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IMBROGLIO OF THE BODO IN ASSAM AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

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Abstract:

*“Learned men see with an equal eye
a scholarly and dignified priest,
a cow, an elephant, a dog,
and even an outcaste scavenger”.* **DeeptiShenoy**

Indian society is characterized by a high degree of structural inequality based upon the organization of people into caste and ethnic groups. Inclusive growth demands that all social groups have equal access to the services provided by the State and equal opportunity for upward economic and social mobility. It is also necessary to ensure that there is no discrimination against any section of our society. In India, certain social groups such as the SCs, STs, OBCs and Minorities have historically been disadvantaged and vulnerable. Our Constitution contains various provisions for the development of such marginalized groups, for instance, Article 341 for SCs, Article 342 for STs, Article 340 for OBCs, Article 30 which provides the right to minorities to establish and administer educational institutions and so on.

The Bodos represents one of the largest ethnic and linguistic groups of the Brahmaputra valley. The 1971 census report indicated Bodos being the 8th largest scheduled-tribe (ST) group in India. Close to 1.5 million people speak Bodo Language. The Bodo Language is one of the National languages after inclusion of it into the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It is medium of instruction in Assam, full-fledged department in Gauhati University and MIL in many other Universities including NEHU. But still this language has myriad of problems including survival as medium and development of language and literature. After the formation of BTC even though in the true sense of term it is said that every people is equal in the eyes of law and justice should be given to the people to maintained peace and tranquility in the state. But all these are happening exactly opposite in BTC.

KEYWORDS:

Bodo, Schedule Tribes, Government, Inequality, Discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

Discriminatory and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of over 167 million people in India has been justified on the basis of caste. Caste is descent-based and hereditary in nature. It is a characteristic determined by one's birth into a particular caste, irrespective of the faith practiced by the individual. Caste denotes a traditional system of rigid social stratification into ranked groups defined by descent and occupation. Caste divisions dominate in housing, marriage, employment, and general social interaction—divisions that are reinforced through the practice and threat of social ostracism, economic

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boycotts, and physical violence. Although the practice has been condemned by many Indian leaders, including most recently by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, unless the government accepts responsibility to end the widespread prejudice, crimes against Dalits will continue. India has consistently cited its numerous legislations and government policies as a measure of compliance with its obligations to end caste-based discrimination, choosing to ignore its failure to implement these measures which has resulted in continued, and sometimes enhanced, brutalities against Dalits or ST/SC people.

OVERALL DISCUSSION:

Jati, or caste, is a second factor specifying rank in the Hindu social hierarchy. Jatis are roughly determined by occupation. Often region-specific, they are more precise than the sweeping varna system which is common across India and can be divided further into sub-castes. This is also the case among untouchables. Andre Beteille defines caste as “a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system.” Despite constitutional prohibitions and laws, most recently the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, violence and injustices against untouchables continue today. The Government of India's National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes states that “...even after 50 years of Independence Untouchability has not been abolished as provided in Article 17 of the Constitution & incidents continued to be reported.” For 2011, the Commission lists 1,157 “registered” cases of abuse of untouchables and tribals.

On January 26, 1950, India became a republic, with an entire section dedicated to “Fundamental Rights,” the Indian Constitution prohibits any discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth (Article 15[1]). This law extends to all public institutions, such as government-run educational facilities, to access to hotels and restaurants, public employment and public wells, tanks (manmade ponds for water supply and bathing), and roads. The practice of untouchability is declared illegal (Article 17).

Significantly, Article 15, which prohibits discrimination, also contains a clause allowing the union and state governments to make “any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.” This language was added in 1951 within weeks of a Supreme Court decision outlawing quotas in school admissions. The speed of the amendment is indicative of the strong political support for reservations, Nehru's personal views notwithstanding.

Similarly, Article 16, calling for “equality of opportunity in matters of public employment,” contains clauses permitting the “reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State” and another allowing “reservation in matters of promotion” for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Regarding the reservation of jobs, Article 335 of the Constitution mandates that the “claims of the members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration.” Finally, a National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was created to investigate, monitor, advise, and evaluate the progress of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under the schemes aimed at the socio-economic development of these groups. Another Commission was also created to investigate the conditions of the socially and educationally backward classes.

