ful or harmful to human beings, and could be offended or flattered. Hence, it becomes an important part of their life to pray to these spirits to appease them, and to avoid offending them. Some awe of the ghosts of the departed prevails widely among the Boros who created myths to describe their activities. Eventually ancestors have found a place in the Boro pantheon. Even they (the Boros) dropped the name of the dead for common usage for a time. If a person dies inside the house or commits suicide inside the house, the house is burnt to ashes to discourage their return. To satisfy the ancestors the Boros offer food, drink etc. on the second day of Baisāu festival. Rev. Endle writes.,

When the head of a family or other man of note passes away, it is not unusual at certain festivals to place on a platform a small quantity of the viands of which the deceased was known to be fond during his lifetime on earth, presumably for his use and behoof.¹⁰

(f) Agricultural Rites

As agricultural product is the main source of livelihood, Boros worship gods when they believe to be the controller of wind, rain, sun, air and fire. To get sufficient food from agriculture they perform puja

⁹ I M Hopfe, op.cit. p. 30
¹⁰ Rev. S Endle, cit. p. 34.

for different deities. Such practices still exist among various societies of the world. Since these pujas are related to agriculture, they celebrated just before the sowing of seeds, after the harvest of the crops and sometimes in between. But it is obvious that these kinds of worship vary from society to society.

Boros are farmers. Their religious festivals are mainly based on agriculture. The Āmtisuā* is one of the agricultural rites which they observe in the month of Āsharā or Āharā as a special occasion of holiness. It is believed by the Boro to be the period of menstruation of Mother-Earth. During the week long period of defilement, they do not dig the soil, do not plough the land, do not cut the useful tree and never enter the bākhri (the granary). They believe that if any green tree is cut during this period of Āmtisuā it will not grow again. As this period signifies the defilement, on the seventh day women throw away their old broomsticks and replace them by new ones. As the menstruation period of Mother Earth is over, the Boros believe that the earth is ready with fertility for cultivation. After that a series of minor ceremonial rites and practices is performed for agriculture. Khotia phonai is the sowing of paddy seeds by offering a pair of areca nuts and betel leaves (Goijor-a-PSthoijar-a), to the goddess Mainao or Lakhi. Likewise after the seedlings become mature the female elderly members of family offer a pair of areca nuts and betel leaves to the Mainso to start uprooting seedlings. Then follows M-al gainal or paddy plantation by offering betel leaves and nuts to the goddess of wealth (M-ainao). After ripening of the paddy, the guar-than of the family brings a small quantity of paddy bunch to the house to keep inside the B-akhri. In their sense, they bring M-ain-ao or Lakhi to the house. This is called Main-ao Lain-ai or AghinSi. Rice eating ceremony is observed as a mark of first meal of agricultural product. But before taking anything, they offer a little quantity of cooked rice and curry of pork to the gods and goddesses, mainly to Bathou Borai and his consort MAinAo or B-athou Buri. This rice eating ceremony is called Engkham godsm jan-ai. The Brahma dharma followers perform a yojnshu.ti where they offer little quantity of cooked rice to the fire. They pray to fire with mixed pulses (prassds) for better crops next year.

(g) Festivals

Festival is the sign of culture of any society. Through the organised worship of deities the individual shares in the unity and harmony of the social order. Festivals were originally evolved in the hunting stage of Polaeolithic period. To hunt the animals primitive people worshipped the god of forest. The same processes were practised in food producing period of human civilization. The Boros of Assa,,n also observe several

* It is observed by the Hindus as Ambuv-achi.

major and minor festivals as part of religion, throughout the year.

i) Bois-agu, the prime religious pre-noon festival of traditional Boros similar to the Assamese Rongali Bihu is celebrated in the month of Baisakh (mid April). The term BoisSgu is derived from the Boro word Bosorni agu which means beginning of the year or New Year. Celebrating the Boisagu. Boros welcome the new year and bid farewell to the old year. This festival starts celebrating from the day of Sankranti of Chaitra and Baisakh (14th April) and continues for seven days. The normal domestic activities become a stand still during these days and spend in festivities through merriment of singing, dancing and feasting etc.

The first days of Boisagu is called Makhou or Mashau. This is meant for 'cattle', as cows and bullocks provide them most of their livelihood. On that day in the morning cattle are decorated with garlands made of slices of raw gourd, brinjal and turmeric and are led to the nearest stream, river or pond for their ritual bath. While taking them for bath, the cowherds throw some of the pieces of gourd, brinjal and turmeric at the cattle beckoning them to eat and recite the following rhyme:

Lao Za phanthao Za
Bosor bosor er hanza hanza
Bimani khiter, phiphani khiter
Nongsor Zagon halua geder.
Bima gayde baidi daza
Bipha bolbd baidi Za
Bari khonayoa dong embu benala
Bi baidi Za geder Zonggolla. 11

(Ananda Mosahary, 18.7.56)

The English gist of the above verse may be explained as follows: (Eating gourd, brinjal, let there be increased your herd in abundance year after year, in revenge of your father, in revenge of your mother who are stunted and short statured, grow into long and tall like a big frog in the corner of the homestead).

After cattle bath, the cowherds too wash themselves and lead cattle to the grazing field strike at the back of cows with the indigenous plant's branches called Digho-lati and recite the following rhyme:

Digholati leoti fnosouni inuli
Dudali jagon gong kikili
Diogoloti lroti kri kri ganti
Jongni mosoua jagon bolod jati
Janai nanga gaide tepra
Markha jagon phaloni behra.

11. M.i.4. Brahma, op.cit., 1960, p. 45.

(The whip of the Digholati has a great medicinal value for cows, Its strokes make cows yield more milk. Every he-calf will grow to be a mighty bull. No cow will be small. all will be big and tall.)

While the menfolk remain busy with the cattle, the counterpart womenfolk keep themselves busy in washing their clothes, utensils and cleansing the houses with cow-dung. On returning of cowherds with cattle, in the evening, the cowherd places a pair of earthen lamp at the court-yard, washes the legs of the cattle and change their old ropes (pagh-a) for the new ones. The whole day long affair is termed as Garu Bihu by the Hindu neighbours. This day is ended with ceremonial eating of fowl meat cooked with bitter and sour leaves. Boros believe that eating bitter and sour Leaves (Gokkai Janai) signifies the severance of one's all connections with the passing year in joyous mood welcome the prosperous New Year.

Next day of Boisigu (1st day of Baisakh) is meant for men and is called '4ansi or i'4anuh Bihu by the Hindus. On this day, Boros worship Bathou for the welfare of the people. Each member of the family use to take ritual bath and gets on to the worship of Bathou with sacrifices. After worship of Bathou, the God of traditional Boro, they propitiate of the spirits of the ancestors and relatives who recently died. They offer food and drink in the name of deceased at the corner of the courtyard. After these rites are over all family members, men, women, young boys and girls exchange their love. They forgive each other's misdeeds and exchange Gaqiosas. Singing song with music and dance become a regular feature of Rangjanai-bajanai from this day of Boisagu. Hence it is called flierry making festival where all walk of lives take part and sing a common song as follows:

Boicagu ayoi - boicagu
Boicagu - boicagu
Bothor gozama thanlaybay,
Bothor godana phoilaybay,
Boicagu ayoi - boicagu,
Bothor godanni bar monnanoi,
Doica doikhrua, bonphan layphana.

