



# Influence Of Bathouism In The Development Of Social Values

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Bathouism is a folk-religion of the Bodos. The deity called Bathoubwrai and it is believed that he rules the five elements of the universe for its smooth functioning. Traditional school of Bathouism does not have any written scripture or religious books. They even do not have any temple. People worship the lord at the 'sijousali'. They worship the Bathoubwrai through different socio-cultural activities like dancing, singing, arranging feasts etc. where all the people of the community participate. They celebrate all the changes in the season and thus contribute in developing social values. Social value helps to understand the relative importance of the decisions we make by focusing on what is valuable to other people. It helps in increasing the positive and reducing the negatives effects in the society and ultimately results in the overall improvement of our social life. This paper focuses mainly on the different rituals and cultural celebration of the followers of Bathouism and its influence in the development of social values.

**Keywords:** Bathouism, social values.

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## INTRODUCTION:

People of Bodo community are one of the earliest settlers in the state Assam. According to Grierson, Bodos can be identified as the section of Assam-Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman speakers. They belong to the Sino-Tibetan speech family. The studies of S.K. Chatterjee revealed that people of this group migrated to eastern India in the second millennium B.C. and a large portion of them was settled in the plain areas. Isolation caused fragmentation and as a result the different branches of the original group formed independent tribal identities like Tipra, Bodo-Kachari, Rabha, Dimasa etc. At present, Bodo means the plain-tribes of the Brahmaputra valley, known earlier as Bodo Kachari. Endle described trans-Himalayan region between Tibet and China as the original home of Bodos. Chatterjee more specifically mentioned that the north-western region of China between the head-waters of the rivers Huang Ho and Yang-Tsze Kiang was the early home of the Proto-Bodos who migrated to the eastern region of India. Now, in Assam, Bodos are primarily settled in the BTAD area, Kamrup, Goalpara, Darrang and Nagaon districts. But, they are spread all over the plain areas of Brahmaputra valley of Assam along with the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. They are earliest Indo-Mongoloid migrants to eastern India. The people of Bodo-speech community is well spread throughout the north-eastern region of Assam, north-eastern parts of West Bengal and adjoining areas of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

Bryan Hodgson used the term 'Bodo' for the first time as an ethnological term to refer the 'Meches', the Bodo speaking people in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The people of this indigenous tribal group call themselves Bodo in the lower Assam region. In North Bengal region, they are called 'Mech'. Again, in upper Assam and Barak valley region they are called 'Kachari'. It is very difficult to locate the early settlement of the people as there is no concrete evidence. There are some suggestive evidences which indicate that the Bodos, before settling in the plains of Assam, must have settled down along the foothills of Himalaya before. The contention signifies the existence of Kirata. The term 'Kirata' was given to the group of Mongoloid people dwelling along the foothills of Himalayas after coming from their original habitats in Himalayan region. Different scholars considered Bodos as the descendents of Kiratas.

The religion has evolved and adapted over time. It has got its present form by the influence of various social, cultural, spiritual, religious and historical factors. These influences have led to the formation of different branches within Bathouism such as 'Bibar Bathou', 'Bwli Bathou', 'Aroj Bathou', 'Moni Bathou', 'Jangkhrao Bathou', and 'Sonathon Bathou' etc. Though different variants have evolved but the core beliefs and

principles remain largely the same. Differences can be seen only in certain practices and rituals. Sometimes the cultural aspects have been interpreted differently among various branches in Bathouism. One of the most significant factor that influencing Bathouism has been its interaction with other religions and belief systems. The culture of Bodos is very rich and multi-faceted. In the society, generally, they follow the patriarchal form; but the women also enjoy equal status with men in the society. The man in the house is the head of the family and also enjoys the property rights. Their social life is closely compact and highly organized. Bodos strictly obey certain community rules and regulations to enjoy their social lives. They always give importance to the community life. They believe in community living, co-operation, helping each other in their needs, team work, fishing, farming and merry making etc. where the whole Bodo community works and enjoys together. Bathouism incorporates primarily the values, rites, rituals, beliefs, social norms, ethics and philosophy of the Bodo community. Value can be understood as the degree of importance of object or action. It aims at determining the actions which are best to live a social life. It also helps to understand the significance of different actions and reactions. Values are the base of any community. No society can progress if they do not have a strong value system. Social value generally refers to those human values or principles which are essentially desirable for the overall growth, development and wellbeing of an individual or a group in a society. These values are a set of principles that are morally acceptable by people of a particular community or society. The principles are mostly created by the dynamics of the community, various institutions, traditions, religions and cultural beliefs of the people.

