



Acculturation and Transition in Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Bodos

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Abstract: The traditional religion of the Bodos, a tribe of north-east India, has been under massive transition due to its increasing contact with the religion and culture of more advanced group of people of the country and abroad. It has been under constant pressure from the major organized religions that comes from the process of integration within a national political and economic system. The religion, called Bathouism, that can be placed under naturalism category, after passing through different stages, is now under threat of losing its principal philosophy. The en masse accommodation of religious beliefs and practices of more organised religions into it through acculturation has started to pose a question on its distinctiveness. The religion has split into many branches, its new versions becoming more popular than original version, indicating that people want reformation of their traditional religion. It is the high time for the followers of the Bathouism to adopt necessary measures in order to retain its basic philosophy and distinctiveness.

Keywords: Bodos, Bathouism, Hinduism, culture, tradition, religious beliefs and practices, acculturation

1. INTRODUCTION

Social and cultural change is a phenomenon witnessed by almost all the societies in today's world. Some of

these changes take place due to the internal dynamics of the concerned societies, whereas many are seemed to be governed by dynamics external to them. With the world becoming one "global village," it has become easier for different cultures to come in contact with each other, yielding an evolution in a culture. Acculturation has become an inevitable process for societies, more and more people are experiencing acculturation nowadays.

Bodo is one of the oldest aboriginal tribes of the state of Assam in India, possessing distinct language, culture and religion. Although Bodos are mainly concentrated in the northern part of the Brahmaputra Valley along the foothills of Bhutan kingdom, they are distributed over all parts of Assam, major part of Tripura, north eastern part of West Bengal in India; they are also thinly inhabited in Bangladesh and Nepal countries. They are the largest tribal community in the northeast India speaking a common language and practising common social norms. Like other tribal communities of the world, Bodos are also facing tough challenges in conserving their cultural traits and religious beliefs. The increasing contact of advanced communities with them has effected directional changes in their language, culture and religion.

Acculturation of different tribes of India has passed through various phases. Their first phase of acculturation



started upon the advent of Aryans coming to India, and the same happened to the Bodos too. Then, in the second phase, when some new religions, namely Buddhism and Jainism, emerged in India during the last millennium of the Pre-Christian era, which spread in India and neighbouring countries, Bodos and other tribal communities were grazed by these religions also [1]. Then, the tribal communities of India underwent third phase of acculturation when the Muslim rulers ruled India during the middle period of the second millennium of the Christian era. Lastly, during the latter part of the second millennium of the Christian era, the contact of tribal communities with the British people brought the fourth phase of acculturation. Historians, like Dr. S. K. Chatterjee, opines that in ancient times the Bodos were known as the Kiratas and they spread over entire foothills of the great Himalayan Hills [1]. But the acculturation and forced assimilation, during different periods, have marginalized the population of the Bodos.

The Britishers' departure from India brought a new course to the acculturation of the tribal communities of India and the Bodos. All the areas where Bodos were mainly concentrated, except Bangladesh, came under the rule of new Indian Government. The new Govt. of India, perceiving the threat of extinction of marginalized aboriginal communities, made constitutional arrangement to safeguard their culture, religion and language, and for their all-round development, vide Clause 25 of Article 366 of the Indian Constitution. As a consequence of this, a list was prepared identifying the communities whose existence was being threatened, such communities being called the 'scheduled tribe' in the constitution of India. After that the acculturation of the Bodos and other tribal communities acquired new trend.

After independence, India became a union of several states, whose people have heterogeneous language, culture and religion, together with unequal socio-economic and educational status, thus making it a 'mini world'. In course of

time the process of integration was evolved and the culture, language and religion of some advanced communities took to emerge as Indian mainstream culture, language and religion. By virtue of nationhood, the isolated tribal habitation areas became easily accessible to other citizens, as a consequence of which, there had been increasing contact between the tribal people and other advanced group of people. Thus, there has been a constant pressure on the tribal communities for change due to the process of integration within a national political, economic and educational system [5]. This pressure has brought about a notable change in culture, language and religion of the tribal communities. Since advanced group of people have acquired more organized religion and prestigious belief system, tribal people are easily inclined towards them; consequently, fast changes are occurring in their religious beliefs and practices.

