CHAPTER - IV

RELIGIOUS LIFE
OF
THE BHUYANS
Religion formed one of the major groupings of cultural aspect of human society. Each of these cultural aspects satisfied the specific wants and requirements of human being. As against these needs and requirements, what religion did was to adjust the man to the universe by providing security against the forces which were more powerful than man himself.¹

Edward B. Tylor defines the religion as "Belief in Spiritual Beings" or "Animism" which centres round the belief in soul, deities and subordinate spirits and practices of worship and propitiation of these spiritual Beings. The important aspects which characterised religious phenomenon were animistic or inanimistic, beliefs, concepts of spirits and ghosts, concepts of power, magic, taboo monotheism and polytheism.² Religion, as it was revealed from the studies of different cultures, was a universal phenomenon and man had developed some religious beliefs and practices long before he devised the means of producing food through agriculture.³ The

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
least utilitarian aspect of culture like the religious beliefs and practices developed so early in the experience of man. The man must have been filled with consternation and awe having his dream experiences and having been obsessed by the fear of supernatural powers and spiritual forces of the universe.\(^4\) Thus, the religion of the aboriginal races including the Bhuyans happened to be the earliest religion of Orissa. The religious faith of the Bhuyans showed a remarkable continuity down the ages. One was astonished to find that it was the same in the present century as it had been in the centuries past.

**Bhuyan Pantheon**

The Bhuyans believed that the universe was dominated by a number of deities and spirits with varied powers. According to their beliefs, a social hierarchy existed amongst the Divine Beings. Their Gods and spirits were classified as the Supreme deities, general tribal gods, nature deities, village deities and family and ancestral spirits.\(^5\) The Bhuyan religion was one of blood.\(^6\) They were

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5. Ibid., P.117.
mitigated by the outpouring of blood. They believe in good as well as bad spirits and paid much attention to the bad spirits. Their Gods were comprised of deities of aboriginal, origin and others derived from the Hindu theology. These aboriginal deities were Boram, Gai-sri, Barahipit, Jaunlipat, Baitaranipat, Lakshmipat, Mandalpat, Mahathakurani, Parialbagia and Pitrupat. The principal deities were the Earth God and her son, the Tiger God. Some of the other deities of them were the village Mother God, the Water God and the deities of the forest, air and rain. The symbols of these deities were rough stones or logs placed under a lofty Sal tree. The Bhuyan pantheon was a mixed one. The Bhuyans had their own priests called Dehuries or Deories. Their sacred group was called Deota Sara. It was dedicated to their different deities. The Dehuri played a key role in the worship of different deities.

E.T. Dalton had the following remarks on the religion of the Bhuyan in the Feudatory State of Bonai.

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
They have their own priests, called Deoris and their sacred groves, called “Deota Sara”, dedicated to four deities, Dasum Pat, Bamoni Pat, Koisar Pat and Boram. The three first are brethren, but there was some difference of opinion as to another Bamoni was male or female. Boram is the sun, also worshipped under the name of Dharam Deota, as with the Oroas. The three minor deities are represented by stones in the Sara, but Boram has no representation. Boram, as the first and greatest of gods and as the creator is invoked at the sowing season with the offering of a white cock. In case of sickness, goats are offered to Dasum Pat and his brethren. On such occasions the goat is given by the owner of the house in which the sick person resides. On other occasions the victim is provided by the community. The sacrifices are all offered at the foot of the trees in the Sara; only men partake of the meat. The Deori gets the head.

Nature of Bhuyan Gods and Goddesses

Like most other Munda group of tribes the Bhuyans of Orissa

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid, P.142.
believed in the conception of a regular hierarchy among the gods and spirits. They never took every evil power or energy to be called a spirit and so it was not every spirit that was entitled to rank among the deities.\(^\text{18}\) Only the more powerful amongst the spirits were recognised and they were propitiated at regular intervals by the Bhuyans to help them in the troubles of everyday life and to avert the sudden dangers and restore confidence and a feeling of a security at the time of crisis.\(^\text{19}\) Besides the spirits of the deceased ancestors and other local deities, the Bhuyans had the conception of benevolent Supreme Deity called *Dharam Deota* - the great Sun God, the giver of light and life.\(^\text{20}\) Like some of the tribal people of Chotanagpur, the Bhuyans of Orissa called him the "Sakhi" or witness of the doings of men and spirits. It was probably after the Bhuyans took to agriculture that Mother Earth or *Dharti Mata*, also variably called *Basuki Mata, Basuki Thakurani* or *Basu Mata*, had been assigned an important position next to the Supreme Deity among their deities.\(^\text{21}\) Sometimes She was called as the wife of *Dharam Deota* or the Sun God.\(^\text{22}\) But though the gods were ordinarily

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21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
formless and invisible they appeared before the Bhuyans in their dreams in definite shapes. Thus, Gai-sri always appeared in the shape of an old lady wearing a reddish silk cloth and so also Thakurani, who is identified by some as Gai-sri, appears in the same shape and garb, with hair hanging down in long locks called jata and a Pat called Hill God, generally appeared as a stalwart man dressed, with royal robes and riding a horse. It was told that, while moving in the air, a god sometimes appeared to men below like a streak of moving fire.

