CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION:

The Bodos are the aboriginal dwellers of Assam. They racially belong to the Mongoloid Stock. S.K. Chatterjee says, "The Bodos who spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as east Bengal, forming a solid blocking Northeastern India, were the most important Indo-Mongoloid people in Eastern India and they form one of the main basis of the present day population of these tracts".¹ About racial features of the Bodos Mathias Hermans observes:

"As is the case with the Mache (Mech) so also with the Kachari (Boro) the Mongoloid features are very prominent: the strong cheekbones, slit eyes, a slight growth of hair on the body and scanty beard. They are shorter and more stocky than the Indians of the North bank."²

Linguistically Bodo language belongs to Sino-Tibetan family. According to Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya the Bodo language has four dialects.³ At present the language is used in the north bank of Brahmaputra such as Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri district of newly formed BTAD under the Indian Constitution. Apart from the BTAD in the north bank the language is also used in Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji district. In the south bank of Brahmaputra it is used in Goalpara, Kamrup, Morigaon and Golaghat district of Assam. Apart from Assam, it is also used in the neighbouring states like West Bengal and Tripura. In Nepal too, the Bodo speakers are found scattered in the Border regions. This language has gained recognition under the 8th schedule of the Indian Constitution.
Various courses in Bodo language such as certificate course, diploma course and M.A. degree courses have been introduced under the Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University.

Oral literature is a valuable resource of the Bodo people. The Bodo oral literature is not lagging behind to the literature of any other community. Various branches exist in the oral literature; there are a good number of folk songs such as Baisagu songs, marriage songs, love songs, ballads and nursery rhymes or lullaby. Apart from the folk songs there are myths, legends and tales which are known as prose narratives in oral literature. The proverbs and riddles, the two branches of oral literature are also found in large numbers among the Bodos. Their oral literature is the main source of some of their written literature. The written literature of the Bodos start from the first part of 20th century “Boroni phisha O aiyen (1915) is the first specimen copy of written literature. Bathou-nam Baikhaguni gidu (1920) and Khonthai-methai (1923) came later on. “Bibar” is the first Bodo magazine of the Bodos which was published by a group of students of Cotton College in 1924. Later on magazines like “Zenthokha” (1926) “Hathokhi-Hala” (1931) and “Olongbar” were published. The eminent Bodo writers wrote various poems, essays, plays and stories in the magazine. Rupnath Brahma and Modaram Brahma wrote poems on national consciousness and mystic poem as well. Romanticism start from the time of Ishan Muchahary. Satish Chandra Basumatary, Dharendra nath Basumatary wrote plays and translated Bengali Jatras into Bodo language. They produced lots of literary works for the development of the Bodo Society. The Bodo Sahitya sabha was established in 1952 at Basugaon. That year marks the beginning of the modern age in Bodo literature. Gradually, short stories, novels, essays and criticisms were also written by the Bodo writers. Mr. Chittaranjan Muchahary wrote “Jujaini Or” the first Bodo Novel in 1962. Besides
Muchahary many other writers started writing novels. Some of the famous Bodo novels are—Kharlung (1976), Maihur (1980), Bisni Lwithw (1981) and Hainamuli (1985). Through these novels the novelist tried to depict the various social, political problems of the Bodo society. Ishan Muchahary was the first short story writer in Bodo. “Abari” is one his best works. Nil Kamal Brahma is known as pioneer of Bodo Short Story. He has written in various journals and his stories were later published in a form of book in 1972. The book was titled “Hagra gurdini Mai”. And it contains some of his best stories like Silingkhar, Beher, Gwswni Akhal, Megonni Nwfr etc. At present writers like Dharnidhar wary, Chittaranjan Muchahary, Janil Kr. Brahma, Haribhusan Brahma, Nandeswar Daimari, Naleb, Buddhadev are contributing the their own way to enrich the genre. We also have some strong critics and essayists, like Brajendra Kumar Brahma, Dr. kameswar Brahma, Mangolsing Hazowary, Rakhau Basumatary, Dr. Anil Boro, Premananda Muchahary and Bhupen Narzari etc.

