

Archetype of the 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

Bathou religion is the traditional religion of the Bodo community with the philosophy of 'sacredness'. It has unique characteristics of specific culture. Bathou religion has played a

significant role in the socio-cultural life of the Bodo people. The socio-culture, custom, traditions and lifestyle of the Bodos are related to this religion. Bodos worship the Bathou as supreme God. The name of the supreme God of Bodos is also known as *bwrai* or *sibrai* (“eldest of all”). The Bathou religion has been practiced since time immemorial. There is no idol worship in Bathou religion. There is no founder and written record of when and where it was founded. Traditionally they had no fixed place for worship like temple or church. Now-a-days they are used to building a fixed place for worship which is called “Thansali” (Bodo word). A Sijou tree (*Euphorbia splendens*) is planted at the middle of the Bathou fencing as a symbol of Bwrai Bathou as Supreme God. Besides ‘Sijou’ a Tulsi tree is planted adjacent to the Sijou at the right side signifying truthfulness and a ‘Jatrasa’ tree is planted on the left side of Sijou, defining wisdom. Bathou is surrounded by a circular fence of split bamboo in five rows. In this analysis, attempt has been made to explore the design or structure of Bathou and the role and meaning of every element of Bathou and its relation to the socio-cultural life of Bodos.

Keywords: Bathou religion, Bodo community, Sijou tree, thulsi plant, jathrasa plant, structure of the Bathou.

Introduction

The Bodo tribe is the largest among the ethnic groups in the state of Assam. They started to settle in the plains of Assam since the second millennium BC. The Census report of 2011 shows the Bodo population nearly 2 million in Assam and the total Boro speakers of Assam is 4.53%. Bodos are not found only in Assam. They had ruled a kingdom from Cooch Bihar to Naga Hills establishing a capital at Dimapur. They ruled the whole of Assam up to the twelfth century A.D. Linguistically they belong to Tibeto-Burmese group and ethnically they belong to a stock of the Indo-Mongoloids. The Bodo language has got the recognition as one of the recognized Indian languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Bathou is the ethnic religion of the Bodo people. Bathou religion is one of the oldest religions of the world. It is practiced from generation to generation without any priest or sacred literature. Traditionally Bodos had no fixed place for worship like temple or church. A Bathou is a bamboo fenced surrounding by centering Sijou tree, Jatrasa and Tulsi plant. Where there is Bathou, there will be Sijou, Tulsi and Jatrasa. 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 jatrasa (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. Boro 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. These represent five basic elements of creation. Bathou Bwrai is the chief of all these elements. The word `Bathou` comes from these -`B` from bar(air), `A` from hah (earth), `T` from dwi (water), `O` from orr and `U` from Okhrang (sky). By combining these sounds, word `BATHOU` is generated as interpreted by Bihuram Boro in `Gibibithai`. He divided the Bathou word into two parts with two meaningful words `BA` and `THOU`. Ba, means `five` and Thou, means `Deep`, or `deep thought`. That means `five deep thought`.

Different scholars have defined differently regarding the religion of the Bodos. Sydney Endel described the worship of Bathou as animist. But some other scholars say Bathou as a traditional religion which means five principles of creation. Edawart Stack also said Bathou religion is animistic. But R.N. Moshahary said Bathou religion is not animistic, it is a Bathouism. Promod Chandra Bhattacharyya also said that Bathou religion is not animistic. But we have to look the meaning of animism. The word `animism` derived from the Greek word `anima` means `soul` which refers to the belief in the existence of such trans-empirical souls or spirits. Taylor says -`Animism is, in fact, the groundwork of the philosophy of religion, from that of savages up to that of civilized men. Now-a-days, with their flourishing language and culture, the Bodos have been able to get recognized as a developing community. The Bathou religion has taken a unique role in maintaining the distinct identity of Bodos in the world.

