CHAPTER – III

RELIGION: RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

3.1 Introduction:

The word ‘religion’ is derived from the Latin word ‘Religare,’ (Re- Back; Ligare- bind) which means “to bind together.” Religion is a principle of unification and harmonization. It is mainly based on the faith in the ultimate unity of man and God, the finite and Infinite.1 There are different kinds of religion. The religion which believes in different gods and goddesses is called polytheistic. Some religions believe only in one God. God is considered to be omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. Such kind of religion is called monotheistic religion. Religious belief is dependent on religious practices. Hence in religion both theory and practice are important.

3.2 Religion:

Man is a social animal and also a religious being. Religion is instinctive to man. Religion is faith in God. Faith means total dependence on God. Hence faith is unification between man and God. Religion is a concrete experience which is associated with emotions, especially with fear, awe and reverence. Religion is a matter of belief. It is nothing but man’s belief in supernatural or super human force. Religious belief is the cognitive aspect of religion. It explains the nature and origin of sacred things.
Philosophers and sociologists define religion in various ways:

a. Edward Burnet Tylor defines religion as ‘belief in spiritual beings’. Philosophically, the religious attitude is the emotion of fear, hope, despair, and faith. Every religion has its own belief in God.²

b. Max Muller defines ‘Religion as mental faculty or disposition which enables man to apprehend the infinite’.³

c. M.K. Gandhi defines ‘Religion is not what is grasped by the brain but is a heart grasp’.⁴

d. Emile Durkheim defines 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”.⁵

In ancient time, people used to live in hills, jungles, under the open sky and in caves in an uncultured society, with unskilled brain and in an unscientific way. They had a great reverence for the power of nature like Sky, Air, Earth, Sun, and Water. In this way religious beliefs came to be aroused in their minds. Such type of primitive religious beliefs still exist in various parts of the countries like Africa, Australia, North and South America, Islands of Andaman and Nicobar and Islands of Pacific. Thus, Religion may be described as a system of beliefs and practices to different types of societies.

In the North-Eastern part of India, particularly in Assam there are different communities who believe in different types of religion. The Bodo is
such an ethnic and linguistic community living in North-East India particularly in Assam. “Racially, the Bodos belong to the Mongoloid stock of the Indo Mongoloid race and linguistically they belong to Sino –Tibbetan language family”.

They are culturally rich enough and they have their own identity, culture, language, customs, tradition, ethos, and religion. Originally, the traditional religion of the Bodos is known as “Bathou”. But with the advent of modernization during 20th and 21st century due to the wave of globalization, significant changes have taken place in the trend of Bodo religion. The Bodos have got converted into other religions such as Christianity, Brahma - Dharma, Satsang Vihar and other sects of Hinduism. Even the traditional “Bathou” religion has been modified in order to accumulate with the change of time. The changes in traditional religious beliefs of the Bodos bear significant impact on their traditional religion and social life.

“Bathou” is the original religion of the Bodos. “Bathou” believers believe that “Bathou” is the chief God of the Bodos and the creator of the world. Though there is no-written record as to how and when the worship of “Bathou” was started by the Bodos, however from the early folk songs and folk tales of the Bodos we could explore that, like any other communities of the world, the Bodos also began to worship their gods and goddesses to protect themselves from the calamities and furies of nature which they often experienced and also, to save them from diseases and misfortunes.”

They also wondered at the mystery of creation and the systematic functioning of the universe and believed that there might be some supernatural power that governed this universe. This belief led early Bodo people to worship some supernatural power. Moreover, agriculture
had been the main livelihood for the Bodo people. So, they also worshipped their 
gods and goddesses to protect their crops from any kind of damages. In course of 
time, such worships are done out of fear and wonder and have given birth to the 
religion of the Bodos known as “Bathou” religion.

The word “Bathou” is derived from the two Bodo words; these are ‘Ba’ 
and ‘Thou’. ‘Ba’ means ‘Five’ and ‘Thou’ means deep philosophy or “deep 
spiritual concept”. Hence etymologically, “Bathou” means “five “five deep 
spiritual concepts”. In Bathouism, forefathers worshipped supreme God 
(Obonglaoree). ‘Sijew’ tree (Euphorbia splendens) is taken as a symbol of 
“Bathou.” In five philosophies, five is a significant number of “Bathou” religion. 
“According to ‘Bathou’, the world is composed of five material elements, these 
are - Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Sky”. (Ong, Hring, kling, Fwt, and Che). 
Therefore, “Bathou” is deeply related with the principles of five philosophies. 
These principles indicate that they are nature worshippers. The Bodos do not 
worship idols but their supreme God is symbolized by ‘Sijew’ plant (Euphorbia 
Splendens) and they worship under this plant. The “Bathou” altar is made in the 
north- east side of the courtyard of every follower of Bathouism. The animals like 
chicken, pigeon, pig, cock, and goat are sacrificed near the “Bathou altar.” 
‘Sijew’ plant is surrounded by a round fence of small bamboo strips woven by 
five bits symbolizing the five religious and spiritual principles of Bathouism. The 
Bamboo is erected by eighteen strips which express that Bathouists worship 
eighteen types of deities. The “three pairs of these strips in the front side are 
twisted in special way and it is called ‘twisted of dove hearth’ (Daothu Bikha
hebnai). These three pairs of strips express that God is the creator, preserver and destroyer.