From different studies it can be observed that evidences indicate Bodo people had their early existence in the Himalayan region. Their rituals and traditions got different shapes and forms with the passage of time. Bodo people have a very strong faith in the community life. Thus, the social values also have a great influence in holding the community together. In this study focus is given to the traditional religion of Bodos i.e. Bathouism. An attempt is also made to find out different social values which are inculcated directly or indirectly by practicing Bathouism.

### OBJECTIVES:

The study has the following objectives-

1. To study about the Bathouism.
2. To find out the different social values in relation to Bathouism.

### METHODOLOGY:

For conducting the present study Descriptive Survey Method has been applied. The investigator has used the Snowball Sampling technique to collect data by taking interviews of 35 eminent scholars in this field. Primary data were collected by the investigator directly from the field and secondary data were collected by reviewing different theses, journals, books, manuscripts, newspapers etc.

### CONCEPT OF BATHOUIISM:

In Bodo culture, festivals play a significant role. They have a very rich tradition of festivals. Their festivals can be broadly categorized in three parts- religious, ritualistic and ceremonial functions. The traditional religion of Bodos is Bathou. It is worshipped every year by the entire village community through different festivals. Bodos practices Bathou by worshipping *Bathoubwrai*. It also has some other names like '*Jiu bwrai*', '*Siu bwrai*' or '*Sibwrai*'. Some people also consider '*Sibwrai*' as Lord Shiva. He is the supreme God of Bodos. From the name of the God, the religion is also named as Bathou. In Bodo, '*ba*' means 'five' and '*thou*' means 'deep philosophical thoughts'. Aryan influence can be observed in their religious practices. *Bathoubwrai* is the source of all knowledge and lights. The term '*bwrai*' in Bodo means the 'oldest and elderly man in power and knowledge'. He is considered supreme in all respects. He is omnipotent and omnipresent '*paramatma*'. Followers of Bathouism worship the God mainly five times in a year.

*Bathoubwrai* is worshipped during the *Bwisagu* festival in the Assamese month of 'Bohag' (mid April). They celebrate it as the beginning of new year. It is a merry making festival where they sing, dance and feast together. They celebrate it for seven days and also worship Bathou for taking his blessings for the upcoming year. Worshipping God in this month is also known as '*Humbai Garza*'.

Next in the Assamese month of 'Ahar' (June-July) they worship Bathou through the festival of 'Amtisuwa'. At this time in India (particularly in Assam) trees are fully loaded with sweet and riped fruits. In this celebration they offer various fruits to the God.

Bodo people also celebrate '*Kati forbo*' by worshipping *Bathoubwrai* in the Assamese month of '*Kati*' (October-November). A section of Bathou followers also celebrate *Kherai* festival at this time. *Kherai* is a greatest traditional festival where the altar is placed in the field. In this festival, Bathou is worshipped along with other eighteen Gods and Goddesses. *Bathoubwrai* is considered as the creator of 'panchabhootas'. These are the five elements of life processes i.e. air, earth, sky, water and fire. This puja begins with various religious and traditional performances including dance, song and playing different musical instruments. These are performed in the honour and glory of God. Performing dance is a very vital part of this festival as it reflects

different and distinct significances of different Gods and Goddesses. It represents the nature, activity and behaviour of the deities. *Kherai* is strictly limited to the woman-folk, where 'dwidini' or 'deodhani' guides and controls the dance. She is treated as the representative of the supreme power. Men can only play the musical instruments from a distance. *Kherai* is celebrated before harvesting or plantation. 'Wngkham gwrlwi janai' or 'Agon forbo' is again celebrated in the Assamese month of 'Aghon' (November-December) by worshipping *Bathoubwrai*. It is usually celebrated with food and music. During this festival people have the food for the first time after harvesting. It is a thanks giving festival to God *Afaa Bwrai Bathou* and Goddess *Mainaow*.

