

CHAPTER- 6

VARIOUS INFLUENCES ON BATHOU RELIGION

6.1 Introduction

With the advent of many new religious sects the Bodo society has been religiously divided into different groups. Other important factors that brought socio-cultural transition among the Bodos are spread of Modern education. The modern political system of India gave new experience to the Bodo society which led to the changes of their outlook from conservative to liberal, replacing their old beliefs and ideas by modern knowledge. Now-a-days many new religious activities have made their appearance among Bodos. Conversion to Christian, different sects of Hinduism like Brahma dharma, Satsang, etc. have brought many changes in the social dimension in Bodo society. Though, the process of conversion affected the Bathou religion, a good number of Bodo peoples are trying to preserve the traditional Bathou religion by bringing some modification in their worship. Though the good number of Bodo people follow Bathou, some Bodos are become mostly follower of Hinduism and Christianity. At present, the Bodo society is passing through a stage of transition not only in religion but also in different aspects of socio-political, economy; education etc. and many more changes are expected in near future.

“As per the available data, 90.31% of the Bodo living in Assam are now the followers of Hinduism, 9.40% of the Bodo follow the Christianity and there are only 0.29% of people amongst the Bodo who follow other religions.”¹

There are several causes of conversion of Bodo people into other religions. Bathou religion is the folk religion of the Bodo which follows from generation to generation. Bathou religion has deep philosophy, principles, festivals and ceremonies with unique way of worship. With the advent of education some educated person are reluctant to accept the traditional, unruly way of worship like rites, rituals and beliefs and sacrifices of birds, excessive drinking of rice beer during the festivals and worship.

Besides of these, during the eighteen and nineteen century upper castes used to neglect the Bodo. They used to hate and utter to the Bodos as ‘mlech’, or under development. Bodos were not allowed to eat with them and untouchable like behavior

were shown with the Bodos. For that reasons the educated and some section of the Bodo adopted other religion and their cultures. They converted themselves in to different sects of Hinduism such like 'Ek Charan Nam Dharma' by Srimanta Sankardeva and Christian missionaries.

Some of them converted themselves into Islamic religion and Buddhism religion. Some of them are realizing to protection their traditional Bathou religion. They want to reform it. Kalicharan Brahma preached the Brahma Dharm among the Bodo during the twenty century. Thus, the Bodo society has become a multi religious society.

6.2 Influence of Hinduism

The emergence of new religions in Bodo society paved the way for transformation of the society. This is also led to social divisions among the Bodo. It brings conflicts among them in terms of religions and their beliefs. Due to contact with other caste and their religion the worshiper of traditional Bathou religions are influenced and accept other Hindu religion.

6.2.1 Ek Saran Naam Dharma by Srimanta Sankardeva

During the nineteen century a tremendous changes came among the Bodo. They are measured as the untouchable and treated as sub caste among the other caste. For this reason some sections of the educated Bodo people took safe passages to eascape from such treatment and to make them acceptable to upper caste they converted themselves in Hinduism or other popular religion. Some of them converted in 'Ex Charani Naam Dharma' preached by Srimanta Sonkardeva. Who accepted this religion they are known as 'Sarana'. Along with the religion some sections of Bodos used to change thier traditional culture and other rites and rituals and assimilated themselves with Assamese culture.

6.2.2 Bramha Dharma by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma

In the last part of the nineteen century and the early part of the twentieth century, a new religion movement led by Kalicharan mech emerged in Bodo society. This is known as 'Brahma Dharma'. During that time, Bodos were passing through unruly social system where excessive and regular use of rice beer and forg meat

happened in the name of worship of Bathou religion. Some section of educated people hesitated to introduce them as Bodo. So, they converted themselves in other religion and culture, like Christians and Sarania, Islamic etc. In such a critical period Kalichran Brahma appeared as a defender of the Bodo society.

In such a critical period Kalicharan introduced Brahma Dharma in 1906 and onwards. He was later known as Gurudev Kalichan Brahma. Bodos used to follow Brahma Dharma and believed only one God Brahma. Now Brahma religion is one of the major influencing religions among the Bodo. The followers of the Brahma religion are worshipping the 'Brahma' as the supreme God. They are worship 'Jaigay ahuti' of fire as the symbol of Brahma God. The ritual of Brahma Dharma is started with prayer of 'Om Sat Guru' and end with 'Om Shanthi' pronounced it three times.

For the name of religion they change their surname and here after the followers of Brahma religion was entitle to write Brahma after their name. The Brahma Dharma uniformed and reformed the Bodo society and their beliefs.

6.2.3 Satsang of Shri Shri Anukul Thakur

The Satsang of Shri Shri Anukul Thakur religion also began to influence among the Bodo people. The main philosophy of the Satsang is that the man lives in religion and he is Param Purus. The religion is only one and it does not have others form. In this religion Anukul Thakur is the Purusattam who incarnates on the earth for religious inculcation.