3.3 The Idea of God:

The word “God” though commonly used by all human beings is difficult to define. Different religions and different religious thinkers offer different definitions of God. Though there are different definitions about God, still all human beings have the same idea of God. The basic source of our idea of God is pure feeling which is completely non-rational. The idea of God is generally the idea of an eternal, infinite, absolute reality which is the matter of faith and devotion. God is conceived as a Supreme Being and Perfect Being. According to Kant the idea of God is beyond the range of human knowledge or beyond the sense of experience.12

In Bonthouism, the idea of God is derived from the idea of five ‘deep Spiritual Concepts’. Bonthouists believe that ‘Banthou’ is the chief God of Bonthouism. “Banthou” is also known as ‘Aham Guru’, ‘Banthou Bwrai’, ‘Sijew Bwrai’, ‘Jew Bwrai’ (oldest spirit), ‘Siw Bwrai’ and ‘Sibrai’. The oldest spirit is supposed as the holy prophet by the Bodos. Due to the influence of Hinduism ‘Sijew Bwrai’ or ‘Siw Bwrai’ is now believed and replaced as ‘Siva’ among the Bodos.13 But, Bonthouism has its own God. He is ‘Bwrai Bathou’. This great holy prophet ‘Jew Bwrai’, from the most ancient time down through the ages has been believed by the Bodos to have five heads to preach the religious and spiritual concepts on earth. So he is known as the ‘Banthou Bwrai’ or ‘Bura Bathou’. ‘Banthou Bwrai’ has good knowledge of five philosophies. Bodo people say,
‘Bwrai Bathou’ the old spirit of ‘Bathou’, is the oldest spirit of five knowledge. The ‘Sijew’ plant symbolized as the supreme God has five ridges. These five ridges are related to the five philosophies of Bathouism.

3.4 The creation of the world and its concept:

The Bodo people have their own concept of the creation of Universe. They have their own myths and mythology on the creation of the world. Myths are narratives which are told to the society in truthful manners. The past things are told to the ignorant people who accept the things to be truthful. Myths are always associated with theology and ritual. Bascom said that myths are embodiments of dogma and they are usually sacred. The origin of the world, the human beings, birds and animas or nature of the world are narrated through myths. Besides mankind and animal world, myths are explaining the activities of deities. The Bodo people believed that they have been created by the great God ‘Aham Guru’. At the beginning, ‘Aham Guru’ created two male and female birds. The female bird laid three eggs. After that the great voice came down from the heaven and said that from these three eggs three different lives would be born. The female bird began to sit on the eggs, by the time passed away, nothing came out from the three eggs and there was no sign of birth or any form of life. Then the female bird became very sad and started to break one egg out of curiosity, still no sign of life could be seen out of eggs. At that moment suddenly a voice came down from heaven to advise not to break other two eggs and spread the broken egg all scattered. The plants, trees, animals, birds, insects, evil spirits, and ghost were born out of those scattered broken pieces of the egg. After that ‘Aham
‘guru’ created the earth. The Bodo people believed that the earth was created with a small quantity of soil and so the area of land on earth is smaller than the area of the water. After many years from the other two eggs, human beings were born. This was the beginning of the human being on earth. From the first egg were born ‘Mansin-sin Bwrai’ (male) and ‘Mansin-sin Burwi’ (female) and from the second egg ‘Diba Bwrai’ (male) and ‘Diba Burwi’ (female) were born. Just after their birth the four human beings desired to go to heaven. But heaven is meant only for those who were free from any kind of sin. The ‘Aham guru’ however allowed them to go to heaven with the warning that during the journey if any one of them looked back then he or she would fall down on the earth. On this condition the four human beings started the journey to heaven. When they reached mid-way, there was some quarrels on the earth among the creatures and on hearing that ‘Diba Bwrai’ (male) and ‘Diba burwi’ (female) looked back suddenly, but they fell down to earth and died. After a few days the remaining two persons ‘Mansin-sin Bwrai’ and ‘Mansin-sin Burwi’ approached ‘Aham guru’ and requested him to provide them with enough food. In reply ‘Aham guru’ told them to live on this earth. So ‘Mansin-sin Bwrai’ and ‘Mansin-sin Burwi’ were the first human beings created by ‘Aham guru’ and their children are the ancestors of the different groups of human beings.\(^\text{16}\)

Mythology is largely an attempt to give reason of things, but in the concrete and dramatic forms related to imagination. It seeks to explain the origin of religious ritual and ceremonies of agriculture, civilization of the world and the reason for natural phenomena. In mythology explanations take the form of pictures and events which are enough to satisfy primitive intellectual curiosity.
Hence, ‘Aham guru’ or ‘Bathou Bwrai’ is the creator of this world. He is the creator, preserver, and destroyer. Here ‘Bathou Bwrai’ is equated with the trinity of Hinduism and Christianity. Different religions of the world have different names of the creator. According to Hinduism Brahma is the creator of this world. Bishnu is the preserver, Maheswara is the destroyer. Trinity is found in Hindu theology and mythology but ‘Siva’ is just one of the trinity.17 In Christianity God is the creator of this world animals, plants and Adam and Eve. According to Christian belief, when God has descended into this world, He is known as ‘Jesus’. The concept of trinity is also found in Christianity. God is the ‘Father’, God is the ‘son’ (Jesus) and God is the Holy Spirit. But they are one. In the Bible John chapter 10 verse 30 it is said “I and my father is one”. And in John chapter 14: verse10 says “who has seen me, seen the father”. The trinity of Bathouism is expressed by the following “Bathou” verse

*Ranrasi, Gwhwrasi, Mwithahaji,*

*Saseanw Satham, Panseanw Pantham.*

(Meaning: “Oh God (Bwrai Bathou), thou art the creator, thou art the nurturer and thou art the desolator. Thou art the power of three Principles, power in one and one in three.”)18

According to the traditional belief of the Bodos, there was simply great void, in which the Supreme Being (*Aham Guru or Obonglaoree*) existed formlessly. The Supreme Being ‘*Aham Guru*’ desired to live in flesh and blood. He descended in this great void with all human characteristics and thereafter, suddenly a deep feeling originated in his heart and he uttered loudly.
Laoba Laoswm Kaoba Kaoswm,

Ada Gwswm Dwiyao Barswm

(English; with the five working organs and five principles of knowledge jump into the river.) By saying these words, He created the universe in a twinkle of an eye along with the living things and beings on it. ‘Aham Guru’ (The Supreme Being) at his first appearance in this universe in the form of a man called himself ‘Sijew Bwrai,’ ‘Jew Bwrai’ or ‘Bathou Bwrai’ (The oldest spirit or oldest man of ‘Bathou’). He then created his consort ‘Sijew Burwi’. After creation of the universe and human being ‘Aham guru’ created the deities.  

