



## Mysticism and Spirituality in the Bathou religion of the Bodos

**Dr. Sankhang Basumatary**

M.A., MPhil. & PhD in Philosophy

Contact No. 9971692115

Email. Sankhangb3@gmail.com

### (i) Layers of Mysticism involved in Bathou religious beliefs and practices

Bathou religion was emanated protologically, by birth with Boro community in this world.<sup>1</sup> There is no written theological texts and history about Bathouism except oral literature and mythological tales. Eschatologically, there is no place for idols worship in Bathou religious beliefs and practices. In Bathouism, different deities are believed and worshiped in the sense of formless, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient. In this connection, informant Monolal Basumatary avers that Boro people believe and worship many Gods (Mwdai) and Goddesses (Mwdwijw) who are addressed and propitiated at home, outskirts of household at the time of Garja and Kherai festival (pwrwb). The names and positions of Gods and Goddesses as well as the layers of mysticism are— 1) *Bathou Bwrai* or *Khoria Bwrai* is the supreme and chief spiritual God of Boros' Garja and Kherai festival. He is given the highest position among spiritual deities in Boro pantheon. His consort is Bathou Buri or *Khoria Buri*. 2) *Aileng*: She is the body-guard of *Bathou Bwrai* and also the mother of earth. 3) *Agrang*: He is the general of the god-in-chief. 4) *Khoila*: He is the messenger of the god-in-chief. 5) *Karji*: He is the follower of the Bwrai (aged/old) Bathou. 6) *Rajkhandra*: He is also a follower of Bwrai Bathou. 7) *Song Raja*: he is the owner of the wild animals and even a follower of Bwrai Bathou. The hunters propitiate him before entering into the jungle for hunting. His consort is Song Rani. 8) *Alai* and *Bilai Khungri*: They are prince Goddesses and followers of Bathou Buri or *Khoria Buri*. 9) *Bhandari*: She is the owner of the store (बानदार) of the food-stuffs. 10) *Ranchandri* or *Ran Phagli*: She is known as the Goddess of war. Before going for the battle field, she is believed to be propitiated where they can win in the wars. 11) *Bulliburi*: She is regarded as the owner of the fish species. Before going for fishing, she must be propitiated to protect from any spontaneous danger or terrible situations and circumstances. She is also regarded as the Goddess of medicine.

Bathou religion gives the place and value (respect) to non-Boro deities (Harsa Mwdai) which is precise in Garja and Kherai festival that cannot be seen in other religions.<sup>2</sup> In Garja and Kherai, they (non-Boro Deities) are also being propitiated and addresses along with Boro deities. As Nowab Badsha (Muslim God or हारसा मोदाइ): This god of the Muslim is also given a seat or value during the Kherai puja who is also identified as Peer Saheb. Apart from Peer Saheb, there are some non-Boro gods are also given the place, value, worshiped

<sup>1</sup>The research narrator Uday Basumatary Oja, at Kherai festival, Bharabkunda, Dist. Udalguri-Assam. Dated: 08/02/2020.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.,

and addressed during Garja and Kherai festival. They are— ‘Mahadeo’ or ‘Mahadeva’ is the chief non-Boro God. To be precise, Bathou is not believed as equivalent or same to ‘Siva’ or ‘Mohadeva’ (destroyer in Hinduism) as He (Mohadeva) is also addressed separately during the time of Garja puja who is reckoned as the chief non-boro god or Harsa Mwdai. His followers viz. ‘Sila Rai’, ‘Bera Bhanga’, ‘Santha Mara’, ‘Damka Mara’ ‘Birā Mwdai’, et al. are also addressed and worshiped at the time of Garja and Kherai festival. There is another relevant non-boro deity whose name is Bishahari who is also addressed and propitiated at Garja puja. Laokar Gosai is the god of cowherds who is known as Garakhia Gosai or non-boro deity. Garakhia Gosai is identified as the Lord Krishna, who is identical with Lord Krishna.<sup>3</sup> His followers are ‘Madhab Gosai’, ‘Gadab Gosai’, ‘Baro Gopal’ ‘Baro Gopini’, ‘Langthia Gosai, et al. Thus in Garja and Kherai festival—Oja addresses altogether thirty three crore (33 crore) deities by chanting mantras— in this view, which is quite similar to Hindu religion.<sup>4</sup>