A short account given by Jaidev Dehuri, the priest of the village Suakati in the State of Keonjhar to S.C. Ray as to how the deity, Thakurani revealed Herself to the Bhuyans of the village in the time of one of his ancestors, threw a considerable light on the Bhuyan’s anthropomorphic conception of the Gods. One evening the Bhuyans of the village were warming themselves before a fire called dhuni in their Mandaghar the deity entered there in the guise of an old lady. She found the assembled men putting the thin ends of logs of wood into the fire and now the

25. Ibid.
head-ends. They did not recognise the deity and so she judged the men to be very stupid and decided not to remain there in that shape and disappeared into the atmosphere.\textsuperscript{26} On the very night Thakurani appeared to the ancestor of Jaideb and to some other villagers in a dream and to told them that on the following morning they would find her in the house of the Dehuri.\textsuperscript{27} On the next morning the Dehuri and his wife after taking bath and reverently entered their hut where they saw the Thakurani in the guise of a lively infant disporting herself in a basket and on seeing this the Dehuri covered up the deity with another basket.\textsuperscript{28} In the following morning when the Dehuri removed the basket, he discovered a short sword made of shining gold inside the basket. Since then the Thakurani was worshipped at the house of the Dehuri until, many years later, the Marhatta troops (troops of the Marathas) came to the village and plundered the houses and threw away the golden image of the Thakurani into the Teliadah eddy of river Baitarani.\textsuperscript{29} After this incident the people of the village fled for life from the village and one day the Thakurani appeared to the Dehuri in a

\textsuperscript{26} S.C. Ray, op. cit., P.210.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. PP.210-211.
dream and told, “I shall not return in person to Suakati now. Get an iron sword made and install it in a new hut and make regular offerings to it in my name.” Now the villagers were relieved in mind and acted in accordance with the direction of the Thakurani. Ever since then two goats were offered as offerings to Her every year, one on the occasion of the Bihira Puja in the month of Asarh (August) and another in the month of Kartik in front of the new temple of Thakurani. Thus, when questioned the Bhuyans said, “The Gods are like the wind; our village gods go with us unseen when we go to the jungles to hunt or to the Komans (clearance on the hill slope) to watch our crops”.

GENERAL TRIBAL GODS

A short account of the different deities and spirits of the Bhuyans of Orissa, their functions and the occasion on which and the manner in which the assistance of these deities and spirits was invoked was described as follows:

31. Ibid.
Dharam Deota

The Bhuyans of Orissa considered Dharam or Dharam Deota as the Sun God.\(^33\) They esteemed Dharam Deota or the Sun God as their Supreme Deity. He occupied the highest rank of all their deities. Sometimes Dharam Deota was described by most of the Bhuyans as the husband of Basuki Mata or Earth Goddess.\(^34\) Dharam Deota shining high above the sky sustained life on earth by giving light and moved round the world regularly to take care of all the living beings. There was no any specific ceremony meant for worshipping Him. But when liquor was taken a few drops of it was poured on the ground with the prayer, "Upere Dharam Deota Tale Basukimata" (lit. the Sun God above and the Mother Earth below) and it was a common incantation expressing reverence to this Supreme Deities.\(^35\)

While taking an oath or a vow either the name of Sun God or Dharam Deota was uttered or a fistful of earth was held. It was believed that nothing could be kept hidden from the Sun God who used to keep a watch all the time over the activities of all the human beings and any lie or falsehood in His name was sure to

bring ill luck or misfortune to the offender. *Dharam Deota* was viewed by the Bhuyans a Supreme benevolent deity.\(^{36}\) Once a *Dehuri* was obliged to say that one must be a fool if he thought that *Dharam Deota* sat on high. He was not represented by any symbol and had no *Asthau* or fixed seat. He had no temple and he was a ever pervading and all-pervasive deity. While other deities were malevolent when offended, but *Dharam Deota* was always beneficent.\(^{37}\) On the occasion of the *Bihira Puja* in the month of *Asarh* (August) the *Dehuri* worshipped Him and sacrificed a white goat called *pondra* for seasonal rainfall and a white fowl was offered to Him whenever there was any trouble in a family or a village.\(^{38}\) Again in the month of *Baisakhp* (May) on the occasion of the *Tirtia Muthi Puja*, milk, molasses and *arua* rice were offered to *Dharam Deota* on a *Koman* field at the first ceremonial sowing of paddy seeds.\(^{39}\)

