RELIGION OF THE BONVS
AND
THEIR SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSITION

CHAPTER II
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THE BATHOU RELIGION AND TRADITIONAL BORO
SOCIETY: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Religion concerns belief and social institution and maintains the social relationship that exists in society. Individual, family and community life in general are regulated by religion, which influence people's behaviour, action, faith for enforcing social norms and ethics. Religion is also responsible for people's foot habit, organization of institution, decision-making, exercise of socio-economic life. Changes in the society and organization are motivated by religion. So the religion is a system of belief as well as and agent of value enforcement and action.¹

BATHOU RELIGION

The traditional religion of the Boros is known as Bathou dharma, which incorporates rites, rituals, social norms, ethics and philosophy of the Boros. Endle describes the Boro religion as "animist and its under-lying principle is characteristically one of the fear and dread."²
But P. C. Bhattacharjee and M. Hajowari give different opinion regarding the *Bathou* religion. *Bathou*, the supreme god of Boros and its worship, is related to origin and creation. (*ba* means five and *thou* means depth). The supreme god is also known as Sibrui (Siva in Hindu). He, with the help of his wife Sibrui, created the universe, and the first man Monsinsin. But Monsinsin was celibate for life, so Sibrui and his wife Sibrui created man Darimuba and women Singrimuba for the propagation of mankind and the *Sijou* tree (*Euphorbia splenden*) was created as an emblem of supreme god at the altar.  

M. Hajowari describes that the Boros worship Sibrui or Siva in different names, such as Bathou Brai, Bura Bthou, Song Raja, Khuria or Khoriya Brai and Mahadeo and his wife Sibrui or Parbati is worshipped with the names- Mainao, Lakhi, Songburoy and Burli Buray etc. According to *Bathou* religion Siva or Sibrui is not a deity, but he is above of all deities. He is the supreme god, Almighty and creator of all beings. Every existence is his creation and he nourishes them all but sometimes he is in furious mood to cause destruction. So the Boros worship him for the prosperity of mankind.

On the other Siva is belief to be the originator of all form of dances, music, play and art. Jarapagla is another name of Nataraja, who is Siva, the Divine-dancer. Jara Pagla was an expert dancer and singer who’s Character resembles to that of Aryan god Siva. Most probably the *Bathou* religion of the Boros long since came into contact with the *Saivism* cult of Hindu as there are many common elements visible in both the religion. Lord Siva performed a cosmic dance known as *Tandava Nritya* and it is said that Jara Pagla in his
cosmic dance produced ragas like Basanta Bhairava, Panchamas, Megha Parvati whom the Boros call Bhurlum Buri or Sibraini.

The origin of the Siva cult cannot be traced. "The newly discovered Indus valley civilization is considered to be the older than the Vedic civilization by a good many modern historian. The relics of that pre-historic age definitely indicate that the Siva cult and the Yoga system were in a sufficiently advanced stage even in that time." So it can be said that Siva cult existed in India even before the coming of Aryans. Like Sibrai, Siva is also known as Bhutapati, Pasupati, Pretapati, and Ganapati. He is the supreme god, creator and protector of all creatures. Siva does not make any demand upon his worshipper that they may find it difficult to meet. Any man, woman, any caste or race can offer direct worship to him without the help of Brahma priest. No body is untouchable to Siva. "It is the place in which all creatures must ultimately take refuge." So it can be said that the Bathou dharma and Siva cult were identical in one time and must have originated from the same concept.

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


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

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

The Boros worship Bathou Brai or Siva as their supreme god along with other gods and goddesses. Though idol-worship is not prevalent among the Boros, yet, they worship sijou plant (Euphorbia splenden) as the symbol of Siva. The sijou plant has peculiar
characteristics. Its botanical name is Nerifolia, belonging to cactus family. It has five ridges and five depressions. Its thorns grow in pairs, leaves resemble hoods of serpents and the branches grow vertically upwards like the Trishul of Siva. It is everlasting. If cut it hardly withers away. If thrown on the ground it survives automatically, on the water it remains for a pretty long time. So it was the best choice of the Boro ancestors to worship it as a symbol of Siva. The sijou is planted on the elevated altar of Siva encircled with five pairs of bamboo splits in five layers interwoven with sixteen pairs of split bamboo posts. The holy basil and jatrsi plant (a kind of shrub) are also planted near sijou. The altar comprising all these materials is termed Bathou. Since the Bathou is conceived to be an altar of Siva, he is also known as Bathou Brai or Bura Bathou.

KHERAI WORSHIP:

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

PHILOSOPHY OF BATHOU:

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

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

A death person should be forgotten peacefully. After the cremation, purification should be done with religious rites.  

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

The Boros have five laws to punish and purify a guilty person, they are- 1. Agarbad, 2. Phongsloobad, 3. Daokibad, 4. Khaoyalibad, and 5. Khoulobodbad.

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

SOCIETY AND CULTURE:

The traditional Boro society, which came into contact with different culture and societies underwent a great change in the 20th century. The change in the different institutional level have been taking place from time to time and these changes are visible in the traditional institutions like, religion, marriage, economy, social
customs and also in their position and status of men and women, foot
habit, dress and other spheres of life. The changes are found in the
forms of sanskritization, modernization and also westernization to
some extent. The prime factor of these changes are, certainly the
influence of Hinduism, spreading of higher education among the
Boros and the Development science and technology. But the upward
movement in the traditional Boro society has occurred without losing
their basic values, norms and identity.

