

Changing Trends of Traditional Knowledge System in Bathouism: A Descriptive Study

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ABSTRACT: The Bathou is the traditional religion of the Bodos. The Bathou Bwrai, or Bwrai Bathou, is the supreme god and eighteen pairs of minor gods and goddesses are also worshipped. The Bodos have been practicing this age-old religion since earliest time with various cults and rituals. Bathou is considered one of the significant religions in North-East India and neighboring country like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. This religion plays a significant role in the socio-cultural life of the Bodos. In ancient times, religious cults and rituals were almost similar and today, regional, social and political issues create differences among cults and rituals in Bathou religion. Currently, these trends of the traditional knowledge system of Bathouism are changing due to the impact of modern education and globalization. This paper explores the effects of globalization on the traditional knowledge systems of Bathouism, including its practices, cults, and rituals.

Key word: Bathou, globalization, traditional knowledge, cults and rituals, practice.

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is a dynamic aspect of human existence that evolves throughout the life cycle. This dynamism is evident in the way cultures adapt to new education, technologies, and globalization, engages with other cultures, and reflects generational shifts. This dynamic or change in traditions is attributed to the effects of globalization. Nowadays, every human society and culture has been transformed by the impacts of globalization. Thus, the Bodo society's culture undergoes both major and minor changes due to the impact of globalization.

Bathou is a religion or one of the cultural aspects of the Bodos. Its practices occurred from immemorial time. Every custom (religious-related or non-related) of the Bodos followed the cults and rituals of the Bathou religion in early periods and still yet. Only some individuals diverted from the Bathou religion to others have unfollowed its cults and rituals. The Bathou religion and its traditional cults and rituals, or traditional knowledge system of the Bathou religion, identify the Bodo culture as an enrichment. The traditional knowledge system of the Bathou religion is evolving or changing due to modern globalization. This

analysis examines the transformations within the Bathou religion's traditional knowledge system.

1.1 Aims and objectives

The main objectives of the study are given in below:

- i. To study the traditional knowledge system of the Bathou religion
- ii. To explore the changing trends of the traditional knowledge system of the Bathou religion and its cults & rituals.
- iii. To documents the changing of traditional knowledge system of the Bathouism.

1.2 Methodology

Methodology refers to the procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze information on a specific topic. There are various types of research methodologies. In this case, only the necessary methods have been applied. In this seminar paper, the Analytical Method and the Descriptive Method are employed to achieve clear and effective writing.

1.3 Data Collection

Data for the paper are collected using established research methods. Primary and secondary data collection methods are used to gather information. Primary data is collected from the oldest and most experienced members of societies (who are often closely tied to religion), while secondary data is gathered from books, magazines, research papers, websites, and more. Thus, Data has been collected using both primary and secondary methods.

II. DISCUSSION

Bathou religion and its cults and rituals are the traditional knowledge system of the Bodos. This knowledge is passing from generation to generation in the society. Bathouism has many unique and valuable traditional knowledge systems, which are pure and acceptable. In the age of modern globalization, its system is adapting to the best of human nature and religion.

2.1.1 Bathou: The Traditional Religion of the Bodos

Bathou is a polytheistic religion. The Bathou Bwrai or Bwrai Bathou is the supreme god, along with eighteen pairs of minor gods and goddesses are worshipped. The minor couples of gods and goddesses are “1.Mwmsinsin Bwrai & Mwmsinsin Burwi, 2.Si Bwrai & Si Burwi, 3.Aham Bwrai & Aham Burwi, 4.Khuria Bwrai & Khuria Burwi, 5.Eheo Bwrai & Eheo-Burwi 6.Mainao Bwrai & Mainao Burwi, 7.Bwlli Bwrai & Bwlli Burwi, 8.Deva Bwrai & Devi Burwi, 9.Gongar Bwrai & Gongar Burwi, 10.Joumwn Bwrai & Joumwn Burwi, 11.Song Raja & Song Rani, 12.Hasung Bwrai & Hasung Burwi, 13.Rajong Bwrai & Rajong Burwi, 14.Agrang Bwrai & Agrang Burwi, 15.Hazw Bwrai & Hazw Burwi, 16.Emao Bwrai & Emao Burwi, 17.Mohela Bwrai & Mohela Burwi and 18.Hafao Bwrai & Hafao Burwi.”¹ “Traditionally, the religion of the Bodos did not have any institutionalised shape. In this way the religion has since time immemorial been practised as a folk religion.”²

They practiced the Bathou religion at home only and during festivals, they worshipped outside (within the village). During that period, each village practiced the religion in its village. In ancient times, Bathou was worshipped through sacrifices of animals, fowls, and offerings of eggs and rice beer.