3.5 Bathou Religion:

“Bathou” religion is a tribal religion. Philosophically, in tribal religion there is a system of ‘nature’ worship. Tribal religion is the most primitive form of religion found in the human society. The main characteristic of tribal religion is found to be animistic. Risley says, tribal religion is a kind of animism. The tribal people believe in the presence of supernatural powers at the back of high mountains, flooded rivers, big trees and epidemics. They try to please these powers by different means of propitiations and worships. An important type of animism is ancestral worship. The tribal people try to please these gods and goddesses by offering the sacrifices of different types of animals and birds before them.  

In “Bathou” religion there is a belief in different gods such as home gods (Noni Mwdai), jungle gods, (Hagrani Mwdai), river gods,(Dwini Mwdai), air
gods (Barni Mwdai), sky gods (Okrangni Mwdai) etc. They worship the jungle gods under big trees. If they go for hunting they worship the jungle gods and for fishing they worship the river gods. Like other tribes of India, the Bodos believed in the presence of supernatural powers at the back of every natural object. Hence it can be said that the religion of the Bodos is a kind of ‘animism’. The European writers also opined that the religion of the Bodo people is animistic, which is too generalized a concept.\(^{21}\) At the dawn of civilization, the religion of every ethnic group was animistic. Religious philosophy developed corresponding with the fragrance of civilization.

There are two sects of “Bathou” religion.\(^{22}\)

1. **Bibar Bathou** (Rituals done through offering flowers)

2. **Rupa Muni Bathou** (The ritual of Muni Bathou is also done through offering flowers).

*Buli Bathou* is the traditional original “Bathou” religion of the Bodos. In *Buli Bathou* animals and birds are sacrificed at the time of worship.\(^{23}\)

In *Bibar Bathou* and *Rupa Muni Bathou* animal sacrifice is completely prohibited. In these two sects religious rituals are done through offering flowers in place of animal sacrifice.

Bathouism is based on five moral and spiritual messages, which guide religious rituals. This are:

1. Messages on Holy Realization: The realization of the Supreme Soul as well as the realization of the five great elements.

3. Messages on Love: According to “Bathou” religion, there are five senses of ‘Love’
   
   a) Love to Eternal God.

   b) Love to fellow-beings.

   c) Love to the wife and children.

   d) Love to other lower animals and objects of nature.

   e) Love to one’s motherland and the world.


5. Messages on Hatred: - there are five kinds of messages on hatred
   
   a) Hatred for the murderer.

   b) Hatred for the thief.

   c) Hatred for the liar

   d) Hatred for one indulging in illicit and unnatural intercourse.

   e) Hatred for the association with a man guilty of offence.
‘Kherai’ puja and ‘Garja’ puja are the two important Pujas as well as festivals of the Bodos. These are given below-

3.6 Kherai Puja:

Kherai puja is performed in Bathouism for the welfare of both private and public lives. The Kherai puja is a religious festival of the Bodos. The chief God of the Bodos is known as ‘Kharia Bwrai’ or “Bathou Bwrai,” who is endowed with all qualities. Therefore, some believed that the Kherai puja is performed in his name only. But along with ‘Bura Bathou’, many other gods and goddesses are also worhsipped at the time of Kherai puja. There are some more explanations about Kherai. One explanation is that ‘Khe,’ means to ‘kneel down’, ‘Rai’ means to pray to God, hence it means ‘knee down before God.’ Another explanation is that when a goat and a pig are sacrificed before “Bathou,” the sound ‘Khe’ comes out of the neck of these animals. Therefore, some “Bathou” worshippers believed that the word ‘Kherai’ is originated from the sound ‘Khe’. Some other explanation is that the word ‘Kherai’ is a combination of two sounds ‘Khe’ and ‘Rai’ which mean puja or the chanting formula before the chief God ‘Bathou’.

There are four types of Kherai puja, these are as follows:

1. Darshan Kherai: This kherai puja is meant for Mainao who is identified with Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth. Darshan kherai is performed during the first week of the month of ‘Kati’ or Kartik. So it is also called as ‘Lakhi Kherai’. Darshan Kherai is also known as ‘Sali kherai’. Because it is related with winter crop ‘Sali’.
2. **Umrao Kherai:** *Umrao Kherai* is done in the name of *Ashu Kherai*, connected with the *Ashu* or summer season crops. This puja is observed during the month of ‘Ashara’. This puja is performed for the wellbeing of the villagers.

3. **Phalw Kherai:** *Phalw Kherai* is performed in the name of thanks giving to God for the winter crops. ‘*Phalo kherai*’ is also known as ‘*Dansrang kherai*’. ‘*Phalo kherai*’ is performed during the time of ‘*Magha Purnima*’ or the full moon night of the ‘*Magha*’.