Daoma daocaya,
Ranza khanbay honoi
Phoido dinoi phoido boybo
Borai buroi, cengra cikhla,
Gotho gothay ranza dini.
Boicagu ayol - boicagu - boicagu

(Ruphath Brahma, 14.11.57)

The English version of this folksong is given below:

Oh mother dear
 Boisagoo has come,
 It is the Boisagoo.
 The old year has departed,
 Oh mother, our Boisagoo has come
 The new wind of the new Year
 'las brought new life and hope
 Rivers and lakes,
 Trees and creepers,
 Birds and beasts,
 All life is dancing with joy,
 Let us come out too,
 Young and old,
 Men and women,
 Boys and girls,
 Let us congregate and rejoice.¹²

(M.M.Brahma, 1960)

The entire atmosphere is surcharged with beating of drums and a combination of melodious sound of Flute (shiphung), one stringed violin (sherza/gadrang kuzrs), rhythmic sound of split bamboo (torkha-), jews harp (gongona) and small cymbales (jotha-) etc. There are many other sweet songs which are popular among the Boro boys and girls; these are sung during the Boisagu festival. Many a times they make separate groups of old and young folk and go to each and every household to sing Bihu song (Husori) with tune and dance merrily. After completion of singing and dancing, household pay either in cash or kind as a mark of respect and husori party equally blesses the inmates of the house in return and wishes a prosperous new Year. This system of collection is called magnsi. The group of husori party eats feast out of inagnai.

In early days, it was believed that third day of Boisagu is called Saima meant for dogs, the fourth day is oina meant for swine the fifth day is daoni meant for fowl the sixth day is meant for ducks and other birds. And seventh day is specifically meant for relatives and friends. Now a days, though these practices are rarely seen, it was the mark of respect to the animals which really were useful to the traditional Boros of early days. Categorical respect pay from cattle to other helpful animals and to men signified Boros mind and heart full of kindness and honest.

During the Boisagu, Boros try to avoid quarrel otherwise they believe to take birth as cows or dogs in the next life. They do not sit on the chairs, stools and pira during the Boisagu which otherwise means to sit on the head of the parents. The women folks of the Boro family acquire tabis or Kebos (amulet) from Oj-a (village medicine man) so

¹². Ibid., pp. 44, 180.

that family members would be free from all sort of evil spirit.

- Blowing North-West wind (Bordoi sikhla-) during the Boisagu is the most significant scientific and ecological aspects of Borols economic lives. The Borodoi Sikhla is derived as Bor means big, doi means water and sikhla means matured girl of heaven, it brings down water to the earth,- makes land fertile for cultivation by which Boro community belief to be rich in agricultural products. Worship to the Burah Bathou, Maharaja, the Supreme God of traditional Boros, is seen common during Boisagu festival.

The Brahina dharna followers, on the other hand, observe BoisSgu festival by performing a-huti in the 1st day of Baisakh. Significantly, no one is allowed to consume jue (rice beer) till the -ahuti is over. But the Christians convert neither worship Bathou nor perform ahuti during Boisigu.

ii) There are some other religious festivals related to the agriculture. Doinasi is a harvesting festival observed both by traditional Boros, Brahfna dharna Boros and other allied Hinduised Boros. In Assanese it is called Bhogali Bihu' which is performed on the Makara sankranti day. They enjoy feast, piths (cake) and a fried mixture of different pulses like Sob-ai, Sibing (Sasemum) mugu pulse etc. K-atri Gasa Sionii is another seasonal festival of Boros. In Assamese it is called K-ati Bihu or Kangali Bihu, which means the Bihu of the crisis. This festival is observed on the last day of the month Ahin. Here they offer earthen lamps at the paddy field, at the altar of B-athou,- at thecowshed (goli) and the granary(B-akhri). By performing these Boros believe that the paddy plants would yield large amount of paddy.

iii) Putuli H-ab-a is another religious festival of Boro-Kacharis and is performed in some of the districts of northern parts of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. These districts are Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur. This kind of festival is performed on the seventh day of the Baishgu festival. Putuli means doll and H-ab-a means marriage. it is a doll marriage having a deep sense of religious character. The dolls are made of straw in the name of Dib-a Bor-ai and Dibi Buroi or R-aona and R-aoni, who are believed to be deities of wind and rain.¹³ The villagers group themselves into two parties¹⁴ and perform mock marriage between the groom doll i.e., Raona or Diba Bor-al and the bride doll i.e., Raoni or Dibi Buroi. Boros believe that R-aona and R-aoni would be satisfied to provide sufficient rain in the earth for cultivation. They believe that the deities would send Bardoi Sikhla- (Bordoi Sila in Assamese), the symbolic girl of the wind and rain to the

13. K. Brahma, Aspects of Social Customs of the Bodos, 1989, p. 58.

14. M. Choudhury, The Boro Dimas-as of Assam, 1988, p. 56-

earth to bestow fertility on the field.

In addition, there is a minor festival like Moh-a Honai,¹⁵ the mosquitoes driving ceremony observed generally by the Boros of Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonit-pur districts of Assam. Significantly, this kind of festival is also observed by some Hindus of these districts specially in the days of full moon (Purnim-a tithi)¹⁶ of Aghon (later part of November and early part of December).¹⁷ The young boys of the village walk from door to door, singing in front of each and every household to ask for alms. They arrange a feast jointly with the alms collected. Rev. Sidney Endle witnessed Moh-a Hon-ai under the moonlight and remarked, "No doubt this is an amusement got up by younger members of the community who are sometimes rewarded for their efforts by small gifts of money, food etc. from their elders".¹⁸

iv) Kherai is the greatest religious festival of Boros traditionally celebrated for the welfare of both private and public lives. Besides, Boros perform Kher-ai for the good harvest of crops also. Though it is difficult to ascertain the origin of the Kher-ai, still some legends and folklores of Boro-Kacharis give some clue about it. In the olden days there was an old man named Jaraphagla. He had seven married sons. Jaraphigla attempted to enjoy his youngest daughter-in-law. She could not tolerate father-in-law's attitude and fled away from the house. Jaraphagla searched for her in all directions but could not trace her. Finally he arranged a Kher-al puja (Kher means to flee and ai means goddess).¹⁹ The songs and dances that go with it aim at exposing the vices and the outrageous behaviour of the old man. The worshipper of Bathou believes that the word Kher-al is a combination of two sounds Khe and i which means or the chanting formula before the chief god Bathou (Khari-a Bor-ai). B@thou Borai of Boro-Kachari is also known as Khari-a Borii and KhuriS Borail which means the latent old man.²⁰ Therefore, Boros believe that Kherai Puj-a is performed in the name of Khari-a Bor-ai who is endowed with all qualities. The Boro charm is as follows:

Ohom de khuria buroi Khuria borai maharaza!
Corgoao dono dohorom deo
Patalao dono thuluci deo
Erphora naiceo
Nai kheo loi apha de.

15. K. Brahma, op.cit., p. 59.

16. Prhkityotish Panjik-a (Assamese), 1991-92, p. 184.

17. K. Brahma, op.cit., p. 59.

18. S. Endle, op.cit., p. 49.

19. See M. Choudhury, The Boro Dimasasof Assam., 1988, p-53.

20. K. Brahma, op.cit., p. 63.

Corgo mortho phathalni nono zananoi dono nobag raza.
Bathou hono bandoba, cizou hono goron ba,
Munucumaya bathra rayo phonba phonba,
Dayni girizon khemani giri non de apha de.
Ozonhalay khankhlabono cari cari
Adi guraa bundon boico mathaya ali.
Munucumaya canco haya, nonni
Muluk khou mithico haya de apha de.

Moidera gabo odalguriao
Munucu maya gabo nobag razani duarao,
Daokhayalay phurakhoi, daoboalay comakhoi
Cagorni ontliaya guphunakhoi
Loithoa dabono thol thanakhoi
Coitho oi thonangou de apha de
Bonma thoio bonca rodomo

Guraa thoio cico arzio.
Zana guru ek hat, nazana guru dui hat
Khema honangon loi apha
Acar cuk hono bicar cuk
Khala gorua dahala dut
Concarao zadon khuli khuli acar
Khuli khuli bicar loi apha.

