



THE NATURE OF THE BOROK ABORIGINES' RELIGION IN TRIPURA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Shantaraj Debbarma

Asst. Professor of Philosophy , Adwaita Malla Barman Smriti Mahavidyalaya, Amarpur, Tripura.



ABSTRACT

Religion is a kind of thread which set the society or community. And to understand the religion, one fine way is religious customs of any religion. George Galloway divides the religion into three i.e., Tribal religion, National religion and Universal religion. Tribal religious life is not separated or departmentalized from social, economical, moral and political life, it is all in one. Moralization of the gods and movement towards the monotheism are the main feature of National Religion. Else the process of individualizing and the monotheism is the main feature of Universal Religion. There is no doubt that the religious tradition of Borok aborigines is fall under the classification of Tribal Religion. However it is observed that there are some features of National religion in the Borok aborigines' religious customs. The Borok are the group of peoples whose mother tongue or first language is Kokborok. Borok's religious custom is Tribal Religion because they believed in Polydemonism, the worship of many spirits. They worships river, earth, hills, forest etc. basically they are animist and nature-worshippers. Yet there are some features of National Religion and some hidden possibilities of Universal Religion in their religious customs.

What is Tribal religion? Can we say Borok's religious tradition is tribal religion? What are the National and Universal Religion? Are there any features of National and Universal Religion in Borok's religious traditions? These are the main concern of this paper. This is the empirical and observational study of above mention matters.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Polydemonism, Polytheism, Borok and Animism.

INTRODUCTION:

To know the mankind it is necessary to study the man, and to know properly to the mankind it is necessary to study the religion. It is impossible to understand the man or community or society without knowing the religious belief of that person or community or society. The term religion is derived from Latin 'religio', Cicero define it as 'the proper performance of rites in veneration of the gods.'¹ Without the concept of god, religion is like an empty pitcher, which can not satisfy the thirst of religious man. Religion is recognition of some unseen power; people think that that unseen power is regulator of their destiny, of their life. That is why we seen that the religious peoples are trying by various means to satisfied their gods. So it is a very important part of individual or social life. D. Miall Edwards said, "whatever may be one's private opinion concerning religion or one's personal attitude to it, one cannot but admit that it is a most important

¹ <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion> retrieved on 06-11-2018

and outstanding features of human life."² And the various kinds of belief, rites and rituals are the exponents of religion. Comte emphasizes that religion embraces the whole of experience of human life and existence.³

George Galloway divides the religion into Tribal religion, National religion and Universal religion on the basis of development of social organization. Religion is a subservient of society; along with social change religious behavior are also changes. So we can say that as a result of change of social system religious behavior is changing. The religious customs are closely connected to the social surrounding. The Tribal religion is the initial stage of religion. The main feature of this religion is the enforcement of social customs on the social or community members. Here social customs and religious customs are in some extent the same thing. Everything is directed by the community head, there is no place for individuality. Community feeling and we-feeling is the main foundation stone of tribal society. Another feature of Tribal religion is belief in animism, Mana, Totemism and Fetishism.

National religion is the mixture of various tribal religions. When many tribal religions merge, national religion arises. The main feature of national religion is moralization of gods and movements towards the Polydemonism to Polytheism. Along with this there is an element of sacrifice and prayed to god. In this stage of religion peoples are trying to establish good relation with the gods. That is why peoples are trying to satisfied through the prayer and sacrifice the animals to the gods and it is thinking that gods will satisfied if they are worships properly by the sacrificing animals and prayer. What should religion be, what is the real meaning of religion, what is the way to get salvation this are the main concern of Universal religion. It has no boundaries; it breaks all the class and community. The main feature of Universal religion is Monotheism, it arises by the process of individualizing and it appeal to the consciousness of the man. All man is equal having same dignity irrespective of caste, class and gender, humanism; fraternity and love are the maxim of Universal Religion.

