

## Chapter 6

### **Brahma Religion and Contemporary Bodo Society**

The present chapter aim to analyze Brahma religion and its impact on contemporary Bodo society.

#### **Brahma Dharma or Religion- A Historical Background**

Brahma Dharma is a monotheistic religion which believe the existing of one supreme unseen being called Brahma. Brahma religion is the off spring of Brahma Samaj movement. Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) established Brahma Samaj with a view of reformation of Hindu society. His religious philosophy and social outlook was deeply influenced by anti-idolatry of Islamism, theism of Sufism, ethical teaching of Christianity and so on. Raja Ram Mohan Roy tried to interpret and assimilate into himself the highest element of Islamism, Christianity and modern rationalism or Hinduism and transformed them into a single creed which found in the ancient Upanishad philosophy of his own community (Buch, M.A 1938). He was a secularist in nature and against idol worship, ritual and caste system of Hindu and ‘expounded the conception of ‘one god of all religion and humanity’ (Desai, A.R., 1996). Because he believed that one Supreme Being created and governs the universes. He proclaimed that through spiritual contemplation one can realize the bliss of almighty not by ritual and religious sacrifices. Raja Ram Mohan Roy studied different religious literature like Bible, Quran, Jain tradition, Buddhist tradition, Veda, Vedanta etc. But the philosophy of Vedanta was influenced him much and realized that Vedanta can be the most suitable medium which can serve his purpose. In 1815-1819, Raja Ram Mohan Roy writes some important text and translates Vedanta and the Upanishad. He translated five principal Upanishad, namely Isa Upanishad, Kean Upanishad, Catha Upanishad, Mandrake Upanishad and Kadoka Upanishad in Bengali and English (<http://shodganga.inflinet.ac.in/bistream//10603/72195/7/07>. Downloaded on 14/08/16). A.R. Dessau (1996) is of the view that Raja Ram Mohan Roy was in favor of rational approach to religion. As Hindu society was governed and dominated by religious conceptions, so Raja Ram Mohan Roy realized without social reform no

religious reform is possible. So, he launched reform movement in different section of social life like education, improvement of women status and so on.

He was strongly against any superstitious believes and practices. He attacked orthodox belief and practice of both Hinduism and Christianity but he was not against them. He never thought to establish a new religion. He could not accept 'Avtarbad' that is concept of god in human form of Hinduism and Christian concept of 'trinity.' His concept of religion is more wide and universal in nature, a type of theism free from all kind of corruptions. Theism of Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a combination of monotheism of Islamism, Unitarianism of Christianity and monism of the Vedanta.

After the death of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1833, Pandit Ram Chandra Vidyabagish the chief representative of Brahma Samaj, carried out the duties and died in 1844. In 1843 Devendra Nath Tagore succeeded the leadership of movement. He gave solid organizational based to Brahma Samaj movement. Being a dynamic personality he launch the Brahma Samaj movement in new ways. He was deadly against the orthodox Hindus and tried to convince the zamindars of Bengal to start Brahma prayer groups in their locality. He also started a monthly journal named '*Tattavodhhini patrika.*' Debendranath has strong faith on Vedas and went to Banaras, for gathering knowledge about Vedas but he got disappointed there. He return to Calcutta and compiled a book called *The Brahma Dharma*. Sumayendranath Tagore (1934) in his book *Raja Ram Mohan Roy* said that the first treatise's of Brahma Religion was brought into being by Debbendranath Tagore along with his learned friend in 1847. He also said that in the same year in a meeting of Tattvabodhini Sabha, The terms 'religions based on Vedanta' were changed to 'Brahma Dharma.'

The Brahma Dharma or Brahma religion was codified by Devendra Nath Tagore (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BrahmaDharma> downloaded on 14/08/16.) The Brahma dharma become the source of every faith on Brahma and reflects the rejection of Hindu Vedas shift away from Raja Ram Mohan Roy's concept of vedantic unitary god. But the some other sources claim that the book *Brahma Dharma* published in 1848 and write certain principle on Natural Theism called Brahma Dharma bija or seed principle of Brahma Dharma.