Before starting on annual hunting expedition on the occasion of *Akhni Pardhip* day in the month of *Chaiti* (March-April) the *Naek* worshipped *Dharam Deota* to ensure succession in hunting. After


\(^{38}\) Ibid., P.282.

\(^{39}\) Ibid, P.213.
the game was begged the Dehuri or an elderly man in the absence of the Dehuri took a little blood of the game and offered to Dharam Deota and prayed, "Here we are offering the first blood of the hunted animal. May we attain succession in hunting in future."40 Offerings of arua rice, turmeric, milk and molasses are made to Dharam Deota on the marriage ceremonies. In times of crisis, such as the difficult labour of a pregnant woman vows were made to Him and were fulfilled after the desired boons were granted. At the time of founding a new settlement or a village the Dehuri, with his face to the east as in all pujas, offered rice, molasses and milk to Dharam Deota and prayed, "May we live here in health; May we have success in clearing the forest, and get enough to eat."41 Sometimes the Bhuyans venerated the Sun as Dharam Deota, but made no offerings to Him.42

Basuki Mata

The Bhuyans of Orissa esteemed Basuki Mata or Dharti Mata or the Earth Goddess. She was called the general god of the Bhuyans.

She occupies the highest position next to Dharam Deota. She was sometimes described as the wife of Dharam Deota. She sustained life on the earth by providing food for all. Though she occupied the high position in the religious life of the Bhuyans, but there was no specific ceremony meant for worshipping her. But whenever liquor was taken a few drops of it were poured first on the ground with the prayer, "Upere Dharam Deota Tale Basumata" (lit. the Sun God above and Mother Earth below) and it was a common incantation expressing reverence to this Supreme Deity. While taking an oath or a vow a fistful of earth was held. If a person told a lie by holding a handful of earth serious calamity must befall him leading to death after which he got mixed in the earth. Basukimata was always viewed by the Bhuyan tribals as benevolent deity. She was not represented by any symbols and had no Asthan or fixed seat. A popular saying of the Bhuyan tribals described Basuki Mata as having "Eyes on four sides, wings on four sides, and flying about." (Chari are ankhi, chari are pankhi, bulichhe).

45. Ibid., P.118.
At every religious festival, Basuki Mata or Basu Mata or Dharti Mata or Earth Goddess was invoked, though not ordinarily with any sacrifices and offerings. While other deities might cause harm if offended, Basuki Mata or Dharti Mata was always benevolent towards men. On the occasion of the Bihira Puja for seasonable rainfall arua rice (aksata) was offered to Basuki Mata. On the occasion of the Tirtia Muthi Puja in Baisakh rice, milk and molasses were offered to Basuki Mata on a Koman field at the first ceremonial sowing of paddy seeds. Before starting on annual hunting expedition on the Akhni Pardhi day in Chait each hunters offered a piece of turmeric to Basuki Mata. The Dehuri made the offerings of rice, turmeric, milk and molasses to Basuki Mata on marriage ceremonies. The Bhuyans also made vows at the times of crises, such as at the difficult labour of a pregnant woman, and fulfilled them after the desire work was done. At the time of founding a new settlement, the Dehuri offered rice and molasses to Basuki Mata and sought from her all sorts of happiness for them in the new habitation.

48. Ibid., P.213.
Konto Kuanri

*Konto Kuanri* was a new deity, who from an obscure origin, had attained the position of a national tribal deity in the Bonai State. She was of tribal origin and worshipped by all tribes and castes including the royal families of erstwhile of Bonai. She took her form as a round piece of metal and appeared once every year before her annual worship. It was said that a cultivator found out her while ploughing his paddy field and gave her to a Bhuyan Dehuri of the village Jolo near the Khandadhar waterfall who started worshipping her. During the days of worship when the deity was carried by the Dehuri from village to village and to the palace of the ruling chief of Bonaigarh, the deity was offered sacrifices by all, irrespective of castes and tribes. One and all starting from the low to high caste Kshyatriyas and Brahmins participated in the worship of the deity along with the Bhuyans and other tribal communities like Khond and Gond who lived in the area. She was identified with the Hindu Goddess *Durga*, the manifestation of the protective power of the god head. After the festival was over the