The Borok aborigines are the title having Debbarma, Jamatia, Reang, Noatia, Rupini, Murasingh, Tripura, Kalai and Uchoi. Their first language is Kokborok. Their religious belief is Animism,⁴ they believed in supernatural power, spirits and natural phenomenon. Generally their religious customs indicate their social life. The fundamental cause of their worship is fear or awe and for convalesce they do worship. By worshiping, they think that they will control their destiny.⁵ Let us see why Borok's religious tradition is Tribal religion.

BOROK'S RELIGION AND TRIBAL RELIGION:

As we seen in an introduction part that Dr. Galloway divided the religion into tribal, national and universal religion. The basic features of tribal and tribal religion are they are limited in number, small but very incorporating. Blood relationship is the main in their social life and we-feeling and community feeling is very strong in their social life. Their religious customs are all related to their food getting, sickness, birth, death etc. They are creative in nature, self reliant, self depending (here self means the community of tribe), not interested to live under others (outsider of the community) control. They want to live with their own ideal, own belief and own philosophy. The Borok aborigine's social structure is also the same. They are small in number in compares to other race; they have a sentiment of oneness and their religious customs are arises from their living style. Although it is observed that due to influence of other religious customs such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, not only their religious traditions but other tradition are also affected and slowly losing the originality.⁶

² See D. Miall Edwards, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p.7

³ Ibid.p.7

⁴ Now some portions of Borok aborigines are believe in Hindu and Christian religion.

⁵ Shantaraj Debbarma, *Aboriginal Culture in Tripura: Special Views on Religious Traditions of Kokborok Speaking Aborigines*, pdf, p.5, received on www.lbp.world

⁶ Shantaraj Debbarma, *Aboriginal Culture in Tripura: Special Views on Religious Traditions of Kokborok Speaking Aborigines*, pdf, pp.3-4, received on www.lbp.world

The Borok aborigines are Animist. They think that each and every object has a spirits or soul and power. Natural phenomena as trees, brooks, hills, river, stone, earth, sky, wind etc. all has a soul. They think that nature is alive, filled with soul, spirit and power. And if she is worshiped she will give them blessing. That is why we observed that the Borok aborigines are worshiping river, wind, earth, forest etc. the entire nature is an object of their worship and they venerate the nature. So we can say that the Borok's religion is a tribal religion, since Animism is the one of the main feature of Tribal religion. Religion means to response the unseen power, soul or spirits and also tries to control the destiny by worshiping, sacrificing and praying.⁷ And we found these traditions in the Borok aborigines' religious traditions. Animism is not only the religious customs it is the philosophy, the elementary human philosophies as stated by Hoffding and the ground work philosophy of religion, said by Taylor in his "Primitive Culture".⁸

Other features of Tribal religion are Mana, Totemism and Fetishism. Mana is a Malanesian term; Mana is all pervading and having supernatural power. A man is powerful in physical strength, political strength, social in character and morally high because of Mana. Similar thing we found in Borok people, the Mwtai. Mwtai (god or deity) is a powerful and it resides everywhere. Everything which is happening in this world it is because of Mwtai. All the works they done in the name of Mwtai and Mwtai is a soul cause of everything and doing everything. Nothing can be done without his consent and nothing is done without his consent. Even the Ochai (Priest) before offering animals he takes consent from Mwtai by using two jackfruit leaves. He tosses the two jackfruit leaves in the air, if one leaf fall front and another leaf fall back on the ground then it is a sign of agree, now he can offer the animals to the Mwtai.⁹ So we can say that there is some similarity between the Mana and the Borok aborigines' Mwtai. Here it is to be noted that the word Mwtai is not only indicate the power, the deity and the all pervading or omni present but it also suggest emotional and psychological reaction of respect, awe and mystery. It also suggest that Mwtai is not for everyone, Mwtai himself decide where he want to stay and to whom he want to reside. And if we worship him properly, he is satisfied and blessing us. This is the opinion of the common Borok aborigines.