Oral tradition has played a great role in building the Bodo Community. It can help in getting an aceess to all the facts about the society of the past. It can also help in creating a history for those who don’t have history of their own. Jan Vansina says oral tradition is “verbal message which are reported statement from the past beyond the present generation”4 According Joseph ki-Zerbo Oral Tradition may be defined as “being a testimony transmitted verbally from one generation to another. Its special characteristics are that it is verbal and the manner in which it is transmitted.”5 Linda Degh says “Oral tradition refers to the transmission of cultural material through vocal utterance and was long held to be a key descriptor of Folklore.”6 The Bodo oral tradition is rich in the field of myths, legends, tales, proverbs, mantras and songs. The
memorized speeches and narratives are traditionally transmitted orally from one generation to next generation.

The Gibi Bithai is written on the basis of oral traditions. It tells about the beliefs, myths, customs, proverbs, sayings and festival of the Bodos. This is a humble attempt to make a study of such elements of oral tradition and highlight them for the reconstruction of Bodo written literature and history.

GIBI BITHAI AND BODO NARRATIVE TRADITION:

Bihuram Boro was born in a village called Bechimary which is situated by the National Highway No. 52 between Dalgaon and Rowta. The place has a good reputation for its high production of green vegetable. According to his matriculation certificate he was born in the year 1941. He was born to late Chandra Kanta Kachary and late Morai Kachary. He had two elder brothers namely – late Jagdish and late Monoram and one younger sister, Haguri. His father had to shift his residence from Bechimary to near Rowta Chariali due to some natural calamity. He couldn’t thrive at the new place and as a result he failed to make the ends to meet. Bihuram Boro was admitted at Balishiha L.P. School. He passed from L.P. school in 1953. He had to read M.E. school at Bhakatpara due to poor financial condition. He has passed his M.E. school securing 1st division in 1958. He got admitted at Dalgaon High school and passed his P.U. from Cotton College and B.A. from Mongaldai College.

Bihuram Boro was a writer and journalist. He wrote many articles in Bodo and English language. His Bodo articles are: Darangao mansibwli (sijou: dihungatham-1970 Rowta), Darrang, Darrangari arw rao thunlai ao biswrni biphan (Boro Raothunlaimi Mongaldai zarimin:}


He has published two books. These books are *Asarba* and *Gibi Bithai*. *Asarba* was published in 1984. This book discussed elaborately about the rites and rituals of Bodos. *Gibi Bithai* is written on Bathou religion. He has written *Godai Bithai*, but this volume could not see the light of day as the manuscript was somehow lost before it could be sent to the printing press.

As a worker of Bodo Sahitya Sabha he has dedicated many of his valuable year for the development of Bodo Language and literature. He had served as a General Secretary for several times and he has also become a Vice-president once. During that period he took great role in introducing Bodo language as a medium of instruction. He has also great contribution in making Bodo-English-Hindi dictionary. *‘Bonjar’* the first weekly magazine was also published by him in 1973 from Udalguri. His contribution to Bodo language and literature is immense. He was shot by unidentified miscreants on 27th Sept 1990 at the middle of Rowta Chariali. The death of such an eminent person is a great loss for the entire Bodo Community. He is survived by his wife Smt. Lalita Boro and his three sons and two daughters.
Gibi Bithai written by Bihuram Boro was published in 1984. There are 33 chapters in Gibi Bithai which is composite in the style and fashion of a narrative verse. The chapters of Gibi Bithai are as follows:

Chapter – I : Fwrwnggiri bawnai (invocation)
Chapter – II – IV : Origin and power of the Bathou (God)
Chapter – V – XIII : Creation of sky, solar system, land, water, trees, animals and Sibrui by Bathou.
Chapter – XXIV – XXV : Five principles of Bathou and Mwnsingsing Guru,
Chapter XXI – XXX : Five rites and rituals of Bodos.
Chapter – XXXI : Creation of Borma (Brahma) and Vishnu.
Chapter – XXXII : Mythical narratives of Kherai.

Gibi Bithai is a religious book of Bodos. This verse can be divided into three parts. The first part deals with the origin, power and the creative function of the Bathou. The second part deals with the creation of man, plants, animals, other essential things and Gods and Goddesses to maintain the world. The last part deals with the various customs of the Bodos such as Bathou bandwba (God rules by five deeds), Mwnsingsingni phongba (Mwnsingsing preached five rules) and Boroni asara monba (Bodos have five customs to do deeds).

Through the various chapters of Gibi Bithai the Bodo myth, proverbs, sayings, festivals and mantras have been presented in a lucid
and plain language. It can be said that the oral tradition of the Bodos have been presented in a capsular form in this narratives.