## (ii) Mysticism in the every domain (ritual practices to prediction and ritual engineering).

Protologically, the holy word ‘Bathou is composed of two meaningful terms ‘Ba’ means ‘five’ and ‘Thou’ means ‘deep’ which altogether refer to five deep philosophical principles and five visible elements viz. earth, water, air, fire and ether. At domestic puja, Garj and Kherai festival, these five elements are also addressed and propitiated in the living symbol of deities who are also recognized as followers of Bathou Bwrai (chief God). They are— a) Bwiswmuthi/Ailwng Mwdai (deity of earth),<sup>5</sup> b) Agrang Mwdai (deity of water), c) Khwli Mwdai (deity of air), d) Sanja Bwrai or San Mwdai (deity of fire/sun/light, and e) Raj Ukhumbri Mwdai (deity of ether). Boro people worship Bathou Bwrai at bathou altar by keeping witness and address of perceptible/visible five elements or deities. Since the creation of this universe, these five elements have also been addressed and believed in living symbol of deities of earth, water, air, fire/sun and ether by the followers of Bathou religion.

Bathouism is one of the religions of the world which believes in eternal and invisible spiritual power (omnipresent) of Gods and Goddesses. In Bathou religion, Gods and Goddesses are respectively called as Mwdai (male deities) and Mwdaijw (female deities).<sup>6</sup> Boro people worship Bathou Bwrai (chief God) as well as even other gods and goddesses at their home and religious functions or festivities like *Garja* and *Kherai*. Except bathou altar of homestead, there is no specific or fixed place to worship like— the temple, church, mosque, gurudwara, in Bathou religious belief and practice. Nevertheless, in every Boro household, there is one *Si-jwu* plant (scientific or botanical name is *euphorbia Splendens*). Informant Oja Manda Basumatary says, by worshipping of Si-jwu plant, His followers (sons or daughters) can get Him in the form of living being or symbol of Bwrai Bathou through which they can achieve His grace as suggested by Si-Bwrai when He was about to die or before passing away in the world. Since then, Boro people have been reckoning that Si-Jwu is Bathou or living being or symbol of Si-Bwrai. According to informant Monolal Basumatary, the term “Si-jwu” is derived from two words “Si” means “Soul or life” and “Jwu” means Supreme or chief which is worshiped as a form of supreme soul. In this connection, for him, the symbol of supreme soul or life is identified and worshiped as spirit of Bathou or chief deity which is eternal and invisible in our open eye. Informant Uday Basumatry says that Boro people have been worshiping perceptible Si-Jwu plant in the form of living being or symbol of Bathou Bwrai or Si-Bwrai since the time of immemorial in this world as precisely can say that after creation of this universe. So in conversation with Toren Basumatary, it is explicit that Bathouism is God centered religion which cannot be called as Animism. As also analysed by Sidney Endle in his book *The*

<sup>3</sup>Kameswar Brahma, (2008). *Aspect of Social Customs of the Bodos*, published by Bina Library Guwahati. p. 65

<sup>4</sup> Informant Uday Basumatary Oja, at Kherai festival, Bharabkunda, Dist. Udalguri-Assam. Dated: 08/02/2020.

<sup>5</sup>The Thesis entitled *Bathou Religion and its Impact on Boro Society: A Folkloristic Study* by Nareswar Narzary. p.30

<sup>6</sup> The research narrator Monolal Basumatary at Turibari Village, Dist. Chirang, Dated: 03/03/2020 and at Kherai festival, Bhairabkunda, Dist. Udalguri. Dated: 09/02/2020.

*Kochari*, “the religion of the Kachari race is distinct of the type commonly known as animistic and its underlying principle is characteristically one of fear or dead.”<sup>7</sup> Even Dr P.C. Bhattacharjee has given a strong argument about Bathouism where says that “the religion of the Bodos is not animistic. They are worshippers of Bathou, the supreme God. They have other Gods and Goddesses. They believe in Ghosts and Spirits also. But the concept of the Supreme God is predominantly remarkable.”<sup>8</sup> According to their view, Bodos’ Bathou religion cannot be regarded as animism. They worship Bathou and their God is known or identified as the Bathou Bwrai.