There is controversy about the publication Brahmanism seed (core) principle; it was Sivanath Sastri who attributes the credit of writing of seed principle on Debendranath Tagore. Sastri said Debendranath made a compilation of selected parts from Upanishad and these were published in book form in 1850, named *Brahma Dharma*. In this book he laid down certain principles for acceptance of member of Brahma Samaj and these are called Brahma Dharma Bija or seed principle. But other sources claim that this Book was compilation of Debendranath's philosophy and these were published in Article form in *Tattwabodhira Patrika* from 1850 and but published in book form in 1862.

The seed principles of Brahma Dharma are found in different version and some variations are found in each version. These are:

### **Sivanath Sastri's version of seed principles are**

- (i) The supreme beings created whole universe. In the beginning of creation expect Supreme Being nothing was there.
- (ii) Supreme Being is one who is beyond comparison. He is eternal, infinite, independence, form less.
- (iii) Our welfare in this world is less in his worship.
- (iv) To do the work which he love and to love him.

### **Adi Dharma Version**

- (i) Only one 'Supreme Spirit' is the author and preserver of existence.
- (ii) There is no salvation and no way to achieve it.

### **Sadharan Brahma Samaj Version**

- (i) There is one Supreme transcendent author and preserver of existence.
- (ii) One Supreme Singularity is the source of creation, being is renewed to singularity.
- (iii) One must respect all beings and creation.

Irrespective of versions, it can be generalized that Brahma religion based on the idea that one unseen Supreme Being or the creator and controller of the universe. People's welfare lays his worship and love. It was against idol worship and rejects the idea of existence of many god and goddess.

Tattvabodhini Sabha and Patrika took the initiative of propagation of Brahma religion in the one hand and took up the challenge of continuous missionary attack against Indian society and culture made by Alexander Duff on the other. Not only this, the patrika also highlight different socio-economic problem of rural Bengal. It created interest among the people towards the Sastros and Sanskrit classics. Under the leadership of Debendranath Tagore the Samaj work for improving the condition of woman and children and for modernization of education system (K.L. Sharma, 2008).

But a new era of Brahma Samaj movement began with the joining of Keshub Chandra Sen (1834-84). He was in favour of radical reform with missionary zeal. Due to his effort Brahma Samaj started functioning in Bombay. He toured in different parts of the country to propagate the idea of Brahma Samaj. But soon the Samaj plited into two parts, because Debendranath was infavour of slow and cautious move where as Keshub Chandra want radical approach. Keshub Chandra in 1866 established the Brhma Samaj of India and Devendranath Tagore and his follower in the same year renamed their group as 'Adi Brahma Samaj' which followed the pure monotheistic from Hinduism. Again 1878 some of Keshub Chandra's follower left him and established 'Sadharon Brahma Samaj' (K.L. Sharma, 2008).

The new organization is active even today and based on universal adult franchise. The numerical figures of Brahma are comparatively small as it was restricted within the upper class, middle class and some liberal educated family. But its idea and ideas are still present among the people of India. Due to this movement lots of changes occur in Hindu social and religious life.

### **Brahma Religion of Bodos**

The new religious faith that preaches among the Bodos by Kalicharan Brahma is also known as 'Brahma Dharma.' But it is a matter of doubt whether Kalicharan's version of

Brahma religion and Brahma Dharma which was flourished in Bengal under the leadership of Debendranath Tagore are same. As history reveals that Kalicharan was influenced by reading a book name 'Saranriya Kriya' written by Swami Shivanarayana Paramahansa. Later Kalicharan met with Swamiji and converted himself. Much is not known about Swamiji and his work. Brahma Dharma of Kalicharan Brahma also believed that there is a supreme being known as Param Brahma, who is ultimate reality. "Brahma is by nature eternally and absolute blissful." The basic principle of Bodo Brahma religion is that is Brahma is eternal, self realized, self perfect and self enjoying. He also posses the unique power of creating from within himself or manifesting himself as the phenomenal world of divinity without the least prejudice to perfect unity of his self existence (Banerjee, 2010).