51. Ibid., P.119.
deity was kept hidden in a secret place in the jungle to be taken out for worship next year.\textsuperscript{53}

**NATURE DEITIES**

The spirits residing over the local hills, forests, streams and rivers were propitiated by the Bhuyans during ceremonial occasions of the villages. The deities residing in the hills, forests, streams, rivers, etc. were called *Pats*. Each Bhuyan village had a set of *Pat* deities named after the local hills, forests, streams and rivers.\textsuperscript{54} The Bhuyans thus regarded those prominent hills or rivers in the neighbourhood as the guardian deity of the villages and they made offerings and sacrifices to the *Pat* or the spirit of such hill or river. Ordinarily the *Pat* was represented by some stones in each village where the village *Dehuri* performed the ceremonial *puja* on Thursday in the month of *Asarh*.\textsuperscript{55} The *Dehuri* remained fasting the whole day. A little before sun set on the day of puja the *Dehuri* rinsed his teeth, washed his face and took bath before he went to the altar called *Merh* constructed for the *puja*. During the *puja*, any

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, PP.118-119.
\textsuperscript{55} S.C. Ray, op. cit., P.214.
one, even the Raja, happening to pass by the altar must halt there. The villagers wishing to attend the puja must take bath before approaching the altar. The Dehuri burnt incense and made offerings of milk, ghee, dahi (curd) and gur (molasses) to the Pat and sprinkled arua rice on the stone representing the Pat and prayed, "O Pat, keep us in health, keep our families and children in health; give us good crops; May tigers and bears disappear." Then the villagers sacrificed goats on their behalf. Besides this general annual worship, the individual Bhuyans and sometimes others got the Dehuri to sacrifice goats or fowls on their behalf in fulfillment of vows made to the deities.

Sometimes a particular village might also worship a special Pat of its own as well as the common Pat of a group of villages. The Baro-Khanda Bar in the State of Bonai, consisting of villages Toinsa, Kainsara, Raonta, Jolo, Julgor, etc. all sacrifice to all Brahmani Pat or the spirit of the river Brahmani while the Bhuyans of Toinsa offered sacrifices to a neighbouring hill called Kuradi Pat, and those of Tainsara worshipped another hill called

57. Ibid., P.215.
Almost every hill in the Bhuyan country was worshipped as a *Pat* by some village or a group of villages. Thus, the Bhuyan villages of Suakati, Dongapani, Thakurdih and Jamdih in the State of Keonjhar offered sacrifices to *Kopta Pat*.

The gradual widening of the social organisation with the advance in civilization among the Bhuyans in evidence by the fact that where as in the *Pabri Pargana*, although a *Pat* was the tutelary deity of a group of villages, almost every village offered the periodical sacrifices to its own *Pat* separately, the Bhuyans of the different villages of the *Kuira Pargana* went a step further and all met together on the *Pat Puja* day. The *Dehuris* and *Naeks* and other representatives from all the villages met at the village *Kuira* before the *puja* of the *Pat*. On this occasion the *Mahakur* or headman of the pastoral caste of *Gours*, supplied milk, *dahi* called curdled milk and *ghee* (clarified butter), and a potter (*Kumhar*) of the village Kolmong supplied earthen vessels for the *puja*. These were divided among the different villages and with these the village elders returned

59. Ibid.
to their respective villages where sacrifices were offered to the Pat deities.  

The Bhuyans of the plains showed a wider organisation for among them a group of neighbouring villages offered sacrifices to their common Pat jointly. The sacrifices to Kala Pat are made jointly at the village Lodam by the Bhuyans of Lodam, Kolaiposh, Nawapara, Kanapali, Thethaiposh, Nohinipara, Sukpali, Ongapara, Sukhaban, Sagriaposh, Tetengagera, Tangarpali, Babniburi, Tokra, Kendudih, Basnai, Kumardih, Jugihar, Paragposh, Kotapara, Rengalbera, Lauposh, Ghunsriposh, Bhalendih, Dhawadih and Mahishchhapal and each village brought a goat for sacrifice. The Kalo or village priest of Lodam, officiating as the sacrificer, offered the sacrifices of goats one after another to the Pat.  