### (iii) Mysticism of transcendental variety—of self, world, soul and God.

Informant Uday Basumatary avers that mystically there are transcendental varieties in the name of Bathou Bwrai in the world but He is one only, viz. Mwnsinsi or Mwnsi Bwrai, Si-Bwrai, Jwmwn or Jiumwn Bwrai, Obonglaori, Ānan Gosai, etc.<sup>9</sup> Like Hinduism and Christianity, there are trinity concepts in Bathou religion also, but those three roles are played by Bathou Bwrai Himself. They are— ‘Rangrasi’, ‘Gwhwrasī’ and ‘Mwithahaji’ towards human beings which are recognized as ‘Brahma’, ‘Vishnu’ and ‘Moheswara’ in Hindu mythology; God the father, God the Son and Holy spirit in Christian religion. In conversation with Uday, it is precise that these concept of trinity are nothing but the roles played by the Bathou Himself. For him, As *Rangrasi*, one who gives birth (Kāngrā, *Gwhwrasī*, one who brings up the living being ‘Bāgrā’ and Mwithahaji, one who destroys ‘Lāngrā’. So Bathou Bwrai is inner engineer of human survival, without Him, human survival is unthinkable in the world. So for Monolal, Boros are sons and daughters of Bathou or Si-Bwrai and Bathou or Si-Burwi. Here informant Monolal says that one can achieve self and spiritual being—after becoming aware of himself/herself—who is a son/daughter of Si-Bwrai and Burwi.

### (iv) Death and the other-world

The research narrator Monolal Basumatary says that there are five life circles in Bathou religion. They are— a) Birth, b) marriage, c) death which have to be compulsorily borne by human beings. No one can escape from these binding of life circles, d) Sorrow and suffering, v) Peace and pleasure from which everybody comes across in their life. A human being can live in a visible form in the world when his/her soul exists in the body otherwise human body is useless or nothing. According to Bathouism, informant Gonesh Mochahari says that after passing away in the world, every human’s soul was taken away or given the place in the kingdom of Bathou (heaven/Swrgw) as a son/daughter of Him and Her (Bathou Burwi). But some people are not allowed to come and not given the place in the kingdom of Bathou Bwrai and Burwi those acted sins and immoral works when they were alive in the world. Their souls need to remain or stay in the world until achieved of salvation. In Kherai, this kind of sinners soul come and express the messages through the Doudini what s/he did sinful act when s/he was alive in the hope of salvation. So after dying, human beings’ soul exist in the other world—one is kingdom of Bathou Bwrai and Burwi—another is hell who remains in the world as a ghost till achieving salvation. In Kherai, this sinful soul is given the time in the early morning between 7 a.m. to 8 a.m. in the ending of Kherai puja to share his/her messages through Doudini how s/he has been suffering because of sinful acts when s/he was alive in the world.<sup>10</sup> It is called gwtwi-gwthang-mānkhāngnāi (death persons haunt in human form) which means the soul of death person haunts through the body of Doudini in the Khrai to share his/her messages.

<sup>7</sup>Endle, S.2007, *The Kacharis*, Bina Library, Guwahati, p.33

<sup>8</sup>Bhattacharja, P. 1997, *A Descriptive Analysis of the Bodo Language*, published by Publication Department, Gauhati University, p.17

<sup>9</sup>An interaction with Oja Uday Basumatary at Kherai festival, Bhairabkunda. Dated: 08/02/2020

<sup>10</sup>Uday Basumatary expresses at Kherai festival in Bhairabkunda, Dist. Udalguri-Assam, Dated: 08/09/2020.

### (v) Ideas and instances of Extraordinary Experience

Kherai is a religious cum cultural festival of Boro community. Before practicing Kherai, Garja puja is compulsorily held to purify place, village and also to negate or suspend evil spirits or deities from place, village which is the intention of to prevent from any future affliction at Kherai. The term Kherai derives from two words “Khe” or “Khe Khe” means “repeatedly or whole heartedly” and “Rai” means “to chant or pray”.<sup>11</sup> So the meaning of “Kherai” explicitly expresses that repeatedly or whole heartedly chant or pray the mantras (incantation). But in conversation with Monolal Basumatry, it is precise that the term “Kherai” is single word which means “repeatedly chanting mantras”. In Kherai festival—“to make sense or waking up of sleeping human beings’ soul—Oja charms the mantras which are considered as rite and ritual mantras of Bathou religion”.<sup>12</sup> In Kherai festival, Oja tries to make sense of Doudini’s (the female Shaman) soul by chanting mantras (incantations) repeatedly and whole heartedly. These mantras are taught by Mwnsi or Si-Bwrai who incarnated by himself into human form first after creation of this world along with Si-Burwi (consort). Doudini is inevitable in Kherai who plays the most relevant role to propitiate the spirit of deities as we can say Doudini is mediator between human beings and Gods or deities. During Kherai festival, she is charmed by the mantras (incantation) of the Oja whereupon she falls (awlwngikangnai) into trance and convert into a spiritual being like the deities.