Every individual 'self' is really identical with Brahman and a part of it. The performance of Yojnahuti by reciting Gayatry Mantra is lead oneself towards Brahma. To believe in Brahman and realized the truth in self is the ultimate goal of this religion. It is believed that the great soul Shivanarayan Paramahansa speaks about the glory of the Supreme Being in the sublime words of Vedas. He prescribed certain Vedic rites to be observed by the follower of Brahma follower.

Like other socio-religious reformer, Kalicharan also realized the need of socio-religious reform of Bodo society. As then Bodo society was dominated by superstitious belief and practices so he thinks to introduce new institutionalized religion. Like mainstream Brahma religion, Kalicharan version is also belief on unseen transcendent reality as the creator, protector of the universe. Like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Kalicharan also believed that god cannot be satisfied by offering animal blood , wine etc rather only soul hearted prayer can please him. He was in favour of simplification rituals. He also wants to check the conversion Bodo's into other religion especially Christianity and Islamism. So, he tried to convert the Bathou follower to Brahma religion and relentless work towards his mission to transform the Bodo into monotheism.

### **The basic principles of Bodo Brahma Religion are**

- (i) One unseen, supreme power is there who create and hold this universe.

- (ii) Only prayer and offering of fire oblation (Yojnahuti) can help one to get his blessing.
- (iii) People can get salvation by following good and pure life (Brahma, 2006).

## **Rituals of Brahma Religion**

Tribal ritual pattern related to more custom and activities and less prayer and hymn. But Kalicharan introduce Vedic pattern of rituals system. The rituals of Brahma religion based on fire oblation (Yojnahuti) towards Lord Brahma and chanting the Gayatri Mantra. Gayatri mantra in Hindu religion is very highly revered mantra of Rig Veda. It contain high value and repeatedly used in Vedic literature.

Kalicharan instructed his follower to perform only Yojnahuti for birth, marriage and death rituals. The steps of performing Yojnahuti are as follows:

### **Steps of Rituals**

- (i) For performing Yojnahuti one water full pot called 'Mangal Ghat' with mango leaves, Tulshi leaf is placed in prayer hall and after chanting some mantra the priest sprinkled the water from pot over people present for purification. Then Chandal wood, Saal wood, Branch of mango tree with leaves, Branch of wood apple are laid in the fire pit.
- (ii) Before starting Yojnahuti priest invite mother Ganga by chanting some mantra that is the symbol of purity. It is believes that mother Ganga's present will clean and consecrate the place and the participant.
- (iii) After inviting Ganga, the priest invites the Goddess of peace to appear in the prayer hall so that the follower of Brahma could complete their prayer peacefully.
- (iv) Then the priests started Yojnahuti rituals and pray to Lord Brahma to the consecrated place of Yojnahuti and accept the follower and bliss him.
- (v) Thereafter the priest put fire on the wood laid in the fire pit and chat the mantra like '*ohm purna parabrahma to jyoti swarupaya namah namah*' and as fire flares up the participant along with priest folded their hands and pray to Lord Brahma. They jointly recite some hymns like: (Brahma, 2006).

“Ohm Ayahi Bradde Devi

Trayathskare Brahmabadini

Gayatri Chandasang matah

Brahmayani Namohstute” (Brahma, 2006).

(vi) After completing all rituals, the priest declares the end of Yojnahuti by uttering ‘ohm santi’ thrice.

These are the rituals pattern of Brahma religion and Kalicharan wish that every Brahma follower should adopt and practice it.

### **The Five Teachings of Bodo Brahma religion’s are**

1. The universe (Atma and Param Atma) should be kept clean.
2. One should be kind and careful to all creatures.
3. Yojnahuti should be performed with pure and scented article and with full devotion.
4. The Param Brahma should be called by reciting Omkar mantra or by dedicating his name.
5. Eyes and minds should be put on the light (free from sin) with respect. (Binay Brahma, 2008).

The motto of Kalicharan was not only to propagate Brahma religion but to bring change in Bodo society. Some socio-religious practice of Bodos were looked down upon by the Hindus and considered them ‘Mlechas’ (lower grade). So, Kalicharan want to raise the status of his community in the eye of other by giving up of some evil practices and adopting some new custom and practices of caste Hindu society. It can be said that he want to Sanskritise his community by following Vedic rituals, code and conduct of caste Hindu society.

