The Bodo tribe of North-East India has its own traditional religion, which is known as Bathou Dhwrwm (religion). Earlier missionaries defined it as animisit\(^1\). They believe in souls or spirits in all the objects of nature. Against the above given statement Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya has said—“The Boros are not animistic. They are worshippers of Bathou the supreme God\(^2\). They have their Gods and Goddess, but they believe in ghosts and spirits also. But the conception of Supreme God is predominantly remarkable. The ‘Gibi Bithai’ of Bihuram Boro also try to establish the fact that the Bodos were not animists, thus they are polytheist. The Bodos believe in one Supreme God; who is the creator and protector of the world who is also known as Bathou or Bathoubrai, traditionally among the Bodos. The Bodos being a aboriginal tribe of Assam, they have contact with Aryan people also. So, they are in very close contact with their faith, belief and customs. In the Gibi Bithai some Hindu God and Goddesses also have found place, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara which are trinity God of Hindu pantheon. They are known as Creator, Preserver and Destroyer in the Gibi Bithai.

Bathouism:

The word Bathou is expressed by the different exponents in different ways. According to Dhuparam Basumatary ‘The main essence of the religion of the Bodo Kachari, the original inhabitants of Assam or Kamrup who worship Bathou as their chief Deity is mwnba— gonthou = Bathou. “Mwnba” means “five” and “gonthou” means “deep
philosophy" the blending of the two syllables “ba” and “thou” taken from the words “mwnba” and “gworth” respectively has resulted in the formation of the word Bathou. Thus Bathou is the amalgamation of five deep philosophies. According to Ramdas Basumatary "Bathou" is the only amalgated word in the Bodo language it is the blending of the two words “ba” and “gworth”. “Ba” means five times and “gworth” means deep. That is why Bathou is a penta philosophical religion and it is the basic of the all the religious traditions in the devotional activities of the Bodo people. This is the reason why their religion is called Bathou.

Bathou religion is the religion of the Bodo people. This religion is very old one. It has no founder. It evolved from age to age. Earlier the religion was in very crude form. In the name of Bathoubrai (the Almighty, the religion is known as Bathou religion. Brai means old man. “Bathou”, is combination of two syllables ‘Ba’ and ‘thou’. ‘Ba’ means five, and ‘thou’ means ‘deep’. So, philosophical thought Bathou means five principles of deep philosophical significances. In the verse singer has explained the power and functions of the Bathoubrai. Bathoubrai is the builder of the world. At the beginning there were no animals and other beings in this world. It was totally empty. First of all, Bathoubrai created sky, earth, water, trees, man and animals. To control His creations Sibr, Sibrui Barmali (Brahma), Lawkhar Gossai (Vishnu) and other Gods and Goddesses were created. Aham Guru, Mwnsingsing Guru were also created by God.

In the verse Bihuram Boro has analysed the word “Bathou” in the chapter “Bathoumumni Gudi” (the origin of name Bathou) as given below:

Ha munni bima bardoimunni ziuma.

or mungni swrang nokhrangmunghi gumurma,
apha iswrranw gwhwmwnba gworth,
benikhainw bikhoul subungya bungyw-Bathou.
In Bathouism, the five elements are given very much prominence. There is sun, water, soil, air in the sky. From the very beginning it was thought that these five elements were the first creation of God. Bihuram Boro has classified Sun, air, sky and water in two divisions. One visible and another one is invisible. The sun, water, sky and soil could be seen with eyes, but we cannot see the air. So it is imagined that a supreme power is hidden behind these five elements. These things might have been created by Bathou (God). He is also known as Bathoubrai, ‘Brai’ means first man or old.

In another place of the verse Bihuram Boro has mentioned different names of the Bathou. These are Krishna, Gopal, Hari, Ram, Bhagavan, Gobinda. He is also known as Sibrai. Bathoubrai is shown as shapeless. He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is the Creator, Preserver and destroyer of this world. He is supreme, having three manifestation- Rangrashi, Maithaihazi and Barigangham (Creator, Preserver and Destroyer).

In the Bathouism many other Gods and Goddesses were also given prominent place. They are Mainaobrui, Sanraja, Sanbrui, Bura Raja, Lawkhar Gossai, Aileng, Agron, Khoila, Rajkhandra etc.

Mainaobrui is the wife of Sibrat. She is the Goddess of wealth. There is a Mainaobrui dance in the name of Goddess of wealth.
Siju tree (Euphorbia Splenden) is taken as symbol of Bathou, because this tree could live anywhere. Bodos believe it has five edges and the rings of the Bathou altar also five. This tree is planted at the North-East, corner of the courtyard. It is teened with split boo surrounding.