4. **Noaoni Kherai:** When *Kherai* puja is performed at home by a family, it is called noaoni *Kherai*. So whenever family face any trouble then this ‘*Kherai*’ puja is performed at family.

In Bathouism, there is no separate place or temple or any fixed place for ‘*Kherai*’ worship. The Bodos select any suitable place for *Kherai* puja. The altar is prepared by the intending worshippers. The altar is a long one and is divided into three parts. It starts from the south and ends in the northern end. Generally, the grazing field is selected in order to make an altar for the ‘*Kherai*’ puja. In the first part of the altar a piece of cloth is hung above the ground. It indicates the formless existence of God, the ‘*Obonglaoree*.’ In the middle part ‘Bathou’ is symbolized by a planted ‘*Sijew*’ tree. The ‘*Sijew*’ tree is surrounded by a round fence of small bamboo strips folded with five steps symbolizing the religious and spiritual principles. Under the ‘*Sijew*’ tree an earthen lamp is lighted (*Alari Bati*) along with five shares of areca nuts and betel leaves, and green bananas. Other sacred things are put on the five plantain leaflets placed under the ‘*Sijew*’ tree and
a pot is kept with holy water at the top of Jatrasi plants or ‘Tulsi’ plants for sprinkling the holy water from the pot on the altar. For the symbol of creation an egg and as a symbol of truth a piece of stone are kept in front of the “Bathou.” In the last part, some rows of a kind of sacred plant are planted leading to the northern end where goddess of wealth is kept.25

3.7 Garja Puja:

Garja puja is one of the most important pujas of the ‘Bathou’ religion. The meaning of the Garja is purification. Some scholars have defined the meaning of the word as a way of making one free from danger. The word ‘Garja’ in Bodo means “garnai or garjanai”.26 In English, it is ‘expulsion’ or ‘discharging’. During the time of Garja puja in a village, some evil spirits are expelled or discharged from the village. When the evil spirits are expelled or discharged from the village it is called ‘Bhasainai’ in Bodo. ‘Bhasainai’ means floating away in the river. Generally, the harmful evil spirits who create diseases in the village are expelled from the village or areas by performing the ‘Garja’ puja. Among the non- Bodo neighbouring Hindu people, a similar puja is performed and it is called by them the ‘Dinga puja’.

The idea of purity is most important concept in every religion. The Bodos perform the Garja puja to purify themselves. They perform the ‘Garja puja’ after any seasonal festival like ‘Baisagu’, etc. They believe that at the annual festival the participants of the villagers become impure due to various circumstances like - eating, merry making, walking, drinking rice-beer from one house to other. So, in order to purify themselves they perform Garja puja at their villages. Such
beliefs of the Bodos help them to maintain the sacredness and purity among them. They also believe that if anyone commits any kind of sin in the village, then he or she has to suffer from disease in the village, and if some epidemic appears in a family and in the village then the villagers perform the Garja puja to protect themselves from it.

Through the Garja puja the villagers examine the villages whether it is right or not. They examine the villages before one night of the proposed Garja puja. In the evening the altar of the Garja puja is made clean after washing it with holy water. A piece of the plantain leaf is placed on the altar and on it a pair of holy basil leaves, nine grains of rice are also placed together and then these things are covered with a bamboo basket (don). Next day, early in the morning, these things are examined. If the articles are found all right it is believed that villagers are alright and free from the danger. But, if these articles are found scattered or some of them are missing, then it is believed that villagers are not all right.27 Then the villagers believe that someone among them has committed the illegal or immoral activities. Then at that time the guilty person is compelled to confess before the gods of the ‘Garja’ puja. Such type of performance is called purifying the villagers before the ‘Garja’ gods, which is called ‘Garja’ or expulsion.28

There is no fixed date for the ‘Garja’ puja. The Bodos generally perform it two times in a year. A lonely place of the grazing field which is covered with jungle is selected for the ‘Garja puja, and that place is called ‘Garja altar’. The first Garja puja is performed during the Assamese months of ‘Jeth’ and ‘Ashar.’
The second ‘Garja’ puja is performed during the Assamese months of ‘Kati’ and ‘Aghon,’ Different types of gods and goddesses are worshipped during Garja puja.29


These are different types of worshipping ‘Garja’ gods at the time of ‘Garja’ religious festival, though it is impossible to recognize all the Garjas. But the Bathou worshippers recognize the following Garjas.

1) **Lakhi Garja:** Lakhi Garja is also known as Lakshmi Garja. It has also another name “Mainao”, the goddess of the wealth. The Bodos propitiate to goddess “Lakshmi” for the welfare and for the successful crops and harvest of the villagers.

2) **Ashu Garja:** The Bodo people cultivate two types of crops in a season. These are Sali Mai and Ashu Mai. Mai means paddy. The Bodo people observe this Garja for the fruitfulness of Ashu crops.
3) **Dhan Kubir Garja**: Dhan Kubir is also the god of wealth according to the Bodos. They appease this god to save the wealth of the villagers.

4) **Bwrai Raja Garja**: Bwrai Raja is also known as “Bathou Bwrai” for the general welfare of the village and the families. The Bodos also occasionally specify the Bwrai Raja, the chief God.

5) **Harsha Garja (Non-Bodo Garja)**: Mahadeo is the name of non-Bodo garja God. For Him a place is given at the time of Garja puja. His followers are Sila Rai, Rupa Rai, Bera Bhanga, Santa Mara, Dhangka Mara, etc.

Thus, different types of gods and goddesses are worshipped in ‘Kherai’ and ‘Garja’ puja. Specially the gods, goddesses which are worshipped in ‘Garja’ puja are called ‘Garja’ gods and goddesses.

Thus, ‘Kherai’ and ‘Garja’ puja are the two important religious pujas or festivals of the Bodos.