The Brahma religion of Kalicharan is not accepted by entire Bodo society of Assam. It is restricted to certain specific areas specially Kokrajhar and some part of Dhemaji, Golaghat district of Assam. In spite of that, the Brahma religion and movement has far

reaching effect on Bodo society as a whole. Because of the progressive idea and ideals of Kalicharan Brahma, number of evil practices, orthodox belief and practices removed, mass conversion of Bodo's to Christianity was checked.

### **Bodo Brahma Dharma after Kalicharan**

Bodo Brahma Dharma is not wither away after the death of Kalicharan Brahma .Some of his follower still engage in propagating Brahma Dharma of Kalicharn.Among them Phwrlang Babaji is one .Details are given bellow;

### **Phwrlang Babaji and Jyoti Ashram**

After the death of Kalicharan Brahma, his disciple Pwrlang Babaji original name Nepal Chandra Basumatary carries out his movement. Phwrlang Babaji established the Jyoti Ashram in 1965 at Roumari of Chirang district which is one of the most important centers of Bodo Brahma Dharma. Babaji propagated the idea and principle Brahma Dharma through the Jyoti Ashram. At the initial stage of propagation of Brahma Dharma the mantras or hymn were chanted in Sanskrit and Bengali language for which many illiterate Bodos consider Brahma Dharma as alien faith. Phwrlang Babaji had realized the feeling of the common people and translated Sanskrit mantras to Bodo language. Babaji said that god knows every language of his creation and he even hears the language of hearts (Brahma, 2006). Phwrlang Babaji advised his followers not to renounce their original culture, music and art. He himself was a gifted musician and dancer. Like Kalicharan he also stood against the social evils like use of liquor, marrying a woman by force rearing pig or chicken and advocated for women free movement at markets or mela (fair). After the death of Kalicharan Brahma the Jyoti Ashram of Roumari has become a nerve centre of Brahma religion. The Ashram runs a Boarding School within Ashram premises with a view to propagate Brahma religious ideas and values along with the general education. After the death of Phwrlang Babaji Shri Yogendra Basumatary succeeded the Ashram and still running it.



## **Brahma Religion and Contemporary Bodo Society**

Though all the Bodos are not converted to Brahmanism and large number of them still followed their traditional Bathou religion. But lots of changes come in the ritual pattern of Bathous and most of the respondents said that by following Brahma rituals they are tried to improve their ritual pattern. Not only this by following Kalicharan's reform movement some reformer emerges among Bathou followers who tried to modified Bathou rituals, prayer system and not to adopt Brahma religion.

### **Impact of Brahmanism on Bathou Religion**

Main aim of Kalicharan was to sanskritize Bodo community but initially most of the Bodo were reluctant to adopt Brahma religion and willing to practice their traditional Bathouism. But gradually Bathou religion came under the influence of Brahma religion and lots of change occurs in their ritual pattern. The effect of Brahma religion on Bathou religion became more visible often the propagation of Mani Bathou Siva Dharma by Rupamani Devi of Basugaon in 1993.

Mani Bathou came into existence as a conflation of the cumulative ideals of Bathou and Brahma cults along with the some elements of Hinduism. This newly emerge cult brought a major modification of the conception and practices of the traditional Bathou religion. Mani Bathou is also called Mani Bathou Siva Dharma, Siva Dharma also not worship any idol or symbol of Lord Siva, but consider Sijou Plant as sacred symbol of Lord Siva.

Like traditional practice, Mani Bathou Siva Dharma does not sacrifice animals in from of deities. The basic principles of this cult are:

- (i) For regular worship of God at home no priest requires. After taking bath any family member can perform it by offering flower and fruits as oblation.
- (ii) On special occasion like birth, marriage rituals, Yojna is performed with the help of priest. Unlike Brahma Dharma they believe in the various gods and goddesses of Hindus and of the traditional Bathou religion (Mohini Mohan Brahma, 1976).

## **Philosophy of Mani Bathou Siva Dharma**

According to this sect, Lord Siva is the Supreme god and creator of all lives, creatures, objects and universe. The universe is born out of him and will have merged to him. Siva has neither beginning nor end, he is the oldest of olds known as Bwrai Bathou and he is the beginning of all clans and gurus. Siva is the owner of heaven, earth and hell; he has three forms like Brahma creator, Vishnu as savior and Maheswar as destroyer.