Kherai is a festival of respect and propitiation to souls of deities who incarnate into embodiment souls in the beginning of the world. During the kherai festival, they possess different positions in the hierarchy of the Boro pantheon and their spirit incarnate into the form of *Doudini* (The female Shaman, male people never become a Doudini in Bathouism) one after another to express the messages or words of how to live a meaningful life without immoral, iniquity and sin.<sup>13</sup> In spite of this, the Kherai puja is performed for the good harvest of crops beside the welfare of both private and public lives. The lived of Boros generally depend on agriculture. So, before and after cultivation of paddy field, they perform Garja and Kherai puja where propitiate different Gods and Goddesses for the success in cultivation.

### (vi) Spirituality as understood through the ideas of self or soul (জিভ).

For Bathouism, there are five holy self realization in relationship or association with different mystical deities in Bathou religion through which one can achieve spirituality and purity— a) One’s realization of the ‘Si-Jwu’, the supreme soul as a son of Bathou who follows His words or lessons. b) Man’s linking up the jiumwn (finding soul or life) with the ‘Si-jwu’, the supreme being as a relationship between father and son. c) One’s realization of Mainao as a daughter of Mainao (lakshmi in Hiduism) who take care of wealth of family. d) Realization of the five great elements, viz., eart, water, air, fire and ether and their relation to five great gods or deities— Bima Bwiswmuti/Ailwng Mwdai (mother or deity of eart), Agrang Mwdai (deity of water), Koila, Khwli Mwdai (deity of air), Sanja Bwrali/San Mwdai (deity of fire/Sun/light) and Raj Ukhumbri Mwdai (deity of ether). So it is a mystical past of Bathou religion. Since the creation of this universe, Boro people have been propitiating or worshiping them (deities) as the Mwdai/deities/Gods hitherto. e) One’s Realization of the need of worldly affairs in his/her day to day life’s requirement after understanding of his supreme soul. According to Bathouism, self happens out of his realization of supreme soul or son of Bathou whose self realization possesses awareness for his future life, whose self realization stands out from everything else. This self

<sup>11</sup>The magazine *Kherai*. 2011. published by All Bathou Religious association. p. 1

<sup>12</sup>An Interaction with Monolal Basumatary at Turibari Village, Dist. Chirang, Dated: 03/03/2020 and the magazine of all Bathou Religious Union, Published in February 2011.

<sup>13</sup>An interaction with Nirmal Basumatary, M (81), (Oja/Medicine man/Researcher of Bathou religion), at village Turibari-Bijni, Dist. Chirang, Assam, Date: 03/03/2020.

realization is expressed—by way of questioning itself, observing itself, reflecting itself, examining itself, analyzing itself—by the way of who depends on his/her own hand, who is aware (sāngrāṅ) of his/her own future requirements, who hates sinners or sinful acts, who deals with pain and sufferings without losing,<sup>14</sup> who scares to act against Bathou's lessons, who gives equal value to everyone, who loves existence of other beings, who allows other people to exercise their own freedom of choice. There is a freedom of choice in Bathou religion where everybody can exercise their own freedom of choice within the restrictions of His (Bathou Bwrai) lessons or words. This is how one's soul or s/he becomes a pure human 'Gwthari' or spiritual being or son/daughter of Bathou Bwrai who achieve holy or good spirit and associate with good deity who is grasped by Bathou without letting mingle or leaving with evil spirits otherwise s/he is not a human, who is handed over by Bathou to mingle/conglomerate with evil spirits who is also recognized as iniquity, immoral, non-human being, etc. So Bathou or Si-Bwrai always wants or wishes to be a pure human to His sons, daughters and followers who aware of themselves and also follow His lessons of theological interpretations as highlighted in Bathou religion. Here informant Gonesh Mushahari says, human and inhuman words are uttered from the words or lessons of Bathou. For Bathouism, who doesn't have self realization about he is the son of Bathou that person is identified or called as inhuman. Informant Monolal says, in every Boro father's and mother's mouth or heart has been emanating upon their sons and daughters hitherto as they express "I wish, my son/daughter to be a man/human of all kinds" (in Bodo "Āngni fīsāyā 'mānci' jābānw jābāi") who is recognized as a son of 'Mwnsi' which was first emanated from lessons of Mwnsi Bwrai.<sup>15</sup> Human beings need to bear with sudden or frequent haunt of troubles and distresses in the world which are inevitable parts of life. Without losing, a pure human being (mānsi) always needs to deal with sudden appearances of pathetic conditions—to overcome from them—to achieve his/her future prediction or goals by worshipping Bathou Bwrai and other deities.