Again, in the Assamese month of Magh (January-February) '*Magw Domasi Festival*' is celebrated by worshipping the God. It is a popular harvesting festival. It generally marks both the commencement and end of the harvesting season. *Domasi* is celebrated at the last day of Assamese month 'Pooh' and the first day of 'Magh'. On this occasion, Bodo people celebrates the harvesting festival with pomp and joy. They prepare different sweets dishes and rice cakes like pitha, laru, sithao, mola, sobai gwan etc. Another significance of *Domasi* is tying the cords made of straw around fruit bearing trees retaining the breath with a belief to have more fruits. In some areas of the state, they also prepare 'meji' or 'bhela ghar', which temporarily prepared for the feasting purpose and they burn it in the next morning.

The followers of Bathou religion maintain spirituality through prayers, offerings and various sacrifices to the God. If we elaborate it more clearly, Bodo people are the worshippers of the nature. They believe the nature has some strong hidden power which dominates their social life. Some scholars have considered their religion as partly animistic. They are nature worshippers and not idolater. They worship the five elements of nature. In certain cases, the number five is found to be very significant in Bathou religion. They use the fruit 'outenga' (*Dillenia Indica*) in worshipping Bathou, it has five ridges. They play 'siphung', the long bamboo flute, for prayers. This flute also has five holes. The altar of Bathou also has five knots of bamboo strips. The Bodo elders (*Boro borai*) also have five moral preachings. They use five types of musical instruments viz. Kham, Siphung, Serenja, Jotha and Gagana; though some of the Bathou followers use only three instruments viz. Kham, Siphung and Jotha. They play the tunes of holy hymns in front of the altar of Bathou.

The altar of Bathou is basically a place where they worship the God. It is also known as '*Bathou Bindo*'. The place is divided into three sections-

- a. The first portion is fenced by various bamboo strips- it is the principal altar.
- b. In the second portion, a part of the principal altar which extends like spur to the northern direction, is worshipped. Here, '*Noni Mwdai*' i.e. the subordinate deities of Bathou are offered prayers.
- c. In the third portion, a similar place can be seen in the southern direction where they pray the '*Hagrani*
- d. *Mwdai*'. But, these deities do not belong to the Bathou family.

B. Bharadwaj in her study mentioned that in the first part of the altar they hang a white piece of cloth above the ground which indicates the formless existence of the supreme God of Bathouism, *Anan Gosai*. '*Sijou*' (Euphoria splendens) tree is identified as the symbol of Bathou by the people of Bodo community. A *sijou* tree is planted in the middle of the altar. An egg of hen and a stone are buried under the *sijou* tree before planting it with a belief that these are the symbols of creation of the universe. Here, stone indicates truth and longevity and egg indicates reproduction and primitive stage of the universe. Then a full blown small branch of *sijou* plant is cut down from the parent plant and made it fresh by spraying some holy water with a branch of '*Tulsi*' (*Ocimum sanctum*) or '*Yatrachi*' (*Justicia Assamica*) plant as a part of the religious custom. In upper part of this branch they make five curls with white fresh thread to indicate the worldly illusion and affection since the creation. Again, *Sijou* plant is surrounded by a round fence of small bamboo strips woven by five other bits, symbolising the religious and spiritual principles of Bathouism. The fence is erected by eighteen pairs of bamboo strips with five knots. These are planted in vertical direction. Each pair symbolises a pair of minor God Goddess. The five knots from the bottom to top signify birth, pain, death, marriage and peace. Three pairs are in the front side and twisted in traditional style. This is called '*Daothu Bikha Hebnai*'. It again indicates the three fold power of Bathou, viz. Creation, nutrition and dissolution. The lamp wick is placed under the *Sijou* plant which symbolizes the spiritual knowledge. For worshipping they offer flowers, which symbolize softness and beauty; fruits, which symbolize the outcome of an action; *dhup-dhuna*, a religious component which is used to purify or bring freshness in air before worshipping the God. The altar, known as Bathou, is represented by *Sijou* tree while *Mainaow*, the Goddess-in-chief is represented by the *Tulsi* plant.

#### **INFLUENCE OF BATHOUIISM IN BODO SOCIETY AND THEIR VALUE DEVELOPMENT:**

The term value can be defined as a belief on the basis of which a man acts by his/her preferences. These are the ideas and beliefs which people cherish. These ideas are again related with the acts to satisfy human wants. Anything that satisfies the human want contains value. Value refers to the objects which individuals consider desirable and worthy in their thoughts and actions. Value is the base of an individual's life, actions and decisions. It is an acquired quality, which a man learns through different experiences. These are quite flexible. Values change with the needs and demands of the objects. Values are developed as a result of the different interrelations among the members of the society. These are socially preserved and transmitted among the individuals. Values help to inculcate the culture, tradition, belief, rituals, faiths etc. for bringing development in the society. It directs a man to lead a healthy and balanced life in the society.