The Boro culture is a part and parcel of Indo-Mongoloid
culture. This subject is vast and complicated. The mongoloid Boro
culture of Assam has, to some extent, influence the Indic (Indo –
Aryan) Assamese culture or vice-versa. The different Boro culture
which has influenced and contributed in the development of Assamese
culture has been analyzed and discussed by many renown scholars.15

How did the Boros contributed in the evolution of the great
Indian culture and the course of Indian history is a hidden part of the
history of this land. Briefly it was a revolution of culture. Did the
Brahmin priest play main role in bringing this culture among the
Boros of Assam and Bengal. "But it was not a case of one sided
influence or absorption. It was a case of mongoloid speeches and
ideologies, cult and customs being engrafted on the stock of Hindu
(i.e. Indo- Aryan cum Austric and Dravidian) speech ideologies and
cult and customs"16

The Boros of entire Assam and Bengal have been in constant
touch with Assamese and Bengali who are more advance than the
Boros. The rituals, customs, living standards, food habit, dress manner
of the Boros are influenced by their neighbouring Aryans in many respects. A comparative study between pre-sanskritized Boro society and present Boro society shows two distinct features of the same society. So effort has been made to narrate and analyze both traditional and sanskritized form of the Bodo society.

FAMILY AND INHERITANCE:

The Boro society is primarily patriarchal, matrilineal and patrilocal with few elements of matriarchal characteristics. The family members live together at home called Nokhor or family. A Nokhor consist of father, mother, sons, daughter, brothers and sisters etc. Father is the head of the family, who is obeyed by other members of the Nokhar. In absence of father or at his death the eldest son or mother (if son is not matured) becomes the head. There are both joint nuclear families among the Boros.

A typical Boro family builds several houses within the compound according to their necessity. The main house nomano stands in the north of the compound or homestead and the granary in the east. The main house nomano is devided into three rooms. The first room, known as khopra, is used for sleeping; the second, akhong, is used for dinning and the third room, ishing is used for cooking and the altars of Bathou Brai (chief deity) and Mainao (goddess of wealth) are placed there for worship. The guest house, known as choura no is built in front of the homestead and it is also used as dwelling house for young boys. Generally, young sons and daughters do not sleep in
the same room or house with their parents. When son is married the couple is provided a separate house for sleeping.

But such typical Boro Nokhor is very rare, nowadays, except in some interior villages. With coming of Brahma religion among the Boros, the use of Noma No and its importance has been changed as the follower of this cult neither set altar nor cook foods in the main house. They also do not build main house like traditional noma no, which posses, only one door and a side corridor running into the interior room without any window. Rather they build houses for their conveniences like other Indians, as there is no rigid rule for constructing houses among the Boros of Brahma religion. Even nowadays, the followers of traditional Bathou dharma have extra kitchen house, as they do not prepare food in the main house. In Moni Bathou, the Savism sect of Rupamoni, though the altar of Siva and Lakshi are placed in the main house, there is no distinct style of house or it is not as sacred as in the traditional Bathou religion. And with the advent of new architecture the construction of typical noma no is gradually disappearing among the Boros.

In the traditional custom only sons are entitled to inherit the paternal property, as daughters have to leave parents house after getting married. Every sons get equal share of land from their paternal property and one who looks after the parents till death may get an additional share of land. The parents can decide with whom they are going to live in their old age. In absence of son, daughters inherit the property. If the person is childless the property goes to the nearest relatives after the death of both husband and wife. An adopted child is
also entitled to inherit the property. Sometimes a rich father can give a portion of land to his daughter even in the presence of sons.

Till the recent past, agriculture was the only occupation of the Boros. The agricultural lands were handed down from generation to generation as the source of economic activities. But due to subdivision fragmentation of land Bodos are compelled to look for other profession. Consequently the law of inheritance, among the Boros, have become flexible.

SOCIAL DIVISION:

Unlike other parts of India the cast system based on Hindu varnasharma dharma was unknown to Boro society. Even the high caste Aryan staying with the Boros had to become more liberal in their outlook and practice, in their religion. One of the important factors is the presence of vast majority of non-Aryan population who were ignorant about caste system. The Aryan had to give up some of their rigid customs and tried to adjust themselves with the local inhabitants. They have become more liberal in their food, drink, dress, customs and manners.\(^{19}\)

The social division among the Boros in the ancient times could be traced according to their occupation. For instance, Swargiarys (swarga-heaven, ari-folk) were entrusted with the duty of worship and they were said to be top of all groups. Basumatary (Basumata-earth, ari-folk) were the proprietor of lands, and Daimarys (daima-river, ari-folk) were the fisherman class etc. But all these groups have equal
status in the society and there is no bar in respect of inter marriage among different groups. However, such division of the ancient time have survived only as surnames without any notion of distinction in the present Boro society. But at present some sort of class division have cropped up, according to their economic and educational status like, division between rich and poor or in between educated and illiterate section of people. But there is not any social barrier among them.

Endle said about the traditional religion, “There is no authorized priestly caste among the Kocharies nor are Brahmans ever employed in their religious ceremonies.” A village elder, having good knowledge about the religious rites and well versed in religious hymn or mantras, performs the religious ceremonies. The office of the priesthood is not hereditary either in Bathou or Brahma religion. Any man living a pious life can become a priest in both the religion.

But nowadays, the Boro society has become a multi-religious society. There are followers of, traditional Bathou cult, the followers of Saiva cult of Guru Rupamani, the followers of Brahma cult, the followers of Saibaba cult and the followers Satsang Hindu cult of Sri Sri Anukul Thakur and Christianity. All these religious cults, except that of Anukul Thakur and the Saivism of Guru Rupamani, did not contribute to create a new caste hierarchy in the Boro society. The Boro priests of Satsang cult are forming a purified class by giving up meat, fish, onion etc. Priest of high rank like Ritwik, Prati-Ritwik observed strict formalities in their dietary habit and behaviours, It
seems the Boro society is leaning towards the formation of new caste system in near future.\(^{22}\)

In the \textit{Saivism} sect of Guru Rupamani the priestly class like \textit{Maha-Rishis, Rishis} and \textit{Purahits} become purely vegetarian and lead their lives like strict Brahmins and generally they do not take meal prepared by so called impure people.\(^{23}\)

Thus it cannot be denied that the Bodo society tends to enter \textit{into the complex social system of the caste Hindu fold} by forming new social divisions. And it is obviously the result of the direct influence of the Hindu religion and the process of sanskritization among the Boros. The present Boro society is so intimate with the Aryan Hindu that very often Aryan Hindus give their daughter into marriage with educated employed Boro boys, and Boro girls are also married to Hindu boys of high castes. It has helped the Boro society to become liberal and extrovert in their outlook. But some Boro intellectuals fear that such relation may endanger the preservation of their cultural identity as larger section of Boros had already merged with Hindu mainstream by giving up their own culture and identity.