In discussion with Oja Uday Basumatary, it is precise, each and every human being is born with an intellect and the best creature (as a son/daughter of Si-Bwrai and Burwi) which they must have a capacity to earn or find out something to the fittest/better survivor in the world through the process of thinking; this is the significance meaning of Gāndola Bwnnai (hunting of dragonfly) dance at Kherai.

### (viii) Universality and particularity of Spirit

The spirits of thirty three (33) crore of deities in Bathou religion are universal, those universality of spirits are eternal, invisible, omnipresent.<sup>16</sup> Some spirits of deities are particularized or given the higher value and propitiated in Bathouism but the spirits of other deities are also addressed in Bathou worship, particularly at Garja and Kherai puja. The theological teachings of Bathou religion precisely conglomerate and link with the spirit of deities and their relation to particular spiritual acts who are worshipped, propitiated, and even given the place and value at Bathou altar, Garja and Kherai festival. Whatever general teaching of Bathouism, there is rooted in particularity of spirits of deities. It is not, then, difficult to come to a provisional understanding of the reference of the 'particular' in the title. Bathouism as a particular religion, distinct from other religions and philosophies, is a distinctive way of appropriating what is believed to be purity or cleanliness, deriving from a

<sup>14</sup> Bathou religion tries to highlight that human beings must know and learn through the thought process of mind—how to deal with sudden appearances of critical conditions—and how to survive in such a critical world with the help of tolerance and perseverance. So s/he needs to involve himself/herself in the process of survival into thought process of mind in the world. In this connection, human mind leads his/her body and soul in the world. But sometimes, one's thought process of mind leads/guides him/her in wrong direction to act iniquities or sins who is recognized as mingling or accompany with evil spirits according to the lessons of Bathou religion. This significance philosophical meaning is expressed through the dances of Kwijema fonai (Yellow ant following dance), Bādāli Gelenāi (bat playing dance) and Nāo Jāonāi (boating dance) at Kherāi festival as said informants Monolal Basumatary and Nirmal Basumatary at Turibari Village, Dist. Chirang, Assam. Dated: 03/03/2020.

<sup>15</sup>The research narrator Dr. Sonamainao Boro, at Udalguri Town, Dist. Udalguri, Assam, Dated: 22/02/2020.

<sup>16</sup>The research narrator Nirmal Basumatary, M (81), (Oja/Medicine man/Researcher of Bathou religion), vill. Turibari-Bijni, Dist. Chirang, Assam, Dated: 03/03/2020.

centre in a specific pattern of spiritual acts. That centre, to be sure, gives rise to a range of conceptions of purity or cleanliness sharing a harmony of family, but is nonetheless common to all those that are recognisably within the Hindu and Christian folds.

There are domestic deities whose spirits are universally particularized and given the place at the household.<sup>17</sup> They are— Bathou Bwraï (Spirit of chief deity), Māināo Buri (spirit of wealth deity) Bhandari (spirit of food-stuffs that deity is owner of the store(bāndār). And, Bā-Raja, here ‘Bā’ means ‘five’ and ‘Raja’ means ‘king’ which signify five kings or deities of basic elements viz. deity of earth, water, air, fire/sun/light and ether whose spirits are addressed in sense of witness while propitiating to Bathou Bwraï and they are also given the place at homestead. These spirits of deity are benevolent—that’s the reason—Boro people worship their spirits for the welfare and prosperity of their families, villages, community as a whole. However, the spirits of Harsa (non-boro) deities are also not forgotten at Gaja and Kherai Puja in order to appeal them so that they would not harm their family, community and cattles.