BODO COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT:

The Government of Assam towards the Bodo medium is like step mother for which till today the medium's problem are not solved nor the government care to find a solution. The problems of Bodo medium is yet not solved till date much to concern of the students, teachers and guardians who have long been facing the difficulties due to the negligence. There are several schools which have not yet sufficient teachers, class rooms and infrastructures as per the RTE Act. The government is not doing for implementation of the RTE Act. Separate Directorate is the only way through which the Bodo medium problems including timely distribution of books can be solved. There are separate directorates for Assamese and High Madrassa mediums but though the Bodos are demanding separate directorate for Bodo medium the Assam Government has no yet fulfilled the demand. Despite of Bodo majority in BTC area Assamese medium schools are more than in comparison with Bodo medium school.

Now the Bodo language has accepted as a national language under the 8th schedule of the Constitution. Bodo culture and language has now come under main stream of national culture. Even though the Bodo language and culture which is not receives sufficient patronage from official sources. Even after

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independence, when Assam was recognised, Bodos rich language and culture is not recognised.

In BTC area the Primary Health centres infrastructures are in poor condition and Dispensaries are also too. It is pointed out that these are running almost without doctors and inadequate medical staffs and short of medicine stock. These are happening only for Assam government.

The discriminatory policies adopted by the successive state government continue to truncate socio-economic prosperity of the community. For instance, the appointment of Assamese teachers in Bodo medium schools, non provincialisation of large number of ventured Bodo medium schools, rejection of demand for a separate directorate for Bodo medium schools.

In the TET examination of Assam state which is conducted for Higher Secondary level subject teachers as criteria the Assam state made a mandatory criteria that one who has 50% in M.A, he/she can apply for the examination. But this is to be noted that according to UGC ST/SC students have to get 50% in M.A to get norms and general category students have to get 55% to get norms. Then it comes to us that general category students can apply for TET without UGC norms but a student of ST/SC cannot apply for TET without UGC norms. So, question arises about the reservation regarding ST/SC.

On the other hand, in the name of countering insurgency continues to victimise even those who are not insurgency group's member. According to unofficial estimates, at least 500-600 Bodo youths have been killed in the name of fighting insurgence between 2009-2013. As for example- on 11th December 2013, three school going boys were shot in wee hours of about 1A.M. at Raidangbari village under Runikatha Police Station in Chirang District of BTC region in Assam Police and Army officers. Two among them JirimiyaNarzary and PranjitNarzary died on the spot while another NikodinNarzary sustained serious injuries. PranjitNarzary was only a student of class VI(six) at Salbari ME School and another one is JirimiyaNarzary was a student of class X(ten) at Dwimalu High School. But there was no any voice against the inhuman act on behalf of Human Rights Act. The General category or Bureaucrats also have not raised any objection to the encounter of the students in the name of insurgency.

The two tribal (Rava) women was raped and murdered by three person's namely-Kishore Das, Nipen Das and GopalBorman. The family members were lost what to do and whom to approach for seeking justice of their owndaughters and so they came to at Kajigaon Police Station for FIR. But, unfortunately the OC of the police station did not accept their FIR by saying that the incident which had occurred at Azara,(Guahati)he was not acceptable case as his choice. Due to this reason, alternately they approached to ABSU for justice and then after getting information ABSU directly approach to the OC then only the police bound hadtoaccept the FIR against the culprits. But, in case of higher class woman's when there is raped or murdered there is a lot of voices from the elite sections of people as well as Woman Commission of India. It should be noted that on 9th July 2012, in Guahatiwhena girl was allegedly molested by a crowd and there was a lots of voices from government, woman commission, civil society and so on. After that culprits were arrested soon. But from the incidents of Azara it seems that there is not taken such kind of initiatives neither the culprits punished nor there is fair judgment. From that we know the tribal woman are discriminated such kind of commission and civil society also.