The Sibrai is the main character of the narrative verse. He was created by Bathou to rule over the world, according to his plan of creation this world. Man, animals, trees, water, sky, earth and other Gods and Goddess also created with the help of Bathoubrai. These demigods and goddesses lived with Sibrai at Kailash, when people became wicked then Sibrai created Aham Guru and Mwnsingsing Guru to preach law and order among the trinity. Brahma, the second and Vishnu is the third. Sibrai is the most powerful among the trinity. Sibrai looked upon Mongoliod people, Brahma looked after the Negros.

In the verse, all the teachings of Bathou were preached by four Gurus. They were Aham Guru, Mwnsingsing Guru, Ana and Thena Guru. This testifies the traditional role of a Guru in Bodo religious worship. First of all Sibrai taught Aham Guru, then Aham Guru taught Mwnsingsing and he in turn taught Ana and Thena learnt from Ana. It was Thena who finally taught the common people everything about God and his rules.

Narratives which are orally transmitted in the form of prose may rightly be termed as prose narratives. This genre includes myth, legend and tale in oral literature. This prose narrative transmits from generation to generation in verbal form among the Bodo community. Traditionally the prose narratives of the Bodos can be classified into three categories such as myth, legend, and tale. Dr. N.C. Sarma give the ethnic term of the myths, legend and tale as mith, subung solo and solo or solobatha, respectively.

In the Gibi Bithai, the three genre of prose narratives myth, legend and tales traditionally extant among the Bodos have been focused the place of myth being prominent than the other two. There are various
types of myth among the Bodos which narrates the tales of creation, the
myth regarding the origin of the Kherai worship, myth regarding the
musical instrument. Most of the mythical narratives are closely related
with the Bodo Bathou religion. This myth narrate us about the origin of
customs, religion and festivals.

As a genre of prose narrative legend is also found among the Bodo
Community. According to Bascom, legends are “prose narratives which,
like myths, are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience, but they
are set in a period considered less remote when the world was much as it
is today. Legends are more often secular than sacred and their characters
are human11. The traditionally extant Bodo legends are as follows.

(a) The legends of the origin of the place Zam Duar.
(b) The Legends of Gambari sikhla.
(c) The legends of Birgwshri sikhla.
(d) The legend of Zaolia Diwan.
(e) The legend of shandramali and Kathia Budan.

From the Bodo legends we can know about the Heroic acts and
travails of the Hero and Heroine of the Bodos. They fought for their
motherland against the Bhutias and British and other enemies.

Folk tale is one of the most prominent genres of oral literature. The
Bodo people also have huge number of folk tales which are handed down
from generation to generation. These tales make Bodo oral literature
richer and also help in the understanding of Bodo Society. The oral
narratives like tales and myths are replete with cultural and ethnic
significations and symbols. With the passage of time many elements of
oral traditions like the songs and the tales are lost but some of them have
been documented in written form. Dr. Anil Boro has classified the tales of
Bodos as given below.12
1. Animal tales (*zunathni solo*)
2. Supernatural or wonder tales (*gwmwthao solo*)
3. Jokes or humorous tales. (*zankhainai eba minsrigwnang solo*)
4. Trickster tales (*sian jamba solo*)
5. Cumulative tales (*Banlanggra solo*)
6. Tales of folk history, (*subung zarimentary solo*)
7. Dilemma tales (*zithw gwnan*)
8. Incestuous tales (*bungthaoyi solo*)

First of all, the tales of the Bodo are collected and published in book form by J.D. Anderson. He has gathered various tales of the Bodos in *a collection of Kachari Folk-tales and Rhymes* in 1895.

J. D. Anderson and P. Goswami collected Bodo tales which were prevalent among the Bodos in the last part of the 19th century, these are:

2. The tale of the Monkey and the Hare. (Ibid pp-27-31)
3. The Tortoise and the Monkey (Ibid – pp-32-34)
5. The Brahmins servant (Ibid, pp, 34-38)
6. The Story of the simpleton (Ibid, pp-38-42)
7. The old man and the Tiger (Ibid pp, 24-27)
8. The Brahmin servant (Ibid, pp-34-38)
9. The tale of the Cat and the Fox (Goswami 1972, p-112),
10. The tale of the Fox (Ibid, P-116),
11. The tale of the Alai dambra (Ibid, pp-1-10)
12. The tale of the Maidangsri (Ibid pp-64-65)
Apart from these tales collected by J.D. Anderson and P. Goswami there are lots of other tales which have not been documented in written form till date.