In village Kuar, in the Keonjhar State, a hut temple had been built for the mountain deity Maha Pat the great Pat and this deity was recognised as a tribal deity by the Bhuyans and other tribesmen not only from all over the Keonjhar hills, but their neighbours from the Bonai and Pal Lahera States came to offer sacrifices to this

62. Ibid.
Maha Pat. 63 In honour of Maha Pat a great annual festival was held on a Friday in the month of Magh (January-February). 64

Like all other deities, the Bhuyans also worshipped river gods. Baitarani Pat is one of these river gods worshipped by them. Both the hill Bhuyans and the Plains Bhuyans spoke of "Nadi-Samudra-Brahmani Pat" (lit. River-Ocean-Brahmani Pat) which corroborated the fact that they worshipped river Gods. 65 Similarly, they spoke of Baitarani Pat as one of their deities. Only the Bhuyans of the Keonjhar State, through which state the river Baitarani used to flow, actually made offerings and sacrifices to the Baitarani Pat. They worshipped Khanda Pat or the Khandardhar waterfall near village Lorapani in Bonai and the Dehuri made a sacrifice of a white goat. 66

Bahuni or the spirit of surface springs was recognised by the Bhuyans as one of their spirits who received offerings of flowers, molasses and fowls in the months of Asarh (June-July) Sraban

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64. Ibid., P.218.
65. Ibid., PP.218-219.
66. Ibid., P.219.
August-September) to ensure an unfailing of water throughout the year. Bahuni was also the spirit of woods. Before the Bhuyans began to clear land for Koman cultivation on the steep hill slopes, the Bhuyan cultivators made offerings of molasses to this forest deity.67

Sometimes the name Pat was applied to the seat of the gods and to the gods themselves. These Pats are Pitru Pat or Pat of the ancestors and Lakshmi Pat or Pat of the Goddess of wealth who were worshipped by the Bhuyans.68 Almost all the Bhuyans worshipped the cobra. Some of the Bhuyans called it to be their mother and thought they were descended from it. They never touched or killed a cobra and did not swear by it.69

The religion of the Bhuyans was one of blood. They worshipped a blood-thirsty tutelary Goddess called Thakurani. Probably this Goddess had originated from the Hindu Goddess Kali.70 The Bhuyan priest used to worship Her and made human sacrifices at

68. Ibid.
certain shrines of Bamra, Bonai and Gangpur. During the Keonjhar rebellion of 1967-68 the Bhuyans carried off and murdered the Raja’s Prime Minister and presented his head to the rebel leader. Beheading the Raja’s Prime Minister was treated as a sacrificial offering to Thakurani Mai. But Risley identified Thakurani Mai with Hindu Durga to whom the Bhuyan priest made offerings of goats, sheep, etc.

Hindu Pantheon

Traces of borrowing from the Hindu Pantheon and religious ceremonies were noticed among the remote hill Bhuyans of Orissa. The Hindu gods and goddesses like Siva or Mahadeb, Durga, Laxmi and Jagannath were revered and worshipped by the Bhuyans. It was a matter of great interest that in Makar Jatra festival a Bhuyan Dehuri worshipped at the shrine which was dedicated to Mahadeb called Nageswar, one of the Holy Trinity of the Hindu Religion. The festival like Makar Jatra and Gamha lacked any feature of the tribal religion and were clear case of cultural borrowing.

GENERAL VILLAGE GODS AND GODDESSES

Boram Deota

Boram was one of the general village deities worshipped by the Bhuyans of Orissa. Off all the tribal deities Boram is considered to be the most powerful deity. They paid great attention to Boram who was also called Bir. He was Vira or Mahabir Hanuman. Some Bhuyans identify Boram with the Sun God. But others viewed it to be a female god and like Sun she was benevolent in nature. Boram was said to be the husband of Gai-sri or Thakurani or Mangala. She resided in the sacred grove situated at the outskirts of the village and was represented by stone emblem. But some believed that Boram who was said to be the husband of Gai-sri, was not represented by any symbol in the Pauri villages. But in the seared grave called Joher of the Kuira Bhuyans a stone was placed in order to represent Boram. In most of the major ceremonies of the Bhuyans, she was propitiated duly and fowls

75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
and goats were sacrificed and rice was offered to her. The festival called *Boram Puja* performed in the month of *Chait* was celebrated in honour of *Boram* to mark certain phases of agricultural operations such as forest clearing and setting fire to the dried matter and sowing paddy.\(^81\) Besides some other important annual festivals like *Katha Jatra, Akshya Tirtia, Bihira puja* are performed near the sacred altar of the *Boram* called *Boram Merh*. During the *Katha Jatra* ceremony held in the months of January and February, the *Dehuri* went to the *Boram Merh* and performed necessary rites and sacrificed a fowl.\(^82\) On the occasion of *Akshya Tirtia* for the first sowing of paddy held on the third day of the moon in the month of *Baisakh*, the family head worshipped *Boram* by offering *arua* rice, milk and molasses. Then he sacrificed a fowl in honour of *Boram* and sprinkled drops of blood on the piles of grains.\(^83\) On the occasion of *Bihira* or *Asarhi Puja* held in the month of *Asarh* (June-July) the *Dehuri* worshipped *Boram* and sacrificed a goat or a fowl alternately every year.\(^84\)


\(^{82}\) Ibid., P.129.