2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper aims at studying the transition of religious beliefs and practices of the Bodos due to acculturation and its current trend. The aim will be pursued by analysing primary and secondary information on following two points-

- 1) Traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Bodos
- 2) Impact of other religions on the religious beliefs and practices of the Bodos.

3. METHOD OF STUDY AND MATERIALS USED

Descriptive method has been adopted for the current study. The study is mainly based on personal and first-hand experiences of the researcher. From the perspective of anthropology, the study will be from emic perspective, i.e., the researcher will be studying own culture and society. Thus, the analyses will be mainly an insider's perception of religio-cultural reality.

Since the researcher's experience was felt inadequate to explicitly analyse the undergoing religio-cultural transitions

of the Bodos, the method of non-participant observation was also employed in the study.

Primary data were collected through interviews of the experienced observers of the societal transitions of the Bodos. A few data were collected through schedule also. The Ph. D. Thesis of Dr. K. Brahma [2] and the work of Bhaben Narzi [3] on the concerned field have constituted the base of secondary source of the study, while, other books and research articles on the area related to the current study have constituted remaining source for the same.

4. STUDY AREA

The erstwhile administrative district of Kokrajhar of the state of Assam, as in 1985, has been considered for the current study. Kokrajhar is one of the 33 districts of the state of Assam in India. Earlier, the boundary of this district extended from Sankosh river on the west up to the Manas river on the east, which is the eastern boundary of the present Chirang district. In the year 1989, the Chirang part was curved out from Kokrajhar district in a district reorganisation move of the state and merged to a newly formed district called Bongaigaon district, and then the same part was upgraded to a district, naming it as Chirang district, in the year 2003. The Kokrajhar district is regarded as the epicentre of Bodo language, culture and religion. The Bodo people of the considered study area, which is constituted by the contiguous area extending from Sankosh river to Manas river, on the foothills of Bhutan kingdom, is dominated by Bodo population, who are in possession of a homogeneous cultural and religious behaviour.

5. THE BODOS AND THEIR RELIGION

In ancient times, Bodos had a common religion called Bathou. This religion was free from the influence of any other religion [2]. The word Bathou is a disyllabic word- 'bā' and 'thou'; 'bā' means five and "thou" means deep, the deep philosophy. Thus, 'Bathou' stands for 'five deep philosophies' for leading life in this compounded world of joy

and sorrow. The Bodos believe in a Supreme God 'Bwrai Bathou', whom they call 'Oubonglaoree' too. The Bodo word 'Bwrai' means old, and hence "Bwrai Bathou" stands for the Oldest God owning five deep philosophies of life, i.e. the Supreme God. Bodos believe that Bwrai Bathou, along with his associates, show the ways to the people to succeed the difficulties of life. The Bathouism incorporates the philosophy of the Bodos [2].

Bodos believe that when Bwrai Bathou intended to create human life on the earth after creation of the earth and a pleasant nature on it (there is a story of creation of the earth), He had an intense eagerness to have a prior taste of His proposed human life on the earth. Hence, He descended on the earth as the first man and enjoyed the charming nature He had created. For this reason, Bodos call their Supreme God as 'Jiu Bwrai' too, the oldest man who is the owner of all life (Jiu → life). This Jiu Bwrai later transformed as Jiu Bwrai → Siu Bwrai → Siu-brai → Si-brai, by which name also Bwrai Bathou is known [2].