The followers of this religion were sanskritized themselves from the main stream of Bathou religion though they live together in the same society. Its impact felt on entire culture in traditional religion, their rites and rituals, in the traditional custom also. Even when they meet each other, they exchange their wishes with the word of 'Joy Guru'. All they are accepted the Aryan culture. Many devotees and priests of the followers consider themselves more refined. Any devotees of Satsang regard themselves high caste Hindu Brahmins in their conduct and manner and try to avoid social interaction with the lower grade people of their faith. But traditionally Bodo have not any caste division among them. There are many followers among the Bodo mainly in Kokrajhar district. They accepted the Aryan culture and their rites and

ritualistic. The devotees are consider themselves as more refined, religious and cultured than the other Bodo.

Besides of these religions, some other Hindu religion also made influence on the Bathou religion. Some section of Bodo people are seen worshiping the Krishna guru and Saibaba also.

Now-a day, traditional Bathou religion of the Bodo is connected and influenced by other religion. That is why the other deities of the Hinduism also took place in the gods and goddesses of Bodo. Like, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar and Bishahari goddess, Mahadev and Khuder etc. are the symbol of other religion. Many deities of the Aryan names must have been borrowed from Hindus and the original names were replaced by the Hindu names as a result of assimilation with other religions. Like Lakhi goddess instead of Mainao goddess, Gonesh etc. All these gods and goddesses have been occupying important place among the Bathou.

All deities of khuber are influenced from Hindu religion. Saivaism is the dominated religion of the ruling dynasties and also of the Hindu population. “Siva represented by a Linga in the Hinduism is similarly represented by a cactus shoot in the Bodo traditional religion belief.”²

Parvati goddess also represent as the Mainao goddess (goddess of wealth) of the Bathou religion. Thus, in the Bthou religion many elements of the Hindu religion influenced.

6.2.4 Wlwngi Khangnai Bathou

There are a small quantity of worshipers of Wlwngi Khangnai Bathou in the area of Rowmari at Chirang District and Bijni District. They also worship the Bathou Altar offering with the flowers. They are not sacrificing the birds and animals like traditional Bathou. They also give the Yaiggo (ahuthi hwnai) like the Brahma Dharma. The Wlwngi Khangnai Bathou is not worship the Kherai and Garza festival but they follow the Doudini’s advices at the time of Bathou worship.

6.3 Influence of Christianity

In the first part of nineteenth century Christian missionary made entry in the Bodo society and began to influence Christian among the Bodo people. Christian missionary took some policy to entry among the Bodo society. They worked for the humanity and tried to attract peoples towards Christianity. The missionaries took a significant role in Bodo societies. They brought some changes in their socio cultural lives.

The missionaries first took a unique role towards the creation of written Bodo language. They were gave the way for growth and develop. The Christian missionaries started to work in Bodo society with a missionary zeal. It is noteworthy to say that the missionaries initially began to work in Bodo society by preaching. The simplicity behaviour and lifestyle of Bodo peoples attracted the missionaries to work.

Many Bodo people converted into the Christian religion. With a view to attract all sections of the people towards Christian missionaries opened educational institutions to teach good education. Few christian missionaries like Americal Baptist Missionaries, Anglican Church, The Indian Home Mission Society, The Prebystian Church of Scotland and The Roman Catholic Church came among the Bodos and worked for the spreading of Christianity. As a result, not only Bodo other tribal also converted in the Christian religion.

The Bathou religion is a national religion of the Bodo. But the worshiper of the Bathou religion is only one caste or only among the Bodo. Christian religion is a universal religion. The followers are also spreading in various parts. Entry of Christianity in Bodo society has made tremendous change in socio-economy, culture and education among the Bodos.

The Christian religion gradually started to influence on the traditional religion of the Bodos. Christians who are converted from the traditional Bathou religion established a new 'Boro Christian society' and worked for the expansion of the Christianity. They believe in trinity, god the father, god the son and the Holy Spirit.

The Bodo Christian also performed the seasonal festivals Bwisagu, Magw (domasi) except religious festivals. Instead of religious festival of Bathou they observed the Christian festivals like Christmas, Good Friday and Easter etc.

6.4 Influence of Buddhism

Influence of Buddhism is least seen in Bodo society. Connection of Bodo society with Buddhism is seen in the writing of Bakul Ch. Basumatary in his book '*Bathou and religious transitions of the Bodos*' (2018). He mentioned in his book about the Sunity kr. Chatterjee's statement that "Buddha was the saint of the kiratas, the group of people to which the Bodos belongs."³ The propagated of the Bodo living in the entire regions of the north, north-west, and eastern India embraced Buddhism, when Lord Buddha propagated it in the preference to the practices of animism or polytheism.

However, after about thousand years, the followers of the Buddhism decided to change over to the practice of the worship of more than one God. Thus, they favored to observe the prescriptions of the Buddhism. During the period from the tenth century till the thirteenth century, the Bodos of Tripura, Kamrupa and Cachar were following the principles of the Buddhism. "The Bodos of Bengal were under the influence of the Buddhism till twelfth century."⁴

6.5 Influence of Islamism

Some sections of Bodo people converted in Islamic religion and lost their original language and culture. Once Bodo people in Panbari and Alamganj in Dhubri district converted in Islam and they are worshipping the Islamic religion. Besides of these, in Bengal also they converted in Islamic religion. Bakul Chandra Basumatary writes in his '*Bathou and Religious Transition of the Bodo*' (2018), that Tribal people, who believed in animism, also changed their religion in a considerable number. Such as Koch, Mech who lived in the north Bengal turned into Muslims. They are known as Ali Mech.