Aims and Objectives

The main objectives of the study of archetype of Bathou are: 1. To study the archetype of the `Bathou`. 2.To study how the Bathou religion is related to the lifestyle of the Bodos.

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) 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.

Archetype of Bathou

The archetype of Bathou is unique in Bathou religion. It is made of several elements. These are (1) one full grown bamboo (2) Sijou plant. (3) Jatrasi. (4) Tulsi.

1. Use of Bamboo for Erecting Bathou

Among several elements, use of one bamboo plant is most important for fencing Bathou. They use only one bamboo for fencing the Bathou believing the existence of one God in universe. Cutting of bamboo is carefully done for fencing Bathou keeping its purity.

They cut one full grown bamboo from the cluster of bamboo and then the stem part of it is cut into two pieces in the size of three to four feet long and then split it into sixteen pieces. The remaining part of bamboo is prepared for fencing five steps of Bathou. After getting ready all the required parts of bamboo the four pillars are positioned in the north, south, east and west of the **Sijou** at the beginning and then all the remaining pillars are positioned measuring its required position.

Bathou is erected at the north east corner of the courtyard of home. Bathou is fenced like a circle with five rows fence of the bamboo. The base of Bathou circle is called `Bumin` in Boro. The diameter of circle is around two feet at the bottom, and it becomes three to four feet at the top of the fencing. It requires sixteen pair posts of the bamboo for fencing Bathou.

Five Rows of Bathou Fencing

Row-1

The first step is rounded inside face with three pieces of flat (Rang-rasi, Mwitahaji, Bari gongtham) bamboo signifying the meaning that all the creatures - beings, man and animals and plants have to undergo the natural law of birth, growth and death. Nobody can escape from this natural law of God. After death, all have to hug the mother earth.

Row-2

This step is rounded upside face signifying the meaning that all creatures including human being are born in the earth. Three pieces of flat bamboo signify that on the advice of Bathou, human beings can become parents of child through social system of marriage by leaving the character of heartlessness, untruthfulness and injustice.

Row- 3

This step is rounded inside face signifying that except human beings all creatures can become parents as they wish. But according to Bathou, human being can become parent by following all the rules of religion and enjoy their wishes on the advice of Bathou only.

Row- 4

This step is rounded upside face. Setting aside the act of injustice, abhorrence, heartlessness, human beings engage themselves for the betterment of the human beings and leave some adorable advice to the society at the end of their life. It is related to end of life or death of a person.

Row-5

This step is rounded inside face. It is related to performance of funeral feast after death. After death a funeral feast is performed for the departed soul for its eternal peace. It is

believed that a soul can rest peacefully in heaven if a funeral feast is performed only in the name of its soul after death and the God or Bathou willfully embrace a person's soul in his heart.

Sixteen Pairs of Posts of Bathou

There are sixteen pairs of posts in Bathou. Every pair of post symbolizes male and female and has their own name and role. These are: 1. Ailong-bwrai, 2. Agrang-bwrai, 3. Bwrai-khaji, 4. Bwrai-khwila (barmwdai), 5. Abla-khungur, 6. Raj-khandra, 7. Raj-phutur, 8. Ali-bwrali, 9. Sanja-Bwrali, 10. Sarini-jwmwn (salijomon), 11. Ai-mwnasu (Dibaboli), 12. Basumuthi mainao, 13. Bwrai-sikh-raj, 14. Bwrai bag-raj, 15. Bwrai soudri, 16. Basmuria. But now-a-days some disciples are using eighteen pairs of posts for fencing Bathou. There is no controversy seen in using sixteen or eighteen pairs of post, the difference is that some disciples used to place the position of Songraja-Songrani and Mainao in Ising, a sacred place inside the main dueling house which is always located in the northern side of the courtyard. The place of Songraja-Songrani for one position and Mainao for another position is called Ising.