\textbf{INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE:}

Marriage is the most important social institution in all the societies of the world. Marriage is considered as sacred. A marriage is performed after receiving, social and religious, sanction hence the couple are to shoulder both the social and religious responsibilities. “Marriage is the institutionalized and legitimate form of man and
woman relationship based on sex. It is related with the procreation of children, their up-bringing descent and inheritance. Marriage is the social means to widen and strengthen the network of social relation in the society.

The chief form of marriage, in the Boro society, is monogamy with some exceptional cases of polygamy. Polyandry is absent in the Boro society. Marriage is held by both sexes after they have arrived at full maturity as a result of inclination of the families. Adultery is considered as sin and serious offence and inflicted severe punishment according to social rules.

Manu, the ancient Hindu lawgiver, describes different modes of marriage. The forms of marriage are eight and they are- 1. *Brahma* i.e. based on Vedic rites, 2. *Daiba* i.e. offering a girl to the priest, 3. *Arsha* i.e. marriage by purchase in which, bridegroom offers a fair of oxen to the bride’s father, 4. *Prajapatya*, i.e. marriage by a proposal made by bridegroom, 5. *Asura* i.e. marriage by purchase, 6. *Gandharva* i.e. a secret union, 7. *Rakshasa* i.e. marriage by force or capture, 8. *Paisacha*, i.e. elopement.

With slight variations, there are six forms marriage among the Boros, though some of them have already been discarded by the society.

1. *Hijnao Songnai Haba*: (Arranged Marriage):- This is regular form of marriage in the Boro society. This type of marriage is held with the mutual consent and agreement of both the parties and it is arranged by the social norms and customs. Till the recent past,
decision of the parents or guardians was given priority than the choice of the boy or the girl, who were dependent on their parents.

2. *Gorjia Lakhinai Haba*: (Obtaining girl by service):- In this type of marriage the bridegroom has to work at the house of bride before marriage. But this type of marriage can rarely be seen in the present society.

3. *Kharsonnai Haba*: (Girls flee away to boy’s house):- On the refusal of her parents the girl comes to her lover’s house, by fleeing, before the marriage. The formal marriage takes place after the bride price is settled. This is an irregular form of marriage.

4. *Hinjao Bonai Haba*: (Marriage by capture): In former days, a woman was forcefully taken away from her parent’s house and marriage took place. This type of marriage was recognized form of marriage in the earlier days. But present Boro society has discarded this system of marriage. It is almost similar to the Rakshasa marriage of Aryans.

5. *Donkharnai Haba*: (Elopement): This type of marriage is alike to paisacha marriage of Aryan. Both boy and girl run away to distant place and live conjugal lives. The Bodo society does not approved this system of marriage. It seldom takes place.

6. *Dongkha Habnai Haba*: (Widow remarriage): *Dongkha Habnai Haba* is socially approved system of marriage where a widow can bring a new groom to her house and re-enter into conjugal life. The man who wants to marry a widow comes to an agreement and as a token he gives a silver coin to her. It is known as *gongkhon honai*. 
Such man has to leave his home and parents and prior to that a religious function is performed, where he provides a feast to villagers. In this marriage the man is deprived of his paternal property to enjoy his wife's property. But, this type of marriage is getting rare in the Boro society.

In the early times Boros were said to be strictly endogamous and inter caste marriage was forbidden even with cognate tribes. But such restriction might have been discarded long back. Nowadays the Boro society approves inter tribe or inter caste marriage on condition that they would accept the Boro social norms and customs. Though monogamy is socially recognized practice in Bodo society, there are cases of man having more than one wife. But such man is considered as a man of week moral character. The Boro society, of course, recognizes polygamy in certain cases like, (i) when a man has no children by his first wife, (ii) if the first wife is suffering persistent incurable disease and there is none to look after the house hold work.

THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM OF MARRIAGE:

The traditional system of marriage of the Boros is known as *hatasuni khurnai*. In this system both the bride and the groom are seated in front of *Bathou*, the altar of Siva in the courtyard and a *Deuri* (priest) recites mantra invoking Siva and other deities and declares that the bride and bridegroom have been wedded to each other and from that day they are entitled to co-habit as husband and wife. As a ritual, the bride cooks rice and curry of ground rice and
chicken without applying spice and turmeric, which is called ondlakhari. The bride offer a little portion of the meal to the house hold god and goddess of ishing (the innermost room of the main house) on banana leaves and the Deuri recites mantras introducing the bride to god and goddess. The bride promises to lead a happy conjugal life by touching rice kept in earthen container. Then the bride serves a little portion of rice and curry to the bridegroom and to the villagers present. Then the Deori and village elders give advice to the new couple about the duties and responsibilities towards the family and society. The main function of marriage ends with these.