Fetishism is another characteristic of Tribal religion. The term 'fetish' is derived from Portuguese fetico, 'a charm'.¹⁰ Fetish is objects which have mysterious power and it is worshiped, sometimes it is a symbol of luck. And it is also think that the spirit or power reside within it. Here it is noteworthy that, a fetish object may be change but the belief in fetishism is not end. If we look deeply into the Kokborok speaking aborigines' religious customs, we will see there are some objects whom they worshiped and thinks, that objects have a mysterious power, symbol of prosperity and the abode of spirit or power. Such as Randok,¹¹ Waa (Bamboo), different kinds of diagrammatize structure made by bamboo etc. Randok is a symbol of prosperity and wealth and it is said that those who are wealthy they are lucky. So we can say that Randok is a symbol of luck. It is believed that Waa (bamboo) is an abode of deity and bamboo represents the deity. The Boroks are use decorative bamboo poles while worshiping. One can say that there is no such kind of Fetishism in Borok aborigines' religious customs but it is proved by above discussion that may be there is no Fetishism but there is a Fetish like Ism in the Borok aborigines' religious customs. We can say Randokism and Waaism.

The similar thing we can say about Totemism also in regards to Borok's religion. It is said that Totemism is the most primitive religion. A totem is a species of animal or plants or class of inanimate objects, with whom a group or community has very intimate relation or kinship.¹² If there is anything as Totem, in the Borok aborigines' religion then obviously it will be Waa (bamboo). Because it is a thing which they uses not only in religious purpose but each and every place of life.

⁷ See D. Miall Edwards, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p.27

⁸ Ibid, pp.26-27

⁹ See also P.K. Palit, *History of Religion in Tripura*, Kaveri Publisher, p.152

¹⁰ For more see D. Miall Edwards, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p.67

¹¹ Two earthen or silver pots filled with rice kept inside corner of the main house.

¹² For more see D. Miall Edwards, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p.29

SOME FEATURE OF NATIONAL RELIGION IN BOROK ABORIGINES' RELIGION:

Any religion considered as a National religion if the religion has a feature of polytheism, anthropomorphize i.e. given a name, character and human passion to the spirits or gods, moralization of gods, movement towards the monotheism and also the presence of sacrifice or offering and praying. A religion become a National religion when many tribal religion fused together or assimilation with weaker by the stronger or imposition by the political and social force. In this stage of religion the nature spirits get the name and human like characteristics. George Galloway said, "We cannot always determine the precise naturalistic origin of national deity, but sometimes we can do so. For example it is clear that Vedic Agni is a fire-god and the Persian Ahura a light-god. The Babylonian Marduk and the Egyptian Ra are sun-gods; the Greek Zeus and the Latin Jupiter are heaven gods; the Germanic Odin and Vedic Indra are storm gods."¹³ If we look into Borok's religion we will see that the presence of several benevolent and malevolent gods. The names and the qualities are also adorned to the gods. Such as Mailooma the goddess of rice and prosperity, Khuluma the goddess of cotton, weaving and knowledge, Garia the god of wealth, health, strength and the fulfiller of one's good wishes. Also there are some malevolent gods, namely Burasa the god who generates illness, diseases and suffering, Haichukma the goddess of the mate of Burasa and ruled over the forest and animals, Thumnairog and Banirog the collectors and the messengers of dead or ill news. It is also observed that certain moral virtues are associated with the certain gods. As an example we can mention Garia as the god of protector, god of war and strength, destroyer of evil forces, Khuluma as the goddess of wisdom and cotton, Khuluma as the goddess of rice and prosperity, Nakshu as the protector of the house, Twima as the goddess of water and so on. Another feature of National religion viz. movement in the direction of monotheism is unclear at present situation in the Borok aborigines' religion. Here it is noteworthy that the Borok aborigines' religion is very much influenced by the Hindu and Christian religion. Even due to Hinduization and being some similarity with Hindu religious customs it is said that all Borok aborigines are Hindu. And the Borok aborigines are also accepted it, though alongside similarity there are several dissimilarities are also seen. The Borok aborigines have their different unique and own culture, whether it is by religion or in socially. May be it is primitive but it is there and it is not Hindu, we cannot say that their original religion is Hindu. Moreover the good amount of Borok peoples are now under the shadow of Christian religion.