CONCLUSION:

The Bodos are struggling for their identity and establishment of their constitutional rights. The Bodos are neglected initially, even though they are larger ethnic group compared to some other ethnic groups who were accorded constitutional rights. The story can thus be analysed as when a marginalised tribe or a community with good historical background is neglected a more advanced community, it becomes like the shrubs underneath the big tree not getting sufficient sunlight for Photosynthetic activities to experience growth being used up in maximum by the canopy in big leaves. A crying child needs care and an ailing child longs for a healing touch. So long as the government lack political will to solve the irritated BTC issue it will continue to be the playground of the political game.

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Marginalised Bodo people in Education by the Government-A Sociological Study

Chithumbasumatary
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I. Introduction:

“Education is something which ought to be brought within the reach of every one.”

“The object of primary education is to see that every child that enters the portals of a primary school does leave it only at a stage when it becomes literate and continues to be literate throughout the rest of his life.”

-B.R. Ambedkar

The term “**Marginalization**” generally describes the overt actions or tendencies of human societies whereby those perceived as being without desirability or function are removed or excluded (i.e., are "marginalized"...) from the prevalent systems of protection and integration, so limiting their opportunities and means for survival. Education was perceived as crucial to processes of planned change. It was seen as the key instrument for bringing about a social order based on value of equality and social justice.

Expansion and democratization of the education system was sought, the two primary egalitarian goals of which were the universalisation of elementary education and the educational “upliftment” of disadvantaged groups. The State’s special promotional efforts have undoubtedly resulted in educational progress for the SC/ST especially in regions where policy implementation combined with the dynamism of reform, and most crucially with anticaste, dalit, tribal and religious conversion movements.

India is a welfare State, committed to the welfare and development of its people and of vulnerable sections in particular. The preamble, Directive Principles of State Policy, Fundamental Rights and specific sections, viz., Articles 38, 39 and 46 in the Constitution of India, stand testimony to the commitment of the State to its people. Socially disadvantaged groups of Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes have received special focus over the years for their social and economic advancement. Government has taken several steps for framing appropriate policies needed to design and implement various welfare programmes for achieving the objective of creating favorable environment to ensure speedy socio economic development of SCs/ STs. For the wellbeing of these communities, special target-oriented programmes are being implemented by earmarking funds, providing subsidies, offering reservations in employment and educational institutions etc.

Bodo people and Education:

Ethnicity and identity have been the key issues of mobilisation in all of north-east India. The region has had a long history of being marginalised; its inclusion in the Indian nation is seriously challenged by communities; and identity politics has shaped the politics of resistance. The struggle for power, both political and economic, has thus become bloodied. The failure of the Sixth Schedule to deliver, the contest over and resources, the lack of development, and the fear of disempowered smaller groups are all tangled in the web of electoral politics of the ruling classes.

It is known that, the All Bodo Students Union since its inception in 1967 has been raising the voice for inclusion of the Bodos and other tribes of Assam in the process of Universal access to Education, Socio-Economic and Political right. In fact, the All Bodo Students Union had demanded Educational and Socio-Economic development before launching the famous democratic political movement for a separate state of Bodoland on the 2nd March 1987. The visible discrimination of the ruling elites of Assam in setting up education institutions right from lower primary school to University had forced the union to resort to political demands so that all problems could be resolved without the intrusion of biased elites.

The discrimination has reached to such an extent that the Bodo medium schools despite being introduced in the year 1963 a total of 842 lower primary schools, 373 Middle English schools and 218 high English schools are functioning without a single penny of government support as venture schools. These schools in absence of any support are functioning in an abysmal condition depriving lack of children from quality education, Mid-Day Meal, adequate text books and other Government Facilities. The teachers are completely demoralized because they do not get a single paisa or payment from the schools. The infrastructures in the schools are in an unimaginable state, it is really disheartening to see that many of the teachers have retired without any remuneration. The newspaper report shows that many of teachers from venture schools were committing suicide.

