

Religion and Magic in Bodo Society: A Study of Mantikiri Village

Bhumita Basumatari* & Mahmudul Hasan Laskar†

Abstract

Religion is one of the agents of social control. Religion plays very important role in maintaining social order in society. There are various types of religion exists in India. Indigenous religions are one category of religion, practices mostly by tribal communities. Bodo is one of the plain tribe of Assam. Bodos practices Bathouism, which is an indigenous religion. Bodo Society is also characterized by practice of magic. Magic has been practiced by Bodos since long time for the different purpose. Magic includes both black and white magic. The present paper is prepared to highlight the study of particular village of Bodo and their religion.

Keywords: *Religion, magic, Bodo, Bathouism.*

Introduction:

Religion is a universal social institution. It may be of different types like monolithic religion (Islam, Christianity etc), religion having multiple gods (Hinduism and other), religion having no idol worshipping (Buddhism, Jainism etc) and traditional or indigenous religion (animism, naturism etc). It is also one of the earliest institutions of human society. Since ancient days religion has been influencing human life and human society both primitive and modern. Each and every aspect of human life and human society bears the influence of religion. Religion is the set of beliefs, feelings dogmas and practices that define the relations between human being and sacred or divinity. It is a belief in supernatural power or it refers to the performance of practices which binds together or links human beings with the unseen super power.

According to Durkheim (1926) religion is a combined system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, uniting into a sole moral community all those who holds to those beliefs and practices. According to Malinowski, religion is a mode of action as well as a system of belief and a sociological phenomenon as well as a personal experience. Magic has been one of the most popular practices prevalent in society. It is not only a practice of traditional society but even a modern society sometimes tends to believe in magic. It is the power of influencing

* Student of MA Sociology, University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya.

† Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya.

certain events of everyday life by using supernatural forces. Magic and change causes by magic are out of any scientific explanation and rationality. Magic, as anthropologists use the term, refers to activities, usually rituals, by which a person can compel the supernatural to behave in certain ways.

The Bodo community of Assam is a branch of great Bodo group of Indo-Mongoloid family. It is believed that the origin of Bodo community was from Tibet and China. The Bodos or the Bodo- Kacharis constitute a very important section of the different ethnic groups and races settling in Assam with their distinctive cultural and linguistic traits. Racially they belong to the Mongoloid stock of the Indo- Mongoloid stock of the Indo-Tibetans. . Bodo tribe in Assam is well known for its indigenous social institutions like religion and magic. Bathouism is one of the most popular indigenous religions in North East India, which has been practicing by Bodo tribe since the time immemorial. As a matter of fact, Bathouism is the ingredient part of life of Bodos. Their socio-economic aspect of life is deeply influenced by Bathouism. Beliefs, rituals and festivals are mostly agriculture centric because Bodos economy is dependent upon it. As a community Bodos are very homogeneous in nature having solidarity so religion Bathouism contributes in large extent in this regard. Another important and almost ingredient part is the practice of magic. Both black and white magic has been prevalent since time immemorial in Bodo villages. It is matter of study that how far magic is relevant today that is in the era of science. So the paper is focused on understanding the significance of Bathou religion and the prevalent beliefs, rituals and festivals in a Bodo village namely Mantikiri. It also tried to understand the relevance of magic in the same village.

Materials and Methods:

The paper is based on a descriptive study. To collect the data both primary and secondary sources were used. For primary data, cluster sampling method was used. The universe was stratified in terms of geographical location. Data was collected from ten households out of 82 households, who follow Bathou. Data was collected by using interview schedule, observation and case study methods from the households in the village. The secondary data was collected from books, published and unpublished journals, reports etc. The results and discussions include – i) Bhatouism determines the socio-economic life of Bodos in Mantikiri Village; and ii) Magic plays as functional component local tradition of Mantikiri Village.

Religious life of Bodo in Mantikiri village:

Bathouism fully determines the socio-economic life of Bodos of Mantikiri village. Out of 88 households, 82 households are the followers of Bathouism. The villagers worship the Sijou plant as the symbol of Bathouism. The root of the Sijou plant is compared with Bathou Bwrai. Who is omnipresent and no one can see him. And the stem is compared with one and only supreme god, the branch represents all the living organism of the universe. The leaf and flower of the Sijou plant is related with Mainao (Lakhi, goddess of food). The Bathou Altar can be found in each and every house of the followers of Bathouism. It is located in the North-East direction of the courtyard. The villagers of the Mantikiri village follow Bibar Bathou and they only offer flowers, fruits, earthen lamp and incense to God. According to the villagers Bathou religion is different from the Hindu religion in terms of beliefs and rituals. The followers of Bathouism do not worship any idol. Bathou Bwrai has no definite shape, he is unseen. As the root of the Sijou plant is only visible when we dig it. Bwrai Bathou is also visible only through deep meditation and one's willingness to get him. The socio-economic life of the villagers is also influenced or contributed by the Bathou religion. The festivals of the Bathou religion are closely related with agriculture. Bathou followers respect the cows and worship during the Bwisagu festival which encourages people to care on such properties as they are unavoidable in socio-economic development of the Bodo people. Religion ties the villagers in one thread. They believe in hardworking. Bathou religion teaches them, the only way to get the almighty God is through hard work. Tuesday is a holy day for all the Bathou worshipers. Villagers do not plough or work in the paddy field in this particular day. Early morning they clean the Bathou altar, lit earthen lamp, offer flowers and pray in front of it and then go to the village's temple for prayer. There are certain rituals, which follow by the villagers.