“Kherai “the religious festival is held among the Bodos, which is mainly related to agriculture. For the “Kherai” no fixed shrine is there. There are four kinds of Kherai. (1) The Darsan Kherai, (2) The Umrao Kherai, (3) the photo Kherai and (4) now aoni kherai. The Darsan Kherai is performed in the month of Kati; the umrao kherai is performed in the month of “Ashara” and the phalo Kherai is observed in the month of “Magha”. The last one is performed for the welfare of the family members.

Bathoubrai is the main God of the Kherai worship. During worship His name is uttered before the names of the other Gods and Goddesses. In this worship different kinds of sacrifices are offered, such as pig, goat, fowl, flower and rice bear etc. earlier. But now these offering are treated as sin according to Bihuram Boro.

Garza is another religious festival of Bodos. This worship is celebrated to expel the evil spirit from the village publicly. Generally Garza is performed twice in a year.

In the Gibi Bithai writer has mentioned myth recounting the origin of Kherai along with the status of the ‘Bathou’, the lord. Why He gets the topmost position in the worship.

There are customs and rituals of Bathouism which are not similar to other religions. There is saying on the rites and rituals among the Bathou followers:-

siphungni gudungya gudungba
Boroni asarabw mwnba
The flute has five holes
And the rites of the Bodos also five.

Kham (drum), siphung (flute), zotha (symbol), serza (bina) the traditional musical instruments are played at the time of praying of Bathoubrai. There are myths recounting the origins of the siphung and serza. These instruments are seen being played at the time of pacifying the angry Sibrai who danced for a long time to destroy the creation of God. (Chapter – XXII – Gibi Bithai). At that time Vishnu played very melodies flute. Kaila played Drum, Ailang played cymbol and Monsri played serza. During the Kherai and Garza festival these instruments are being palyed till now.

The Doudini perform 18 types of dances at the time of Kherai worship. The Doudini demonstrates different types of dance for different God and Goddess.

Such as Bathou gidingnai, satrali, khapri sibnai, khwijwma phonai, gandolabwnnai, sagwlao bwnai, muphur gelenai, naobwnai, khamao barkhwnai, daothwilwngnai, mwsakhaori mwsanai, maozi membrang gelenai etc. Through these dances the Doudini exhibits the prowess and skills of the Doudini on different occasions.

In the verse Gibi Bithai there are mentioned Tandav Nritya, Laisyavi Nritya, thungri sibnai and khapri sibnai (in the Ch - XXXII – Kherainai). Tandav Nritya was danced by Sibrai (Siva) to bring reformation in the world. Laisyavi was dances by Sibrui at time Tandav Nritya to calm down the Sibrai. 'Thunggri Sibnai' was danced by Rwnwphagli or Ranchandi. The Doudini demonstrates the fighting of goddess holding a sword in her right hand and a shield in her left hand.
Contact between Bathouism and Hinduism:

*Gibi Bithai* is an amalgam of origin of God, faith and beliefs, rites and ritual and custom of the Bodos. Mainly Bathouism is focused right now. On the other hand the neighbour Aryan peoples Hinduism also spread in the verse. It is true that the Indigenous tribal peoples are influenced by the Hindu God and it is testified by the following quotation "*the Kacharis pantheon is very extensive one, though it seems probable that only a comparatively small numbers are strictly of tribal or national origin, many having obviously been borrowed from their Hindu neighbours*". The following lines speak about Siva and Parvati that "*Apart from Bathoubrai and Maothanshri of the Bodos – Gira - Girasi of the Douris, pha - mohadeo and His concert of the Tiwas and so on which are original tribal person of Siva - Parvati.*"10

*Gibi Bithai* is an outcome of the two religions – Bathouism and Hinduism. It gives more emphasis on the religious matters of Bathou religion than on Hinduism. The verse discussed about the origin of Bathou, the Supreme God. His power creation of man and animals, the universe and His right hands Sibrai (Brahma) and Vishnu. At the end of the chapters ‘Kherainai’ the writer has discussed about the origin of Kherai worship and how Sibrai became above all the Gods and Goddess. From the various chapters of my discussion it is found *Gibi Bithai* is purely religious book on Bathouism.