However, Gibi Bithai has not incorporated all the genre of Bodo oral tradition. The main focus of Bihuram Boro is on the creation stories, belief and worldview, rites and rituals and folk custom closely related to Kherai worship. As a poet the poet has drawn inspiration from narrative tradition of the Bodos. The narrative tradition as persist till today in the context of Kherai worship and performance has been adapted for composing the verse narratives titled Gibi Bithai. As the poet has confessed in the preface to Gibi Bithai he learned the oral narrative and songs and sayings from various traditions beavers in his native village. One of the tradition bearer was his own grandfather. The other was his father. Thus Bihuram Boro did acquired and learn from oral tradition what he transformed and recreated in the form of a verse narrative. He learnt heavily on the oral traditional material while composing the verse narrative entitled Gibi Bithai. Tradition has it that the Serja Bwrai, (the old man player of the serja) used to tell myths and tale to the melodies tune of the serja, the Bodo stringed instrument. This tradition is no longer here, but the oral narratives are scattered here and there in the nook and corner of the Bodo villages and performed and memorized and recapitulated in the context of Kherai worship. The poet who was born a traditional Bodo village inherited the tradition and endeavoured to give it book to the community in a new package of writing and print. Thus the process also involves conscious selections, edition and appropriation besides authorship.
Significance of study:

The significance of study oral tradition is seen from the various angles to Bodo Community. First of all oral tradition is the main sources of history, it tells us past history of Bodos. From the oral tradition we know the Hero and Heroines of Bodo, how they fought against the foreigners to save Bodo people. There are good numbers legends among the Bodos. On the other hand Bodos have their own customs. These customs united the illiterate people earlier. They took these customs as secret and words of god but now a days no longer treated with much importance. Because influence of western literature, there was a example African people how they have reconstructed history on the basis of oral tradition. So the significance of systematic study on oral tradition is very importance and such study will enlighten the eye of coming generation, otherwise the significance of oral tradition will demines. The fact is that the new generation of the Bodo people tends to forget our past history i.e., the Bodo oral tradition. But to develop a community the significance of traditions cannot be denied, these are strong weapon of enemy and they can give identity of own culture to another develop community.

Objectives of Study:

The objectives of study of Gibi Bithai are to find out Bathou, the god of Bodos and His power and function and how he found place in narrative verse. Bathou is the central theme of Gibi Bithai, He is almighty. He creates all the worldly matters, man, animal and other gods and goddesses. There are various myths about the origin of God and Goddesses.

Another objective of the study Gibi Bithai is to find out the oral tradition of Bodos as an aboriginal tribe of Assam. They possessed rich oral tradition. Oral tradition helps those people who have no history of
their own. So, oral tradition works as history for those people. It tells us about the past. It gives information about the culture, so these studies will help the common people to know about the oral tradition of Bodos.

Lastly, the study of *Gibi Bithai* will help in better understanding the narrative verse. Because *Gibi Bithai* is written in traditional style and its theme and philosophy are very complex. Besides understanding the narrative verse, we could also know that the writer of *Gibi Bithai* is also a singer, social worker, journalist and a good teacher.

**Research Methodology:**

The study has been based mainly on field study and conscious observation of the relevant data. During the course of field work conducted in the study of narrative verse, the bearers of tradition have been interviewed. For the collection of data recording equipments and camera etc. were used. The field data were compared with the host of ethnographic writing so far available. The local journals, periodicals, booklet in the native language in an Assamese or other languages were collected. The proposed study used the methodological tools generally used in folkloristic and other social science disciplines the research was an endeavor to look into the research problem from the point of view of a native insider.
References:
3. Dr. P.C Bhattacharya opcit, p -11.
8. Dr. N. C. Sarma, Prose narratives of Boros, Birgwsri thandai, Souvenir of 38th Annual Conference BSS, p-25.
9. Dr. A. Boro, Folk literature of Boro, An introduction, p-167.
10. Op-cit p-28,
11. W. R. Bascom, Contribution to folkloristics,p-98
12. Dr. A. Boro, op-cit, p-189.