There are different sources of values. Among them, religion is a very important source. Many of our morals, beliefs, thoughts and actions have their roots in religion. It unites people. Religion recognizes our duties as divine commandments. Religion is the base or source of various values like social, moral, spiritual etc.

Bathouism is also the source of different social values. The rituals and traditional practices inculcate many social values like love, cooperation, sympathy, compassion, patience, responsibility, forgiveness, peace, fraternity, justice and so on. As a religion, Bathouism teaches about unity. The rituals are practiced by the community together. They sing, dance and feast together. They celebrate their togetherness through different customs and rituals.

Unity is the base of any peaceful society. Bathouism gives direction for maintaining peace and harmony in the society. It teaches about the right and wrong and thus holds a strong foundation for the community life.

The religion also helps to set higher ideals. It believes men should have higher thinking. They should free their mindset from all conservative thinking and must lead a life which shows higher level of ideologies.

They are the nature worshippers. Hence, they believe in the sustainable development. They conserve the nature with different ritual practices and preserve its existence for the future. They worship different plants and value their importance in life. It develops the qualities like care, compassion, humanity, responsibility etc.

Cooperation is another essence of Bathou religion. They play different musical instruments, dance and sing together to offer their gratitude to the God. They harvest and celebrate the activity through different rituals. It cannot be done without the help and cooperation of other community members. They offer fruits to the God and prepare different sweets together as a part of their culture. They celebrate each other's company in various festivals.

Bodos worship Bathou during Bwisagu festival. Bwisagu is a merry-making festival thus it signifies friendship. Friendship brings peace in their minds. It is again the foundation of unity. No society and community can exist without the values like friendship and fraternity. Social values are essential for the existence of mankind.

Values of Bathouism also form the moral character of a person. Man is a social animal and they cannot live in isolation. They need to interact with other individuals continuously. For maintaining a healthy relation with others it is very important to have a strong character first.

We have already discussed that Bathou religion has taken different shapes and forms with social changes. The religion has accepted modernity and as a result many rituals like sacrificing animals, birds etc. has stopped. Now, instead of sacrificing these, flowers and fruits are offered to the God. Education and advancement in lifestyles can be reflected in its different rituals at present.

Social values are inseparable parts of culture. Bodo culture is directly linked with Bathouism. Their food, traditional attire, folk songs, folk dance, traditional instruments, rituals etc. everything is based on Bathou religion.

The religion primarily teaches about discipline, social sensitiveness, justice, we feeling, toleration, adjustment and mutual understanding through its various festivals and ritual practices. Each and every religious practice has some social teachings.

### CONCLUSION:

At present many old practices of worshipping *Bathoubwrai* have been discarded and many new principles and systems have been adopted. As a result of modernity, now-a-days Bathou religion has divided into different sections like Sanaton Bathou, Abru Bathou, Rupamoni Bathou, Narayan Bathou, Swrjigiri Bathou etc. Each section carry some distinguishing identity on the basis of the original form of Bathouism. An organisation All Bathou Religious Union (ABRU) was formed in the year 1992. ABRU has been making various efforts to give an organised and institutionalised shape to the religion. Society and religion are just like the two sides of the same coin. Change in religion will bring social change and vice versa. Bodos are the aboriginal tribe of Assam having their unique traditional religion, ideas and beliefs. It believes in the existence of only one God whom they call Bathou/Bathoubwrai. He is infinite and he is also the creator of all creatures. Bathou is an identity of the Bodo community. It won't be wrong if we say their culture, tradition, customs, beliefs, rituals, festivals etc has originated from this only. Bathou acts as a thread to bind its own people. It is the backbone of their society and values. Their social values are nothing but the reflection and outcome of the various religious practices. Hence, it is very important that the social reformers, philosophers, educationists and reformists should come forward to revive the deep philosophical thoughts and knowledge of Bathou religion to grow it in each and every individual's heart so that it can uphold the strength of unity, justice, harmony, peace, fraternity and identity of the Bodos.

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