

Myth and Bathou Religion: An Analytical Study

Mrs. Kanery Basumatary, M.A.
Research Scholar, Bodoland University
Kokrajhar,783370, BTC, Assam
nkanery@yahoo.in
Cell phone. 7002650742

Abstract

Every myth is related with their folk religion. Myths tell about the folk story from the past times, especially about the human beings, creation about the nature, creation about the universe, ghosts, etc. it is also a part of the prose narratives. Prose narrative is a part of folk literature. Bodo have rich in their myths. Bodo myths are directly related with the Bathou religion. Bathou religion is a traditional religion of the Bodo. They believe that 'Bathoubwrai' is the supreme God of the world. He is the creator of the universe. There are so many myths of the Bodo like- creation of the Bathou religion, creation of the traditional musical instruments of the Bodo, creation of the kherai, etc.

Keywords: Bathou religion, myths, kinds of Bodo myths, myths related to the Bathou religion.

Introduction

The Bodos are the single largest tribes of plains of Assam in the north-east India. The Bodos are mainly agricultural people. Bathou is the ethnic religion of the Bodo people. It has been practiced from generation to generation without any priest or sacred literature. Traditionally Bodos has no fixed place for worship like temple or church. A Bathou is a bamboo fenced surrounding by centering Sijou tree, Jatrasi and Tulsi plant. The followers of Bathou religion worship Sijou tree as the symbol of Bwrai-Bathou. Bathou-bwrai is the supreme God of the Bathou religion. The supreme God Bathou-Bwrai is invisible. The Sijou tree is planted in the centre of the bathou as a symbol of God and in the right side of the Sijou, Tulshi (basil) plant is planted as a symbol of purity and in the left side jatrashi (justiceassamia clake) plant is planted as a symbol of Knowledge and wisdom.

Bathou has five elements Ailwng, Agrang, Khwila, Sanja Bwrali and Raj Kunggri attributed as god of earth, water, air, fire and sky respectively. Comprising these five elements, Bathou altar presents one supreme God which is called Bathou Bwrai. The Sijou tree has five knots. Bodo community believes in regeneration of life. Believing these five elements of

Bwrai Bathou, the followers of Bathou used to worship as the god of Earth, water, air, fire and sky.

‘Myth’ is a traditional story which concerning the early history of people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon, a cultural belief and practice of a group of people involving supernatural beings and events’. It is an ancient Greek word. Myth is a folklore genre consisting of narratives or stories that play a fundamental role in a society, such as foundational tales of creations of world, human beings etc. William Russell Bascom defines “*Myths are prose narrative which in the society, in which they are told, are considered to be truthful account of what happened in the remote past*”¹. Maria Leach defines *myth is a story presented as having occurred in a previous age explaining the cosmological and supernatural traits of a people, their Gods, heroes, cultural traits, religious beliefs etc.*²

Myth is a part of prose narratives. Prose narratives are classified into three categories, viz, i) myths, ii) legends and iii) folk-tales. The Bodos are numerically and sociologically one of the most important tribes of the North-East India, particularly in Assam. They belong to the Indo-mongoloid group and linguistically they belong to the Sino-Tibetan group. Bodos have rich in their folk-culture. Traditionally they believed the ‘Bathou religion’. ‘Bwrai Bathou’ is the supreme god of the Bodos. They also believe different Gods and Goddesses. They planted a ‘Sijou’ plant (euphorbia splendens) as the symbol of ‘Bwrai Bathou’. Myths mean ‘gwjam solo’ in Boro terms. There is a slight difference between the myths and legends. *Myths are supposed to be more truthful and full of reality than the legends. A legend is not regarded as sacred. It is for the entertainment only and has no connection with ritual.*³ But the legends tell the stories of activities of the past heroes, chiefs and kings. The story of the legends is related with the prehistory. In folktales animals can talk like human beings. In folk-tales animal can be very clever than the human beings. But the stories of all these three categories are coming out among the people from generation to generation without any proper gap. All myths of the Bodo are generally related with Bathou religion and rites and rituals. It tells us about the creation of the world, human beings and creation of the nature, Gods and Goddesses, how the Bathou is formed, about kherai, traditional musical instruments of the Bodo and so many. There are so many myths believed in the community which have been continuing from generation to generation.