Bima-phiphaya dohon corgokhou holan ronakhoi
Non phiphakhou khintha nanoi holan don loi anlia.
Nouan thithi boicagu thithi
Phuzi gacoino dono loi apha.
Aphaloi nobag raza, corgo mortho phathalni
Rog biadi nonni akhayao.
Corgoni rogkhou corgoao phozob nangou
Phathalni rogkhou phathalao phozob nangou.

Canzaha narkhe
Conabha narkhe
Kholaha narkhe
Caha narkhe-rog biadikhou phozob
nangou de apha de.

Maonay dannay photharni khithi mozan rakhinanoi
Cukbay cuk boconoi munuco mayakhou
Go lokhikhau lakhinanngon.
Cuk canthioi din thanbo nangon de Apha de,²¹

The English translation of the above mentioned charm is as follows:

21. M.M. Brahma. Folksongs of the Bodos, 1960, pp. 49-50.

Oh khuria Borai,
Oh high khuria Borail
In the heaven there is the god of religion.
In the nether world there is the Tulsī god.
There is none else to worship but thee, oh father,
You are the Nobag, Lord of the three worlds.
Bathou is said to have five rings of bamboo,
The plant of the cactus family
Is said to possess five edges.
Man has five essential things likewise
We are sinners, you are the forgiver, father.
Here there are rows of the grass, kusha.
Our first preceptor has held
The earth to be the track
Man cannot gauge,
Cannot know your creation.

The elephant whines in the woods
Man cries at the door of Lord Nobag
Crows do not turn white,
Cranes do not go black.

The stones and rocks in the sea,
Have not made the waters muddy.
The river Luit has not gone underground.

Oh, father, truth abides,

Even now.

Trees die down, but offshoots spring forth.
The preceptor dies, the disciple emerges.

The learned preceptor is surpassed in speech
By one less versed, who speaks
Twice as much.

Father forgive us.

One who has happy conduct
Has happy judgement too.

A cow may be black.
But its milk is white.

In this world, oh, father,
Conduct and judgement

Vary from caste to caste, from family to family.
Parents did not bequeath

Either wealth or heaven to us,
But you were recommended to us

On the new corn day,
In the month of Bohag,
We have continued
To worship you, father
Oh father, Lord Nobag.

All the diseases of the three worlds
Are subject to you.

End the diseases of heaven in the heaven's boundaries;

End those of the nether world

In the nether world itself;

Those of the east,

Push them further east;

And similarly with the diseases

Of the west and north and south.

Further away let them be pushed.

And thus protect men and cattle,

And keep us in happiness and prosperity,

Oh father.²²

Kheraihas, -over the centuries, transformed completely into a religious performance meant for propitiate the primal God Bathou and many other gods and goddesses. Jaraphagla dance has probably turned into Deodhani dance where Deodhani acts as mediator between gods and worshippers. The Boros have no temples or fixed shrines of worship. The family Kher-ai is performed at the permanently erected Bathou altar in the courtyard while the community Kherai is celebrated outside the house compound where they temporarily erect Bathou altar. The altar symbolises a holy road from Heaven to the earth, a holy link between the God of the Heaven and the human being.²³ A piece of cotton yarn is tied to the post of bamboo with green leaves. It is believed to signify the principle of endless creation.

The Deodhani (female exorcist) is the key dancer during the Kherai puja. She performs most of essential rites with the help of oia and a githal * or gidal. Two drum (Kham) beaters.- two bamboo flute (Siphung) players and two cymbal (jotha) players excite Deodhani. The Deodhani a somewhat weird looking figure, with dishevelled hair, and vermilion-stained forehead, wearing a long petticoat, dances up and down,, to and fro with a long sword (imfi) and a shield (ddhal)** to the

22. Ibid., pp. 187-189.

23. K. Brahma; op.cit., p. 67.

* Githal or Gidal performs duty as a helper of the oja durin- Kherai puja.
** D'Shals or shields were used by the Boros in the battle field in earlier days.

tune of music. The Deodhdni demonstrates three stages of activities. First, she becomes subject to charm by the formula of the oj,a. This is called Alongikhingnai. She falls into a trance in the second stage while in the third stage she possesses the nature of spiritual being and is able to tell the tales of the gods and goddesses in their voices. After the dance is over, she can tell the fortune of the people. She narrates good or bad events of the villagers, success or failure of crop production and the duties and responsibilities of the people as a precautionary measure in near future. Kherii no doubt is an expensive affair where the Boros have to sacrifice pig, goat, cock, pigeons along with other materials to the gods and goddesses. A pig is sacrificed for -i or Khuriii Bor-Bathou Bora ai, the Supreme God of Boro-Kachiris. The pigs are also sacrificed, one each for the following gods and goddesses. They are Rajkh5ndrd - the follower of Bura-B-athou, Al-ai Khungri - the princess goddess and follower of B-athou Buri or Khari-a Buri, Bulli Buti - the owner of the fish and goddess of medicine and mantras. A goat is sacrificed to appease the god K-arji, the follower of Bura B-athou. The cocks are sacrificed one each to the god Aileng - body guard of B-athou BorSi, Agrong - the general of the god-in-chief, Khoil-a - the messenger of the god-in-chief, Bhand-ari - the owner of the store of the foodstuffs, Ranch'andri or Ran Phagli - the warrior goddess. The Sang Raja, the owner of the wild animals and a follower of the Burd Bathou is believed to be satisfied with a red cock only. L-aokhjtr GosSi is the god of the cowherds and is known as Garakhia Gosai. L-aokh-ar Gos-ai is identified as the Lord Krishna. A pair of pigeons are set free in the name of him.* As this Kherai puj-a is expensive, it is now performed for three days and nights instead of seven days and nights as in earlier days. KherSi pujs is more religious than social. Bhaben Narzi says that out of the three kinds of Kherai puja, two are related to seasons to secure bumper crops. They are:

(i) Ashu Kherai, connected with the -asu paddy or a summer season crops.

(ii) Sali Kherai connected with the winter crops.

Both pujds are meant for M5inAo or Lakhi I the goddess of wealth. The third one is No-ani Kher-ai performed for the welfare of the family. The No-ani Kherai is performed by the family if and when they face any trouble.²⁴

v) Garj-a puja is purificatory ceremony dedicate to the village deities to purify the uncleanness of the village community. At the time

* For all the names of gods and goddesses for whom birds and animals are sacrificed. see K. Brahma, op.cit., pp. 64-65.

24. Bhaben Narzi. op.cit.. pp. 181-182.

of participation in the annual festivals, the Boro people believe that the participant may become impure due to free mixing with each other, eating, merry-making, drinking rice beer, day to day business transactions involving acts of omission and commission. All these acts consequently lead to natural calamities in various forms such as pestilence, drought, flood etc. which may cause untold sufferings.²⁵ In order to be protected from all possible dangers the Boro-Kach-aris purify themselves through performing Garj's pujs. The word Garja or garjanai or garnhi means expulsion or discharging any-thing. The evil gods are expelled or discharged from the village boundary after this Garja puja. In olden days villages were subjected to attack by epidemic diseases. Then villagers had to perform the Garja pujs to protect the inhabitants of the village. The names of the gods and goddesses of Garja puja differ from area to area, but the major gods and goddesses remain the same. A special seat is given to the Borai Raj-a at the Garj-a s-ali. And other minor gods are placed towards the left side of the seat of Borii RijS.. A male pig and a chicken are sacrificed for Borai Raja. Likewise a male pig for the Jaman Borai and a female pig for the Jaman Buri are sacrificed while one male pig is sacrificed to the Tulsing-Mulsing Gar 'aa. A chicken is sacrificed to the Pabira and a white chicken is sacrificed to the Sun god. Goats and pigeons are sacrificed for Bima Kali or Ai Kalil Bishahari, Aikali. Maya Kiliy Shaya Kati of Harsa Garj'S deities (Harsa means non-Boro deity).