The term Bathou consists of two words ‘Ba’ and ‘Thou’ or ‘Gwthou’. ‘Ba’ means ‘Five’ and ‘Thou’ or ‘Gwthou’ means ‘deep’. The term Bathou consists of five principle components. The forefather of the Bodos formulated certain traditional rules and regulations relating to their religious life. They have established very well tradition of Bathou religion. The Sijou (Euphorbia splendens) plant signifies the Bwrai Bathou or the highest immortal soul. The term Sijou consists of two words, ‘Si’ and ‘Jou’ or ‘Gwjou’. ‘Si’ means ‘Soul’ and ‘Jou’ or ‘Gwjou’ means ‘Higher’. Therefore, the term Sijou means “the higher of soul”.

The Bathou altar (Bathousali) is a sacred place in the Bathou religion of the Bodos where the supreme God Bwrai Bathou is worshipped. This place is prohibited to impious individuals. The Bathou altar can be divided into two types: the Family Bathou altar and the Community Bathou altar. The family Bathou altar is situated in the northeastern part of the courtyard ,not so far from Noma No (main house) (according to Bodo customs, Noma No is located in the northern site of the home). On the other hand, the

¹Barmahalia, Faguna. *Revivalism of Bathouism among the Bodos*. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSRJHSS) ISSN: 2279-0845 Volume 1, Issue 5 (Sep-Oct 2012), p.43.

²Barmahalia, Faguna. *Revivalism of Bathouism among the Bodos*. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSRJHSS) ISSN: 2279-0845 Volume 1, Issue 5 (Sep-Oct 2012), p.43.

community Bathou altar is situated in the Eastern part of the chosen area of the worshippers. The Bodo people believe that the northern and eastern sites are sacred and generate progressive energies. Therefore, the eastern part of the courtyard is reserved for the Bathou altar.

2.2.2 Traditional Knowledge System

Traditional knowledge is an intellectual property of a community. Traditional Knowledge or Indigenous knowledge is developed by local communities that have well-established customs and practices, passed down from generation to generation. This traditional knowledge is present across various fields, including agriculture, culture, science, religion, ecology, medicine, technology, etc. Traditional knowledge protects indigenous cultures and identities, livelihoods, health, and ecological benefits. This marks the origin of modern globalization in the world.

2.2.3 Changing of Traditional Knowledge System in Bathouism

The impact of globalization brings elements into modification to utilize the best of human potential. This modification is not a complete change; it merely reflects a slight change in human nature, incorporating elements of origin and tradition. The following discussion explores the modifications and changes resulting from the impact of globalization:

Cultural Revivalism and Institutionalization

Globalization has sparked a renewed interest in traditional Bodo culture and the Bathou religion, leading to organizations like the All Bathou Mahasabha and initiatives to interpret its philosophy. The organizational system of the Bathou religion arises from the need to institutionalize and sustain a faith within society. This system fosters unity, understanding of each other, and discussion on religious sustainability. In ancient times, there was no organization in the Bathou religion. They practiced the Bathou religion at home only and during festivals, they worshipped outside (within the village). During that period, each village practiced the religion in its village. They worshipped the Bathou religion in the same cult and rituals, which included sacrificing animals, fowls, offerings of eggs and rice beer. They had no means to connect with other villages and societies through religion. Currently, the organizational system facilitates connectivity between the various villages within the community.

Awareness and Documentation

Traditionally, the Bathou religion has been passed down orally and through practices. There was no written documentation or formal records regarding the religion. Nowadays, organizations are working to amend, sustain, and preserve their religions. They tried to enhance

understanding of religion through awareness and published books about the cults and rituals associated with it. The “Bathou Thandwi” (2006) and “Gwthar Mwikhun” (2014) are examples of religious texts.

Establishment of Temples

Globalization introduces the concept of the temple system in the Bathou religion. In early periods, there were no designated temples for the worship of God. In that time, the Bathou altar was located only in the northeastern part of the home’s courtyard. During festival times, it is temporarily situated on the eastern side of the designated area. Currently, every Bodo village and religious organization has its own Thansali (Temple) to worship God and they gather weekly at the temple to worship together on a specific day.

Specific day

Many religions designate a specific day for followers to engage in ritual practices related to their faith; i.e. in Christianity, Sunday is designated as the holy day of worship, in Hinduism, each day of the week is associated with specific deities: Sunday is dedicated to Surya (the Sun), Monday to Shiva, Wednesday to Vishnu, Friday to Durga or Lakshmi, and Saturday to Venkateswara and Shani. In Islam, Friday is reserved for Jummah prayers. Similarly, in Bathouism, Tuesday is the specific day for worshipping God at both the home’s Bathou altar and at community temples. Nowadays, Tuesday is the designated rest day for followers of the Bathou religion; on this day, worshippers refrain from work.