The marriage function is followed by a grand feast, which continued for several days in earlier days. Rice beer and pork are the most important items of the feast and they were supplied in abundance. The villagers irrespective of sex and age enjoyed by singing, dancing and playing traditional musical instruments in the marriage. 27

THE BRAHMA MARRIAGE AND CHANGE IN THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM:

In the Boro society, the Brahma marriage is performed with Vedic rites associated with some traditional customs and rituals. Since the first decade of 20th century thousands of Boros had been embracing Brahma dharma under the guidance of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, consequently the new system of marriage came into existence in their society. The new religion has not only brought a
great change in the pre and post marriage ceremony but it has also refined the old customs to suit the new religion. The use of rice-beer and pork on the day of wedding have totally been discouraged and the use of liquor has been replaced by tea. Tea has become one of the most important items to entertain guests in the wedding ceremony, nowadays.

Unlike the hatasuni haba there is no prevalence of dancing or singing in the Brahma marriage. Modern Band party has taken the place of traditional music. Nowadays wedding takes place mostly at brides house like that of Assamese or Bengali, but if marriage is to be solemnized in between two different religion, it has to be held at bridegrooms house.28

On their arrival to bride's house, the bridegroom party is given a ceremonial welcome at the gate of the house along with the music of band party. The bridegroom stands on the gambari khamphlai (a low sitting tool made of wooden plank of gambari wood) and the younger sister or cousin of the bride washes his feet and puts perfumed oil and cosmetics on bridegroom's hair and face than she combs his hair. The bridegroom, in return, gives a small present to his new sister-in-law as a token of love. Then the bridegroom and his associates are taken into the noma no (main house) but the guardian of the bridegroom and other members sit in the affat (a meeting place) to negotiate the business.

The main function of the marriage is performed at night. In accordance with Hindu calendar a shubha lagna (sacred time) is fixed for the performance of yajnahuti. The bride and bridegroom are taken
from the main house to the *mandop* (the place of *yajna*) by cheering and playing band. The main function of the wedding starts with the *Purohit* (priest) chanting *Gayatri mantra*, facing eastward, in front of the fire of *yajna*, which will be followed by the father of the bride then also by the bride and bridegroom. The *Brahma Gayatri mantra* goes like this-

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“Om aiahi barde devi trayakshare
Brahma badini gayatri chandasun
Matoh Brahmajani nomohastyute”
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Then they offer *prasad* (mixture of corn, rice, pulse, sugar etc), *ghee*, *dhuna*, and sprinkle holy water to the *yajna* fire by chanting mantra.

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“Om varde devi paramjyotih Brahmane svaha”
“Om purna param Brahma jyoti svarupaya
svaha....”
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The rest of the *mantras* are recited in Boro language. Keeping the yajna fire as witness, the father of the bride makes *sampradan* (offer) of his daughter to bridegroom. And they pray for the blessing of god for the new couple.

Thus the follower of *Brahma dharma* introduced a new system of marriage in the Boro society, which is much akin to that of Aryan marriage. Nowadays, this system of marriage is not confined only to the followers of *Brahma dharma*, but even the followers of the traditional *Bathou dharma* and other Hindu cult of Boros perform *yajnahuti* in the matter of wedding. The traditional system of marriage
or **hatasuni khurnai** is becoming obsolete in the Boro society except in some interior places.

**BRIDE PRICE AND DOWRY:**

Demand of **phon thaka** (bride price) was compulsory and unlimited in the traditional Boro society. The demand of **phon thaka** sometimes exceeded to rupees one thousand in those days. Gradually it was brought down to rupees one hundred and five only. But in the present Boro society demand of bride price has almost disappeared except it is still practiced as a ritual. In the prevailing customs, the father of the bride offer a nominal price of a pair of areca nuts, betel leaves and a pair of one rupee coins on banana leaf to bride's father. The bride's father accepts the areca nuts and betel leaves and returns the coins. This change in the Boro society came as a result of reformative works of **Brahma** religion and it had great impact in the Boro society.

On the other hand, though the dowry system was not known in the Boro society till the recent past, now it has crept into the society in disguise. These days it is seen that the parents of the bride give some valuable properties to their daughters, like furniture, gold ornaments, T.V., Scooter, Refrigerator, a plot of land for construction of house etc. according to their capacity. But unlike the Aryan Hindu society, no demand is made by the bridegroom himself or his parents. The parents of the bride feel humiliated if they fail to send anything with their daughter after marriage, as it has become a usual practice in the
present Boro society. However such practice is confined mostly among the well-to-do section of Boro people and its impact is slightly felt in the lower middle class too. This system has developed as a result of the cultural inter-action with the Assamese and the Bengalis who are immediate neighbours to them. The conscious Boro people are afraid of such practice as it may, in the long run, take an ugly turn like dowry demand, bride torturing etc. as they happen in other parts of India. They also feel that the social organization should come forward to interfere and check when it is still young, so that the poor section people do not become victim of this system.

MARRIAGE IN MANI BATHOU DHARMA: (Saivism sect of Guru Rupamani)

The marriage ceremony in the Mani Bathou dharma is much alike to Brahma religion in appearance. Both the religions perform yajnahuti and follow the customs of Boro samaj in pre and post marriage ceremonies. But there are some basic differences, in the concept and practice of marriage, of the two religions.

Mani Bathou dharma is more ritualistic than Brahma dharma, right from the marriage negotiation to the end of the post marriage functions. Unlike the liberal view of the Brahma dharma they are more traditional and strict in many respects. For marriage negotiation a pair of men and a pair of women should go, as odd number is not desired in the process of wedding ceremony. Widows and widowers are not allowed to go for any such work as they are regarded as
unfortunate person for sacred function. The negotiators have to carry sugar, tealeaves, areca nut, betel leaves, muri (puff rice) to girl's house. Unlike the traditional custom they do not carry a pair of bottles of liquor. Then both the parties talk over the matter seriously and if the girls party agrees, the present of articles is accepted and if disagree it is refused. Sometimes the process is lingered by the visit of girl’s party to boy's house or by giving chance the boy and the girl to meet each other at girl's house and after that the final agreement is made. Marriage is held either in the house of the bride or bridegroom. If the marriage is held in the house of bride, the bridegroom is not taken to into noma no (main house) rather the bridegroom is kept in other house where from he is taken to humkunda (altar of yajna) along with the bride from noma no.30