A study of rites and festivals is necessary for a clear conception of the religious philosophy of the Boros. Through organised worship and festivals the individual shares in the unity and harmony of the social order. Spiritual consciousness grows and essential kinship between God and man is established. These rites and festivals contain in a magical fashion the germ of mystic and sacramental religious forms. There is no authorised priestly caste among the Boros. Deoris discharge religious offices and enjoy a high social position. "The office is not hereditary, and any one versed in the usual forms of exorcism etc. can discharge it,"²⁶

Some festivals are social in nature. For example, Bihu among the Assamese, and Bais-agu among the Boros of Assam have become national festivals where people from all religions take part, exchange their mutual love and respect. No doubt, many festivals are based on agricultural seasons. People worship their respective god, and goddesses to get high yield from the field. Kherai, Baisagu and Garj'a originated in ancient times but they persist even today. Geographical separation within the valley, assimilation by marriage with neighbouring Hindus,

25. R.N. Mosahari, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, NEHU, Shillong, 1986, p. 245.

26. Rev. S. Endle, op. cit., p. 39. See Bhabendra Narzil OP.Cit., P. 201.

conversion to the Brahma Dharma and Christianity give different pictures of these rites, rituals and festivals. Even the Christian Boros perform Garja puja for the welfare of family though no puja is allowed in the Christian religion. Even the Darrang Rijavali (pp.63-65)* reveals that Naranarayan, the King of Koch, (the descendent of Kach-ari) performed siva puja according to the Kachari custom (i.e. Kherai puja) before proceeding for war against the Ahoms. Here, Deodhini was the forecaster and key agent between Bathou and men (Kachari and Koch).

* See Bhjabendra Narzi, op.cit , p.201

BORO RELIGION

The word 'religion' has been interpreted etymologically in two ways. It is said to be derived from 'religere' i.e., to execute by means of repeated effort or from 'religare' i.e., to bind together, signifying that religion is essentially a bond of piety. These interpretations refers to the twofold aspect of religion. On the objective side it involves a recurring performance of certain activities; on the subjective side it indicates the hidden experience of psychic life.¹ Whatever might be meaning of religion from different epistemological spectrum it may be described as a system beliefs and practices adhered to and followed by different types of societies. It is a human phenomenon representing the transcendental concern of man and constantly interacting social aspects of life. Therefore, it is growing through an evolutionary process from primitive to modern civilization as well as well as affecting the social changes of human life. Emile Durkheim, the founding father of sociology, defined religion, as "an integral system of beliefs and practices referring to sacred things, things that are separated, prohibited; of beliefs and practices which unite into a moral community called the church all those who participate in them,"²

In the field of anthropology, Tylor argues that religion had its origin in the belief in immaterial souls which might inhabit objects like - stones, trees, animals or human bodies, but also could exist independently of them. The word 'animism' derived from the Greek word 'animal, means 'soul', which refers to the belief in the existence of such transempirical souls or spirits. But further he argues that the origin of this belief was probably in dreams. For example, a man may dream of a friend who has recently died. In the dream the man seems to continue to exist as a soul independent of his physical body. As Tylor says,

1. E.R.A. Seligman, Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, Vol. 13, p. 228.

2. W.S.F. Pickering, Durkheim on Religion, 1975, p. 212.

"Animism is, in fact, the groundwork of the philosophy of religion, from that of savages upto that of civilized men"³.

Herbert Spencer also offered a similar theory. He found the origin of religion in the respect given to ancestors combined with the belief in ghosts caused by dream experience. Man makes the ghosts of his ancestors into gods. But Spencer's theory errs on the side of over simplicity. As Dr. Jevons says, "It never happens that the spirits of the dead are conceived to be gods. Man is dependent on the gods but the spirits of his dead ancerstors are dependent on himll."⁴ He is not bound to worship them.

The primitive people spent their lives in hills, jungles, under the open sky and in caves and bore all the hardship of life. In an uncultured society, unskilled brain and unscientific thought made them behave like children. Any unusual happening in their habitat was thought to be the act of supernatural power i.e. God. They had logist found some evidences of Neanderthal man of Northern Europe. Neanderthal man was believed to have ritual burial of the dead. In a cave of Southern France the remains of two Neanderthal adults and two children had been found. In another cave an adolescent had been buried in such a manner that it indicates ceremonial respect for the corpse. The art of Cro-magnon man has been discovered in a number of caves in Southern France and Northern Spain.

In Neolithic period there are two different categories of food producing societies, the 'Pastoral' and agricultural. The prime religious symbol in pastoral societies was the sky, regarded as the abode of the gods. Sky, sun, thunder and storms were the deities of Pastoral societies. Nuer (of Nuer land) and Dinka (of Dinka land) of Africa are the Pastoral societies of Neolithic period. E.E. Evans Pritchere,⁵ the great anthropologist studied in details about the Nuer. He found their religious belief in spirits (Kuth); one of these spirits means the above and other means below or the earth. The spirit of the above includes powerful beings of the air while the spirit of the earth includes totemic spirits, nature spirits and fetishes. The totem is an animal, plant or physical object which is identified with a particular clan.

In agricultural societies of Neolithic ages what we find may be called planter religion. They were dependent on cycles of spring time, which possessed the power of regeneration and reproduction. Hence, their prime symbol was the earth rather than the sky, the feminine rather than the masculine, the goddess rather than god with the basic concept

3. E.B. Tylor, Primitive Culture, 1891, Vol. 1, p. 426.

4. F.B. Jevons, An Introduction to the History of Religion, 1896, p. 196.

5. E.E. Evans Pritchard, Nuer Religion, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1956.

of fertility, birth, growth etc. The 'Great Mother' is called Basumati, Dharani, K5li in India, Cybele in Roman, Dian-a in Greek. The worship of this Universal Mother, sometimes as mother of Agriculture in many countries is a symbol of primitive religious culture and it indicates the beliefs of the primitive people in primitive age.

Primitive men were ignorant of the world's natural process, although they might have learned something from observing animals, that no birth takes place without a preceding copitus. The Arunta in Australia believes that a woman becomes pregnant when an ancestral spirit, who is present at a certain place succeeds in penetrating her body. Levy-Bruhl (1857-1939) a French Sociologist and Philosopher who studied primitive psyche of early man, regarded primitive thought as really a form of experience lying somewhere between magic and the earliest appearance of religion. In this context the religion of Ekoi of Kamerun and Southern Nigeria, West Africa also can be taken as an example of primitive beliefs. It centres in the conception of ghosts and the ritual practice to avert or nullify their anger.

Ekoi have two major deities, like Osaw which is associated with the sky and Nsi which is associated with earth. By these two deities the whole are made. Later they separated and took up their abode in the heavens and under earth, respectively. 'Osaw' is cruel for them, sometimes he sends too much rain, thunder and lightning. On the other hand, 'Nsil is benevolent.'⁶

Thus, there are ample examples of beliefs in gods and goddesses which may be termed as polytheism among the primitives. Lack of scientific knowledge over the phenomena was the source of belief among the primitive men. The Boros are no exception. Even in the present day there are people who in times of distress turn back to old religious customs. 'Bathou' is the Supreme God, the plant 'Siju' (Euphorbia splendens) represents Ilim. They believe in five gods - Ailong, Agrang, Khoil-a, Sanji Borli and Raj Khungri accredited as god of earth, water, air, light and sky respectively. In addition, under some circumstances they worship some minor gods to get high return from their labour in the fields. Totemism is also traced in Boro religion. Some of the clan names exhibit this characteristic. Take, for example, Mushabari (Mosa--aroi) or Baglari (Bagh-l-aroi), Mosa or Bagh means Tiger and aroi means fold. So are Narzerya (Narze = Jute), Swargiary (Swarga= Heaven), Basumat (Basumati = earth) with the suffix aroi being used as title of the Boros. This pattern of primitive religious belief is found in many early civilizations.