That is why in the Garza worship Mahamad, Nawab Badsha also got place during the worship as 'non Bodo deities' (harsa mwdai). At the time of sacrifice 'cock' the harsa Douri utter the word 'Bismilla'. The harsa Douri wear 'Lungi' type dress during the time of sacrifice.

6.6 Transition of Traditional Bathou Religion to Modernity

6.6.1 Bibar Bathou

One of the most important influences on the Bathou religion is the transition of traditional Bathou to the refined Bathou. In this refined system the worshipers are changing the worship in new mode. The archetype of the Bathou and rites and rituals are same with the traditional Bathou. But the followers are denounced to sacrifices of living creatures in the name of worship. Instead of this, they worship the Bathou with the flowers and pray prayers song of Bathou. They offer the Prasad (mixer of fruits) to the Bwrai-Bathou and other gods and goddesses.

They also play musical instruments in the worship. Tuesday is taken as the sacred day of the followers and they eat vegetarian on that day as the name of Bwrai Bathou. The emergence of Bibar Bathou modified the traditional Bathou and their belief.

6.6.2 Rupha Moni Bhathou

Mani Bathou Siva Dharma was founded by Guru Rupamani Devi in the year of 1980 at Basugaon. It is also called Rupha Moni Bathou. This religion also modified some concept of the Bathou religion. Rupha Moni Bathou is dominated in lower Assam. This religion has adopted many basic element of Hinduism and Brahma religion. Sacrifice of animals is not allowed in this religion. In place of that they offer the Prasad and flowers to the Bwrai-Bathou and other gods and goddesses.

6.6.3 Swami Nabin Brahmari

Another reformed of Bathou religion also appeared, which is known as 'Swami Nabin Brahmari'. Who establish Arya Brahma Gyan Mat or Baba Sidhaya Yogashram at Ultapani of Kokrajhar district nearby in the Bhutan border. The concept of this religion is Siva created the Bathou religion. They beliefs that spirituals life of the Bodo can be culminate in the Bathou beliefs and with their rites. The Bathou Altar is same with the traditional Bathou. The followers of the Swami Nabin Brahma are small in numbers.

6.7 Impact of modernity on Bathou religion

The impact of modernity is a factor for influence of other religion on Bathou religion. The present young generations do not like to sacrifice animals and birds at the time of worship. Instead of these, they offer the flowers of the worship. The appearance of Bibar Bathou and Rupamoni Bathou are the outcome of these. In the wake of globalization there emerged a group of Bodo generation who are ignorant to their own identity, culture and tradition. They are passionate with western style of life.

1.8 Summing Up

In this chapter, discussions have been made on the various influences on Bathou religion. The chapter emphasized on various influences on Bathou religion in the modern time. Influence of Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islamism are the main influences on the Bathou religion. Due to contact with Hindu society the worshiper of Bathou religion are now accepted the Hindu religious aspects. Some sections of Bodos are now accepted to worship 'Ek Saran Naam Dharma'. They are known as 'Sarana'. Some sections of them are now follows the 'Brahma Dharma' which are preceded by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma and 'Satsang of Shri Shri Anukul Thakur'. Thus traditional Bathou religion is more or less impact.

Besides of these, transition of Bathou tradition to modernity and impact of modernity are also analyzed. Bathou religion is a folk religion of the Bodos. Though Bodos are adopted other religion also. At present there is multi religious society among the Bodo society. They are now adopted to worship Christian, Islamic, Buddhism and Hinduism. Spreading of Christianity among the Bodo society is also impact among the traditional religion. Many section of Bodo are converted into Islamic religion also. They are now adopted Islamic culture and language.

Apart from that traditional Bathou religion is also transmitted with the time of modernity. Impact of modernity also a factor for influence of other religion on Bathou religion. Instead of sacrifice animals and birds of worship now some followers are offer the flowers of the worship of Bathou. Today there are many different name of Bathou like Bibar Bathou, Rupha Moni Bathou, Swami Nabin Bathou, Wlwngi Khangnai Bathou etc. But still today every body know that the folk religion of the Bodo is 'Bathou religion' and they worship it traditionally.

Endnotes

1. Mahanta, Parag, Jyoti, & Nath, Dhruvajyoti, 2018, *Annual Multidisciplinary Journal of ACTA*, Vol-xxxx, Assam College Teachers Association Journal, p. 188.
2. Brahma, Sekhar, 2006, *Religion of the Bodos and Their Socio-Cultural Transition*, DVS Publishers, H.B. Road, Pan Bazar, Guwahati, p. 60.
3. Basumatary, Bakul Ch., 2018, *Bathou and Religious Transitions of the Bodos*, WORDS and WORDS, RNB Road, Kokrajhar, p. 122.
4. Ibid, p. 26-27.