According to Bathou philosophy, the number five is connected with the human life in various ways. Firstly, the Bodos account the association of five with five basic elements of the human life- 1) earth (soil), 2) water, 3) air, 4) light or fire and 5) ether (sky). They believe that these five entities are governed by five associates of Bwrai Bathou; they are the Gods and Goddesses - Ailwng, Agrahng, Khwila, Sanja-Borli and Raj Khungri; there are five sense organs of human body- eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin. In the same way, the Chief God of Bathouism has provided five holy sermons to His worshippers- 1) Meditative prayer to God, 2) Conversing religious and spiritual matters, 3) Making charitable gifts to the poor, 4) Loving the fellow-beings, and 5) Doing things unitedly. Apart from these, Bathouism promotes five senses of love- 1) Love to Oubonglaoree, 2) Love to fellow beings, 3) Love to wife and children, 4) Love to other power, animals and objects of Nature, and 5) Love to one's Mother Land and the World. It also imparts moral to

have hatred towards five sinners- 1) Hatred for the murderer, 2) Hatred for the thief, 3) Hatred for the liar, 4) Hatred for the one indulging in illicit and unnatural intercourses, and 5) Hatred for the association with a man guilty of offences of any of these natures [5].

As all basic elements required for life and basic sense organs of human body are connected with the number five, the Bodos believe that their Supreme God Bwrai Bathou too, when visits his pleasant earth, prefers to sit on a 'Sijau' tree, which has also five ridges (Euphorbia spelanden tree). Hence a Sijau tree is planted at the north-east corner of the courtyard of every Bodo home; a circular altar is constructed with the Sijau tree at the centre and fenced by a bamboo following certain rules of fencing. Upper side of this altar remains open. This altar is called *BathouThanshali*, usually called *Bathou*. Every religious activity, starting from birth to marriage then to death, is performed there. It serves like a Hindu temple for the Bodos [5].

After acquainted with Sijau tree, there comes one more association of number five to the Bodo philosophy. It further advises for five holy realisations- 1) Realisation of the 'Sijau', the Supreme Soul, 2) Linking up the 'Jiwma' (human soul) with the 'Sijau', the Supreme Being, 3) Realisation of 'Mainao' the Goddess of wealth, 4) Realisation of the Five Great Elements, viz., Earth, Water, Air, Fire and Ether, and 5) Realisation of the need of worldly affairs [2].

A coherent analysis on the religious philosophy of Bathouism may lead to a conclusion that the traditional religion of the Bodos may be placed under the category of naturalism, conceptualised by Max Muller. According to this theory of naturalism, the nature itself is responsible for the religious sentiment. There are emotional responses of men to the mysterious, inexplicable, gruesome, strange and frightful powers of nature, and these constitute the core of a religion [6]. Bodos are also worshipper of nature; they worship the Sun, the Moon and Stars; they have god and goddesses of air, water, soil, fire and sky (where stars hold their position). In

addition, the Sijau tree is worshipped as the Supreme Soul of this universe.

6. RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS OF THE BODOS

There are two religious festivals of the Bodos- 1) The Kherai, and 2) The Garja.

The Kherai is the greatest religious festival of the Bodos. It is held at least once in a year where all the God and Goddesses, including the Chief God Bwrai Bathou, are worshiped together by sacrificing chicks and dancing with an objective of acquiring blessings from the Gods and Goddesses for the welfare of both individual and public lives. During this festival, worshipping ceremony is performed item wise for the whole night through a woman performer, called *Doudini*, who is assisted by an *Oja* and two *Douris*. Although this festival is collectively organized by all families of a village, the same can also be performed by an individual family for the welfare of the family. When a family encounters a persisting great difficulty, such as an uncured health problem, then also this worship is arranged by the family in order to get rid of it.

Bodos believe in ghosts and spirits too. They believe that there are some invisible evil entities, such as Bira, Anggrimwnda, Haraibangkhw etc., who have the power to harm the people; they are believed to be able to enter inside the human mind and body and to make him/her behave in an unnatural way. Due to presence of such beliefs among the Bodos some foreign scholars, such as Endle, Dalton, Gait opined that Bodos are animistic [7], [8], [5]. But, native scholars such as P. C. Bhattacharjee, do not agree with this opinion, terming it as only oversimplified one [9]. Bodos believe that such evil entities have owned lesser power than their traditional Gods, and can attack people only in absence of them. In Bodo they are termed *asbar gajri* (impure air). In such cases, the *ojas* (healers) ward these evil powers off the victim with the help of traditional Gods, for which arrangements are made to worship the traditional Gods. If desired result is not obtained, at last *Kherai* is performed to



worship their Supreme God *Bwrai Bathou* and his associates together for such purpose. From such point of view, it would not be appropriate to term the Bodo Religion as animistic one.