\(^{83}\) S.C. Ray, op. cit., PP.245-246.

A day in the month of March-April was fixed for the worship of Boram Deota. On the previous day the Dehuri remained fasting and husked paddy collected from all the families to be used in the ritual. After the husking of paddy was finished he ate once only in the late afternoon and observed continence. At the night each and every family took a gourdful of paddy to the house of the Dehuri and left it there over night. In the following morning the Dehuri killed a chicken at his doorstep and sprinkled a little of blood on all the gourds containing paddy. Veiling their faces women came and took their respective gourds. It was believed that this paddy carried good luck and it was stored for the first sowing on the Akshya Tirtia. Then the Dehuri proceeded to Boram Merh with a group of villagers and propitiated Boram by offering arua rice, milk, molasses and by sacrificing fowls or goats. The meat and the rice were cooked and eaten there and were never brought home. It was only after the Boram Deota was worshipped that the Bhuyans could take up the activities like setting fire to their Biringa and sowing upland paddy.

86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
On the occasion of *Akhni Pardhi* or the annual hunting expedition held on the third day of *Chait* when the Bhuyans of each village went to the jungle for the hunting, the *Dehuri* offered a few drops of blood to *Boram* as soon as the game was begged.\(^8^9\) In *Megh* or *Falgun* (January-February) when the mango blossoms came out, the *Dehuri* made offerings to render innocuous the eating of new fruit, the cutting of trees and bushes and the application of manure to the fields and generally to avert all evils.\(^9^0\) In the month of *Baisakh* (April) an offering of *arua* rice was made to *Boram Deota* to make the sowing operations free from unseen dangers.\(^9^1\) In the month of *Bhadra* or *Asvin* (September-October) the Bhuyan cultivators made the offerings of molasses and frankincense to *Boram* on their respective fields when they cut the first sheaves of paddy. After two or three days when the new rice was first eaten, the *Dehuri* on behalf of all the villagers, sacrificed a fowl to *Boram Deota*. Thus, the supernatural danger that might otherwise arise from the eating of new rice was removed.\(^9^2\)

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\(^{89}\) S.C. Ray, op. cit., P.222.
\(^{90}\) Ibid.
\(^{92}\) S.C. Ray, op. cit., P.223.
Gai-sri was another important general village deity of the Bhuyans of Orissa who received offerings at every village. In the villages of the hill areas of the Bonai, Pal Lahera and Keonjhar States where the village sites were changed from time to time Gai-sri was represented by a wooden pillar fixed on the ground on one side of the Darbar. But in the villages of Koira Pargana and the Plains villages where all the villagers were agrarian Gai-sri was represented by a stone which was installed along with other stones in a permanent sacred grove called Jahira. Thus Gai-sri represented the tutelary deity of the Bhuyan villages to whom offerings were made in different ceremonial occasions celebrated by them for the well-being and prosperity of the villagers. She was the wife of Boram and was identified with Thakurani or Mangala. She was always benevolent and protected the villagers and their cattle and crops from diseases. In case of diseases the Dehuri burnt incense, offered prayer and food and propitiated Gai-sri in great solemnity so that she warded off all troubles and difficulties.

94. Ibid.
They also worshipped Gai-sri for bumper harvest. Before the Katha Jatra festival or the burning of dried trees and bushes in the forest clearing held in the months of January and February the Dehuri, the sacerdotal head of Bhuyan village, made the offerings of arua rice, milk and molasses to Gai-sri. It was believed unless the festival was performed the Bhuyans did not eat dried Mahua flowers. In the month of Chait (March-April) on the occasion of Akhni Pardhi day which marked the beginning of annual hunting expedition, when the Bhuyans of each village went to the forest for hunting, the Dehuri offered a little blood of the game to Gai-sri as soon as it was begged. In the month of Magh or Falgun (January-February) when the mango blossoms came out, the Dehuri made offerings to Gai-sri to render innocuous the eating of new fruits, cutting of trees and bushes and application of manure to the fields and to avert all evils. In the month of Baisakh (April) when Akshya Tirtia festival was celebrated on the third day of the moon the Dehuri worshipped Gai-sri by offering arua rice, milk and molasses and sacrificed a fowl in his honour to make the sowing operations free

98. Ibid., P.129.
from unseen dangers. Finally in the month of Bhadra or Asvin (September-October) the Bhuyans made individual offerings to Gai-sri in their respective fields when they cut the first sheaves of paddy. Two or three days after this individual offerings to Gai-sri, on behalf of all the villagers the Dehuri made the offerings of a little jau or new rice cooked in a new earthen vessel to Gai-sri in order to avert the supernatural dangers of eating the new rice. It was not unreasonable to say Boram on one side of the village and Gai-sri on the other side of the village represented male and female forces of nature or rather the creative and protective aspect of the Deity.