On the other hand Hinduism is also given due in the verse. Hinduism is a very old religion of the world. Among the major religions of the world it is one of them. Sir Charles says, Hinduism has not been made but has grown. It is jungle not a building."11."
God and Goddess of Hinduism:

Hinduism is an ancient religion; it is very difficult to say about the Gods and Goddess. From that side the Hindu religion is characterized by polytheism. Vedas as most original sources of Hindu faith and beliefs, it is seen polytheism in nature. Among the major deities of Vedas, Agni, Indra, Surya, Baruna and Mitra, Vayu, Soma, Visvakarma, Yama are found. Agni is the God of fire. Indra is the God of firmament. Surya is the son of Aditi, sometimes he is called a son of Dyaus. Baruna and Mitra are two deities who were named together in the hymns. Baruna is addressed more frequently than Mitra. There was belief that Baruna looked over the night and Mitra ruled over the day. Vayu is the God of wind. He is also known as Vata in Veda. Vayu is thought to be an associate of Indra. Later on he is known as father of Hanuman in Ramayana and father of Bhima in Mahabhrata. Soma is the God of Juice according to vedic hymns. Viswakarma is known as architect and workman of the Gods. In the Vedas he is known as Tvastri. Yama is known as also Dharmaraja (king of righteousness). Later on He is the judge of men. According to the works of man during his lifetime, Yama decides the place of the soul of that person after death. His soul may be placed either in hell or heaven depending on his past deeds. Generally Yama is represented in a Green colour of his body, with red garments. He holds clubs, having a flower in his hair and rides on a buffalo.

Among the Hindus Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara(Siva) are also very prominent deities. They are three great Hindu puranic Gods. It is believed that these three deities are the various forms of a almighty God (Brahmo) which is known as trinity among the Hindus. These three Gods have different aspects. Brahma is the creator, Bishnu is the preserver and
Siva is the destroyer. The Goddesses, Parvati, Durga, Kali, Saraswati and Lakshmi are the consorts of the trad Gods. These Gods and Goddesses have prominent places in different fairs and festivals of Hindu.

In Gibi Bithai the Gods and Goddesses of Hinduism like Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara (Siva) are described as representatives of God. Siva is the first creation of Bathoubrai, He has to look after the Mongoloid group of people, in Asia Continent.

In Gibi Bithai the Indra, Yama the vedic Gods are mentioned. Indra is said to be the owner of clouds and sky. He is known as Mirugiri in the verse. According to the myth Sibrai, the first representative of Bathoubrai ordered Mirugiri to flood the world to punish the wicked people. As per Sibrai’s order Indra caused the clouds to rain continuously for three months. As a result the world is filled with water, and not a single piece of land remained dry. In the flood the wicked people were drowned. This is how Sibrai punished the wicked people by the help of Indra (Mirugiri). Yama is known as ‘thoimaraja’. In the Gibi Bithai of Chapter – III (Bathou mungni gudi) it is said that after death of a person the soul is also decided by Him, according to the previous works of life. If a person’s past deeds were good then he would be let to stay in heaven. If the persons activities were not good then he will be placed in hell. All these duties are done by Yama. His activities are clear in the following verse:

\[ g\text{wthar gususini phozogwn bisar}, \]
\[ unao thwima razaya, \]
\[ g\text{wthara unthrigwn gusua sazagwn} \]
\[ raobw khargohaya; \]

(Gibi Bithai Chapter – III, St. 68)

Kamdeva, the God of love is mentioned in the Ch – XIX, mwdaiphwr zakhangnai, He is named Zwmmnbrai and it means God of
young boys and Girls. At the cited chapter the name of Goddess Saraswati is named as Mwnsri, She appeared as the Goddess of wisdom.

Philosophy:

The philosophy of Bathou religion is focused very elaborately in the verse. In the verse B. Boro has elaborately discussed the Bathou tatta (five deep philosophies). How the ‘Bathou’ was originated, its power and function on the world.

Bathou is almighty. His power covers everywhere of the world. Human being is part of Him. The life of beings are determined by God. Life is a part of God. It is also immortal. It takes place for a while in human body. After completing its period of life on earth, it again goes back to the kingdom of God according to the works of his lifetime. It may go heaven or may beat hail.

Acquiring salvation is an aim of every human life. There is good number of systems in the world which are preached by the God. To get salvation a person must do the rules and regulations of the world.

.bandwbaya zadwng dingama,
.phonbaya beni dwima,
.zaonwba be dingyakhou
.nanggwo asar baithakhwo

(G.B. Ch – XXVI, St.-847)

The life of human beings has to follow five ties or principles of God. These five ties are birth, marriage, joyful, sorrow and death. These are compared with a river. To cross this river (fongba) boat is needed. To sail the boat rites are needed and it is compared with an oars.
So life has a purpose i.e., to achieve the abode by doing according to prescribed ways of God. Because soul is not perishable only the human body is perishable.

References:

2. Dr. P. C. Bhattacharya: *A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language*: p-17.