Kalicharan's Brahma Dharma not only influence religious life of the Bodos but their social and cultural life also came under the influence of it. By following the norms of Brahma religious the Bodo adopted number of new customs and practices in their day to day life.

## **The Objectives of Mani Bathou**

- (i) The aim and object of this religion is to live an ideal life through reforms and worship and to purify the universe by performing Yojnahuti.
- (ii) One gets salvation or mukti only after merge with the supreme Almighty Siva.
- (iii) To get rid of sorrow, suffering and pain one has to come under to shelter of Lord Siva.
- (iv) To show respect and love to others and to help poor needy person (Brahma, 2006).

The Mani Bathou Siva Dharma emerge in last part of 20<sup>th</sup> century and started to flourish in different parts of Bodo dominated area of Assam and West Bengal.

## **Bathou Aroj**

Another cult of Bathouism is Bathou Aroj initiated by Dr. Mangalsingh Hazowary of Kokrajhar district. He is retired principle of Kokrajhar Government B. Ed College. He influenced by Brahma Dharma and tried to modify Bathouism. He also tried to introduce some refine worship pattern and banded animal sacrifice in the name of rituals. It gives more importance on mercy and love of god, wisdom and goodness, singing devotional

songs, accompanied by traditional musical instruments etc. are in order to get blessing of God.

### **Impact of Brahmaism on Religious life of Contemporary Bodo Society**

Those who neither follow Mani Bathou nor Batho Aroj but practices traditional Bathouism also came under the influence of Brahma Dharma. Those who still followed Bathouism are not practices traditional age old religious rituals. Though in studied villages nine tenth respondents are the follower of Brahma religion and rest are not following Bathouism in its original form. Following table make it clear.

**Table No. 6.01 Distribution of Respondents (Bathou Follower) on the basis of rituals they perform.**

Rituals Performed	Villages						Grand Total And Percentage
	Respondents						
	Kazigaon	Gombiraghat	Maliaghoi	Gombrikhata	Harjhora	Bongshijhora	
Fire Oblation	-	5 (50%)	9 (69.22%)	2 (25%)	02 (40%)	6 (46.15%)	24 (48.97%)
Offering Flower	-	4 (40%)	4 (30.76%)	5 (62.5%)	03 (60%)	5 (38.46%)	21 (42.85%)
Animal and Bird Sacrifice	-	01 (10%)	-	1 (12.5%)	-	02 (15.38%)	04 (8.16%)
Total	-	10(100)	13(100)	8(100)	5(100)	13(100)	49(100)

**Source:** Field study conducted during on May 2012 - January 2015.

The above tables reveal that 48.97% Bathou follower adopted fire oblation as a part of their ritual, 21.85% adopt offering flower as a part of their ritual and 8.16% are still followed traditional rituals this animals and birds sacrifices. Village wise Kazigaon does not have any Bathou follower, 50% Bathou follower of Gombiraghat, 69.22% of Maliaghoi, 25% respondents of Gombrikhata, 40% of Harjhora and 46.15% of Bongshijhora adopted fire oblation as a part of their ritual, 40% Bathou follower of Gombiraghat, 30.76% of Maliaghoi, 62% respondents of Gombrikhata, 60% of Harjhora and 38.46% of Bongshijhora adopted offering of flower in their ritual. Whereas 10%

Bathou follower Gombiraghat, 12.5% of Gombrikhata and 15.38% of Bongshijhora still following the traditional method of warship.

The respondents further asked why they bring change in their original rituals and practices. They are of the view that after watching Brahma rituals they realized that their practices are untendered and meaningless, so they bring change on it. Not only religious rituals changes but changes occurs in other aspect of their social lifelike large number of villagers are against of forceful marriage, people especially women are against of liquored consumption, etc.

Contemporary Bodo society cannot deny the role of Kalicharan and his Brahma Dharma for molding and shaping it. Whatever the development takes place in the field of education, religion, rituals, economic condition the very foundation of it laid by Kalicharan Brahma and his reform movement which is still performing its role silently.