On the other hand, the Garza religious ceremony is usually arranged after seasonal festivals in order to purify the village and villagers. They feel that during such festivals they become impure by dint of freely eating together, merry-making, walking, drinking rice-beer roaming from one's house of the village to another's; that is why purification is required. Further, they believe that as the villagers become impure by involving themselves in such activities, the sacred traditional Gods keep themselves away from such people and place of activity, that is the village. Taking this advantage of the absence of traditional Gods in the village, evil gods enter in the village and slowly start to do harm to the villagers. So, in order to purify themselves and to ward the evil gods off the village, villagers collectively organize the Garza worship. Besides this, Garza worship is arranged periodically linking it with different seasons and occasions [3].

7. CONVERSION OF BODOS TO OTHER RELIGION AND ITS SEQUENCE

Bodos travelled a long way through Bathouism. When Aryans came to India and came in contact with the Bodos, acculturation of the Bodos started through the process of Sanskritisation, which meant purifying oneself. That acculturation was driven by Aryans [2], which connotes that Aryans were successful in motivating the innocent Bodos and other innocent tribal communities to feel themselves inferior and less cultured to them. A large number of Bodos converted to Hinduism through this process of Sanskritisation. After that, during the medieval period, many Bodos, who were under the rule of the Mughal rulers, accepted Islamism. These two conversions of the Bodos to other religions have been considered by the analysts as forced conversion, rather than due to acculturation [10]. Bodos who converted to these two religions, totally gave up their cultural practices and language along with their religion, and accepted the culture and

language of the target religion. Some historians, like S. K. Chatterjee, want to say that when Buddhism spread in all directions, sizeable number of Bodos converted to Buddhism too [1]. But there is no way to prove or disprove this assertion due to non-availability of convincing references.

Still, till 15th Century, in the present northeast region of India, Hinduism was accepted by the royal families of the Bodo community only, there being no religious change among the common Bodo people. But during the middle of 15th Century, Bodos were acclimatized to Vaishnavism preached by Sankardeva of Assam. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam triggered a sudden massive conversion of Bodos to other culture and language. The current of the acculturation and conversion of the Bodos due to this religious movement was so strong that during the British rule in India, some scholars even feared their possible extinction from this world [4].

In the nineteenth century, during British rule, they were influenced by Christian Missionaries and good number of them converted to Christianity. This conversion to Christianity brought a new dimension to the religious conversion of the Bodos, because unlike former convertees, they did not totally give up their traditional culture and original language, rather they made an adjustment between the ways of their new religion and their then existing cultural practices. In other words, these Bodos joined Christianity along with their culture and language; whereas the former group of convertees of Hinduism, Islam and Neo-Vaishnavism joined those religions without their culture and language. Since the identity of the earlier group of convertees did not remain as Bodo, they did not constitute any part of Bodo social life after their departure, and as such, their conversion to other religion could not bring any change in the cultural and linguistic spheres of the Bodos. But the latter group of convertees constituted a part of the Bodos, and their shift in the religious and cultural ways affected the mainstream Bodo



culture. From then only the transition in religious beliefs and practices due to acculturation started among the Bodos in true sense.

In the recent centuries, Bodos have been influenced by Assamese Neo-Vaishnavism, social reforms under Brahma Dharma (a branch of Hinduism), , and the spread of Christianity. All these influences have effected transition in religious beliefs and practices of the Bodos. Further, the advancement of science and technology along with the increasing contact between the Bodos and other people have also brought a noteworthy transition in the religious beliefs and practices of the Bodos.