### (x) Myth of Creation and associated meanings

After creation of this universe—Informant Uday Basumatary avers—Bathou Bwrai tended to begin the process of human beings or life in the world where He created first ‘Mwnsinsi Bwrai’ and ‘Mwnsinsi Burwi’. For him, ‘Mwnsinsi’ is a connotation of two terms i.e. ‘Mwn’ which means mature in regard, aged and knowledgeable person and ‘Si’ means soul or atma. Hence, ‘Mwnsinsi’ means the ripest in all the knowledge and wisdom, who have divine and extraordinary power. But in the conversation with Monolal Basumatary, it is precise that when Bwrai Bathou created this universe, Bathou Bwrai and His consort Bathou Burwi by themselves incarnated into Mwnsi Bwrai and Mwnsi Burwi as a husband and wife in human form wherein He tends to create the world of human beings or life. Since then, they are believed to be recognized as deities in human form and also the ever first man and woman in the world. After incarnating into human being in the world, they used to be called or named as Jiumōn or Si-Bwrai and Jiumwn or Si-Burwi that were derived from “Jiu” means “soul” and “Mwn” means “to find or get” that means “finding or getting soul” in human form. So in the beginning, He and His consort ‘Mwnsi’ or Si-Burōi were together incarnating into embodiment of soul by themselves in human form in the universe who were identified as the ever first human beings, a couple in the world. Since then, the term ‘mansi’ (man or human) was derived and Boros have been using this term in their livelihood hitherto.<sup>18</sup> The research narrator Monolal Basumatary also says that the term ‘Mwnsi’ is derived or rooted from two words ‘Mwn’ which means ‘ripest’ and ‘Si’ means ‘soul’. So the term ‘Mwnsi’ means the ripest or aged man who has all the knowledge and wisdom and even divine knowledge. According to the mythical tale of Bathouism, Boro people are sons and daughters of Mwnsi Bwrai and Mwnsi Burwi. Along with Bathou or Si-Bwrai and Burwi, other spiritual deities viz. sons, daughters, followers and evil spiritual deities were also incarnated into human form in the world but others are not whose spirits exist in invisible, omnipresent, etc. in the world. Since then, Boro people believe in or existence of evil spirits in the world who can create severe situations or diseases in human livelihood. So they have also been addressed, propitiated and given the values or places along with Bathou Bwrai outside or far away of household particularly at Garja and Kherai festival to overcome from any severe condition and also to suspend the evil spirits from village. They (Garja, Kherai) are also performed mainly for the good crops and welfare of the people at all times. In this connection, Garja and Kherai festival are held the outskirts or far away from home because they (Boros) propitiate good and evil spirits (deities) there. Except good deities of household or domestic deities (Bathou, Mainao, etc), they don’t give place to evil deities

<sup>17</sup> Oja Uday Basumatary, at Kherai festival, Bhairabkunda. Dist. Udalguri. Dated: 08/02/2020.

<sup>18</sup> It is precise in conversation with Menda Basumatary Oja at village Mohanpur, Dist. Udalguri-Assam. Dated: 12/02/2020.

at the home. From the preceding statements, Bodo people believe the existence of different malevolent gods in the form of spirits, ghosts, with-craft etc. They (deities) specially were addressed, worshipped and propitiated in different pujas or occasions to get rid of the dangerous demon.

### **(xiii) Interface of Moral and Mystical**

According to mythical tale of Bathou religion, Mwnsi Bwrai was the first giver or guru of ethical principles, customs and traditions to human society. The narrator Taren Basumatary says that one can live in meaningful life, purity of spirit and strong conscious life through the principles of Bathou religion. Informant Monolal also avers that if there is no rites of religion—father can perform or act immoral or mark awful comments on his wife, sons and daughters, and son also can act immorally with his father, mother, sisters. Without following the religious principles of Bathouism, happiness will not be emanated in family or their day to day walk of life. So in the Kherai, Bathou Bwrai always scares his sons and daughters or human beings to give punishment and hand over to evil spirits who are sinners, impurity and unethical humans through the messages of Doudini. The spirit of Bathou never conglomerates or stays with sons, daughters and family who are sinners, impure and immoral. His spirit exists only in pure places and conglomerates with ethical or pure human beings. So informant Gonesh Mushahry also expresses that a family has to suffer or vanish in every situations like disease, poor, because of handing over to evil spirits or deities by Bathou. To be precise in Bathouism, one has to suffer in severe conditions or perish his/her family because of not following the ethical principles or rites of Bathou or Si-Bwrai. Since the incarnation into human body in this world, Bathou has been preaching moral lessons or words his sons, daughters and followers through which one can live in meaningful and happy life.

### **(xviii) Ethical teaching and religious practices.**

Bathouism has five deep philosophical significances in association with mystical and spiritual entities.<sup>19</sup> The term Bathou is derived from two words 'Ba' means 'five' and 'thou' means 'deep' which means there are five deep philosophical significance in Bathouism. In this connection, fivefold preachings of Mwnsi are found in different traditional verses and narrative or mystical tales which are also related to ethics, the ways of life, religious rites and ritual practices of Bathouism. The unique theological problems of Bathouism derives from the fact that basically it is not only a religion (linguistically, there is no specific term of religion or Dharma in Bodo), but an ethical or moral teaching through which everybody can live in meaningful life into love, value, responsibility and freedom. In other words, its teachings are distinctively what they are by virtue of their relation to particular Mwnsi's acts, because they are primarily a teaching or philosophy.