From the 'Charm' of traditional Boros, one can easily infer that

they believe in 'animism'. The 'charm' is as follows:

Gaci gici bilalatha icakhi
Boicomatha cakhi
Canzu curzu bay burundu khonacon aphaphor
Bathou hono bandoba cizou hono goronba
Boro borayni bathraya phonba plioiiba.
Coithoni giri coithoao coithoao thanangou.

The English meaning of this charm is as below :

Oh you trees, the universe and earth,
You moon, sun and gods of wind and water,
Hearken unto me.

Bathou is said to possess five bends.

The plant 'Siju' has likewise five edges,

The old Bodo injunction also is five fold.

If and individual Boro commits some abhorrents act, such a man is not allowed even to stay in the same village with others, till he has been purified.⁷

Thus Boros attribute a kind of soul to the phenomena of nature. To them all nature is alive, filled with innumerable spirits. But not all the spirits which animate the objects of nature are worshipped by them. It is therefore wrong to call Boro religion exclusively animistic. Religion is too complex a phenomenon to be accounted for by the growth and spread of a single custom.

The study of primitive religion is considered to be very important in the sense that all other religions of the world have sprung up from them. Some of the common characteristics of primitive religions which still exist are evidenced by the works of the anthropologists. The sacrifice appears to be found in present day societies. Few other instances, belief in the lucky coin, avoidance of unlucky number thirteen in the Western countries, preference of lucky thirteenth lunar day (Sanskritized: Sharva Suddhi Trayodashi) in the Eastern countries, acceptance of magic as part of theology, worship of animals in Gopasthami so on and so forth, are widely found in the societies of twentieth century.

Charles de Brosses tried to analyse the form of religion as it actually appeared in the past. He argued that the first form of religion was fetishism i.e., the worship of inanimate objects like stones, animate objects like tree and animals. Tylor clearly stated that the first form was animism, or the belief in 'souls'. The magic stage preceded the animistic one as argued by Frazer.

Primitive men worshipped nearly everything in nature. Trees had been the objects of religious cults; mountains or hills had been the objects of worship or the places of revelation; the seas and the creatures in them

had been objects of veneration; the heavenly bodies - the sun, moon and stars had played a part in nearly every religion; and lastly fire, water and the earth itself had become objects of worship. The list of animistic expression is almost endless.⁸ Many Indian tribes seem to worship trees, snakes and animals. The animistic impulse, probably will not vanish from most of the religions of the world.

James Frazer, the classical scholar on religion, argued that the religion developed out of an original magical stage of human culture. The primitive magician wanted to know how the universe operated and how it could be controlled for human purposes. The magician may be termed as primitive scientist who made mistakes due to insufficient knowledge and techniques. But he believed that phenomena could be controlled through magic spells. On the other hand, a religious man always believes in the existence of spirits that must be placated and cajoled by prayers, rather than controlled directly through a magic formula. Tylor, Spencer, and Frazer came to the conclusion that primitive religionist made hypothesis on the basis of insufficient evidence. His belief were products of thought though they reached erroneous conclusions.

The magic had been used in the primitive societies to do evil to the enemies. The most common example of it is form of 'doll' created roughly of the enemy. It may contain such personal elements of the enemy as bits of hair or nail. Since the doll looks like the victim, whatever is done to the doll will happen to the victim. Interestingly, if the doll is pierced with a needle through the leg; then the victim will be injured in the leg; if the doll is pierced in hand or neck, then the victim will get injured or felt pain in the neck etc. In primitive societies many of the rain ceremonies are based upon imitative magic which is seen in many tribes of India. Magical rites are performed by the Boros not only to destroy enemies but also to cure illness, to increase production of crops and to bring people under one's control. People are afraid of witchmen.⁹

Another characteristic among the primitive societies was divination. In ancient China a tortoise shell was heated until it cracked, and the pattern of cracks was interpreted as the prediction of the future. Among the ancient Greeks the future was predicted when a priestess sat on a tripod and breathed fumes that escaped from the ground at Delphi. What she said after breathing fumes was interpreted by a priest as the message from the gods regarding the future. Such kind of divination is still practised among the Boros in deodhani dance. Here female dancer receives a supernatural power by which she can tell about the future happening like the Shaman of Siberia who was possessed by gods and

8. Lewis M. Hopfe, Religions of the World, 1979. p. 23.
9. See Bhaben Narzi, op.cit., pp. 218ff.

who spoke their messages to their own clan.

'Totemism' is one of the practises found among the primitive religions. Durkeim was intrigued by the phenomenon of totemism, i.e. the practice of taking a particular natural object or animal and making it into the symbol (or totem) of a particular social group called clan. The totem figures clearly represented social groups and at the same time led to the belief in distinctive gods and spirits ruling over men. Totemism, as written by L.M. Hopfe, was first identified by white settlers in the eighteenth century when they found the practice among American Indians.¹⁰

Totemism was later identified within other primitive societies in other parts of the world. It is nothing but an extension and expression of animism. It brings a kind of relation between a tribe or a clan and an animal / plant or even sun, moon, stars etc. Hopfe cited an example, a bear may be the ancestor of the clan. The clan may possess the characteristics of the bear which expresses strength, ferocity or size. The members of the clan may believe that when they die they will take the form of the bear. As the bear is a totem of the clan, members may not eat or kill this animal except in cases of self defence or on very sacred occasions when they may eat its flesh in a ceremonial meet that has the effect of binding the clan closer together.

Toboo is such that it should be avoided otherwise the spirit world release harmful effect of the person or group. The Polynesian word tabu means act to be avoided. Among the primitive societies, in general, holy persons, places and objects are considered as taboo to the ordinary person. Women during their menstrual period are strictly considered as taboo, for they often live in a separate house from the rest of the family members. There are numerous examples that are considered as taboo in most tribes of the world.

The Boro religion rests largely on a totemistic basis. In early days, the Boros were rigidly bound by totemic rules. Clans like the Narzaroi, Baghlaroi or Mosaroi, Gandret-aroi, Sijouiroi etc. are found with their totemic rules which they observe till now. The Narzaroi is the jute-folk who hold jute in special honour and chew certain quantity of their totem (jute leaves) on ceremonial occasions¹¹ and after the cremation to purify themselves.¹² For the Mosaroi clan, the killing of a tiger was a taboo, so that, they were required to mourn the death of a tiger.¹³ Even they throw away their earthen utensils by way of atonement when a tiger

10. Lewis M. Hopfe, op.cit., p. 26.

11. S. Endle, The Kacharis, 1975. p. 25.

12. K. Brahma, Aspects of Social Customs of the Boros, 1989, P. 11.

13. Endle, op.cit., p. 25.

was killed in the neighbourhood.¹⁴ J.D. Anderson has quoted that, not to speak of killing a tiger they were not even allowed to speak disrespectfully of tigers, and if they killed one, they had to give a feast in atonement.¹⁵ The Gandret-aroi, the slug or leech folk, cannot kill a leech in any ordinary circumstances. They are required to chew a leech with vegetables as a purificatory ceremony after the death of a family member.¹⁶ Flie 'Sijouarois' is the cactus folk who hold the cactus plant in special reverence, although the Boro people of all clans consider it as holy as the symbol of their traditional Supreme God 'B-athou R-aj-al'.¹⁷

Sacrifice was the most common feature among the primitive societies of the world. Most often the sacrifices are animals and sometimes birds., which are slaughtered and then burned or cooked and eaten before the gods. Human sacrifice, on the other hand, seems to be practised among the primitives. But 'it is rarely mentioned in religious literature and is usually considered an extreme but effective method of persuading the gods.'¹⁸ The Kesaikh-ati temple of Sadia and some temples in Kamrup and Goalpara bear the evidences of sacrifices still being practised by the Boros of Assam.