During the time of the ‘Kherai’ puja and ‘Garja’ puja of the “Bathou” religion three persons are very important to perform the religious rites. They are ‘Ôja’, (medicine man) ‘Douri’, (man priest) and ‘Deodini’ (woman priest). The Bodos worship their gods and goddesses during the ‘Kherai’ puja. In the ‘Kherai’ puja the two persons, ‘Deodini’ and ‘Douri’ remain as the holy custodians under the guidance of the ‘Ôja’, (medicine man). ‘Ôja’ (Medicine man) is the most important person of the ‘Bathou’ puja. With the help of the ‘Douri’ and the ‘Ôja’
all the rituals of the ‘Kherai’ puja are performed by Deodini. In the ‘Kherai’
puja, ‘Deodini’ performs most of the essential rites with the help of the ‘Oja’.
‘Deodini’ is the key dancer of the ‘Kherai’ puja. She demonstrates different
dances to propitiate the gods and the goddesses. The traditional musical
instruments like, Kham (drum), Sifung (flute), and Jotha (cymbal) are inseparable
parts of ‘Kherai’ puja.30

3.8 Oja (Medicine man):

‘Oja’ is the most important person of the “Bathou”. During the ‘Kherai’
puja ‘Oja’ instructs the worshippers and other co-workers to help ‘Deodini’
(women priest) in performing ‘Kherai’ puja smoothly. The villagers are obliged
to follow his advice when they arrange a ‘Kherai’ puja. ‘Oja’ (Medicine man) is
the only person to chant the mantras and give instruction at the time of puja.
Traditionally, it is believed that the ‘Oja’ (Medicine man) is able to understand
the motives of the gods and goddesses at the time of the puja. He enchants the
mantras to please the gods and goddesses at the time of puja.31

The mantras (prayer) are given below; which are chanted by the ‘Oja’ at
the time of the ‘Kherai’ puja.

“Wi Phiphaguru,

Anan Gossai, Binan Gossai,

Nwng ondw nwngni ogiyan Boro bichpwrkhwo,

Wi swrjigiri nwng, Nwngnw phwtangw, Nwngnw langw,
Nwngniprai dershin laosin raobw gwilia,

Wi, thaiqiri khaong kaongba,

Sijewni siru siriba,

Sifungni gudunga gudunba, Bathou ni bandwa bandwba,

Bodo bwrain raowa phonga,

Bima phipha guru binikainw Bathou pathiyanwi Sijew Gaiwanwi, gasa saonanwi, kham jotha, sifung lananwi nwnng phipakhwo onsayw, Ondw afha phipaguru Ondw;

Ondor singao gwglwiswnanwi tanai Boro phishapwrkwo ondw nwnng,

Wi phipaguru khwmsniprai bokonanwi srangao langdw jwnghkhwo,

Swrgnwpri bwr sarsrinwnw hordw nwnng jwnng phisaphwrnw.”

Rendering the above chant in English it follows as-

(Oh God, our father, Protect your ignorant children, You are the Creator, preserver and destroyer, All in one, you are the peerless; that the Dellenis Indica fruit has five rinds, The Euphorbia splenden has five edges, The flute has five holes; The Bathou has five knot, the elderly Bodo old man has five moral words, We plant the Sijew on the altar, light the flame of oil and worship you, With playing Kham, (Bodo drum) Jotha, (Cymbal) Sifung (a bamboo flute). Oh Father be merciful, have mercy on your Bodo sons, steeped in darkness
of ignorance, give light to us father, from darkness to light, bless your children from Heaven). 32

During the puja the above prayer is offered by the ‘Oja’ to welcome the gods and goddesses through the ‘Deodini’ (women priest). At the time of prayer ‘Oja’ is found in half sitting position without using tool and mate. ‘Douri’ (man priest) is also in the same position just like half sitting position which is called ‘Joslongnai’ in Bodo.

3.9 Douri (Man Priest):

‘Douri’ is the priest among the “Bathou” believers. He performs all kind of religious rites among the believers. ‘Douri’ is the most important person of the village for the ‘Bathouists.’ ‘Douri’ remains as the holy custodian under the guidance of the ‘Oja’ (medicine man). ‘Douri’ is the co-worker of the ‘Oja’. With the help of the ‘Douri’, ‘Oja’ performs all kind of religious rites at the time of puja.

3.10 Deodini (Woman priest):

‘Deodini’ is the key dancer during the time of the ‘Kherai’ puja. All the items of the ‘Kherai’ puja are performed by ‘Deoudini’. 33 While she dances, two Drums (Kham), two bamboo flutes (Sifung) and two cymbals (Jotha) are played. While ‘Deodini’ dances, she holds a long sword (thungri) and a shield (Dahal). At the time of dance ‘Deodini’ expresses the nature of gods and goddesses. She demonstrates different type of dances to express each god and goddess. While she performs the dance she changes her nature into three types.
a. She changes her mood

b. She assimilates herself with gods and goddesses

c. She expresses the nature of different gods and goddesses.

As discussed above ‘Deodini’ demonstrates different type of dances to propitiate gods and goddesses. Some of these dances are given below;

1. **Bathou gidingnai dance: (Moving round Bathou altar)**

   This dance is a type of dance, where ‘Deodini’ moves round the ‘Bathou’ altar for several times.

2. **Chatrali dance (Dance of war):**

   In this dance ‘Deodini’ holds a sword by her right hand and a shield by her left hand. She dances by moving round the ‘Bathou’ altar. She is believed to be demonstrating the war dance in the name of goddess of war, ‘Ranchandri’ or ‘Ranphagli’.