All these are happening despite being aware of Article 46 of the directive principle. The recent recognition of Educational Rights as Fundamental Rights under the Article 21(a) also seems to be non-applicable to Bodo students. The fundamental right to equality before Law under article 14 also seems to be in vain in case of the Bodo as despite being in the same land Bodo has been treated unequal.

If the Educational condition in the Primary and Secondary level is in this shape, one couldn't imagine of higher Education. There are 3 million (30 lakh) of population in Bodo Territorial Council area whereas Bodo have only 08(eight) degree colleges and 5(five) junior Arts colleges which are provincialised against the 26 (Twenty Six) non provincialised degree colleges and 13 (thirteen) junior non provincialised Arts colleges. There are total 7 (Seven) science non provincialised colleges and 3 (three) non provincialised commerce colleges. The long standing demand and aspiration of people living in Bodoland region for a Central University has been discarded by Government of India at the juncture when other places are dumped with institutions of higher Education. The Medical College and Agriculture College seems to a costly dream for the Bodos.

The consolidation of the Indian state in so far as its coercive instrumentalities are concerned, along with its increasing indifference to and marginalisation in matters of development benefiting all sections of the people, is a fact that is blazingly evident.

The BodoSahityaSabha (BSS) has urged upon the government of Assam to solve the problems of the Bodo medium schools in the State and for giving ample scope for the upliftment of Bodo language and literature.

The General Secretary of the BSS said the Sabha has been working for the all-round development of the Bodo medium schools and enrichment of Bodo language and literature since the foundation of the BSS on November 16, 1952 at Basugaon in undivided Kokrajhar district, now in Chirang district. He said the Sabha will discuss mainly on the Bodo medium related problems as the government has not taken necessary steps to solve the problems of Bodo medium. He said over 70 per cent schools of Bodo medium are yet to be provincialized and most of the schools do not have Mathematics and Science teachers.(The Sentinal,22/03/13).

The Bodo medium venture schools have the largest contribution in providing education to the Bodo students but these schools have lack of teachers, he said adding that the government should provincialize the Bodo medium schools across the State for survival of Bodo medium.

The Education is the Fundamental Right which is included in the Article 21A of the Constitution of India; this fundamental right is made more worthy under The Right of Children of Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. The Act ensures the children from age of 6–14 years, for free and compulsory education. However, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) in a statement sent by the General Secretary and Education Secretary said in many tribal areas of Assam children are deprived from getting free and compulsory education. In the recent Provincialisation of the LP, UP and Secondary and Higher Education the Provision in the case of the elementary education which the RTE ensures that all the schools must be recognized and provincialized by the government as in the provision under Section 6 & 7 of the RTE Act, the statement said adding that the Provision in The Assam Venture Educational Institutions (Provincialisation of Services) Act, 2011, provides the terms and conditions which contradicts the Fundamental Right to education in the elementary level.

The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) said the land issue is the fundamental right is inherent to the land where the persons are living. Therefore for the schools in the forest areas established and recognized must be provincialized as the land permit from the forest or any department cannot remain a hurdle in enjoying the Fundamental Right of Education; there is also a provision in the Schedule Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers' (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 under Chapter II, Section 3(2) clearly directs the government of India and the State to allot land for the schools and other welfare projects for the ST and traditional forest dwellers people dwelling in the forest region. In fact, denying the rights of the tribes forest rights in Assam is very much condemnable.

Mixed-medium (Bodo and Assamese) type of schools must not be left apart and only one medium must be provincialized when the recognition year and establishment is in the same year which will be a discriminatory to the vernacular medium of Bodo.

On the distribution of free text-books, the ABSU said the government of Assam must be very sincere on the implementation of the Fundamental Right of Education to all sections of society and medium of instructions. The Union rejects the policy of not sending extra textbooks or the office copy in the LP & UP schools; which is a hindrance to the teacher to impart proper education lacking the opportunity to self-study. The other concern is RTE ensures admission of children in any LP & UP schools at any time of the academic year; therefore books must be available at the schools for quick access for the quality education and ensuring fundamental rights. As all children are entitled to free and compulsory education from the age of 6–14 years, all children despite in private must get free textbooks all over the State.