In Bathouism, Bathou Bwrai has five moral teachings through which Boro people have been practicing these five moral principles wherein their way of life and social customs are based on. In this connection, there are five moral teachings of Bathou or Mōnsi Bwrai which are related to His mystical and spiritual principles:<sup>20</sup> a) Meditative prayer to God, b) Conversing religious and spiritual matters, c) Making charitable gifts to the poor, d) Loving the fellow beings, and e) Doing things unitedly. Further, Mwnsi or Si-Bwrai concludes His moral teaching with the resistance towards five sinners— a) resistance towards the murder, b) resistance towards the thief, c) resistance towards the liar, d) resistance towards that one indulging in illicit intercourses or pre-marital sexual intercourses or extra-marital affairs, and e) resistance towards the association with a man of guilty offences.

<sup>19</sup>The research narrator Nirmal Basumatary, M (81), (Oja/Medicine man/Researcher of Bathou religion), Interaction at village Turibari-bijni, Dist. Chirang, Assam, Date: 03/03/2020.

<sup>20</sup>Bathou Religion and Its Philosophical Significance by Banashree Bhardwaj. IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) p. 63.

Human beings sometimes make mistakes and also sinful acts by chance in their day to day life. So in Bathou religion, Mwnsi or Bathou Bwrai gives the opportunity to own up his/her mistakes and sinful acts by doing His lessons of rites and ritual principles. According to Bathouism, Si-Bwrai preaches five rites (bādas) to purify from his/her sinful acts and sinners are given the opportunity to rectify from bad habits which badas resist or restrict people in performing bad habits. So the guilty sinners or persons are purified and given the chance to own up into the following rites of punishment— 1) Agarbad, 2) Phongalothbad, 3) Daokhibad, 4) Khoulabad and 5) Khaoalibad. The bādas are dependent on a particular guilty or sin of person. As who beats his father/mother/elder and who has pre-marital sexual affair that person is punished through the Agarbad. If someone beats a young girl that person is punished into Phongalothbad. If s/he eats restricted foods which foods are resisted in eating in the lessons of Mānsi-Bārai like beef, fox meat, etc. that person is punished through the Daokhibad. So for a long time, most Boro people have not been performing sins because of fear from the Bādas.

Bathou or Mwnsi Bwrai uses the term ‘onnāi’ (love/respect/kindness) in the sense of value in His lessons of ethical teaching.<sup>21</sup> He teaches the five senses of love in His words or lessons— a) Love for Ānan Gosāi as a father, b) Love for other fellow beings: Bathou principles respect the existence of other human beings; Bathouism teaches universal love to value everybody as equal value with their own freedom of choice within the limitations of His (Bathou) lessons, like other deities (harsa or non-Boro) are given the place and values at Garja and Kherai worships. c) Love for the wife and children, i.e. harmony within a family, d) Love for animals and objects of nature where we need to preserve animals and other objects of the nature, and e) Love for one’s mother land and world. It is precise that Bathouism celebrates morality in every walk of life where everybody can live meaningful life into value, respect and love, and can exercise their own freedom of choice within the limits of Bathou’s lessons or words.

### (xii) The idea of Indigeneity

The term or idea of indigeneity refers that indigenous people are the descendants of the aboriginal people or occupants of lands in a particular region. Many indigenous peoples have maintained their traditional cultures and identities and because of this they strong ties to their ancestral territories, cultures identities and religions which are evidence of a traditional livelihood like— indigenous language, culture/custom, religion/belief and attires. So the idea of indigeneity has been used as a designation distinguishing those who are ‘native’ from their ‘others’ in specific locales and with varying scope.<sup>22</sup> In South-Eastern Asia, Boro people are aboriginal and the earliest settler or inhabitant, whose language, culture, food habit, identity and religion are entirely different from other communities (Harsa or non-Boro).<sup>23</sup> According to the Bathouism, since the creation of this universe Boros have been dwelling in South-Eastern parts of the world as sons and daughters of Bathou Bwrai and Burwi through their language, culture, identity, values, and principles. Protologically, their way of life, language, ethnicity, food culture and identity are closely related with and emanated from Bathouism. By looking at their way of life, they live like innocent as they give value and love/respect others. They have specific food items or traditional cuisines (Onlā, Nārji,), those are offered in rites and ritual practices at Bathou worships. Apart from them, they have specific traditional and folk dances like Bagurumba, Mwsāglāngnai, etc. which are related with and performed at Kherai festival. These dance forms are called traditional dances of

<sup>21</sup>Bathou Religion and Its Philosophical Significance by Banashree Bhardwaj. IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) p. 63. According to primary source of Monolal Basumatary also avers about the ethical teaching of Bathou Bwrai.