3. **Dhal shibnai (Twisting shield):**

   In this dance, ‘Deodini’ demonstrates the tactics of how a person can save himself from the attack of the enemies in the battle field. This dance is related with the ‘Bura Ailong’, the body guard of ‘Bathou bwrai’.

4. **Kwijima phonai: (Dance of destroying enemies)**

   In this dance ‘Deodini’ demonstrates the tactics to destroy enemies in the battle field. This dance is related with ‘Abla Kungur’, the chief follower of ‘Bathou’.
5. **Gandoula bwnnai (Tactics of destroying enemies):**

This dance is performed for the Manasu goddess. In this dance ‘Deodini’ demonstrates the tactics to destroy the enemies by her dance.

6. **Chanalaw banai (Dance for preparation for battle):**

This dance is related with the god *Abla Kungur*, a very powerful god. This dance expresses and demonstrates the preparation for the battle.

7. **Muphur Gelenai (Play of Bear):**

This dance expresses that god has the nature of *Muphur* (bear). This dance by ‘Deodini’ shows the nature of *Muphur* (bear).

8. **Nao Jaonai: (Boat sailing.)**

This dance is the dance for the deity ‘Laokar Gossai’ (cowherd). He is also identified with *Lord Krishna* of Hinduism. This dance shows the greatness of the ‘Laokar Gossai’, Lord Krishna.

9. **Khamao Barkwnai: (Jump on the drum):**

*Rajkhandra* is the grandson of ‘Bathou’. At the time of the ‘Kherai’ puja ‘Deodini’ jumps on the ‘Kham’ (drum). This dance is danced at the time of propitiating *Rajkhandra*. The dance is performed by ‘Deodini’. It is called ‘Khamao Barkwnai’ dance.

10. **Dao thwi lwngnai (Sucking the blood of hens):**

When ‘Deodini’ performs this dance, she takes the blood of sacrificed hen and cock at a ‘khurwi’ (cup) and she dances around the altar with the music
of ‘Kham’, Jotha (Cymbal) and ‘Sifung’ (flute) and drinks it by standing in front of the “Bathou” altar.

11. **Mwshakaori Mwshanai: (Dance of entertainment):**

   This dance is performed in the name of god ‘Khaila’. He is the messenger of the ‘Bathou Bwrai’.

12. **Maoji Membrang gelenai (Spotted cat dance):**

   This dance is performed by ‘Deodini’ at the time of Kherai puja for the recovery of patients of the family.

13. **Gorai Dabrainai (Horse riding dance):**

   *Gorai dabrainai* (horse riding) dance is danced in the name of ‘Basmati’ deity. When dance is over, she tells the fortune of the people, good and bad days of the villagers, success and failure of the cultivation and the duties and responsibilities of the villagers for safeguarding from any kind of danger in future.

**3.11 Belief in Many Gods and Goddesses:**

“Bathou” is the chief God of Bathouism. So, “Bathou” religion is regarded as monotheistic religion. In Bathouism, along with ‘Bathou Bwrai’, the Bodos worship many gods and goddesses. In that sense “Bathou” religion may be called polytheistic religion.35 But, Other gods and goddesses are regarded as minor gods in Bathouism. In Hinduism too many gods and goddesses are believed and worshipped. Though the Hindus believe in many gods and goddesses yet there is only one God also in Hinduism. In general though they believe in many gods and goddesses, yet Hinduism may be regarded as a
monotheistic religion. At the same time Hinduism is monotheistic, polytheistic and also atheistic. Though ‘Bathou Bwrai’ or the ‘Bura Bathou’ is the Chief God of the Bodos, in Bathouism along with the Bura Bathou, many other gods and goddesses are also worshipped at the time of ‘Kherai puja.’ They are: Bathou Bwrai, Ailong, Agrang, Khwila, Kharji, Rajkandra, Song Raja, Alai Kungri, Bhandari, Ranchandri or Ranphagli, Bulli Buri, Laokjar Gossai, Basmuty, Ablakungur, Jwmwn, Nowab Badsa (external god).  

1. **Bathou bwrai**- He is also known as ‘Bura Bathou’. He is the Chief God of ‘Bathou’ religion. The Bodos give him the highest position among the gods. The betel leaves and areca nuts along with a pig are offered in his name.

2. **Ailong**- *(the god of earth)* He is the body guard of ‘Bathou Bwrai’.

   A cock is offered to him.

3. **Agrang** – *(the god of water)* Agrang is the general of the chief God.

   A cock is sacrificed for him.

4. **Khwila** – *(the god of air)* Khwila is the chief manager of the chief God. A cock is sacrificed for him.

5. **Kharji** – *(the god of light)* He is the chief follower of the chief God.

   A cock is sacrificed for him.

6. **Rajkandra** - *(the god of sky)* He is also the follower of the ‘Bura Bathou’. A pig is offered to him.
7. *Song Raja*- He is the owner of the wild animals and a follower of the “Bura Bathou.” The hunters propitiate him before entering into the jungle for hunting; a red cock is offered to him. His constant companion is ‘Sang Rani’.

8. *Alai Kungri*- Alai kungri is the princess goddess and the follower of the “Bathou Burwi.” A pig is offered to her.

9. *Bhandari* - She is the owner of the store house of the food staffs. She is offered a cock.

10. *Ranchandri or Ran Phagli* - She is known as the goddess of war. Before going to any battle field she is to be propitiated with a cock.

11. *Bulli Buri*- *Bulli Buri* is regarded to be the owner of fishes. *Bulli Buri* is worshipped before starting for fishing. She is also regarded as the goddess of knowledge and medicine. A pig is sacrificed for Bulli Buri.