Aims and Objectives

The main aims and objectives of the study about the myth and Bathou religion are:

- 1) To study to know about the myths of the Bodo.
- 2) To study how the myths are related with the Bathou religion of the Bodo.

Methodology

Both primary and secondary methods will be applied for the study. Primary method will include the field visit, interviews with senior citizens, with All Bathou Religion Union (ABRU)

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 20:7 July 2020

Mrs. Kanery Basumatary, M.A.

Myth and Bathou Religion: An Analytical Study

or other religious organizations related to Bathou religion. Secondary method will include previous research reports, newspapers, magazine and journal content and all other published books, etc.

Some Myths of the Bodo Related to the Bathou Religion

(a) Myth on conception of the Human beings

Bodos have belief that they have been created by the God Aham Guru on the earth. First of all, God Aham Guru created two birds- one male and another one female. The female birds laid three eggs. Then the Aham Guru said from the heaven that three different lives will come out from the eggs. The female bird began to sit on the eggs. But the female birds became sad because thousands of years passed sitting on the eggs and there was no any sign of birth of any life. The female bird broke an egg and could not see any sign inside the eggs. Then suddenly came another heavenly voice from Aham Guru not to break the two eggs, otherwise the universe would be destroyed. Aham Guru advised the female bird to spread the broken pieces of the egg here and there. There was a belief that from the broken egg, the evils spirits, ghost, various kinds of insects and birds, plants were born.

After the many years passed, from the two eggs Mwn-sin-sin Bwrai and Burai (male and female) and Diba Bwrai and Dibi Burai (male and female) were born. After born they desired to go to heaven. The God Aham Guru allowed them to go to heaven with the warning that during the journey if any one of them looked back on the earth then he or she would fall down on the earth. Mwn-sin-sin Bwrai and Burai and Diba Bwrai and Dibi Burai started to go to the heaven with the help of golden ladder (jangkhla). When they had reached at mid-way, the creatures born out of one broken egg made noises on the earth to accompany them to the heaven. Hearing the noise of creatures, Diba Bwrai and Dibi Burai looked back and suddenly fell down on the earth. Some days later, the creatures fell in scarcity of enough foods. They (creatures) prayed to the Aham Guru to provide them for enough foods. Then the Aham Guru told – “the children of Mwn-sin-sin Bwrai and Burai will come to live on the earth, and they will provide enough foods to the creatures and will become savior of all creatures”. From this myth it was known that Mwn-sin-sin Bwrai and Burai was the first human being created by Aham Guru. Aham guru was another name of the Bwrai Bathou.

Besides this myth, there was another myth of creation of human being among the Bodo. Before creation the earth there was neither the sun nor the moon and stars in the universe. The Lord Anan Gosai (aham guru) was lying silently in his formless state. One day in a fine moment (ever-conscious self-existing supreme energy) Anan Gosai desired to take a form and lead a life form. Suddenly he uttered fourth words loudly. These were ``Laoba-lao-swm (five organs of knoladge), khaoba- khaoswm (five organs of action), Ada-gwswm (dignified elder brother),

Dwiao-barsum (jump to deep water).` With this voice of Anan Gosai the five gyanendriyas (five principle of knowledge) and five karmendriyas (five working organs) with a great physical form appeared in the open air. The physical form was appeared in full form as `Sibrai`. Sibrai was the first visible form of the God. The earth, water, air, fire, and sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, the plants and every creature were created from the mouth of the Sibrai. `Si` means `form` and `brai` means the oldest man. Sibraifelt lonely. Then he created `Si-burwi`. Mwn-sin-sin was the first man to born from the Si-brai and Si-burwi.

There was another one myth that human being comes from the monkey. After the creation of earth, the Bathou sent down his creation 'Si-bwrai' to look around the earth. Accordingly, the Si-burwi also came down to the earth. They noticed that some big size animals were trying to dominate over some small animals. They noticed the animals like lions and tigers were attacking over some small animals like monkey. Seeing the dismal condition of the monkey folk, suddenly the Si-bwrai got sympathy on monkey and offer blessing to the monkey that their two front legs turn into hands so that they could protect their life from the enemy. From the day the monkey got blessing from Si-bwrai they became capable of thinking and doing as they like. Subsequently the monkey started dominating over other animals and transforming man.