One of the fundamental differences between Mani Batou (Siva) dharma and Brahma dharma in performing yajna is philosophical. Since the Brahma dharma is monotheist they devote everything to Param Brahma, the eternal God, but Moni Bathou (Siva) dharma being the believer of multi gods and goddesses, summon all deities to be present in yajna fire to bless the bride and bridegroom. They first summon the chief deity, Siva and his wife Bhagavati then Indra, Swaraswati, Laksh, Brahma, Visnu, Maheswar, Viswanahari, Visvakarma, Ganesha, Ganga and souls of great saints etc. and offer prasad, flowers, ghee, dhuna, milk etc. in the yajna fire. The mantras are recited mostly in Boro language. The bride and bridegroom walk seven times around the yajna fire and the bridegroom put sindur (vermillion) on bride’s head. After the yajnahuti is over the bride and
bridegroom are led to the main house, where the *Purohit* discourses on significance and responsibility of conjugal life.

**DRESS OF BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM:**

The bridegroom wears white *panjabi* shirt, white *dhoti* and wrap white towel on his neck and puts on *murari* (wedding crown) on his head. The bride wears traditional dress of red colour like, *dokhna*, blouse, shawl and she puts on gold ornaments and a small *murari* on her head. The bride is adorned with lustrous ornaments and cosmetics in a special manner for the day. Her face is covered with a veil of transparent synthetic cloth of red colour with floral design. Though not superb the bridegroom is also decorated with cosmetics, ascent etc. on wedding day.

**AT MONGAL:**

On the eighth day from the day of wedding, the bride and bridegroom come to bride’s house for the post marriage ceremony known as *At mongal*. In the traditional society the bridegroom brings cocks, goat or pig in honour of his father-in-law’s family and relatives. But the educated section of Boros has almost given up such practice. The bride’s father arranges a feast, on the occasion of *At mongal*, which is attended by the relatives of the bride. After this ceremony bride takes away all her belonging remaining in her maternal house.
WIDOW RE-MARRIAGE:

Widow re-marriage is allowed and encouraged by the Boro society since earlier. When a widow, having minor children, remarries a man her children also go to the house of her new husband. The children become *fisha Bathul* (step son or daughter) to new father. And if the husband is also widower, having children from previous wife, the second mother becomes *bima bathul* (step mother) for these children.

A widow can remarry the younger brother of her former husband but the Boro society does not permit a remarriage with the elder brother of her former husband. But, there is no post marriage ceremony in the widow re-marriage.

FEMALE CHASTITY:

Pre-marital sexual relationship is strictly prohibited in the Boro society. Female chastity is considered to be the major qualification for marriage. If one does indulge in such affairs, he is subjected to physical punishment at the time of trial, in the village court. Then he is required to undergo ritual purification along with religious function. And if pregnancy occurs against the law of chastity marriage between the lovers becomes absolutely compulsory. As such the Boros in villages lead pure life before marriage.
Boro girls are given in marriage only when they become physically fit to be married. The practice of child marriage is not prevalent in the Boro society. Normally a boy marries a girl who is younger to him at least by one year.

Nowadays the Boro society also recognizes the marriage performed in the Hindu temple. But the temple marriage is required to observe the post marriage rituals as it is in the social marriage.

DIVORCE:

Divorce is also permitted by the Boro society in certain cases. But there must be valid ground to satisfy the society. But divorce or separation is very rare among the Boros. If both husband and wife desire to get divorced, they have to appear before the 'Boro Samaj' for settlement. Divorce is carried out by a symbolic act of tearing a Pan (betel leaf) into two halves. If, a man divorces his wife without any justified reason he has to pay compensation and has to give financial support for her livelihood until he gets a proper means of living. Generally divorce takes place when both husband and express their willingness to be separated from each other. And if divorced occur due to unfaithfulness of the wife, the husband is entitled to recover the amount of money he spent for the marriage from the parents of the bride.

The Boro Samajni Pandulipi (social codes of the Boros), in its recently modified social laws of Kokrajhar district, sanctions divorce on the following grounds.
1. When, one of them is suffering from incurable disease like leprosy etc. and the home affairs become unmanageable.

2. If one become mad or one of them does not have sex potency.

3. If a husband is cruel or always tortures his wife with out any reason.

4. If, either of the husband or wife is proved to be a man or woman of bad character like- thief, dacoit, prostitute, etc.

5. If, the husband and wife are uncompromising or they always quarrel and deceive each other or they have no mutual faith etc.

In all these cases the Boro samaj has the right to pass the verdict supporting divorce and inflicting punishment.33

FOOD AND DRINK:

Rice is the staple food of Boro Kocharies along with the curry prepared with variety of vegetables, meat or fish. They are very fond of meat like pork, chicken, mutton, buffalo and also meat of duck, pigeon, which are domesticated at home. They also go for hunting deer hares, wild hogs, porcupines, wild buffalo, mongoose, civets, land tortoise, jungle fowl, field- rates for flesh, which are abundantly provided with meat. The Boros also eat all sorts of fish, water tortoise and eri worm. They like all kinds of vegetables either sour or bitter available at home and jungles. But they do not eat beef within the pale of Hindu influence. Eating beef is considered as sin and a crime to Boro Hindu society.
The Boros preserve dry meat and dry fish for future use, which are very favourite diet for them. They also know the art of preserving dry fish inside bamboo pipe by plastering the mouth of bamboo pipe with mud, which is called nafam (sidal in Assamese). It can be preserved for long time. The Boros also use kharoi (alkaline) in different curries to make it more tasteful.