8. TRANSITION IN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF THE BODOS

Since Bathouism evolved from nature itself, though Bodos made a long journey through Bathouism, there was neither any religious icon nor any social or religious institution for carrying forward the philosophy of Bathouism. It transmitted generation to generation traditionally. On the other hand, the newer religions like Hinduism, Islamism, Christianity, Neo-Vaishnavism were much well organised in comparison to Bathou, and there had been always an icon or institution who constantly worked for the improvement and spread of their respective religions. For example, Brahmans were taking care of Hinduism, Maulanas, Kazis etc. are there for carrying forward Islamism, Bishops, Fathers etc. are there for looking after Church activities and preaching, Satras, Dhols etc. are there for the purpose of uplift of Neo-Vaishnavism. But the *Oja*, *Doudini* and *Douris*, who are connected with religious performances of Bathouism, are only casual practitioner and self-developed for the purpose. As such Bodos were attracted towards the ways of other more organized religions.

8.1 NEO-VAISHNAVISM AND THE BODOS

During the Neo-Vaishnavet Movement, the Bodos accepted Vaishnavism en masse and tried to adopt Assamese culture [11]; they gave up their Bodo name titles and accepted

other Non-Bodo titles. They were known as Kachari-Saranias. But many of them, later on, were unable to completely give up their traditional beliefs and practices, or were not accorded recognition as a part of Assamese society. As a consequence of this, there was an intermingling of Bodo religious traditions and that of the newly accepted religion. Still, they did not prefer to identify themselves as Bodo, as the Christians and others did, and as such they have remained delinked from mainstream Bodo culture and religion.

8.2 CONFLUENCE OF BATHOUISM AND HINDUISM

Due to absence of any religious icon and religious institution of Bathouism, during the last part of 19th century and beginning part of 20th century, there was a chaotic and confusing situation among the Bodos in their religious affairs[2]. During that time large number of Bodos were converted to other religions, mainly to different branches of Hinduism and to Christianity; sizeable number of Bodos gave up speaking Bodo language; the age old cultural and social bond among the Bodos was enfeebled. As a consequence, the social system of the Bodos was almost collapsed and an unhappy state of affairs prevailed upon them; Observing the then social, language and religious condition, Sir Edward Gait, an English Scholar, made a hard prediction on survival of Bodo language by saying that "*The Bodo dialects, though still spoken in Assam by more than half a million person are in their turn giving way to Aryan languages (Assamese and Bengali) and their complete disappearance is only a matter of time*" [3]. At that crucial juncture, a Bodo son, having his name as KalicharanMech, came up to bring an end to such condition among the Bodos. He adopted *Brahma Dharma (Brahmareligion)*, a branch of Hinduism, from Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, and preached it among the Bodos. Since the motif behind preaching *Brahma* religion was to bring a stability in the Bodo society, conversion of Bodos from *Bathouism* to *Brahma* religion was significantly different from other conversions. Brahma religion was adopted as a tool by the preacher for the purpose of bringing a social



reformation movement among the Bodos in order to save them from their extinction, wherein all Bodo elites joined their hands under the leadership of Kalicharan Mech. Therefore, trial and error method was constantly applied while accommodating the philosophy of Brahma religion in the context of retaining Bodo cultural traits in its original form. On the other hand, Bodo culture was grown based on Bathouism, hence a great adjustment was effected between the religious beliefs and practices of the Bodos and the philosophy of Brahmanism, and consequently, Bodos accepted Brahma religion as their another religion, calling it *Brahma Dhwrwm*.

8.3 TRANSITION IN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

After Brahma Dhwrwm occupied a place among the Bodos, a remarkable transition in the religious belief and practices took place among the Bodos. Along with *Bwrai Bathou*, Bodos now consider *Brahma* too as a Lord. Since their conscience did not tell them to accept the existence of two different Gods for their community, they started to find a linkage between the Bathou religion and newly introduced Brahma religion. At the same time the Hindus also tried to woo them that Bathouism is a branch of Hinduism, citing that in the Hindu mythological works there are many references of Kirata God occupying high place among the Hindu Gods. Consequently, major section of the Bodos has taken to accept that *Bwrai Bathou* is nobody but the Lord Shiva of the Hindu religion, according to which the God is the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara (another name of Shiva).