(b) Myth on Foundation of the Earth

At the beginning, there was no earth, only water and water around the world. The God Aham Guru desired to create the earth. God Aham Guru ordered the creatures to bring the soil from the bottom of the water. But none of them could bring the soil from the water. Then Aham Guru sent two old barbell fishes. These were called Magur-Maguri in Bodo term. The Magur-Maguri went to the bottom of the water and collected some soil as much as they could. But on the way they returned, the gourd of the water attacked Magur-Maguri and they were beaten to die. They could not come again alive on the water. Then the God Aham Guru sent birds and the other creatures to find out the Magur-Maguri. After searching many years, the crow found the dead Magure-Maguri and informed the God Aham Guru. The Aham Guru created the earth with the small quantity of the soil sticking to the heads of the Magur-Maguri. There was a belief that the earth was created with a small quantity of soil, thus the area of land was smaller than the area of the water. This myth was also known as myths of Magur-Maguri. The dead body of Magur-Maguri got alive again when they were beaten by Aham Guru with his death-stick and life stick.

Myth on Conception of the Bodo Traditional Musical Instruments

The traditional musical instruments are still used in every social activity of the Bodo. Every indigenous community has their own musical instruments. At the time of worship, they use only traditional instruments. The Bodos also have their own musical instruments. There is a myth among the Bodos how the musical instruments are originated among the Bodos. The

musical instruments which are used in the religion purpose are-kham (dram), zotha, siphon (flute) and serja.

(c) Myth on Conception of the Siphung (Flute) –A Musical Instrument of the Bodo

Once upon a time there was a group of cowherds, who used to keep watch cattle in the field. In the course of watching cattle, they used to spend their time playing different games. After playing game, all cowherds worshiped the Gods and Goddesses. They selected a leader (douri) from the cowherds to sacrifices and charm at the worship and some of them prepared for the worship and some of them sang and danced. They wanted to sacrifice a grasshopper for the Gods and Goddesses. They catch a grasshopper one by one every day. One day an appointed cowherd could not catch the grasshopper. Then the leader said that he (who could not bring the grasshopper) should pray to the God and Goddesses by sacrificing his drop of blood. All of them prayed to the Gods and Goddesses and enjoyed by singing song and dance. Suddenly an old man appeared before the cowherds. The old man also joined with the dance. Then he asked the cowherds to bring a piece of reed (a kind of tall grass growing in marshy lands) and a crab. They bring a piece of reed and a crab following his order. Then the old man made a small hole on one side of the reed and on the other side the old man placed the crab. The crab made another five holes on the reed with its legs. After that the old man asked the leader of the cowherd to blow with his lips. When he blew on the reed a sweet and melodious sound came out of it. The old man disappeared after playing this melodious tune. Thus, the piece of the reed turned into the `Siphong` (flute). Thus, Siphung has come into existence in Bodo Society. Siphong has been traditional musical instrument of the Bodo. In this myth the old man was the `bwraibathou` the supreme God of the Bodo they belief.

(d) Myth on Formation of the Serza

‘Serza’ is a four stringed traditional musical instrument of the Bodo which is made from the Sijou (euphorbia splendent) plant. There is a myth how the Serza came up among the Bodo.

Once upon a time there was an old man named Khorai-bwrai. He had two sons whose name was Dwnsing and mwnsing. He was a cultivator. One day early in the morning the old man wanted to go in the field to plough. He heard that a cock is crowing in a strange sound. The cock said as ``one who eat my head he will be the king``. The cock repeated it again and again. The old man surprised, and he wanted to prove it. So, the old man killed the cock and toasted its flesh in the fire. Then he kept it ready for eating after returning from paddy field telling his wife to keep the toasted head and legs and wings for him separately. Then he left to the paddy field for ploughing. At that time two sons Dwnsing and Mwnsing came back at home and looked for some food to eat at kitchen. They saw toasted head, legs and wings of the cock and eat all without asking their mother. Dwnsing ate the head part and Mansing consumed other parts of the cock. When their mother came to know that her son had eaten all fleshes, she advised them to go