As society and religion are interrelated, religion tends to change when social changes take place. Again social change will occur when changes in religion take place. The Boros of the Brahmaputra valley, no doubt, are an aboriginal tribe of Assam. Their traditional religion ideas are unique. The Boro religion is and its intrinsic 1 essentially monotheistic in nature. It speaks of only one God whom they called B-athou. He is infinite, the creator of all creatures. Boros are not animistic. They are worshippers of B-athou, the Supreme God. They have minor deities. They believe in ghosts and spirits also. Like the Hindus, Boros believe that different gods and goddesses are various manifestations of the Supreme Deity. Thus the conception of the Supreme God is predominant in Boro religion which therefore transcends the tribal stage and reveals a very great enlargement of outlook and a significant deepening of the content of religious consciousness.

14. H. Risley, The People of India, p. 103.

15. E.H. Pakyntein,, Census of India 1961, Assam, Vol. IIIY Part V-A, p. 58.

16. Endle,' op.cit., p. 25.

17. R.N. Mosahary. Proceedings of North Eastern History Association. Gauhat-1, 1988, p. 92.

18. Human sacrifice is mentioned only occasionally in the Jewish Bible, for example. When it is mentioned, it is regarded as the supreme and outstanding sacrifice which is usually prompted by extremely rare circumstances. See Genesis 22, Judges 11, II KIng 3:27, and Micah 6:7

There are a few works on religion and culture of Boros carried out by the scholars of foreign countries. Considerable works on the different aspects of their lives are carried out by the scholars of North East India. Some comprehensive studies have been made by the scholars of Boro community. They are Bliaben Narzi, M. Clouduiry, K. Brahma, M. Brahma and R.J. Musahari. P.C. Bhattacharya has done extensive research on Boro culture. Boros believe in spirits. They think that certain invisible beings act upon the body for sickness, cause famine and even earthquake etc. These are the result of malevolent spirits who must be propitiated by frequent offering of pigs, goats, poultry, rice, plantains etc. Their earliest belief in Mod-ai (invisible spiritual beings) makes them inclined towards faith in supernatural powers. In a certain stage of moral and spiritual development Boros are undoubtedly influenced far more by what they fear than by what they love; and this truth., Rev. Endle, applies to the Kachari race in the most unqualified way.¹⁹ The malarial diseases, waterborn diseases coupled with viral diseases frequently attacked (Boros the Kacharis) in early days. These compelled them to believe in "Mod-ai hamdang."²⁰ As Endle remarks,

*In the typical Kachari village as a rule neither idol nor place of worship is to be found; but to the Kachari mind and imagination earth, air and sky are alike peopled with a vast number of invisible spiritual beings, known usually as 'Modail, all possessing powers and faculties far greater than those of man, and almost invariably inclined to use these powers for malignant and malevolent, rather than benevolent, purposes.'*²¹

There are a few folksongs related to the evil spirit which Boro people propitiate in the name of Kubera Devata. When an infant cries from acute stomach-ache, and the mother becomes helpless to feed her breast milk, she believes that Kuber Davata (Modai) has spread his evil influence on the infant. Here in this stage local medicine man (ojaor oja Bura) performs a ritual reciting the following charm (Unni Monthro).

Oi aphaphor zolhubir, dakha khubir,
Khala khubir, dahala khubir
Dakhli amokhia udoi cananoi
Aykhan baykhan zabay baybia
Bekhou mozan khalambda
Goy phathoi rana dekhra hono honnanoi
Phao phuza hono honnanoi raithikhanaiya

19. S. Endle, op.cit., p. 33.

20. Mod-ai hamdang, an evil spirit has seized (me).

21. S. Endle,' op.cit., p. 33.

Dinoi noncorno honay zabay. ²²

Through this charm the medicine-man promised to sacrifice red hen and offer nut and betel leaves etc. for deliverance from evil spirits.

The tribe is like a psychic organism within which the human members live as cells, not yet fully separated as individuals from the group mind. The tribal customs, beliefs and taboos are sovereign and bear collectively the awesome aspects of the holy. Man is social to the roots of his being. It is the chief source of his psychic vitality and he draws strength and reinforcement from it, when as a worshipper he celebrates with his fellows the religion which binds them together. In the rise of the cult the society reaffirms itself in a symbolic way. As Durkheim points out, rites are means by which the social group reaffirms itself periodically. ²³ Thus religion provides through its sanctification and renewal of basic norms a strategic basis for social control in the face of impulses dangerous to the stability of society.

Ancestor-worship in no way could be denied among the Boro societies of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Offering viands to the deceased head of the family and other noted deceased persons still exist almost all the sects of the Boros. Worship of natural forces are still found here and there. For example, Parwa'show or bhatheli is a festival where people enjoy themselves by dancing, wrestling, and tom-toning around a tall bamboo pole. The Parw-a is a tall bamboo pole draped with decorated holy clothes and shoar (holy fan) and put up in a field alongside a tree where the people assemble to worship and enjoy. Here, they offer black pigeon (Kala P-awr-a) and sometimes black goats with g-aj'l (a mixture of gram seed, moong and rice etc.) for gods and goddesses to make villagers free from all sorts of mishaps and diseases. This type of festival is common to Hindus of Barpeta, Nalbari and Darrang districts of Assam. Endle observes, "It is possible that this may be a relic or survival of phallic worship, the parwa taking the place of the lingam or phallus". ²⁴ The idea behind performing lbhathelil at the time of April (at Vais-akh Bihu) was probably to welcome the monsoon necessary for growth of bamboo, because bamboo was the primary house building materials for the Boros in early days. This festival though originally performed by the Boros is observed by the Hinduised Koch and even by Hindus. Water has a sacred character among the average Boros. It is noticed by another fact that dead body is cremated or buried near the

bank of running stream or river. ²⁵

In olden times the Boros believed in five main gods. The belief in these five traditional gods of the Boros proves that from the very beginning they worshipped objects of Nature like - (1) Ailong (the god of earth), (2) Agrang (the god of water), (3) Khoili (the god of air), (4) Sanja Borli (the god of light), and (5) Raj Kumbre (the god of sky). They represent the five basic elements of creation. Bathou as the Supreme Lord is the ultimate ground of everything. He is the chief of all gods. He is endowed with all qualities. The Boros are not unaware of the impersonal indeterminate character of God. This is evident when they hang up a piece of cloth above the ground in the first part of the altar for Kherai Puja to indicate the formless existence of God (Obanglaoree). ²⁶

From the mythological evidence (Kalika Purana, Chap. 38. 112, V. 121), it is revealed that the original inhabitants of North-East were Mlecha and Kirata. Historical records (Kachari Buranji) show that the people of the region are of Tibeto-Burman stock. Aryanisation took place in this region around 1500-1200 B.C. The progressive Aryanisation of the Boro people gained momentum in the 7th century A.D. under the patronage of the Varman and Salasthambha, belonging to Mech tribes. In course of time, the culture and custom of Aryans attracted them to become Hindu in a slow process. The newly converted Boros are called Koches. Initially they were treated as the Sarania Koch, and they were allowed to wear the sacred thread (like Hindus) and carry water for the Brahmins. Now they are known as 'Rajbansi' by themselves, because in sixteenth century they became Hindu after a ceremony performed by their Brahmins chanting vedic mantras. For example, Birdarpa Narayan (1643-1681) became Hinduised and considered himself a true worshipper of Vishnu and studied scriptures of Hindu religion. On the other hand, Haris Chandra II (1757-1772 A.D.) was declared a pious Hindu and worshipper of goddess Kali. On the advice of the Brahmin, Haris Chandra became a devotee of Shiva and strictly followed the Hindu rites and he ascribed the birth of his two princes Krishna Chandra and Govinchandra to God's blessings. ²⁷

25. 11 ... One of the principal branches of the widely spread Bara race i.e. the people of the North Cacliar Hills, still speak of themselves of Di-ma-sa i.e. 'sons of the big river' or 'children of the great water', even though none of them would seem now to dwell anywhere near a large river (S. Endle, op.cit., p. 35).