Dhaothu Bikha Hebna (Replica of Dove Hearth)

The Daothu-Bikha (replica of Dove hearth) in front of the bathou is made by folding Ailung position. The post of Ailung is split into sixteen pieces and after dividing into two parts, it is crossed bended down to each other. Among sixteen post of Bathou, Ailung post is a symbol of powerful God who can control ones hideous lust and greed and being a first worshiper ask to follow his disciples to worship Bathou with him.

Rangtham or Sili-mala (Bodo term)

After completing fencing of five rows of Bathou three bamboo sticks are webbed one into another at the top along with row five and this is called Rangtham or sili-mala. All the sixteen posts of Bathou are tied together with this Rangtham and this symbolizes the upholding all god and goddesses, social customs and beliefs and rites with five principles of Bathou.

Pherenga Dao Lanjai (Black Drongo Bird Tail)

After completion of Rangtham, top part of all the posts except Ailung post are cut like a victory sign and this is called Ferenga lanjai. There is a believe that **Pherenga Bird** (Black drongo bird) can indicate any untoward incidence to be occurred by its unusual behavior and people believe it to be savior of misfortune. It is a symbol of to be conscious in day to day life of people.

Place of Cotton on Pherenga Lanjai

Every year during offering of Salami (purification ceremony), small amount of cotton is put in to each Pherenga Lanjai of sixteen pillars. This signifies the symbol of purity and marriage. In the past, the Bathou disciples used to put cotton on the married women's

hooped hair as a symbol of marriage instead of putting Sindur as used by Hindu women. Disciples of Bathou performed marriage ceremony on the advice of Bathou and as a mark of marriage they used cotton on their hooped hair.

Extra Post Place with Agrong and Basumathi

The extra post placed in the name of Goddess Asagi and Bwisagi with Agrong and Basumathi is called Khaoa Gainai (Bodo term).

Name and Role of Sixteen Pair Pillar of Bathou

1. Ailung Bwrai

This is a first God to worship Bathou Bwrai himself and advised his disciples to follow him to worship Bathou. He protects his disciples from suffering evil deeds and ominous event. He dances with sword in Kherai festival.

2. Agrang Bwrai

He is a god who offers blessing to his followers for peace and unity. He is a warrior who can fight holding two swords in both hands. He plays a role of strolls in Kherai dance.

3. Bwrai Khaji

He is a god of purity and truth. He provides guidance to his followers to keep purity and truth in their day to day life.

4. Bwrai Khwila

He is a God of wind. He got power of whirl wind from Bathou. He can fight in a form of whirl wind against enemy without any weapon in his hand. He is a god who dragged Mainao Burwi from the base of sea and help human being to leave in earth.

5. Abla Khungur

He is also a god of wind. He is a warrior with whirl wind power and protects his follower from suffering danger in day to day life. He also took major role in dragging Mainao from the pedestal of sea.

6. Raj Khandra

This god teaches the followers to worship the truth. He asks to control one's lust, hate and anger and advise to treat senior and junior equally. Being a god of culture, he has brought awareness among disciples to preserve their own culture.

7. Raj Phutur

He teaches the followers to do the best with best desires. He teaches the followers to follow the principle of love begets love. He also encourages people to uphold the culture by displaying his dance near Kham during Kherai.

8. Ali Bwrali

He is a god of cultivation. He teaches the disciples how to cultivate and take care of their crops.

9. Shanja Bwrali

He advises his followers not to harm or kill any animals and birds mercilessly. Even one's enemy is not to be attacked as revenge.

10. Sharini Joumwn

This is a goddess of wisdom. She educates her followers how to earn knowledge and wisdom.

11. Aei Mwnasu (Debaoli)

She is a goddess of natural power. She is the owner of all natural seedlings. She distributes seedlings to human beings for cultivation according to the natural season.

12. Basumaty Mainao

She is a goddess of mother earth and wealth. She teaches the followers the way to survive and to accumulate wealth for running their families in this mother earth.

13. Bwrai Shik Raja

He is the owner of wild animals. He teaches the followers to be obedient and polite to their parents, elders, and teachers. He teaches to be self-restraint from obstinate mind.