away from home to save two sons from to be hit by angry father. After coming back to home when father asked for the roasted flesh to eat, his wife told the matter what was happening in the home. The angry father having no other option, cut down his wife and went out to search children. Dwnsing and Mwnsing had passed seven days and night in the forest because they could not come back in the home due to fear of their father. They became very hungry and thirsty and tired. The elder brother Dwnsing went on searching water to drink leaving his younger brother to stay under a big tree. But elder brother never came back to his younger brother. The lake from where Dwnsing went to bring water was known as `Bilwbudang`. He went near the lake. He noticed there a big heron king having three heads spreading his three heads with long necks towards the three lakes situated at the three different places. He noticed there also was a big elephant lying just like a small hill between the lakes. When he wanted to fetch water as the advised of the king heron, the elephant said he will have to ride on his back and then only he would give him water for his younger brother. As soon as Dwnsing rode on the back of the elephant and tried to take water, suddenly the elephant got up and walked away from the lake to the other place. There was a king named 'Mwikhun raja' who had dead at the previous night. So, they searched for new king of their place. Dwnsing became king of that place. In this way the Dwnsing became the king as what the cock said and proved it be truth. After becoming the king he forgot younger brother Mwnsing who was lying under the big tree. Some days later Mwnsing dreamt in his dream that his brother Dwnsing became a king. He went up to search his brother in the jungle. After some days of search operation, he came to know about location of his elder brother with the help of king heron. When he went to search his elder brother on the way he met an elephant with the name of king Dwnsing on the forehead. Then Mwnsing became very happy and wanted to ride on the back of the elephant. But the driver of the elephant got angry and brought him for the trail before the king Dwnsing. But Dwnsing could not recognize him. He forgot everything. After long trail the king ordered gourds to give Mwnsing a shelter along with the cattle at the cattle shed. King also ordered Mwnsing to look after all the cattle every day from the morning to evening. Remembering his early life Mwnsing became very sad.

One day he dreamt a dream that when he rested at noon near the 'Sijou' tree, along with the herds of the cattle. In this dream the Sijou tree advised him to cut down the Sijou tree and out of this tree he should make an instrument of four strains. Then with this instrument he should sing the song narrating his past life before the others, so he could be relieved of his trouble with the help of this instrument. He dreamt this kind of dream for three times. He was instructed by the Sijou tree how to make the musical instrument. Such like 'Serza' came among the bodo. He learnt how to play on the Serja and turned into a melodious song. People came to know about his miracle creation. With his melodious music he earned natural power to command cloud to rain, thunder, and river to flow on earth as his wishes. His melodious music could grow new leaves in the tree.

One day king came to know about him. Then he called him. Mwnsing went to the king's court and played on the Serza. He narrated about his tragic life history of his own life with the help of Serza's tune. Then the king came to know, that he was none other than his younger brother. Then he donated a half of his own kingdom to his younger brother. They lived happily. Thus, the Serza a traditional musical instrument came into existence in Bodo society.

(f) Origin of the Kherai

There was a mythical story regarding the origin of Kherai. At the ancient time there was an old man who had five well grown sons. The old man managed his family as a joint family very well. But after the five sons' marriage he faced hardship in maintaining the family. So he advised all his five sons to go for searching some other places for cultivation far away from their home. Accordingly, the five sons went in search of fertile land and started farming there leaving all spouse at home. During that time the old man stayed at home looking after all his daughters-in-law. The youngest one was very beautiful and proficient in domestic works. Her name was Mongli. The old man used to take special care on her in her work and movement. He used to display his love in Mongli more than other daughters-in-law. During this situation, a rumor was roaming among the elder daughters-in-law that their father-in-law love Mongli. Roaming of such words made Mongli uncomfortable and embarrassment inside their family. Taking fallacy on the behavior of the family in her mind, one day early at dawn she fled away from home leaving all her family in dark. The old man became very embarrassment on the missing of his daughter-in-law. The old man decided to go for searching her out of his village to bring back at home. In the course of search operation. he forgot to take care of his health, food, dress. Looking at his condition people used to call him phagla (mad). As his name was Jara, people used to call him Jaraphagla. One day Jaraphagla sat under a tree and got asleep. During his asleep he dreamt a dream that an old man advising him to perform Kherai puja with the help of musical instruments like Kham(drum), Serza (cerenda), Siphung (flute) and zotha (cybal). Accordingly, Jaraphagla organized a grand Kherai worship was performed and musical instruments were played. Surprisingly, a woman appeared and began to dance with the music. The woman was none other than Mongli. She began to dance and afterward became "Doudini". Jara-phagla discovered his daughter-in-law in the course of Kherai worship and the old man who advised in the dream was Bathou-Bwrai. This is how the "Kherai" was originated.