Moreover, the Government of Assam has not maintained and provincialized all the venture institutions without any condition since four decades. The Bodo medium schools were deprived from having insufficient teachers. However, in such a condition of the functioning of the venture institutions how can there be a 20

percent pass percentage maintained in that teacher less Bodo Medium Institutions? The government of Assam has done atrocities to the tribal community neglecting the backwardness and inability to quality education. The union demanded for the tribal venture institutions to be provincialized immediately. The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) has reacted strongly to the proposal of Assam Education Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to conduct separate TET for the tea garden areas and tribal students.

The Union president and general secretary said, although the Union has been demanding holding of separate TET for Bodo medium schools in Assam, the government has no intention of developing Bodo medium schools and this has come light with the recent announcement of the Education minister.

Pramod Boro said, "The Union has been demanding development of Bodo medium since the last six decades. Bodos are not against development of other communities or areas, but the government has totally ignored our demand by giving preference to certain communities and areas over others."

II. Conclusion:

Since the level of educational attainment plays a 'linchpin' role in reducing the incidence of poverty as well as improving the health status of the socially marginalized and economically disadvantaged sections of the society, the need to provide adequate and qualitative education in rural areas, and especially to the weaker sections of the society.

Assam Government showing apathy in implementation of Bodo language as one of the state official language. The Bodo Language is one of the National languages after inclusion of it into the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It is medium of instruction in Assam, full-fledged department in Gauhati University and MIL in many other Universities including NEHU. But still this language has myriad of problems including survival as medium and development of language and literature. The main reasons are totally negligible financial support from the state Government, lack of proper planning and absence of proper institutional mechanism. But after long eight years of experiment on the line of BAC formed in the year 1993 Bodo have experienced that it is creating more chaotic situation rather than solution in all the matter related to education, socio-political and law and order. The Bodos were optimistic that the maximum problems faced by the Bodo community would be resolved with the formation of BTC in 2003. In the true sense of term it is said that every people is equal in the eyes of law and justice should be given to the people to maintained peace and tranquility in the state. But all these are happening exactly opposite in BTC.

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Bodo Community & Religion: A Sociological Study

Chithum Basumatary

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Bodo People in North-East India

The generic term, Bodo of Tibeto-Burman Languages was first applied by Hudson to a group of people of the Brahmaputra valley. The Bodos live in a scattered manner throughout the North–Eastern region of India. Linguistically, Bodo is a Tibeto-Burman language of the North and East Bengal, Assam and Burma.

The Bodos belong to the greater Mongolian stocks who are described to be the inhabitants of a country north of the Himalayas and west of China. According to Kameswar Brahma, this land is known as “Bod” which meant a “Homeland”.

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Chithum Basumatary

Bodo Community & Religion: A Sociological Study

In fact, *Bodo* is a generic term which includes a large number of the tribes settled in Assam. In our discussion, we shall proceed with the Bodo language speaking people of Assam who form a large ethnic group of Assam. According to the recent Census of 2011, the Bodo population in Assam is approximately 15,00,000 of the total state population of 3,11,69,272.

History of Migration

In several research works, the term *Kirat* is used to describe the groups of people including the Bodos. According to Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, the Kirat came to Assam in 2000 BC. They seem to have come from North-Western China between the head waters of the Huang-Ho and the Yangtze Kiang Rivers.

According to Rajmohan Nath, different groups of people came across the Himalayas from the north when the early dwellers of Assam, the Austric people, became weak in power. They were the primitive people of the area north to the Himalayas and west China.

According to Rev. Sidney Endle, the origin of the Kachari (Bodo) race is still very largely a matter of conjecture and inference, in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history. In features and general appearance they approximate very closely to the Mongolian type, and this would seem to point to Tibet and China as the original home of the race.