But nowadays, the Boros have modified their food habit and menu of diet according to their neighbourhood to other communities. Many of the animal meats have now been abandoned due to the influence of the Hindu religion among the Boros. These days they like to drink milk, eat curd, butter, ghee, sweets etc. though these items were not preferred by common Boro folk in the past, even if they were available to them. Gait mentioned, "It is not their custom to eat ghee so that if any article even flavour of ghee they will not eat it." But presently, these are considered as luxurious items of food by the Boros.

They cook different varieties of curry, fry of vegetables, fish, meat using mustard oil, salt, spices like onion, chilli, ginger, garlic, jira etc. Nowadays their preparation of meat or fish curry is almost similar to that of Assamese or Bengali preparation.

Even the Brahmin or the upper caste Hindus became non-vegetarian under the influence of Mongoloid people in this region. "Meat and fish comprised common article of diet. Fish eating is probably a pre Aryan custom and in Assam it might have been from Mongolian people. The different devices of catching fish were also
introduced by these people. Such word as langi (a kind of fishing net),khoka (a kind of fish trap), are no doubt of Tibeto-Burman origin." 35

The Hinduised Boros also observe fasting or abstain from eating meat, fish or certain on amavasya (blue moon), purnima (full moon), ekadasi (eleventh day after purnima or amavasya) and on religious tithies.

On special occasions they prepare some special items from different varieties of rice and take as breakfast or tiffin. These are phitha (cake made of powdered rice putting some ingredients like, sugar, coconut, lit etc.), maibra enthab (pan cake made of sticky rice powder and other ingredient), chourai (flattened rice), Akai (parched paddy free from husk), coconut laru etc. But these days, Boros also prepare puri, luci, pakari etc., which have, undoubtedly, been borrowed from the Aryans.

The Boros are fond of chewing areca nut and betel leaf with lime. It is also offered to guests as the first item to entertain and as a sign of honour and affection.

DRINKS:

THE Boros cultivate the habit of drinking liquor (Jou), as it is a must in the traditional social gathering or religious function. They are expert in preparing wine or beer from rice. They use two types of liquor viz., jou bidoi (rice beer) and jou goran (fermented liquor or distilled liquor). The jou bidoi though intoxicating is nutritious too. 36 They drink rice- beer after whole days hard work or after working in
scorching sun. The rice beer is drunk by man, woman and children, in the traditional society, but they hardly get drunk. In the words Hodgson (1850:150), “I see no reason to brand them with name of drunkards, though they certainly a merry cup in honour of the gods at the high festive of their religion. Among my servants, the Bodos have never been seen drunk; the Moslem and Hindus several times excessively to.”

But with the appearance of religion like, Brahma, Satsang or Saivism cult of Guru Rupamani the use of liquor was totally been wiped out in any social or religious function. They even tried to ban it socially.

Nowadays taking tea has become very popular among the Boros. All sections of people, in the present Boro society, take tea regularly and entertain their visitors, friends and guests with a cup of tea. The tea has taken the place of liquor on many occasions like community work, social gathering etc.

dress and ornaments:

The spinning and weaving is an indispensable part of every Boro family even today. The Boro women still wear their traditional dress dokhana, a home spinning product woven by women themselves. The size of the dokhana is about ten feet length and four and half feet breadth. They wrap dokhana around their body leaving only the shoulder exposed, from above the breast down to ankles and tighten knots one above the bosom and other in the waistline. The
Dokhana has borders both side and it is designed with geometrical or floral or sometimes stripes running along its entire length.

To cover the exposed portion of body they use smaller piece of cloth known as sadri. Sadri is also hand woven fabric in variety of colours with geometrical and floral designs. The length and breadth of the fabric is two metre by a half metre. The use of blouse and petticoat was not known in the ancient time.

The Boro men use to wear hand woven fabric called gamcha, by which they cover them from the waist down to the knees. They also use shirts, known as gosla. But the use of turban or phali khaokhanai was not common to all. Boro people wrap eri or endi shawl during the winter season to protect them from cold. In the olden days the Boros used a kind a foot-ware made of wood with jute lace known as yapthong or phoitha. 37

But now with the development of modern industries different varieties of machine made dresses have flourished the market, which can be obtain without pain and at cheap rate in no time. As such even the villagers, now, wear machine product shirts, pants, trouser, dhoti etc. well-to-do and educated men wear western as well as Indian dresses like long-pant, coat, suit, necktie, jeans, shoes or dhoti, panjabi shirt, just like typical Bengali Bhadralok.

The Boro women of Kokrajhar district exclusively wear dokhana, though mekhalai is also worn in other parts of Assam or outside. The use of blouse and petticoat is common nowadays. Now they wear skirts, shaloar kamis, and sometimes, modern saries while they are on outings. Unlike the westernized hill tribe women of North
Eastern States, the Boro women are more Indianized in their in their
dress and manner.

The women mainly use the ornaments of gold and silver. They are
very fond of ornaments like bracelets, necklace, earring, fingerring, etc. Though, nose ring was worn by Boro women, they have
almost given up the use of it. The ornaments have occupied a very
important place in Assamese and Boro society. In the time of crisis
they take loan from mahajans keeping the ornaments as security bond.
Failure to give ornaments to a new bride in the marriage is looked as a
sign of extreme poverty by the Boros. Thus ornaments are
considered not only luxurious article for women, but, also a help in
the days of crisis.

ECONOMIC INSTITUTION:

There has been a striking change in the economy of Boros from
the ancient time to modern times. The change in the economic system
has also contributed towards the development of present Boro society
and it has also helped to change the outlook of the Boro people.
Fertility of land and monsoon rain made this region suitable for easy
cultivation of various crops and vegetation. They mainly depend on
the paddy cultivation. But they also cultivate cash crops, such as
mustard seed, tobacco, jute, varieties of pulses and vegetables like
potato, cabbage, cauliflower, radish, carrot, cucumber, gourd, green
leaves etc. these are cultivated partly for domestic consumption and
partly for selling in the market. They also cultivate varieties of spices, chilli, onion, garlic, coriander, ginger etc.