(g) Myth on the Origin of Customary Laws of Bodos (Bad khanthi)

There had been a system in Bodo society by which the society maintaining the purity, peaceful and social disorder in their social life. The social system was tied up with this bad(law) system and it had been continuing from generation to generation. 'Bad' was a Bodo term with a meaning charges for social crime (offence) committed by somebody in Bodo society. The guilty person of the society was called 'Baduajanai' in Bodo term. This Bad system was a rule of social

administration of Bodos and there was an interesting myth on how this generated in Bodo society.

At the earlier stage, there was a young Bodo youth known as ‘Sandw Baodia’. He was a very great player of the Serza (fidde). Serza was a Bodo traditional musical instrument. There were two sisters at that time namely Asagi and Bwisagi. One day Sandw Baodia went in the deep forest with some wood cutters of the village to bring some firewood. They made a temporary hut near a stream in the forest for shelter for some days. The woodcutters gave responsibility of cooking to Sandw Baodiya while they did cut wood in the jungle. During that time Sandw Baodiya always used to play Serza. One day an incident took place in that hut. Asagi and Baisagi who went to enquire about the melody of Serza coming from that hut got trapped at that hut because Sandw Baodia always used to put a trap while he was not present. Asagi and Baisagi were trapped and they could not escape from there. Sandw Baodia had to touch Asagi and Bwisagi to release them. There was a belief that if anybody touches the unmarried person there would be a breach of purity of unmarried girl and so nobody could touch unmarried person at that time. The news of incident of trapping of Asagi and Bwisagi’ spread among the villagers. Then the villagers arranged a meeting for taking immediate measures for this offence. A public meeting was arranged in the village to find out the quilt person, but nothing could be found out even after a long discussion.

The meeting was held continuously for the one week but there was no solution how to book the offence as per rule of society. Then they called the Mwn-sin-Sin bwrai. He was the oldest and wisest person. He came from the heaven with the golden ladder. After twelve years of analysis, Mwn-sin-sin could bring solution to this case by introducing some social rule of law. These were called five Bads (Bodo Term) He had introduced five `Bad` system- 1. Agar-bad, 2. Phongloth-bad, 3. Daokhi-bad, 4. Khoulbwd-bad and 5. Khaoali-bad. These were the five main Bad system of Bodo by which the social control system had been continuing in the Bodo society.

(h) Myth of How Human Being Became Mortal

There was a beautiful myth among the Bodo how the human being became mortal. This myth was not only concerned with the life of Bodo but also in general term. After the creation of the universe Anan- Gosai (God) created the human being and the deities. When the Anan-Gosai started to give life with the help of immortal water from the stone pot, the Anan-Gosai could not give the immortal water to the human being from the stone pot because of distressed made by the Satan and he compelled to give water to the human being with the leaves of Arun and the deities were given to drink water with the pot of stone. So, the Gods or deities became immortal and human being became mortal.

Conclusion

Myths were a part of folk literature. Every folk religion was related with their myths. From time immemorial Bathou had been worshiped by Bodos. The religion, custom and traditions, rites and rituals were realized through the teaching of Bathou. The tradition, socio-culture, rites and rituals of Bodos were bonded or reflected through the worship of Bathou. The worship process for Bathou was very unique. The worship of Bathou was never done in public places like temple or Mosque. Worship of Bathou was done in every individual family. It was hoped that through this Bodos could realize Sibrai, the supreme God. In the worship of Bathou, Oja (priest) had been playing a very important role in maintaining the Bathou altar. It was noteworthy to mention that “Kherai” festival related to Bathou religion was performed publicly as well as in the individual family level also. According to the belief of Bathou followers, Bathou descended on earth with his human characteristics of five organs of knowledge and five organs of action. This religion teaches the people how to sacrifice, control the evil thoughts, helping each other, etc. Religion was the backbone of the culture of the Bodo community. The Bodos had rich in their myths. Every myth was generally related with the religious rites and festivals etc. The Bathou followers believed their every myth and it had been continuing from generation to generation.

=====

References

1. Bascom Russell William, 1981, *Contribution to folkloristic*, p.98.
2. Leach Maria, 1949, *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legends*, p.778.
3. Brahma Dr. Kameswar, 1992, *a study of socio religious beliefs practices and ceremonies of the bodos*, p. 117.