Forms of Religious Life, 1954, p. 387.

26. K. Brahma, op.cit., p. 66.

27. U.C. Guha, 'Kach-arir itibritta, Gauhatil 1970, pp. 110-

23. E. Durkheim, The Elementary

24. S. Endle, op.cit., p. 34.

Out of the fear of isolation from the society the aboriginal tribes who lived in the vicinity of the Hindu village had easily succumbed to the Hinduisation. They became Hindus by two ways; either they embraced Hinduism or simply took Saran under the 'Hindu Gosain' or 'Guru'. But in Hindu conversion, the process led to another sub-religion among the Boro-Kacharis of Assam which is known as 'Brahma religion'. The founder of this new religion was Guru Kalicharan Mech (subsequently known as Gurudev Kalicharan Brahmachari). He was the first preacher of the Brahma movement. He has brought about a change in their religious thought and practices. The followers of this religion have identified themselves as perfect monotheists, believing in one, 'Brahma' as the Ultimate Reality, known to them as Om Sat Guru identical with oblonglaori of the traditional 'Bathou religion'²⁸ the traditional concept of Trinity - Rongrchi, Maithahschi and Barigongtham has been identified with the Hindu Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvera.²⁹

R.N. Mosahary says that,

*The coming of the Brahma religion whose theology centres round the Upanishadic Brahman as the Supreme God and Ultimate Reality with Vedic rituals - of worship, such as, chanting of Brahma gayatri (Vedic hymns) at Yajna kunda and the acceptance of formal initiation in the teachings of the saint Anukul Thakur, thus falling in line of Satsangi are the direct results of deep influence of Hinduism on the Boros. The Anukul authority ever since it established its grip over a sizeable Boro population is seen imposing on its followers all the Hindu injunctions step by step. This authority prohibits eating of meat, fish, onion, garlic etc. as well as wearing of their traditional colourful and embroidered customs by the Boro women.*³⁰

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. Christianity is the youngest bud of the religious stem. The colonial administration followed by education and medical facilities provided by Christian Missionaries attracted the simple minded tribal people who believed in traditional religion rather than in any of the major religions. The Roman

28. Modaram Bralima, Purani Boro Sajmajor Uporat Brahma Dharmar Prabhav", in K. Brahma (ed.), Souvenir, 1984, BSS, pp. 7-8.

29. M.M. Brahma, "Religious and Philosophic Aspects of the Boros" in Kamrub-Bisombi, Souvenir, 1976, BSSP p. 12. M. Brahma, Ibid., pp. 7-8.

30. R.N. Mosahary, Proceedings of North Eastern India History Association, Tenth Session, Shillong. 1989, p.171.

Catholic missionaries came into contact first (17th-18th Century) with the people of North-East India with small sect of followers.³¹ David Scott., then Commissioner of Assam had opened a Baptists Mission Centre at Guwahati as early as 1829.³² A school boarding house was opened first by Baptist Mission at Guwahati in 1843 where a number of Boro pupils got accommodation. Many a time missionary had chosen village headman from the Boro community to convert whole community to the Christian. This was the reason how Boro Christians increased by number. It was found that worship to Bathou involved more time than prayer to God in the Christian way. Christianity brought a new social, psychological changes among the Boro people. Many Boros became Christian, because they were convinced that the new religion would at least free people from the evil activities of malevolent spirits. The Boros are not antagonistic to Hindu religion, but they expect that prosperity would come only with the help of the Christian Missionaries.

Religion exercises a tremendous influence upon the life of the individual and that of the community. Religious beliefs usually act as a great kinetic force for social inertia. The religious attitudes percolate down to all other institutions that the societies establish. The Boro life-cycle more or less centres round the three most important rites of passage viz., birth, marriage and death. At every stage rites are performed for purification, safety and prosperity, whether in this world or in the next world. A belief in transmigration of soul plays a vital role in the performance of rituals. A new born baby is accepted as a Boro, although it might have been a non-Boro in the previous life. Ceremonies are performed to free the dying from sins, to disconnect the living ones from him, to show the path to the after world, to make his journey easy and free from danger and to ensure his non-return. Boros respect all religions. So during the Kherai puja they propitiate a Muslim God 'Peer Saheb' or 'Nawab Badsha' by sacrificing a cock. The person engaged in this ritual keeps the back portion of his garment loose and pronounces the word Bismilla at the time of sacrifice. So the Boro conception of religion is not conservative but rather universal. Though primitive, it is a religion of humanity.

31. C.B. Firth, An Introduction to Indian Church History, 1983, pp. 265-270.

32. F.S. Downs, The Miplity Works of God, A Brief History of the Council o Baptist Churches in N.E. India, The Christian Literature Centre, Guwahati, 1971, p. 12.

CONCLUSION

The Boros are numerically and sociologically one of the most important tribes of the Northeastern India, particularly Assam. They belong to the Indo-Mongoloid group of tribes who have been generally designated as Kiratas in Puranas. Religion plays a significant role in the life of a Boro. The worship of Bathou and the erection of the altar of this Supreme Deity with the Sijü plant in his courtyard are noteworthy features of his life. In addition to the domestic worship of Bathou, there is the common place of worship for the community as a whole. Religion is a spiritual process. It is man's faith in a power beyond himself whereby he seeks to satisfy emotional needs and gain stability in life in the face of various forces which threaten him. The traditional religion of the Boros is a great advance on the crude animism of the primitive culture. While it reveals to us a stage of polytheism, there is a movement from the many to the One. All gods and goddesses are regarded as manifestations of the Supreme Deity, Bathou. Monotheism is attained by the Boros through the realisation of the spiritual unity which underlies all differences.

Bathou represents the five basic elements of creation. He is also known as Sibrai (Siva). Sibrai with his wife (Siburi) created this universe and the first man (Monsinsin). Thus the religious consciousness of the Boros was lifted into the region of speculative thinking. Man has a mortal body but an immortal soul. Some awe of the ghosts of the departed prevails among the Boros. But worship of ancestors exhibits tribal loyalty and establishes a fellowship between all the members of the tribe. Rites and rituals are symbols of hope and desire. Their main purpose is welfare of both private and public lives as well as good harvest of crops. Blind superstition and religious faith of a high order are intermingled in Boro religion. A multitude of usages has developed out of the magical view of things. The role of Deodhani (the 'possessed' woman) in Kherai Puja brings out the mystic element in the traditional religious beliefs of the Boros.

Like the Hindus, Boros believe in disembodied existence as well as transmigration of soul. This belief is the basis of rites of birth and death. When the baby is sprinkled with holy water, the following verse is uttered:

oi gotha? nongba godo mamon,
Bangal na jungal,
Garo na Gangar,
Harsha na Mephal mon?
Dinoini phrai Boro jabai.1

1. Bhaben Narzil Boro-KachSrir Samaj Aur Sanskriti, 1966, p. 145.

(Whoever you were, whether you were a Muslim, a Garo, a Bhutia or a non-Boro or a Nepali, you have become a Boro from today).