Thakurani Usha

In the month of Agrahayam, a few Bhuyan families, in the Koira Pargana of Bonai and in the Plains, made a special propitiation called Thakurani Usha every day for a whole month, in fulfillment of some vow or in expectation of some desired boon. They also performed Bisri Usha in Magh for eight days during which Devi was worshipped in a clay image. On the last day of these Ushas or Bratas, they made the offering of goats, sheep,
fowls and buffaloes to the deity. Beside, they observed another Usha known as Dhun Kulia Usha and worshipped Mahadeva under the name of Sri-Subana or Somanath and his consort Parvati for over a month from the eighth day of the new moon in Bhadra to the full moon in Asvin. On the last day of the Usha one or two goats were sacrificed and no images of the deities were made. Everyday in the evening a number of men and women used to assemble in the courtyard of the family that celebrated the Usha and few youngmen sang and danced to the accompaniment of the primitive music played by an old man or woman. This Usha was in vogue among the Plains Bhuyans as well as some other aboriginal and semi-aboriginal families in the Plains. Like other Ushas, this Usha was observed for securing some boon or in fulfillment of some vow.

The Bhuyans apparently borrowed Goddess Laksmi from the Hindus, who was considered as the guardian of crops and cattle and the bestower of prosperity. On a Friday, the Bhuyan cultivators

105. Ibid.
108. Ibid., P.226.
offered *arua* rice and molasses to Goddess *Laksmi* on their fields. Then they reaped a few sheaves of paddy, brought them home and inserted them into the inner side of the thatch of their huts. At the time of making receptacles called *pura* to store rice, they put inside the first *pura* a betel-nut as offering to Goddess *Laksmi*. After filling the *pura* with rice and plaiting it up, they lighted a lamp over it in honour of the Goddess *Laksmi*.

**ANCESTOR WORSHIP**

Like other gods and goddess as noted earlier, the Bhuyans worshipped ancestor spirits or man gods and offered consecrated food and incense on every ritual and festive occasions. The man gods or the family gods or ancestor spirits were ceremonially conducted into the house and given seats in the *Bhitar* (inner-tabernacle). These ancestor spirits or *Pitrus* watched over the well-being and prosperity of the family excepting there was any negligence in making regular offerings and sacrifices to them on which they depended for nutriment like other spirits. Generally

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the ancestor spirits were benevolent in nature and helped the members of the family and kept them and their cattle healthy. If neglected or offended, they got angry and bring sickness and killed the cattle. Therefore, the Bhuyans were very particular about the worship of the ancestor spirits. But the spirits of the unmarried persons and children and those who died of cholera, small-pox, leprosy, snake-bite, tiger-kill and by committing suicide did not have any place in the spiritual world. They turned into ghosts and hovered around the village. These ghosts were believed to cause illness and therefore, were appeased by offerings of tobacco, liquor and food. The ancestor spirits of the village in general were worshipped by the village Dehuri during all collective worship where as the family heads worshipped the ancestor spirits separately in their respective houses.

The customary offerings and sacrifices made by the Bhuyans to the ancestral spirits were as follows:

A few drops of liquor were dropped on the ground for the ancestor spirits whenever liquor was drunk by the members of the