Bathouism belief in invisible God, and as such *Bathou Bwrai* remained unseen to the Bodos, His shape is not known or unimaginable to them. Now major section of the Bodos use to believe that He has a fixed shape, although he is capable of changing it by virtue of His power. Earlier, during their prayer at *Bathou*, Bodos used to recite– *He afa, Bwrai Bathou, swrjigiri.....* (Oh Father, *Bwrai Bathou*, the creator....), but now when they pray at *Bathou*, they start by

the sentence– *He afa, Bwrai Bathou, ShibMahadeb, swrjigiri....*

Not only the *Bwrai Bathou*, many Hindu Goddesses are also accepted as the visible form of their traditional Goddesses. Hindu Goddess *Lakshmi* is now accepted by the Bodos as their traditional Goddess *MainaoBurwi*, or *Bulli Burwi* or *Siu Burwi*, who, according to Bodo belief, happens to be the wife of *Bwrai Bathou*. Similarly, the Goddess *Khwinasanti* is now believed to be the Hindu Goddess Ganga, the Goddess of Water, and so many.

After coming in close contact with Hinduism, acculturation of the Bodos got accelerated and acquired new trend of transition in religious beliefs and practices. Currently, several branches of Bathouism have been emerged, such as *Bibar Bathou, Moni Bathou, Jangkhrao Bathou, Aroj Bathou, Sonathon Bathou* and many others. Some of them have modified the ways of worshipping *Bathou* and avoided sacrifices, instead, every item of worship is performed by offering flowers. On the other hand, some of them do not only consider *Shiva* as the *Bwrai Bathou*, but worship Him by arranging *Yajnahuti* in front of *Bathou*, which is a way of worshipping the God in Brahma religion. Another fact is that not only the Bathouism has accommodated the ways of Brahmanism, but Brahmanism has also accommodated the worshipping ways of Bathouism. In earlier times, a family following Brahmanism gave up to keep the *Bathou* in their courtyard, but nowadays, the *Bathou* can be seen in the courtyards of almost all Bodo families following Brahmanism. These families pray to the *Bwrai Bathou* regularly at *Bathou* altar. A village following Brahmanism collectively arranges a *Yajnahuti* occasion wise, such as on the eve of seasonal festival *Bwisagu, Domashi, Amtishua, Full moon* of the month of *Maghw* (a Bodo month), etc. On that occasions, families of the village first pray at *Bathou*, and then go to participate in the *Yajnahuti* arranged at village level at a fixed place of the village. Further, religious worships performed by



Bathou followers, such as Bhasani, are also performed by followers of Brahma religion.

The transition on belief due to the influence of Hinduism does not end there. Almost all Hindu Pujas are now performed by Bodos. The way of performing pujas by Hindus has attracted Bodo people; since worshipping of their traditional Gods take place mainly during Kherai only, most of the Bodos have now taken to worship most of the Hindu deities. Every family, who has got their son-daughter as student, or has a member connected with education, worships Sarasvati Goddess on the day of her puja, accepting that She is the Goddess of knowledge. In the similar way, Hindu God Vishvakarma is now accepted by the Bodos as the God of architecture and he is worshipped in the Bodo families on the day of his puja. During the Hindu puja, it seems like that Bodos have accepted Hindu by heart and soul.

Since early times, Bodos have some religious beliefs and practices connected with the birth of a baby. These beliefs and practices, except some addition, more or less remain the same; there is only variations in the ways of practising these; the Bathou followers perform these practices through Bathou, Brahma followers perform it through Yajnahuti, Christians perform it at Church. Perhaps, due to strong influence of Hinduism, some Hindu practices have been added to the religious practices of the Bodos. Among these, worth mentioning practices are– 1) name giving ceremony of a newly born baby, 2) first rice-eating ceremony, and 3) first hair cutting ceremony of a child.

In earlier times, Bodos performed the marriage of a pair of boy and girl in front of the Bathou, which is known as Hatashuni. After acceptance of Brahma religion, now Bathou followers also perform the marriage through Yajnahuti after conducting prayer at Bathou. Similarly, Brahma followers also conduct prayer at Bathou before sitting at Yajnahuti for marriage. Apart from these, Bodo society now accepts the marriage of Bodo pairs held at Hindu Temple also. Like original Hindus, marriage may be held at temple and then

reception party may be arranged at home or a convenient place. In like manner, nowadays, Bodo marriage is performed in the Church also.