Sacrifice and Prayer is called the act of religious customs. These are the two ways to establish relationships with gods. These two acts are considered as characteristics of National religion. Why men sacrifice something to the god? Firstly, take favor from god. Secondly, thanks giving, after getting something, at first to offer god. Thirdly, to think communion with god, by taking sacrificial meal and meat, men think that he is now companion and comrade of god. Moreover he feel pride and energetic and thinks as a blessed person. Fourthly, propitiation and confederate with god. In Borok aborigines' religious customs we also see the presence of these causes of sacrifice. It is also observed that the Ochai (Priest) is the person who tells that what kind of materials or animals is required in the sacrificial ceremony. And this type of sacrifice is done to overcome the illness and diseases. Moreover, the Borok aborigines are go to Tripura Sundari temple at Udaipur and Fourteen god temple at Khayerpur to sacrifice he-goats. We can say that this is the kind of thanks giving sacrifice. After getting some desired things peoples are go to sacrifice which he or she has promise before. It is one kind of deal with god that if my desire is fulfills then I will offer you so and so. However there is a matter of belief, respect and fear, which is not seen in ordinary business. Thus we cannot say that it is bargaining with god. It is looks like bargaining but we should not say this.

Prayer is an essential part of religion as it is a kind of way to reach to the realm of god. Prayer to god means appeal to god for something. How civilized people are, it can be to know by their style of appeal. "... perhaps a history of prayer would be the best history of the religious development of mankind."¹⁴ Garia a

¹³ Quotation taken from D. Miall Edwards, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p.72

¹⁴ A. Sabatier, *Outlines of Philosophy of Religion*. Quotation taken from D. Miall Edwards, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p.82

god of good wishes and provider of health, wealth and strength also considered as benevolent deity of Borok aborigines. The keynote of the prayer to the Garia is to keep house in order, ensuring the peace and prosperity inside the home and community. In Lampra¹⁵ worship the Ochai (Priest) on behalf of the householder prayed to the god that to keep free from diseases, pain, stomach disorder, cold or snivel and weakness in fever. And also praying god by uttering to god as Omnipotent that give him (in the name of whom worship is done) happy and long life like imperishable stone, give him or his family members augment and prosperity and don't let them understand the lack of food and cloths. You, save us from all the evils of the society and evil eye of the swkal (witch). So it turns out that the main point of prayer is to get ride from the evil, diseases and to get the happy and prosper life.

UNIVERSAL OR MISSIONARY RELIGION:

The main feature of Universal religion is the process of individualizing. A religion becomes a Universal religion by the individualizing to the religion. The universal religion appeals to the conscience of man, because it goes beyond the boundary of community and nation. Monotheism is another characteristic of this religion. The main cause of publicity and propagation of universal religion is the prophet and his disciple's enthusiasm, interest and sincerity. Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, these three religions are considered as the Universal religion. The ideal of Buddhism is to attain the Nirvana or salvation, the world is full of sufferings and our aims of life should be to overcome these sufferings. The philosophy of Buddha is peace and it is profound as dreamless sleep. The end of Christianity is also salvation by controlling or crucifying bodily passions and lusts. Die to live is the ideal of Christianity, by sacrificing the life, do realize the life. And the sacrifice is the only way to attain the salvation. Here it is noteworthy that the ideal of both religions is salvation though there way and nature is different. Miall Edwards said, "The salvation of Buddhism is deliverance from struggle, that of Christianity victory in struggle."¹⁶ Both the religion is optimistic, not pessimistic. Because in Buddhism it is believed that although the world is full of sufferings yet, there is a way to remove these sufferings. While the Christianity also believed that though there is a presence of sin in the life but we can overcome this by the grace of God.