Since rice is the primary cultivation of the Boros, they mostly prefer alluvial land called, *hama ha*. For the establishment of village and homestead they select high land, where there are grazing field, river, lake for fishing, jungle and forest for hunting and fire wood.\(^{39}\)

For cultivation of paddy, Boros mainly depends on monsoon rain. But they also construct artificial irrigation system to supply water in paddy field by damming the stream and by digging canal. Sarbeswar Rajguru quoted from W. Rabinson (*Adescriptive Account of Assam*: 1841), "The Kocharies along the northern frontier......... about the Bhutan Dowers exhibit on exception to the general neglect of irrigation. They are in habit of extensively irrigating their rice field from the small streams which intersect these districts."\(^{40}\)

Most of the households in the villages have areca nut trees and plants of betel leaves. These two items fetch a good amount of money in the family income, from market.

There are several means of cultivating land in the society. They are self-cultivation, *adhi* system and *sukhani* system. The first one is the traditional system of the Boros, the second and the third system might have been borrowed from others as the names denote to.

**Self Cultivation:-** In this system the owner cultivates his land with the help of his family members or keeping agricultural labourer *dahoma* (male) and *Ruwati* (female) for a season on contract of some *monds* of paddy as wages.
Adhi System:- In this system the owner gives away his land to a
cultivator temporarily and the total product of the land is distributed
into two shares between the owner and the cultivator.

Sukhani System:- By this system the owner of the land enter into
contract with the cultivator and the cultivator has to give a fixed
quantity of product (paddy), to land owner, for each higha of land he
cultivates.

Saori Lingnai:- Another system prevalent among the Boros is
community work or saori lingnai. If the owner of the land or a
cultivator is unable to complete his work of cultivation or harvest in
time, he invites the villagers to work in his field and provides a
nominal feast. This system is still in vogue in the Boro society.

DETERIORATION OF AGRARIAN ECONOMY:

There are several reasons for deteriorating agrarian economy of
the Boros, which compelled to go for other occupations. Firstly, the
Boros still follow the primitive method of cultivation. Secondly,
economic division and fragmentation of land holding generated
disguised unemployment. Thirdly, another important factor is the land
alienation from Boro tribal to non-tribal

The Assam land Revenue Regulation, 1886, was amended in
1947 by the Assam government, and the new Chapter X, for the
protection of backward classes, was added to it, under which, thirty
eight Belts and Blocks have been created till now. Though, no specific
provision was made in the land revenue Act, 1886, for the protection
tribal by the British Government, the line system was introduce during 1930-1940 for the protection of tribal land, which divided the tribal areas and the non-tribal areas. But in 1942 Sadullah Ministry in Assam withdrew the line system on the plea of grow more food programme. Thus, the vast areas of *khas* land, within the tribal areas, went under the occupation of immigrants and non-tribal.\(^{41}\)

The existing tribal belts and blocks are also nothing but a documentary expression as the corrupt government officials made their fortune by transferring the tribal lands to non-tribal, and giving *myadi patta* to non-tribal, illegally. Thus thousands of Boros became landless. Consequently, they went in search of new land in the reserved forest or took the occupations like, wage earner, labourers or small sellers etc.

**RIOT SABHA:**

After the emergence of the *Brahma dharma*, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma formed the *Riot Sabha* or *Raijoni Affat* to make the peasants conscious about their pitiable condition, and Gurudev himself became the Chairman of the *sabha* for life. Through that sabha he worked for the cause of the illiterate peasants and saved them from the exploitation of corrupt businessman. Thus he enabled the peasants to get appropriate price for their product. It improved the condition of the cultivators to some extent.\(^{42}\)
TRADE AND BUSINESS:

In the traditional society the Boros did not encourage to carry out any trade and business. The Boro Kocharies are very simple and truthful in nature. They believe that in business people have to resort in lying to make profit. Telling a lie is considered to be a great sin by them. So they were not accustomed to any trade and business till the recent past.43

But this theory does not hold good at present. Due to division and fragmentation of land holding the agricultural products are not enough for livelihood in many families, as such many of them have to take subsidiary occupation like, small business, shop keeping, carpentry, manual labourers, drivers, technician, mechanics etc.

Gurudev Kalicharan realized that though many of Boros were involved in timber trade, they made little progress due to lack of sound capital formation, and because of unorganized system of trade. With a view to assist these traders Gurudev Kalicharan founded the Brahma Company in 1972. Each and every member of the company had to contribute a share of Rupees fifty to the company's fund. The member traders could take loan from the company's fund in the time of need to run his business. The Brahma company was successful for a few years, but it could not last very long time due to lack of proper management. Yet, it led to a section of people to be economically prosperous in Boro society.

At present some Boros have started doing small business of vegetables, fish, meat, food grains and agricultural products in the
rural and urban markets. As a result of it many market centers have cropped up even in the rural areas or in the villages. In the district head quarter town, Kokrajhar or the Sub-divisional town, Gossaigaon or in the semi-towns, a few shops, small enterprises, printing press, hotels, restaurants, saw mills, supply agencies of T.V., Radio, sewing machine and patrol pump etc. are owned by Boro people nowadays. They do not consider trade and business as a sin any more, rather they began to think that, business is the root of wealth and honour.

SPANNING AND WEAVING:

The rearing of eri and muga is another tradition of economic activity of the Boros. Almost all the Assamese people in Brahmaputra valley cultivate muga and eri worms. The Boros produced muga and eri cloths for their own use as well as for business purpose. But nowadays they have almost given up rearing muga or silk worms, as it is more laborious than the market price. At present they only produce eri cloths, which can be reared indoor.