After the death of a person, Bodos used to bury the death body. Bodo Christians still follow this system as per their recommended religious practice. Although this system still exists among the Bathou and Brahma followers, most of them now prefer to burn the death body. Bodos used to believe that some rites are to be performed after death of a person for his/her spiritual liberation; if this is not attained, it is believed that the soul does not find a place in the heaven, and in turn, it remains on the earth as a harmful spirit. In this regard, still the Bathou and Brahma followers perform the same rites through their respective performing ways; but the Christian followers have given up such rites and they simply pray to the Almighty for the eternal peace of the departed soul.

8.4 TRANSITION IN BELIEF AND PRACTICES ON ILLNESS

Bodos divided the illnesses into two types– one is ‘natural illness’ and the other is ‘evil-effected illnesses’ [12]. In their belief, each of these health problems must be treated in different ways. They believed that natural illnesses have natural causes and can be cured using traditional medicines, which is treated by traditional healers. On the other hand, according to their belief, evil-effected illnesses are caused by evil spirit or witchcraft, and cannot be cured by traditional medicines; it needs to be treated in a different way. Thus, there were two types of health practices among Bodos– 1) Traditional medicinal practices, and 2) Magico-Religious Practices.

In every village, there were traditional healers having good knowledge of medicinal plants, who could heal diseases by applying medicine obtained from the plants. They were called “*oja*”. Ojas were divided into two kinds– simple ojas (*mulioja*), who are capable of healing diseases by applying medicinal plants only, and spiritual healers (*mwdaioja*)– who are high-powered ojas, having the capability to combat evil spirits by virtue of some chanting along with medicinal



knowledge. When an illness was not cured by the treatment of simple traditional healer then they supposed that the suffering must be an act of evil spirit affected by witchcraft, or an exertion by their own God due to his/her dissatisfaction on the family members for committing some forbidden activity. In order to cure such illness, second category of oja was consulted; the family God was worshiped first praying for forgiveness to their mistake, if any, and to provide them protection from external evil spirits. If necessary, the spiritual oja made arrangement to drive the evil spirit away from the family or obstructed the action of witchcraft by chanting *mnwthwrs* (mantras) with the help of their traditional Gods.

Nowadays, due to availability of modern medicines, traditional healers have gradually disappeared; but the demand of spiritual healers has not lessened. Bodos still consult spiritual healers for healing their diseases apprehending that his/her illness is evil effected. For such purpose, many magico-religious practitioners have grown up, who install idols of Hindu God and Goddesses and perform magico-religious activities in order to solve health and family problems of the people. Instead of arranging worship at home for their traditional Gods to solve health and family problems, people now use to go to such places without any consideration of religion of such magico-religious practitioners.

9. CONCLUSION

Bodo traditional religion has come across different stages; first, there was en masse conversion to other religions from Bodo religion, second, it had to leave space to other religions, which has converted Bodo into a multi-religion community; third, it had to accommodate the beliefs and practices of other religions due to acculturation, and lastly, the fourth, its split into many branches, which has converted Bathouism into a multi-branched religion. Remarkable transition has taken place in the religious beliefs and practices of the Bodos in terms of performing the worship and rites and rituals.

Modification and accommodation of religious ideas, beliefs and practices are necessary to maintain its acceptability by the people, but it should not be at the cost of losing its originality. Blind imitation of belief and practices of other religion may yield counterproductive results. The development of science has made the mind of the people also scientific; now people don't want to accept too much unscientific belief, care should be taken in this direction also. The new versions of Bathouism are becoming more popular than its original version, indicating that people want reformation of their traditional religion. Arrangement of Kherai involves a high expenditure, as a consequence many families cannot arrange it due to their financial constraint, though they are willing to do so. Therefore, providing an alternative arrangement in this regard is the demand of time. From the world affairs a trend may be observed that only the religions which have been institutionalized, are surviving. Time has come to institutionalize Bathouism.

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