Bodo Groups

There were many historical figures of Bodo who include eminent rulers like Raja Iragdao, Sikhwna Jwhwlau, Swmdwn Jwhwlau, Gambari Sikhla, Birgwsri Sikhla, etc. Different dialects of the language changed to different sub-languages and the community was divided into sub communities with different names like Bodo, Garo, Rabha, Tiwa, Sonowal, Karbi, Dimasa, Kokborok, Mishing, Ahom, Chutiya, etc.

About the earliest mentioned king of Kamrupa or Pragjyotisha, K.L. Baruah writes that the king was non-Aryan and he might belong to the Bodo dynasty. He writes: “the earliest mentioned king of Kamrupa or Pragjyotisha, as it was known in more ancient times, was non-Aryan named “*Mahiranga Danava*”. His name was evidently “*Mairang*”, for a hill on the seventh mile of the Gauhati & Shilong road is still known as “*Moirang Parbat*”. It is shown in the modern map as “Moirangka”. The word “*Mairong*” was sanskritised into “*Mahiranga*”. It is clearly a Bodo name and the people of this race who then inhabited the country were called Kiratas and Mleccha as they were Mongolian immigrants (Kameswar Brahma, 1992).

Kachari (Bodo) people have prominent mongoloid features: the strong cheek bones, slit eyes, a slight growth of hair on the body and scanty beard. They are shorter and scantier than the Indians of the north-east (Anil Kumar Boro, 2010).

Historians and Social Scientists are of the opinion that the Bodo-Kocharis have, in different epochs in their history, been instrumental in exercising and maneuvering royal power. According to R.M. Nath, when Buddhism spread into Bodo countries, especially the Southern part, inhabited by the Buddhist Lamas, was known as Bsti (Lamas), Bod and later on it transformed into Bsti-Bod-Tibod-Tibbot-Tibet.

Traditional Religion of the Bodos

The traditional religion of the Bodos is called *Bathou* which has been practiced since time immemorial in South East Asia. This religion is invariably linked up with and centered around the worship of *Bathoubwrai* or *Sibwrai*, i.e., the supreme god of the Bodos. Hence it is known as Bathou religion. In the Bodo language, *Ba* means *five* and *thou* mean “*deep philosophical thought*”. The five elements are- *Bar* (Air), *San* (Sun), *Ha* (Earth) and *Okhrang* (Sky). Hence, Bathou means five principles, significance of which is mysterious, not easy to understand and not easy to feel without meditation.

Amongst the followers of Bathou religion, God is known as the Bathou Bwrai. In Bodo language, the word *Bwrai* signifies the *oldest* or most elderly man in power and knowledge or

the Supreme in all respects. Therefore, he exclusively represents supreme soul, *poromatma*, who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. Fire can't burn him, water can't moisten him, air can't dry him and spear can't pierce him. He is the illuminator of all earthly objects. He is the source of all knowledge and light. He bestows on us everything we need in this world. The creator of these five elements is called Bathou Bwrai or the God. After creating the physical form of a man with the composite elements, he confers his spirit to the inanimate body which displays as the totality of living being's body. So, Bathou is religion and philosophy that embodies the spirituality of the creator or the God. The followers of Bathou religion practices spirituality through prayers, and offerings and sacrifices offered to the deities.

Animistic or Non-Animistic?

According to Sindney Endle, "the religion of the Kachari race is animistic and its underlying principle is characteristically one of fear of the dead." He again says in the same monograph - "in the typical Kachari Village as a rule neither idol nor place of worship is to be found; but to the Kachari mind and imagination earth, air and sky are alike people with a vast number of invisible spiritual beings. Mwdai is a Bodo word which means deity (God or Goddess) and should not be mistaken for invisible spirits."

P. Bhattacharjee strongly argues that "the religion of the Bodos is not animistic. They are worshippers of Bathou, the supreme God. They have other Gods and Goddesses. They believe in Ghosts and Spirits also. But the concept of the Supreme God is predominant."