14. Bwrai Bag Raja

He teaches the disciples to be self-restraint while dealing with self-esteem. One should not behave aggressive or rude with their possession of wealth, obstinate and anger.

15. Bwrai Shoudri:

He is also a worshipper of Bathou. Human beings should be ready to face any eventualities in life. Human beings may fall and suffering in untoward incidents, but they can be rescued by Bathou if and when they offer prayer for help. He teaches the followers to offer a pair of betel nut and betel leaves near any river when they cross over such river for their safe journey.

16. Basmuria

No man and animal, plants and birds are immortal. Nobody knows the timing of life and death. It is a game of god. Basmuria is a carrier of soul of dead things. He plays a character of horse riding signifying the meaning of taking away the soul of dead things to the heaven.

Sijou: (euphorbia splendens)

Bathou Bwrai is the supreme God of the Bathou religion. The Sijou plant is planted at the centre of the Bathousali which is placed at the northeast corner of the courtyard of Bodo family. They plant Sijou plant as the symbol of immortal Bathou-Bwrai. `Sijou` have verse and deep meaning which is planted as the symbol of Bwrai bathou. `Si` means `jiu`, `Atma` `Jou` means supreme, or `paramatma`. He is the ultimate ground of everything.

He is the creator of the universe. Sijou has five stripes. The stripes represent the symbol of five main elements of the creator or Bwrai-bathou - air, earth, sky, fire and water. Sijou has a pair of thorn. It is the symbol of male and female. Sijou tree grows layer by layer spreading five or three branches in every layer systematically. There is a social faith and belief that when the branches and thorn come out from the stem more than three or five and single thorns, a misfortune may occur in the family and for that reason they cut the Sijou tree replacing it with another new one. So, the Bathou followers always used to observe the growing stage of Sijou plant. They change the sijou plant every year during purifying time, which is called `salami`. The leaves of sijou also represent symbol of Baro-birgwn, a class of warriors referred in the Bodo mythology as protectors against bad elements. If a disciple does not follow well, it makes harms to the same disciple by becoming Swima-hangali itself. The leaves also come out with the line of thorn. The taste of leaves also varies within a day. In the morning its taste is sour and a little bitter. It becomes sour and watery at noon and sour and bitter in the evening. The Atma or soul of human is immortal. As the Sijou plant is not mortal, Bathou disciple planted a Sijou plant in the Bathou altar as a symbol of god.

Tulushi (Tulsi plant)

It is the symbol of `pure` and `truth`. The disciple of Bathou plants Tulsi at the right side of the Sijou plant.

Zathrasi (Justica assamia Clarke)

Zathrasi is also planted at the Bathou at the left side of the Sijou. It is the symbol of `knowledge` and `wisdom`.

Material Use During Prayer at the Bathou

Disciples of Bathou generally use some materials during prayer. Betel nut, betel-leaf, one earthen pot for illumination, and handful of rice are used at the time of prayer at Bathou altar. Besides these they use some fruits and flowers and even animals and birds in diferent occasions of prayers and festival.

Conclusion

Bathou religion is one of the oldest religions. It played significant role in the socio-cultural life of the Bodo community. Bathou religion has unique characteristics and people are dependent on its activities.

From time immemorial Bathou has been worshiped by Bodos. The religion, custom and traditions, rites and rituals are realized through the teaching of Bathou. The tradition, socio-culture, rites and rituals of Bodos are bonded or reflected through the worship of Bathou. The worship process for Bathou is very unique. The worship of Bathou is never done in public places like temple or Mosque. Worship of Bathou is done in every individual family. It is hoped that through this Bodos can realize Sibrai, the supreme God. In the worship of Bathou, Oja (priest) has been playing a very important role in maintaining the Bathou altar. It is noteworthy to mention that “Kherai” festival related to Bathou religion is 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 is the backbone of the culture of the Boro community.

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