Islam, though it is a Universal religion but it is a far less universalistic in spirit in comparison to other two religion. It is universal religion because it is a missionary religion, widespread propagation and Monotheism. The meaning of 'Islam' is submission to God's will. According to this religion only through complete submission to the God's will, one can get the peace. This religion does not permit to worship other deity except the Allah, the God.¹⁷

Borok's religion is not a Universal religion; we can see it by bare eyes, because the main characteristics of universal religion are missing in this religion. However there are some elements in this religion which are present in the universal religion. The so-called universal religion is not arising suddenly; it is a historical evolutionary development of religion. We have found that the elements of peace, well-being and welfare for the people are present in their prayer as well as in their worships. And there is a right approach towards the nature, people and world. There is an aim of their all religious activities, i.e. to overcome the sufferings and diseases, to maintain peace and serenity in the community or state. The marvelous thing is that their religion is not pessimistic rather optimistic and it can be said surely that their religion is transforming towards the secularization and universalization.¹⁸ So we can say that though it is not Universal religion but there are some dormant possibilities to becoming a Universal religion.

¹⁵ Lampra word is derived from two Kokborok term 'lam' means lane or street and 'pra' means branch. So the literal meaning of Lampra is cross street or road. The main purpose of this worship is peace and welfare of the individual or all the member of household. And this is done beside the cross road.

¹⁶D. Miall Edwards, *The Philosophy of Religion*, pp.89-90

¹⁷ Pramod Bandhu Sengupta, *Dharma Darshan*, Banerjee Publishers, p.74

¹⁸For details see Gautam Kr. Bera, *Religion and Society in Sovereign Tripura*, pp.79-94

CONCLUSION:

So finally we have to say that Borok aborigines' religion is having some potentialities and possibilities to become a National and to some extent the Universal religion. This religion is widening, extending and developing by the influence of and adopting some values from other religion. This religion itself is a rich and enormous in its own sphere because it has some universally accepted moral values like peace, freedom, welfare, respect and love to the humanity as well as the entire nature. We have already seen that they are the nature worshipers, they love nature, they respect nature and they want to stay with nature. Because their culture whether it is religious or social depends on the nature, arises from the nature.

The Borok's religion is a tribal religion and its origin in Borok aborigines' community, there is no place for doubt. Because we have seen in above discussion that they are the believers of spirits, think that each and every object possesses spirit or soul and each object and natural phenomena has a power. That is why the Borok aborigines worship all the natural objects or phenomena. It is not only the religious customs but it is a philosophy of their life. Basically they are nature-worshippers. Almost all the characteristics of Tribal religion are present in Borok aborigines' religion. And it is found at present time also though many things enter in the realm of their belief and in the place of their practice due to come in contact with other convention, religion and culture.

Though the Borok aborigines' religion is a tribal religion still there are several features which are the features of National religion. The words of prayer, the name and qualities ascribed to the gods indicate that this religion is fitted to be considered as a national religion. The reason may be that this religion is always having been in touch with other comparatively developed religion that is why this religion didn't lose its motion. It is one of the examples of evolving religion, evolving in the sense that from the very beginning it has been influenced by others and still being influenced. The negative side of this is that it has lost some originality but the positive thing is that it is widening, running and developing with the progress of the people. Galloway rightly said that "Only a religion which develops can be a truly universal religion."

At last,

Starting to walk, I will not stop anyhow

I will make my own way, which I get on the path

And will not turn back

Whatever may be the destination, I will widen my way

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<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion>

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Shantaraj Debbarma

Asst. Professor of Philosophy, Adwaita Malla Barman Smriti Mahavidyalaya, Amarpur, Tripura.