From the study of the rites performed after the death of a person it is evident that the Boro has,

Some idea, however vague and unsatisfactory, of a life prolonged after the great change we commonly call 'death' though his notion of the future life is merely that of the first (earthly) life renewed.²

The world of the Boros is crowded with gods and goblins. Diseases of men and catastrophies of the world are traced to angry spirits. So gods and goddesses are propitiated. Spells and incantations are used. All these require specially qualified persons like deoris, deodhais and deodhsnis. Sacrifice and prayer form the main elements of the culture. Dread or fear is the underlying principle of the religion of the Boros. As Endle remarks,

In a certain stage of moral and spiritual development men are undoubtedly influenced far more by what they fear than by what they love; and this truth certainly applies to the Kachari race in the most unqualified way.³

The Boros believe that many invisible spirits interfere in the affairs of men and so they must be propitiated by frequent offerings of rice, plantains, pigs, goats, poultry etc. Thus often sorcery and magic prevail over the genuine religious spirit.

The Boro social structure is primarily patriarchal with a few matriarchal characteristics. There are definite regulations as to their house building and maintenance of their homestead. They observe various ceremonies and festivals in relation to birth, marriage, death and agricultural activities. The status of women in the society is almost equal to that of men. Women share the pressure of work equally in field and at home. Social customs and traditions play a very important role in the cultural life of any ethnic group. The Boro society is tradition-bound. It can hardly afford to do away with customs and traditions with core values. The religion of the Boros is not sectarian. It transcends our narrow individuality and small interests. The word 'Boro' in the closely allied Tripura language means 'a man'. Thus the religion which Boros follow is the religion of man which is universal in outlook and is not built around any particular personality.

Hinduism is a medley of beliefs and rites. It holds the view that men differ in temperament, training and level of aspiration. Synthesis rather than elimination is the guiding principle of Hinduism which has become a mosaic of almost all the types and stages religious endeavour.

2. S. Endle, The Kacharis, 1975, p. 48.

3. Ibid., p. 33.

As Radhakrishnan says, "Hinduism is not based on any racial factor. It is an inheritance of thought and aspiration to which every race in India has made its distinctive contribution."⁴ There is no real conflict between Hinduism and the religion of the Boros. The process of assimilation of the two faiths is evident from the fact that Hindu gods and goddesses are given seats at the time of Garja Puja. Bathou, the chief of gods is identified with Siva. Some legends depict the origin of the Boros from Siva, the third power of the Hindu Trinity. Boros have not given up their culture and tradition. They seek their place within the Sanatana dharma of the Vedas.

4. S. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought, 1939, p. 306.

GLOSSARY OF BORO TERMS

Abo	- Elder sister.
Ada	- Elder brother.
Adei/Adwi	- The paternal uncle.
Agrang	- God of water.
Agwi/Agei	- Young sister.
Aham Guru	- The Supreme God of the traditional Boros.
Ailong	- Festival of bamboo worship.
Alongkhongnai	- The first activity of the exorcist.
Amai	- The maternal uncle.
Amisua	- Agricultural rite observed in the month of Ashara.
Aroi	- People (Generally used as suffix).
Baghlaroi	- The clan of tiger folk.
Baisagu	- A spring festival of Boros observed in the middle of April.
Bakhri/Bakri	- The granary of paddy corn.
Binanao	- Younger sister.
Bathou	- Siju plant worshipped as God and identified with Siva. He is the incarnation of Aham Guru.
Bathou Borai	- Supreme God of traditional Boros.
Bathou Buri	- Goddess of Boros the consort of the Supreme God.
Buhi/Dygbai'	- Flow of water.
Boro Buri Zob Zob	- A couple of Boros husband and wife.
Cheppa	- A kind of fishing implement, made of bamboo stick.
Daha Garnai	- A ritual ceremony for the death of a person on 10th day of the deceased where favourite foods are offered in the name of dead person.
Dakhna	- A kind of traditional female dress.
Dan Sarnai	- The gift to the relatives of the Dead.
Deori	- Minister, respected elder person of the community.
Deodini/Deodhani	- Female exorcist.
Dhoka	- A widow marriage system where husband has to stay at wife's house.
Diba Borai	- God of rain.
Diba Buroi	- God of wind.
Digru/Digaru	- To bathe.
Ditru (Bd)	- A blister, testless.
Dibang (Db, dib)	- Luscious, plenty of water.
Dikhau/Dikhou	- To draw water.
Dikran/Dikreng	- Rapid in a river.
Disan/Disa	- A small stream.
Engkham Godam Janai	- New rice eating ceremony of the year for the first time.
Gandearois	- The clan of snail folk.
Garja/Garjanai	- Expulsion.
Garja Lakhinai	- The system where the son-in-law has to stay in his father-in-law's house after marriage.
Gojjora-Pathojjora	- Pairs of areca nuts and leaves.
Githa/Gidal	- Follower of oja.
Haba	- Marriage, to bear the responsibility of the earth on the back or shoulder.
Ha-chum-sa	- Black earth folk, the royal clan.
Hadengoura	- The chief judge.
Hashungoura	- The subordinate lawyer.
Imfi	- Sword.
Ising	- Kitchen.
Jau/Zu	- Rice beer.
Jotha	- Cymbals.
Katri-gasa saonai	- Bihu of the crisis,- offer earthen lamp in the paddy field.
Kham	- Drum.

Khanta	- Front yard.
Khapra	- Sleeping room.
Khell	- Individual social group.
Kherai	- Puja or chanting formula in front of the chief god Bathou.
Khoila	- God of air.
Khotia phonai	- Agricultural rites of sowing paddy seeds.
Kokka	- A kind of fishing implement made of bamboo.
Kurma	- The relatives.
Laokhar	- Cowherd boys.
Madh	- Rice beer.
Mahari	- Clan.
Mainao	- Goddess of wealth.
Mai gainai	- Paddy plantation will ritual performances.
Mainao lainai or	- Bringing a bunch of matured paddy Aglainai from the field to house for the first time.
Mainao Bindou	- The goddess of prosperity.
Mairang Maginai	- Collection of money, rice etc. from door to door by the boys and girls.
Mansi	- The second to seventh day of Baisagu observed for men.
Mansingsing	- The first man created by God.
Mashau/Makhou	- The first day of Baisagu observed for cattle.
Masaü Saran Hogamai	- To set free a bullock in the Sraddha ceremony in some special case to liberate his soul of the dead person..
Masau Thukhoinei	- Showing respect to the cattle.
Modai Hamdang	- An evil spirit of Boros, Devil, Devata, Kuber Devata.
Moha Honai	- Mosquito driving ceremony, held on full moon night of Aghon month.
Na khong	- The guest room.
Narzarois	- The clan of jute folk.
No ma no	- The Big house, where the older couple stay.
Nophang	- The head of the family member.
Oblonglaori	- The Supreme God who is the only reality like Brahman.
Oja	- Local medicine man, who gives home made medicine and amulet to cure.
oma-bedor	- Pork.
Phongbai	- Younger brother.
Polo	- Kind of fishing implement.
Putuli Haba	- Doll marriage.
Raj Kumbri	- Goddess of sky.
Raona/Raoni	- Gods of rain and wind.
Rongrachi, Maithaha	- Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara. chi, Baringongtham
Saradu	- Equal to the Sanskrit Sraddha. A ritual ceremony for the death.
Sanguri	- Groups of the villagers who perform works for another person without money.
Sanja Borti	- Goddess of light.
Sanmelon	- Committee.
Sanfang	- The men's clan.
Sekla	- Inner yard.
Sewari	- The flat stick of bamboo used in weaving.
Shabri Taka	- Deposited money.
Shohra	- A kind of fishing implement.
Siju/Hiju	- Euphorbia splendens.
Sijuouarois	- The clan of cactus folk.
Siphung	- Bamboo flute.
Sua Garnai	- A process of cleaning unclean leaf plates after feast by the eldest son of the dead (father/mother).
Zekhai	- A kind of fishing implement, bamboo made net.
Zulu	- The woman's clan.