Bathou Altar

Sijou is a plant whose scientific name is *euphorbia splendens*. The Sijou is planted in the Bathou altar at the centre as the symbol of Bathou religion of the Bodos. In Bathou religion, the Sijou plant (*Euphorbia splendens*) has an important place and this Sijou has been widely accepted as the symbol of life or soul by the Bodo people since time immemorial. The Sijou plant is the living symbol of Bathoubrai, the supreme God. It needs to be mentioned here that

there is no seed in Sijou plant and it can survive in every place. Hence a branch from another plant is brought and planted at the Bathou altar.

The Bathou altar is the main place of Bathou worship. Bodo families, who follow the Bathou religion, must have a *Bathousali* in the North East corner of the courtyard. Apart from this, each village has to set up a Bathou altar in the community land. In a Bathou altar, Sijou plant is planted and fenced with 18 pairs of small bamboo strips folded with five fastening which symbolises and signifies the religious and spiritual principles of Bathouism as well as the eighteen gurus and deities. The pairs of the part symbolically mean the married couple of gods and goddess, gurus as well as Mahagurus.

Earthen Lamp

In the name of the above mentioned god and goddesses, an *Alari Bathi* (earthen lamp) is lighted on all the altars. The first round of fastening from the bottom signifies the three *Bando* (bindings) of human beings: *birth*, *sorrows* and *pains* or troubles and distress and death which have to be compulsorily borne by human bindings. No one can escape from these things. Another remaining two rounds of fastening signify the two other bindings - marriage and peace and pleasure from which one may escape.

Folk Religion

It can be observed from the above discussion that the Bathou is an ancient religion of the Bodos which has been practiced by the followers since time immemorial. So, the colonial ethnographers and missionaries called the indigenous tribal religion animism. It is also true that to a certain point the existence of Pluralistic God and Goddesses perhaps point to the primitive stage of folk religion. Besides these, there are lots of characteristics of folk religion namely propitiation, purification, expiation, avoidance, taboo, asceticism, orgies, revelation, divination, ritual and magic which are common to the traditional religions of the world.

Lack of Institutionalization in Early History

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Bodo Community & Religion: A Sociological Study

Traditionally, the religion of the Bodos did not have any institutionalized shape. But in course of time and due to the rapid changes in the society this Bathou religion has faced some new challenges. The process of worship such as sacrificing animals and fowls, offering and drinking rice beer in the name of deities appears to be crude and unfit in the eyes of the educated people. Gradually people started to dislike these processes or way of worshipping. Moreover, there was lack of uniformity in the rituals and other related matters in the same religion.

Community Rites – Modern Developments

Community rites are performed once or twice in a year. A priest performs and initiates rites. In these rites a selected woman performs the role of “*Doudini*”, which is considered as the spirit or deity. The *Douri* (male priest) and the *Doudini* (female priest) who used to play pivotal roles in traditional Bathou religion are being shifted to the background. They are replaced by Gwthari Asari priest appointed by the village and a band of singers who sing, i.e., Bathou Aroj at the time of worship. The Douri explains the reason *Raisongnay* in Bodo why and to whom this worship is performed or offered in the beginning and again the worship comes to an end with his *raisongnay* (concluding mantra).

The preachers and the followers of modified Bathousim have given importance to Douri instead of Douri (male priest) and Doudini (female priest) combination. Earlier, during the Kherai worship, Doudini had to play a great role in the worship.

The Kherai is a religious festival, and in Kherai the deities are propitiated with the ritual dance and drama. The doudini is the key dancer. As soon as the priest or *Oja* chants the mantra, she starts dancing rhythmic dances. The doudini moves in a circular way round the Bathou altar where deities are positioned. The oja and the deouri and the elderly members of the village follow her dancing and making hand gestures. There are eighteen varieties of dances performed by the doudini, viz: *Dahal sibnay*, *bathou gidingsay*, *Cha gwlaow bwnay*, *khwijema fonai*, *dahal thungri sibnay*, *thungri sayao ganay*, *mwisw gelenai*, *gorai dabrainay*, etc. These dances are

performed with the traditional musical instruments like *Kham* (big drum), *Sifung* (long flute), *Serza* (violin) and *Zotha* (cymbal).