One of the presents, the kusuma vastra sent by Bhaskar Varma to Harsa, as mentioned in Harsa Charita, is believed to be eri silk of Assam, who’s colour is described as white with yellow tinge.44

Spinning and weaving is women activity among the Boros. Endle remarked, “....a Kochari woman if not greatly or frequently interrupted in her work can weave half a yard each day.” The Boro women are expert weavers. A Boro women does not Know the art of spinning and weaving is regarded as auturi (good for nothing), and
neglected by the society. The Boro women weaves on the frame loom and produce their own requirement of fabrics in their spare time. These hand woven fabrics are used, by women, men and children in religious occasion or festivals, at the funeral for covering death body and also as bed sheet, furnished cover etc. they can depict different floral and geometrical design on the fabrics. The Boro women still wear the hand woven traditional *dokhana* and *sadri* of different colour and design.

Nowadays the governments have various schemes to provide free grants, loans to tribal weaver in cash or kinds, to open weaving centre or industry, through, the Tribal Development Corporation, District Rural Development Agency, Bank etc. Taking such assistance from the government some Boro women have opened weaving industry in various places of the district and supply their product to the markets. Thus quite a few Boro women have become economically independent in the present Boro society.

**MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE:**

Up to the recent past the barter system was prevalent among the Boros. In the earlier times the business transaction were done, and value of the things were measured, by barter system. The Boros used paddy as the medium of exchange, as it is valuable and essential article for all families. Though money has taken its place, even today in Boro villages, wages of agricultural labourers, *dahona* (male worker) and *ruwati* (female worker), are paid in terms of paddy. As
stated in the pandulipi for Boro society the wages of the agricultural labourer are as follows:—

1. Dahona (male labour) is paid ten monds of paddy during the season of cultivation and seven and a half monds at the time of harvesting.

2. Ruwati (female labour) is paid seven and a half monds of paddy during the month of cultivation and six monds for the months, from Aswin (September) to Chaitra (March / April).

In the urban people, whose occupation is non-agriculturist pay the wages of servants in cash but the exact value of the paddy, because, contract is made in term of paddy. Some elements of barter system still exist in some interior villages, but in a few cases only. In the traditional Boro religion the rice is considered as a form of Lakhi or Mainao (goddess of wealth), so the Boros honour and accept it without hesitation.

But today, all societies are interdependent to each other in many affairs including economic activities for which barter system stands as inconvenient to be the medium of exchange and it is gradually disappearing from the Boro society.

COMMUNICATION:

Good transport and communication helped in changing the pattern of the society of this region. The National Highway 37 and Railway line run across the whole district and interlinks with parts as well as the whole country. Moreover there are many P.W.D. roads, pacca as well as gravel, linking almost all major parts of the district.
Being the western-most district of Assam, the region was the first to come into contact with other parts of India. Consequently, the Boros of this region are greatly influenced socially, religiously, politically and economically by other Indians.

Although the over all economic condition of the Boros are not good at all, a new privileged class economically better off having high social position have been emerging. In the past when a town grew up Boros retreated to rural areas in search of new cultivable land. But at present the trend has been reversed. Any person having considerable wealth tries to get a plot of land in towns, where modern facilities are available. Any government officer or employee of Boro community builds house in urban areas as most of them do not like to go back to villages. Thus the very outlook of the Boro people has under gone a complete change.

**STATUS OF WOMEN:**

The Boro women have been playing very significant role in the family, socio-economic life and also in religious function. Though the overall condition of Boro women till the beginning of this century was not worth mentioning, yet, from the time of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma a gradual change has been taking place as a result of the reformation movement led by him and their condition must have been better than that of high caste Hindu women in some parts of India.

Though the process of Hinduisation of the Bodos started long back under the patronage of the Bodo ruler like, Krinhna Chandra and
Govinda Chandra of Cachar, Siva Singha and Nara Narayan of Koch kingdom, yet the Boro society was free from social evils of the Hindu society. Towards the last part of 19th century, Hindu society was engulfed by many social evils and practices. And social reformers like, Raja Ram Mahan Roy, Swami Dayananda Swaraswati and others made their best effort for reforming the society. But in spite of that, evil in the Indian society were not rooted out totally. On the other hand, though the Boro society was intermingled with the mainstream Hindu Society, yet the system like satee, dowry, child marriage, purdah etc. were unknown to Boro society.

In the traditional society, the status of mother, daughter-in-law and daughters varies from person to person. An expert in domestic affairs is regarded as a good mother or a good daughter or a good daughter-in-law etc. They also enjoy honourable status in their family or society. In fact, they also enjoy equal freedom with man in performing their functions.

In the field of economy Boro woman play very vital role. Leaving aside ploughing, they worked in the agricultural land along with men. A woman produces her dresses and necessary cloths in the family by weaving. She helps the family economy by poultry farming, animal husbandry etc.

In performing religious rites and rituals Boro women play very important role. In kherai puja (worship by shamanistic dance) a female shaman called doudini, performs dance in propitiation of various gods and spirits while she is in the state of trance.
In these days, the educated and cultured Boro women enjoy equal social and political rights and status with man, as provided by the society. Now they also become members of different political and social organization and take active part in it. Boro women are also holding prestigious position in government and semi-government offices, banks, educational institution and other institutions. They also take part in various activities like, games and sports, music, dance etc. and have created for themselves new honourable status in the society.

The Boro society is in constant mobility and they have accepted the change not only to cope with the outside world, but also to create a new way for life. The Boros have gathered new experience and ideas from their contact with outside, but their main concerns are still for their society and locality, that has been existing since the days of their fore-fathers. The educated section of Boros is in the forefront of the social change of the Boros.

The impact of various socio-cultural forces on their economy, religion, psychology is quite visible in the Boro society, as it has been discussed. The conflict between the traditional system and modern ideas and knowledge, have created an avenue for continuity and change in the Boro society.
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