<sup>22</sup> Francesca Merlan, *Indigeneity: Global and Local*. JSTOR. p.303.

<sup>23</sup> The research narrator Dr. Rajendra Nath Basumatary, an interaction at Udalguri College, Dist. Udalguri, Assam, Dated: 16/02/2020.

Boros which got from bathou worship. Eschatologically, Boros are indigenous peoples of the south-eastern region of the world.

**(xi) Forms of experiences recognized by the indigenous communities.**

Language, identity, culture, religion and their representation are self-declared priority issues for most indigenous people viz. Boro community. Bathouism is an indigenous way of life for the Boro community in the world. Its religious practices and beliefs (denomination) have been followed by the aboriginal Boro peoples since the time of immemorial as can say after creation of this universe.<sup>24</sup> But it is explicit in mythical tale of Bathou religion—after incarnation into human form in the world—Bwrai Bathou has been preaching theological rites and moral lessons to His consort, sons, daughters, followers and other existence fellow deities through Bathou religion. So there is no historical events or texts when Bodo people have dwelled in particular place in the world except oral literature.

**(xix) Are ethnic religions really a religion?**

Bathou is the ethnic way of life for Boro peoples, the principles which were emanated by birth of Boros as we can say after creation of this universe. Bathouism is an ethnic and indigenous mode of living closely connected with nature which advocates fundamental human values like love, dignity, freedom, ethics, morality, altruism and so on. Boros aspire to delve into a way of life which makes their existence ethical and meaningful. Although they worship and revere a number of Gods and Goddesses but that is only to keep people on the path of equality, fairness and morality, while they do not promote blind faith like other orthodox religions of the world. Bathou principles show us a way of living close to fellow human beings as well as taking care of our natural resources.<sup>25</sup>

**List of Informants or Narrators**

Sl. No	Name, Sex and Age	Addresses, Interaction Place and Date
1.	Uday Basumatary, M (56) (Oja/A key person who chants the mantras at kherai, garja worship; medicine man). Dist. Baksha, Assam,	interaction at Bhairabkunda, Kherai Festival, Date: 08/02/2020
2.	Ganesh Ch. Moshahary, M (59), (Adviser of All Basic/Origin Bathou Association)	Dist. Udalguri, Assam, interaction at Bhairabkhunda, Kherai Festival, Date: 08/02/2020
4.	Monolal Basumatary, M (56), (Adviser of All Basic/Origin Bathou Association), Dist. Chirang, Assam,	interaction at Bhairabkhunda, Kherai Festival, Dist. Udalguri-Assam. Date: 09/02/2020 and Vill. Turibai, dist. Chirang-Assam. Dated: 03/03/2020.

<sup>24</sup> Suren Daimari, M (56), (Lots Gaonbura of Mowdubi area), interaction at village Rangarah-Mohanpur, Dist. Udalguri, Assam, Date: 19/02/2020. Brajendra Kr. Narzary, M (56), (President of Delhi Bodo Bathou Religious Union) an interaction at South-Avenue, New Delhi, Date: 15/03/2020.

<sup>25</sup>The research narrator Monolal Basumatary, at village Turibari, Dist. Chirang-Assam. Dated: 03/03/2020.

5. Jati Basumatary, M (61), (Oja/Medicine man), Interaction at village Mohanpur-Gobsar, Dist. Udalguri, Assam. Date: 11/02/2020.
6. Menda Basumatary, M (63), (Oja/Medicine man), Interaction at village Mohanpur-Gobsar, Dist. Udalguri, Assam, Date: 12/02/2020.
7. Dr. Rajendra Nath Basumatary, M (53), (Asso Prof. in Dept of Bodo, Udalguri College) Interaction at Udalguri College, Dist. Udalguri, Assam, (Date: 16/02/2020).
8. Suren Daimari, M (56), (Lots Gaonbura of Mowdubi area), interaction at village Rangarah-Mohanpur, Dist. Udalguri, Assam, Date: 19/02/2020.
9. Dr. Sonamainao Boro, F (41), (M.A. PhD in Bodo Literature, President of Udalguri District Mainao Afat) Interaction at Udalguri Town, Dist. Udalguri, Assam, Date: 22/02/2020.
10. Nirmal Basumatary, M (81), (Oja/Medicine man/Researcher of Bathou religion), Interaction at village Turibari-bijni, Dist. Chirang, Assam, Date: 03/03/2020.

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