A section of the Bodo populace has embraced Christianity or other religious faiths.

Bodo Community & Religion

Every society has a religious system. Srimat Kalicharan Brahma started preaching Vedantic religious cult among the Bodos. After becoming adept in Brahma faith under the teaching of Guru Paramhansa in Calcutta, Kalicharan endeavored to unite the religiously disunited Bodos within the framework of his new outlook based on the Brahma faith. He preached Brahma religion, a new Vedanta based religion among the Bodos. In this way, another new religion emerged among the Bodos that influenced the socio-cultural life of the Bodos in broader way.

In the aftermath of the various socio-religious and socio-political situation during the last quarter of the 19th century and in the 1st half of the 20th century, a great change came to the life of the Bodos. Thus, a section of the Bodos is attached to the some religions/sects like Krishaguru, Vaisnavasim, etc.

Bodo Religious Philosophy

The Bodo philosophy in itself is unique. The five holy sermons of the Bathou Borai or the five sacraments for all the Bodos include prayers to God, conversing religious and spiritual matters, being charitable to the poor, love the community people and be united. The five holy realizations are – Realization of Sijau, the supreme soul, merger of atma (human soul) with the supreme soul (Sijau); Realization of Mainao; Realization of the Panch Mahabhutas corresponding to the five main gods: Ailong, Agrang, Khoila, Sanja-Borli, and Raj Khungri; and Realisation of the need of wordily affairs. The five senses of love: love to God, fellow-beings, wife and children, poor animals and nature, motherland and the world. There are other moral and spiritual preaching which the followers of Bathou continue to believe in.

Magic

Magic is practiced and it cannot be separated fully from the worship of Gods. While the gods are moved by prayer, and the gods are petitioned for general wellbeing, magic is always used with reference to specific problems. Magic is an integral part of the tribal religion and its importance is equally noteworthy in the case of Bodo traditional religion. The chants of the Deuris, the oracles of the Doudini, and the different performative feats during the religious festivals are important aspects of the ritual.

Brahma Religion

Brahma Religion, a direct product of the Brahma Dharma Movement under the leadership of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, is a Bodo socio-cultural movement, which heralded a radical change in Bodo society. Kalicharan Brahma can rightly be considered as the morning star of social and cultural reformation of this society. It was the first intrinsic effort of a few literate Bodo people to reform their own society when the outside cultural processes of Sanskritisation and Shankarnisation were unable to bring a complete change of their traditional life and their social, moral and spiritual aspects. By that time Christian Missionaries could not also penetrate into the centre of Bodo society for such a major reformation. After Kalicharan, there was a new Brahma consciousness among Bodo people under the initiatives of Gurudev Shankaracharya who influenced Fwrlanga Babaji, Gurudev Nabin Chandra Brahmachary and Lanka Brahma who initiated an ethnic fusion of Hindu religion, a mixture of Hindu and Bathau cult.

The first stage of Brahma religion worships only the Brahma, the supreme God of Hindu, the second stage of Brahma religion worships Bathau as an absolute image of Trimurty, three Hindu Gods; Brahma, Bishnu and Moheswara (Brahma, Bishnu arw Moheswar; sathamjung saselo Iswar). Though Bathau is often considered as different ethnic cult or God, Mwnsingsing Bwrai, Bathau Bwrai, Brahma religion allows itself to interpret it in different ways. Brahma religion opened a link between Bodos and mainstream Hindu people; it provided opportunities

for intercultural communication, acculturation and Hinduisation. Brahma religion truly brought a spiritual enlightenment in Bodo society which paved the way for the present society. Religious culture has the capacity to bring other changes simultaneously along with its development. It can also be claimed that Brahma Dharma Movement carried the idea of modernization and standardization to this society. It was a period of socio-cultural transformation that lifted up the Bodos to the present stage of life. Idea of Brahma Religion touched most of the Bodo dominated areas and gave a new turn to people's life. This religion was successful in giving a new outlook and a new way of life to the people of this community.

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