12. *Laokhar Gossai* - He is the god of cowherds. This God is identified by Hindus as Lord Krishna. A pair of pigeon is set free in the name of cowherds.

13. *Basmuty*- she is regarded as the follower of “Bathou”.

14. *Ablakungur*- He is a very powerful god. He is also the follower of the ‘Bura Bathou’. For him a red cock is sacrificed

15. *Jwmwn*- He is also the follower of the ‘Bura Bathou’.
16. **Nowab Badsah** (external god)-

A seat is also given for this god during the time of *Kherai* puja. A cock is sacrificed in the name of external god.

3.12 **Transmigration of the Soul:**

Like Hinduism, the Bodos believe in the law of ‘Karma’. Every good action brings good consequences and every bad action brings bad consequences. This is called ‘*Karma Phala*’. This ‘*Karma Phala*’ determines our present or future life. Bathouism believes in the transmigration of the soul. After the death of human body, the soul is transmigrated from one body to another body. There is a continuous series of births and deaths in human life. This belief is based on the rites of birth and death. When the new baby is born in a family, the baby is sprinkled with holy water; the following verse is uttered in the Bodo society.37

*Oi Gotho, nwngba gwdw swrrmwn?*

*Bangal Na Jungal,*

*Garo Na Gongar,*

*Harsa Na Mephal mwn,*

*Dinwiniprai nwng Bodo Jabai.*

In English- *(Whoever you were, whether you were a Muslim, a Garo, or a Bhutia or a Non-Bodo or a Nepali, you have become a Bodo from today.)*
The Bodos believe in some spirits. This spirit is called in Bodo ‘Mwdai’. ‘Mwdai’ is the invisible spirit who acts upon the body for sickness, and who brings natural calamities etc. These are the results of the malevolent spirit. Sometimes, he is also propitiated by frequent offerings of pigs, goat, red cocks etc. In earlier time they believed that ‘Mwdai’ (invisible spiritual being) makes them inclined towards faith in supernatural powers. If any family member suffers from fever any disease then they think of ‘Mwdai ordwng’ (possesed by evil spirit) or ‘Mwdai homdwng’. But in a certain stage of their mental development the Bodos are undoubtedly influenced far more by what they ‘fear’ than by what they ‘love’, and this truth is justified by Rev. S. Endle that Kachari race is the most unqualified. In earlier days if people used to suffer from malarial disease frequently, the Bodos believed it to be due to “Mwdai Ornai”. (Possesed by evil spirit) Scholars like Bhaben Narji, Rev. S. Endle, K. Brahma, R.N. Mushahari, and P.C. Bhattacharya. M. Choudhury, have done extensive research on different aspects of the Bodos in Assam.

3.13 Worhsip of the female deity:

In Bathouism, there is also a ritual of worshipping female deity. The belief in female deities is prevalent among the Indo-mongoloid Bodo group of people. The Bodos worship the consort of ‘Bura Bathou’, ‘Sijew Burwi’ as a female deity.” She is regarded by the Bodos, as their mother who brings them up and the Bodos are regard ‘Bwrai Bathou’ as their almighty father. She is also called “Bima Baisamuti” (mother earth). So the female deity worship was prevalent among the non Aryan Indo-Mongoloid people. The Bodo people
worship ‘Bulli Buri’ and ‘Ranchandri’ as ‘female deities’. These goddesses are also recognized by the Deori people who are the group of the Bodos and they worship ‘Keshaikhati’ at the ‘Tamreswari’ temple, which was situated at the bank of the river ‘Dhala or Dhol’, 18 miles away from Sadiya. There are many goddesses in Bathouism which are not worshipped as female deites.

3.14 Influences of other Religions:

Religion is instinctive to man. Men are the only religious beings. The Bodos and other tribes of the north-east region followed religious systems of their own. In the pre historical period, the religious systems were free from influences of other religious systems; there were no influences from any other religion to the indigenous religion of the Bodos due to the geographical isolation and communication gap. But in the first half of the 19th century during the time of king ‘Iragdao’, the religious system of the Bodos were largely influenced by other religions. The Bodo group of the plain tribes of Assam practise different types of religion. The impact on the traditional religion of the Bodos may be discussed in the following manner-

3.14.1 Influence of Hinduism:

During the period of the last king of the Bodos, the Bodos were influenced by the Hindu religion to a great extent. The king ‘Iragdao’ changed his name to Gobindo Chandra under the influence of the Hindu priests. It is believed that after the conversion of the king, most of the people of his kingdom also had been converted into Hinduism. Thus, the pure traditional Bathou religion has been mixed up with Hinduism.
There are different sects of Hinduism. Saivism had a very strong hold in Assam during the period of several Indo-Mongoloid ruling dynasties. At that time, Saivism was followed by the Bodo Kings as well as by the kings like Pushya, Barman, Salastambha, Brahma Pala, etc. and the Koch kings. It is clearly mentioned in the Puranas and other historical documents that the kings like Bhagadatta, Bajradatta and Banasura were followers of Saivism. From the above discussions it is known that Saivism had greatly influenced the Bodo people.

Neo-Vaisnavism in Assam was initiated by Sri Sankaradeva. He was successful in spreading the ‘Eka Sarania Nama Dharma’ among the Kacharis. Most of the non- Aryan people were also influenced by the Neo-Vaisnavism of Sri Sankaradeva. Some Bodos were converted themselves into this religion. The Bodo people who were converted by the Neo-Vaisnavism were called ‘Sarnia’, ‘Das’. They were greatly influenced by the Neo- Vaisnavism. According to them “Bathou” religion was not systematic in its religious practices and thus, they lost their religious rituals and practices as well. This was how ‘Bathou’ religion was influenced by Vaisnavism.