Birth rituals: When the child is born the villagers perform birth rituals. The umbilical is cut with the sharp edged of bamboo and the detached cord is tied with the cotton thread. The male baby's cord is tied five times and the female baby's cord is tied seven times. On the seventh day after the baby is born the village priest sprinkled the holy water to the baby and the mother and pray in front of Bathou Bwrai to accept the child as he has born from the womb of the Bodo woman, he has become Bodo from now onwards. They believed in transmigration of soul. So the village priest sprinkled holy water on the new born and claim it to be their own.

Marriage: Marriage has three stage according to the Bodo society i.e., pre-marriage, marriage proper and post- marriage. Pre-marriage ceremony is a kind of negotiation between bride and groom's house towards the settlement of marriage. And the Marriage proper is performed in the fixed day where the marriage took place. Hathasuni khurnai is also the important part of marriage in the Mantikiri village. This ceremony is organized at night after the proper marriage. The Bride and Groom are taken to the nearby river followed by village priest and the villagers by singing and dancing on the way. Then the bride and groom take bath in the river and the bride carry water in the pitcher to home. After that the bride enters in the kitchen for cooking. The first meal cook by the bride is serve to Groom first and then to the villagers. On the eighth day after the marriage proper the post marriage ceremony is performed in the bride's parent's house. It is the day when the bride goes to her parent's house for the first time after her marriage.

Death rituals: When death occurs in the Mantikiri village, the corpse is taken out immediately from the house and kept in the middle of the courtyard. The body is washed with water and is covered by new cloth. Some favorite food is prepared and all the members of the family offer food to the dead person. And after that the body is taken to the cremation field. On the eleventh day from the day of the death of the person they performed the *Saradu* ceremony with prayer before the Bathou Altar. The villagers and the relatives are given feast on this day.

Ancestral rites: Bodos worship their ancestors from the very beginning. On the first day of every festival, the head of the family perform this rite. They believe that the ancestors must be satisfied by offering some foods and drinks otherwise they may cause harm to the family. So the Bodos offer food and drinks to the ancestors and the earthen lamp is lightened in the name of their ancestors facing towards the south. In Bodo it is called "*Gwthwi Si Baonai*".

The socio-economic life of the Bodos is influenced by religion. They believed that hard working is the right way to worship God. Every religious festivals of Bathouism are related to agriculture. Bwisagu is the New Year festival of Bodos. It welcomes the Bardwisikhla to bring rain and wind for the cultivation in the field. In the New Year all the villagers gather in the village temple for offering prayer. And in the second day all the villagers gather together and beg alms in each and every house of the village by dancing and singing with their traditional musical instrument. And the villagers pray for the wellbeing of the family and cultivation in the New Year in front of the Bathou Altar of every house. It shows the unity and equality of the villagers where there is no hierarchy among the community. Ancestors of the family are offered

rice beer and some eatable things in this festival. Through these worships, rituals and festivals the individual shares the unity and harmony of the social order. Religious consciousness grows and the bondage between man and God becomes stronger. Here it is clear that Bodos also worship their ancestors and the second preference is given to their ancestors after the God Bwrai Bathou.

Magic in Mantikiri village:

According to the six respondent households out of ten households says that in Mantikiri village both white magic and black magic is prevalent. Because they believe that bad spirits and witch do exist in the society and they can harm people. Magic can make a person abnormal or cause illness. For example: When a snake bites the person they take him to the old man who can perform magic and cure him. And when the child cries severely the mother thinks that the bad spirits have caught the child, so she takes the child to the Ojha Bwrai (old chant man) to cure the baby. The other example of magic is that if a person acts abnormal the person is immediately taken to Ojha Bwrai for recovery. As they believed that witch has done black magic on him or her to make the person abnormal. If a person is considered witch, the villagers avoid mixing up with that particular family. As they fear that he or she may cause harm to them. And mostly avoid eating anything from that particular family member as he can mix up harmful things in the eatable things which may cause illness. According to the four respondent households out of ten households' magic do not have function in the Mantikiri village. They believe in supernatural power of only one supreme God Bwrai Bathou. The patient is immediately admitted to the hospital. And the members of the family lit an earthen lamp at the Bathou Altar in the name of the patient and pray for his well-being. They say that mass prayers in front of the Bwrai Bathou can cure the person. So if illness occurs the villagers gather together and pray to God for the recovery of the person.

Conclusion:

Religion plays a significant role in the life of Bodos. A study of beliefs, rituals and festivals is necessary for a clear conception of the religious philosophy of the Bodos. Through organized worship and festivals the individual contributes in the unity and harmony of the social order. Bathou religion is the indigenous religion of Bodos. It is prevalent from time immemorial among the Bodos. Though some of the other Bodo villages has convert into Christianity and the Brahma religion. The 82 households of the Mantikiri village follow Bathouism. Due to the educational development the changes in the society can be seen in the

village in terms of beliefs, rituals and festivals. The olden forms of religion like sacrifice of animals in the name of Gods and deities have not been found in the village. The practice and belief of magic has been slowly decreasing in the present Bodo society. Traditionally, the Dwodini who was thought as spiritual influenced woman during the performance of Kherai used to predict the future which seemed that some magical influenced in Bodo society had prevailed. But at present the practice of Dwodini dance and the prediction of future has eliminated from the Bodo society. It is clear that all the religious festivals of the Bathouism are related to the agriculture and nature. And the worship of ancestors is very important rituals of the Mantikiri village. It can be seen almost in every festivals of the village. Even though most of the Bathou followers do not agree with the similarities of the Bathou religion with the Hindu religion, they have still failed to give the clear cut definition of the Bathou religion which identifies its difference from Hindu religion. Magic is not yet abolished completely. People still have belief on magic and its outcome. It uses for both positive and negative purpose.

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