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114. Ibid.
115. Ibid.
family.\textsuperscript{116} At the name giving ceremony of a \textit{Pauri} child an offering of pudding called \textit{(jau)} made of rice flour and sesamum seeds was offered to the ancestor spirit in the \textit{Bhitar}.\textsuperscript{117} The Bhuyan bride also made the offering of \textit{jau} to the spirits of her husband's ancestors.\textsuperscript{118} When the soul or shade of a deceased member of the family was conducted into the house at \textit{Bhitar}, the offerings of turmeric, \textit{arua} rice, frankincense and molasses were made to the ancestor spirits in the \textit{Bhitar}.\textsuperscript{119} Similarly on the occasion of the annual hunting expedition called \textit{Akhri Pardhi} held on the third day of the moon (\textit{Akshya Tirtia}) in the month of \textit{Chait} the offering of turmeric, \textit{arua} rice, frankincense and molasses were made to the ancestor spirits by the \textit{Dehuri}.\textsuperscript{120} On the occasion of the \textit{Am-Nua} ceremony held in \textit{Magh-Falgun} (December-January) the \textit{Dehuri} worshipped the ancestor spirits and makes the offerings of \textit{arua} rice, frankincense, molasses, mango blossoms and rice flour to them.\textsuperscript{121} During \textit{Nua-Khai} or \textit{Nua-Khia} or new rice eating ceremony which was held in \textit{Bhadra-Asvin} (September-October) the \textit{Dehuri}
worshipped the ancestral spirits by offering of arua rice, molasses and frankincense and in some cases sacrificed a fowl and also the heads of the families made offerings to them in the Bhitar.\textsuperscript{122}

In addition to the spirits of the deceased ancestors, sometimes the spirits of a murdered person was accepted by the family concerned as a family god to save the family from the troubles that might otherwise be caused by the spirit. Sacrifices were made to appease such spirits at stated intervals.\textsuperscript{123} Sometimes they believed that a field was hunted by the spirits of some deceased or murdered persons who caused harm to the persons cultivating the field. The owners of such fields propitiated such spirits by providing them asthan or a permanent seat in the fields and promising them periodical sacrifices which were subsequently offered regularly by them.\textsuperscript{124}

Other man gods or ancestor spirits of the Bhuyans were the Baghia or the spirit of a man killed by a tiger and the Bauti or the spirit of a man killed by a bear. Such spirits were not conducted

\textsuperscript{122} S.C. Ray, op. cit., P.249.
\textsuperscript{123} JBORS, Vol.VI, Part-II, 1920, P.288.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
into the Bhitar or inner tabernacle of the house as they were believed to wander about at will and try to secure food and nourishment for themselves as best as they could.\textsuperscript{125} They were believed to assume the shape of a tiger or a bear, as the case may be; and to protect themselves from being destroyed by the Baghia spirits who appeared in the shape of tigers or bears, the Bhuyans made the offerings of fowls to them before they started on annual hunting expedition on the Akhni Pardhi or ordinary hunting expedition. No Asthan or a permanent seat in the Bhitar was provided for such man gods or ancestral spirits.\textsuperscript{126}

As the Bhuyans believed that the Bauti spirits only damaged their crops no regular sacrifices as offerings were made to them. But when the bears caused repeated damages to their crops, occasional vows of sacrifices of fowls are made to them.\textsuperscript{127} The name “Bauti” was also applied to the familiar spirits of certain individuals. Barahi Pat is the Pig deity. To prevent pigs and parrots from damaging their crops, the Bhuyans sometime offered sacrifices at the foot prints of the pigs in the forests.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{125} S.C. Ray, op. cit., P.228.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., P.229.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
The spirits of some ancient heroes, not belonging to Bhuyan community, were vaguely spoken as deities, but they were not offered sacrifices separately. Only on occasions of certain pujas of the village gods, the names of all spirits or deities worth naming were taken by the sacredotal head by the village, Dehuri along with the recognised village deities and the names of Bon Rai, Baro Bhai Mallar and a few others who were apparently spirits of deceased men of worth mentioning. There were two such spirits, however, who had been given a seat in the Pauri country and received offerings of stones. They are called Andya and Sandya who were said to have belonged to a white (Pundi) tribe named the Asurs who were reputed to have possessed super human strength.

Thus among the aboriginal people like the Bhuyans, religion played a conspicuous role. The origin and growth of their religion were undoubtedly conditioned by the background of the struggle for existence in an insecure physical and social environment with all its attendant fears. The Bhuyans worshipped all degrees of deities.

from their *Dharam Deota* down to the orthodox Hindu Goddess *Kali* or *Durga*. In the Bhuyan Pantheon there were mainly four types of deities having various degrees of power and the deities borrowed from the Hindu religion. Generally, the Bhuyans worshipped no images and built no temples for their deities. The Bhuyan made regular offerings and sacrifices. Besides worshipping the deities and spirits described above, the Bhuyans, like other animistic tribes, believed in the presence of a host of impersonal or minor personal agents who might however be controlled, cajoled or tricked into inactivity and quiescence. The *Dehuri*, a sacredotal head of a village, played a very important role in the religious activities of the Bhuyan community. The Bhuyan religion exerted a profound influence upon their society and culture. With the primitive characteristics this religion proved to be a binding thread to keep their age-old institutions, traditions, manners and language in tact.