

## **Boros of Assam : An insight into ‘Bathou’ Faith & belief system in the light of the guiding principles**

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### **Abstract :**

Boros constitute the major indigenous community in Assam and are the aborigines of the Brahmaputra valley those have been mentioned as *Kirats* in the ancient literature of Bharat. The sociocultural foundations of this community are integrated with an independent faith and belief system and emanates in all walks of life with reverence for ‘Bathou’ as the supreme God. Lord Shiv is worshiped as Bathou who too is considered as a *kirat* while the Proximity to Mount Kailash as the abode of lord Shiv from this place can lead to assume this fact that the reverence to Lord shiv in the form of ‘Bathou’ by Boros might have been due to in being the primal descendancy at a certain point of time. The Boro way of life attributes every principle of self discipline assigned to a specific deity. The spiritual elements in the ‘Bathou’ faith could also be considered as one of the devout principles in Sanatan Hindu Dharm which is related to be realized within human consciousness. The study has drawn inferences upon the existing primary and secondary sources and the materials available.

### **Introduction :**

Bharat has a considerable no. of indigenous population in almost every state. The scheduled tribes of Bharat make between 8-9% of the total population. The colonial rule had initiated the term tribe in Bharat, by using the term in the context of the indigenous settlements the Britishers segregated the ethnic groups and thus connoting each group under a terminology. It seems the idea behind doing so was in the name of administrative convenience. Harry Verrier Holman Elwin was a British born Indian anthropologist and a Tribal activist, who began his career in India as a Christian Missionary. Elwin had been working for several years and his insistence on preserving tribal Identities and customs and he had been advising J L Nehru that this region that had many tribal communities should not be interfered with to preserve their pristine character. And due to this policy Many parts of Bharat where Indigenous population have been dwelling were in segregation and for a total of almost fifty years the Northeastern part too had met the same fate. This policy was an impediment to the growth of this region into the national fold. Thus the word Tribe that came to be incorporated in

the constitution had played a major role in dividing the people and distancing the indigenous populations those had some affinity among themselves from each other and that got reflected in the policy of preservation and segregation. The Boros are a large indigenous group in this region and in this context an attempt is made to discuss the rudimentary aspect of the religion of the Boros also with some reference to the contemporary belief system.

**Objectives of study** : Understanding the basic principles of the Bathou faith and acknowledging the same. Identifying the significance of the Bathou faith and methods of worship of Boros. Understanding the integration of the elements of nature being touched upon in conceptualizing the Bathou faith.

**Methodology** : Mainly secondary sources were being consulted. Talking to the some people belonging to the community had been the source for understanding the processes and methods of worship.

### **Origin** :

The Boros of Assam are recognized as a scheduled tribe (under plain category). They constitute the largest indigenous group among the various ethnic populations of the present-day state of Assam. The Boros (Kacharis) may be described as the aborigines or earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley.<sup>10</sup> There was a time when the entire western valley of the Brahmaputra, Chinese areas in the east that covered Hwangho and Yang-tse kiang rivers of Northwestern part and the Patkai region on the southern Tibet was dominated by the Indo-Mongoloid people, as according to the modern terminology and were called as *kirats*. According to the available sources in various ancient scriptures and Historical discourses, Books on History etc. The Himalayas have been the abode of most of the hilly population of Bharat and those are the ancient inhabitants in the present society. In ancient times, the north-eastern region, especially Assam and its neighboring regions, was known as the land of Kiratas, i.e. the habitat of the Indo Mongoloid people.<sup>11</sup>

The Himalayan *kiratas* are the Boros, also known as *Kirats*, as mentioned in various Hindu scriptures and Purans, more particularly in Mahabharat. They are considered to be a group of ancient indigenous people living in the eastern Himalayas and the northeastern regions of India. The Puran that mention the Kiratas include: Shiva Puran, *Markandeya Puran*, *vayu puran*. Boros were known as *kiratas* and had been ruling Assam before the entry of Ahoms. In the War of the Mahabharat many

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<sup>10</sup> E. Gait, A History of Assam, LBS Publications, Guwahati, 1984, p.24

<sup>11</sup> S.N. Sarma, A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam, Bina Library, Guwahati, Reprint, 2001, p.36

Mongolian Boro kings had been ruling in different parts of the HwangHo valley and Yang- tse - kiang rivers in the Northwestern part of China.<sup>12</sup>

The Indus valley civilization and the Kirat -Boro civilization had flourished together at different places and were contemporary.

The genealogy of king *Baan* as the famous Boro king was contemporary to lord Krishn. It is mentioned in *Suta samhita* that King Ban was a great devotee of Lord Shiv.

### **Bathou the supreme God :**

The religious faith 'Bathou' is the prime faith on which the entire socioeconomic and cultural life of the Boros is based upon and they worship Bathou as the Supreme God. According to the Boros before the creation of the Universe there existed a vacuum and *Oblongwari* an eternal God who was formless had desired to take the form of flesh and blood thus he came in the shape of a lively human being and was called *Jiu Bwrai*. He is believed to be the first human with a soul. It is believed that he had uttered these five spiritual words *Awng* (Earth) ,*Hring*(water), *Khling*(air), *fwt*(fire) and *che*(sky). It is therefore believed that the first five elements were created then and by Him. Panchtatva i.e the five elements have also been the basis of all the philosophies of Hindu sanatan dharm.