3.14.2 Influence of Christianity:

The Bodo people were influenced by the teachings of the Christian missionaries when the missionaries came to India to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The missionaries engaged themselves into some activities for the development of the Bodo society. “The activities of missionaries directly or indirectly freed the indigenous people from certain superstitious beliefs and
practices.” In 1884, Rev. Sidney Endle published the Bodo grammar for the first time. After Endle, Rev. L.O. Skreisrud wrote a short Grammar of the Bodo language in 1989. The Christian missionaries published various types of books of the Bodos. Some of these great works are such as, ‘Linguistic Survey of India’ by Grierson and the ‘Descriptive Ethnology’ of Bengal by Dalton extended good contribution towards the study of the Bodo language, culture, and history. The missionaries also tried to introduce Bodo textbooks in the primary level of school. With this aim in view, they published books in Bodo language viz. Gonthoni Lekha (children book) in 1951, Boroni poraigra Bijab (for class I) and for class - II. All of these activities of the Christian missionaries made an impact on the Bodo society as a whole. Due to the influence of Christianity, the Bodos gave up old customs, rituals and most of them were converted into Christianity.

3.14.3 Brahma Dharma:

In the last part of the 19th century a great confusion came in the religious affairs among the Bodos. In those days the society of the Bodos were sunk in the midst of the evils, superstitious beliefs, confusions of the religion and disorders of the social systems. Some of the Bodos were involved in excessive and regular use of liquor and meat in the name of religious festivity which was lasted more than one week and had demoralized the life of the common people as a whole. The society of the Bodo people was neglected by other people. Some of the Bodos took the ‘Saran’ under Sri Sankaradeva’s “Vaisnavism”. Some were converted into Hinduism, Christianity, Satsang Vihar and some remained in the same religion. In the mean time when Christian missionaries came to preach the
gospel of the Jesus Christ to the North-East, many tribals were converted and the Bodos even got converted into Christian religion. At this critical juncture a great man appeared among the Bodos. His name was Kalicharan Brahma who had rescued to a great extent the Bodos from social evils with a new religion called Brahma Dharma. Kalicharan Brahma, a Bodo social and religious reformer thought that Brahma Dharma was appropriate for the Bodos due to the negligence of the non-Bodo people, and all religions and social systems of the Bodos should be replaced by the Brahma Dharma immediately. He was influenced by the book “Sarnitya Kriya” of Swami Sibnarayan Param Hamgsa. Kalicharan Brahma accepted the Brahma dharma under the influence of Sibnarayan Paramhamgsa in 1905.44 Under the influence of Kalicharan Brahma most of the Bodo people were converted into Brahma Dharma.

This religion brought many changes to the “Bathou” religion. Brahma Dharma prohibited sacrifices of animals, preparation and drinking of alcoholic substances etc. It also emphasized on offering ‘Hom Jagya’. Those who accepted the Brahma Dharma wrote their titles as Brahma. Brahma Dharma largely influenced the Bodo community as well as the “Bathou” religion.

Now, it can be said that the Bodos and other tribes of the north-east region followed religious systems of their own even though they were influenced by Hinduism or other religions. Though some Bodos have converted themselves into other religions, the main Religion of the Bodos is “Bathou.” “Bathou” is Chief God of the Bodos. He is never represented in an idol form, but is well evident through his living symbol, the ‘Si+jew’ plant (Euphorbia splendens). The
Bodos are not idol worshippers, but nature worshippers. If we study the traditional “Bathou” religion, then we find that ‘Bathouists’ were the nature-worshippers. It is said that the religious beliefs and practices of the Hindus of Assam are the outcome of the gradual development of the religious beliefs and practices that were prevalent among the indigenous non-Hindu people, mainly the Indo-Mongoloid Bodo-Kacharis, who had been dominating the north-eastern region since the pre-historic period. Any usual happening in their habitat was thought to be the act of supernatural power, Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Sun, and they worshipped them. The religion of the Bodos rests largely on totemistic basis. In early days totemic rites rigidly bounded the Bodo society. Sacrifice was the most common feature among the primitive societies of the world. But due to the influence of modernity, the traditional customs of the “Bathou” religion have been changing. Hence, In ‘Brahma Dharma’ “animal sacrifices have been replaced by offering ‘Hom Jogya’ and ‘Siva’ is worshipped in Brahma Bathouism.” “Bathou” priests now a day have developed different concepts about “Bathou” religion. Religion exercises a tremendous influence upon the life of the individual and that of the community. Religious beliefs usually act as great kinetic forces. The Bodo’s life cycle, more or less centers round the three most important rites of passage viz, birth, marriage and death. At every stage rites are performed for purification. “Bathou” religion is a monotheistic religion. If other gods and goddesses come into discussion then “Bathou” religion can be called ‘polytheistic’. Because the Bodos have different gods with different names and portfolios according to their abilities. Others gods and goddesses are not the manifestations of “Bathou”, as found in Hinduism, and other religions of the
world. But all other gods and goddesses are minor gods, within “Bathou” according to “Bathouism”, who are the followers of the “Bathou”. God “Bathou” is ruling over them as a king. Hence, “Bathou” is called God in-chief. “Bathou” religion is not, at the same time monotheistic and polytheistic. The Bodos’ conception of “Bathou” religion is a universal and primitive religion, it is a religion of humanity.

Agriculture and traditional festivals are the important parts of the culture of the Bodos. The culture of the Bodo is meaningless without agriculture and traditional festivals. Agriculture is basic part in the culture of the Bodos. The festivals of the Bodos are divided into three types. These are discussed in the next chapter-IV.
References:


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35. Ibid, p.176

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