The 2nd Tuesday of the Magh Month in the Assamese calendar is observed as “Bathou San” (Bathou Day), which is officially recognized by the government of Assam. But, in ancient times, the Bathou religion did not have a specific day for worship. However, they believed that Tuesday and Thursday were the best days to begin work, so they chose to worship on those days.

Religious and Society Diversification

Due to the impact of modern globalization, many people have modified the Bathou religion. Many worshippers of the Bathou religion still follow the traditional cults and rituals, including the sacrifice of animals, fowls, and eggs. Although many people have abandoned the sacrifice customs, they now worship by offering flowers and fruits instead. As a result, various types of cults and rituals currently exist, leading to a diversification within the Bathou religion. According to the All Bathou Mahasabha report, there are 52 categories in the Bathou religion.

The religion diversification diverts the people’s mind, every category has its organization, and they provide lots of knowledge about their categories. Their mindset is distinct from other categories, and each worshipper strives to excel

in their category. As a result, societies have become divided on the issue of religion, losing their sense of unity.

Sacrifices and Offerings

The Bathou religion traditionally involves sacrifices of animals, fowls, offerings of eggs and rice beer, which continue to be practiced today by the different categories of the religion. In modern globalization, some people are rejecting the sacrifice and offerings rice beer system and are starting to worship by offering flowers and fruits. They modified the traditional cults and rituals, creating a new category. Thus, the traditional system of cults and rituals involving sacrifices and offerings has been altered by the influence of modern globalization.

Invention of Prayer Songs

The concept of prayer song is one of the major impacts of globalization on the religion of the Bodos. The prayer song is known as “Bathou Aroj” in the Bodo language. The All Bathou Mahasabha has released a book titled “Aroj Bidang”. The prayer song system is invented in the category of innovative Bathou religion, known as Bibar Bathou. On Tuesday, the designated day of the religion, prayer songs are sung in the temples of villages and organizations. In the innovative Bathou religion, prayer songs play a key role in worship, including incantations that address people’s concerns. While the prayer song system may have been influenced by other religions, ancient practices focused on addressing the people’s concerns through incantations.

Area on Education

Tradition serves as the foundation of modern education; it paves the way for modernity. In the modern education system, the traditional has become a course subject up to the master’s level and a research topic for a Ph.D. The Bathou religion is incorporated into the modern education system, providing the new generation with knowledge of its beliefs, cults, and rituals. Many scholars have researched and written about the Bathou religion of the Bodos. This document serves as an important record of the Bathou religion. While, in the name of religion many private school are established and the students are teaches to understanding about the religion. Thus, Globalization leads to the revival and institutionalization of the Bathou religion within Bodo societies. Thus, the Bathou religion is becoming increasingly integrated into the modern education system.

Impact on Religious Festivals

The Kherai and Garja are the two main religious festivals celebrated by the Bodo community. In early period, these festivals were celebrated in each village for the well-being of the people and the crops during various seasons and events. Currently, most Bathou worshippers do not celebrate

Kherai and Garja; only a few categories celebrate in these celebrations, where they follow the traditional practices of their religion, which include sacrificing animals and fowls, as well as offering eggs and rice beer. In innovative categories, they are moving away from the Kherai and Garja festivals and starting to celebrate new festivals, including Bwisagu, Amthisua, Khathi Gasa (Mainao), Wngkham Gwrlwi and Magw and they worship with offerings the flowers and fruits. They incorporate numerous seasonal and agricultural festivals into their religious celebrations.

Role of Social Media

In today's globalised world, the media plays a multifaceted role in religion. The role of disseminating religious information includes shaping public perception, influencing religious practices, promoting religious tolerance, and can lead to misinformation and polarization. Social media is also influencing the Bathou religion. Bathou is becoming known worldwide due to social media. The media has showcased visuals and documents about the Bathou religion to the world.

III. CONCLUSION

Bathouism is the indigenous religion of the Bodo people, representing a comprehensive belief system that is deeply intertwined with their culture and daily life. It is not merely

a religion but a comprehensive way of life, encompassing social customs, traditions, and rituals related to birth, marriage, beliefs, practices, and death rites. Overall, globalization has created a dynamic environment for the Bathou religion and culture of the Bodos. While some traditions are challenged, others are preserved and revitalized in response to modern influence. Thus, the impact of globalization is changing the religious trends among the Bodos.

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Informants

SL No	Name of Informant	Address	Occupation	Age	Source
1	Phwthaisa Basumatary	No. 2 Kailajuli, Rangapara, Sonitpur, Assam	Cultivator &	55	Traditional cults and rituals
2	Sabiram Narzary	Dopdopi Rangpur, Rangapara, Sonitpur, Assam	Cultivator	65	Innovative cults and rituals
3	Budang Bassumatary	Kaijamati, Udalguri, Assam	Preist (Douri)	62	Traditional cults and rituals