The term Bathou consists of two meaningful words i.e. 'Ba' means 'five' or '*pancha*' and '*thou*' (or *gwthou*) stands for principle or philosophy (*tatva*). The term 'Ba' incorporates in itself five elements - '*Ha*'( earth), '*Dwi*' (water), '*Bar*' (air), '*Or/San*' (Fire/Sun/Light) and '*Okhrang*' (ether); without which there is no survival. So the term Bathou comprises five elements (pan-cha-tatva) those are ; not easy to understand without spiritual realization. Panchtatva is also one of the basic principles of the Sanatan Bharatiya Hindu Dharm. In both the belief systems this spiritual conformity is the basis of the beginning of this cosmic universe accordingly.

Boros regard Bathou as the divine entity of Shiv or *Sibray*. Through Bathou Boros worship Shiv and Bathou is the main God of worship. The *Sijou* - plant a cactus (*Euphorbia splendens* ) is worshiped with great reverence and is being kept in northeast direction of every household in its sacred altar. Boros believe that lord Shiv meditated under a big *sijou* plant on the mountain of the Himalay, thus it is worshiped as a symbol of lord Shiv. The plant to be placed for worship has to have five branches

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<sup>12</sup> P.C.Chaudhary, The History of civilization of the people of Assam 1987.p126

and is to be planted in the eastern part of the courtyard. The place from which the plant is brought a ritual is being followed wherein a music is being played by the devotees and then very respectfully the plant is placed upon Altar. There are sixteen posts created equally split into two parts while in the creation of the sacred Altar. Each split post symbolizes male and female and specific deity that has a specific role. Each post represents a deity.

The foremost and most important God is the '*Ailing*' deity of lust and greed. By worshiping Him one can overcome the intense desires of lust and greed. It is believed that his disciples are protected from these evils. Another deity named '*Agrang*' blesses his disciples with peace and unity. '*khaji*' is a deity who provides guidance of truth and purity. '*Khwila*' is another deity, God of wind. '*Abla khungur*' is yet another God of wind. '*Raj khandra*' is the deity of truth. '*Raj phutur*' is the God of love and teaches its disciples that love begets love. '*Ali Bwrali*' is the God of cultivation and cares for the crops. '*Sanja Bwrali*' is the God who teaches not to kill animals and birds and to be merciful. '*Sari jwmwn*' is the Goddess of knowledge and wisdom. '*Awi Mwnasu*' is another Goddess for cultivation and natural seedlings. '*Basu Mainao*' is the Goddess of earth and wealth. '*Bwrai sikh Raja*' is the deity of wild animals and teaches his disciples humility and compassion. '*Bwrai Bag Raja*' is the deity who teaches self restraint.

'*Bwrai Shoudri*' is a deity that teaches disciples to pray to Bathou during any eventuality in life. '*Basumati*' is the deity of death who carries the soul after death.<sup>13</sup>

In other words Bathou is a civilization in itself that enhances all the human traits thus enabling in alleviating and also resolving the conflicts of survival. Most of the agrarian societies be it Sumerian, Mesopotamia etc. in any of polytheistic or monotheistic nature it is seen that the sociocultural set up in these societies had been based upon a belief system incorporating deities, Gods and Goddesses in order to develop and create a systematic functioning of the society. Similarly, Boros as an ancient society are still playing an important role of conservationists and in preserving nature as their forebears in the form of rituals, practices, customs etc. Lord Shiv being the core of the Sanatan Hindu Dharm with the philosophy almost similar that emanates from the reverence of Bathou with those principles thereof. In addition to this the Boros worship many deities and during Durga puja

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<sup>13</sup> Dr. Nusahar Burgayary, Journal of people's history and culture vol.8 no.2 December, 2022

and other Hindu festivals Boros offer oblation to the respective deities as well.

The principles on which Boro society is organized does encompass all the aspects upon which a perfect society must stand and evolve upon. It can be said that these foundational spiritual principles guide the Bathou religion and furnish all the philosophical requirements for a perfect civilizational value system to flourish and grow. Surrounding the Bathou philosophy exists a system for regulating the functioning of the moral as well as economic and sociocultural life and the principles are the guidelines to lead the society that stands quite similar to the sanatan way of classifying deities of their attributes respectively.

*kamrup* ( Assam ) was being ruled by *kirats* and the religion that was followed was '*kiratajohmotoh*' that in other words means *kirata* -religion. In conformity with the belief that Lord Shiv was a *kirat* and Goddess Parvati was a *kirati* , It can be inferred as the abode of lord shiv had been Kailash and this Mountain in China had a great a great affinity with the inhabitants of this very large area.

It is accepted that lord Shiv and Goddess Maa Parvati are also the originators of the music and dance. The ragas were introduced by Lord Shiv and Ma Parvati had taught the dance to the Princess Usha the daughter of king Baan of *Thoiphur* (Tezpur). Later Usha had taken this art form to Dwarika from where the entire women had learnt the dance in various forms. The structure on which the entire sociocultural and religious set up of Sanatan Hindu civilization stands upon consists of the spiritual elements similar could be traced back to the progenitors of the people of this region.

## **Conclusion :**

Boros being one of the most ancient societies of the world, the fundamental principles of the Bathou faith do possess the sources of civilization intangibly incorporated in the practices of worship and it is purely spiritual in character. The entire sociocultural regulatory mechanism for an ideal society to evolve upon rests on the fundamental principles of Bathou. Boros and their Idiosyncrasies are quite relevant to most of the indigenous societies of Bharat in relevance to the faith and practices of worship in commonality of being spiritual and incorporating the elements of nature as well.

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## **INDIC HERITAGE AND CULTURE**

*An International Open Access, Peer Reviewed Refereed, Yearly Multidisciplinary Journal*

ISSN (0): 2584-2862

Vol.-4, Issue-I, 2025

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